

A QUESTION OF BALANCE: INDIA AND EUROPE AFTER RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

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SUMMARY

- European officials are frustrated at India's apparent fence-sitting over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Yet, for Indian policymakers, maintaining a workable relationship with Russia is central to counterbalancing Chinese hegemony in their shared neighbourhood.
- India also depends significantly on Russia for arms supplies, including advanced systems that help it keep pace with China.
- Despite this, India has for some time been slowly decoupling from Russia and strengthening its relations with the West, especially the US.
- Europeans should be aware of how India defines its own strategic positioning, and support India where possible as they negotiate the tricky issues relating to the Indo-Pacific region.

Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, to wide international censure. The next day, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) rejected a draft resolution condemning what Vladimir Putin termed a “special operation”. The draft won support from 11 UNSC members but was, unsurprisingly, vetoed by the Russian Federation. China and the United Arab Emirates abstained – as did India.

During the debate on the resolution, India’s permanent representative to the UN called for an “immediate cessation of hostilities”, emphasised that dialogue was “the only way to settle disputes”, and expressed regret that diplomacy had been “abandoned”. In a clear allusion to Russia, the Indian diplomat also observed that “the contemporary global order is built on the United Nations Charter, international law and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States”.

Prior to the vote in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which condemned the invasion, EU ambassadors in New Delhi met senior Indian foreign ministry officials to press for their government to take a stronger position on the conflict. But its stance remained unchanged. India’s UNSC abstention opened an era of relative turbulence for its foreign policy, as the country’s decision to sit on the fence made it appear inconsistent when set against its longstanding insistence on the importance of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Western policymakers hoping for increased allyship with the world’s largest democracy felt disappointment at the outcome.

But India’s position should not be confused for support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Nor should it be mistaken for a continuation of its cold war-era non-alignment policies. In fact, despite Western uncertainty about whether the country, especially under Narendra Modi as prime minister, is drifting in an authoritarian direction, if anything India is shifting away from Russia.

India is pursuing what it views as its own interests, which are multiple but involve a real and ongoing effort to reduce its dependence on Russia. It is doing this while remaining wary of China, anxious to see Beijing’s power counterbalanced in the Indo-Pacific, and continuing to handle other issues in the neighbourhood, such as its difficult relationship with Pakistan.

For the time being, India has been able to manage the pressures on its diplomacy, despite the great tensions surrounding the war in Ukraine. But it will find reducing its structural dependence on Russia increasingly tricky as Moscow continues to create tensions internationally; Russia may end up making India collateral damage of a conflict New Delhi does not approve of. India will constantly have to seek and develop alternatives without antagonising Russia.

This policy brief examines the nature and determinants of India’s Russia policy and analyses the

consequences the country faces in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It argues that, while India remains dependent on Russia in areas such as arms sales, its partnership with Russia actually began losing value some years ago. The war in Ukraine will also change the contours of Moscow's partnership with Beijing and affect New Delhi's considerations. India has long looked at its relationship with Russia through the prism of the latter's capacity and willingness to balance China. But it will also increasingly take account of the costs as well as the benefits of its relationship with Russia, including its impact on the other partnerships India wishes to develop, such as with Europe and the United States. This paper draws on the author's recent conversations with Indian and European officials and commentators, including Indian government officials.

India has already set a course to reduce its dependence on Russia. Indeed, the Indian government seems to have decided on what can be described as 'seeking a new non-Russian future' – one in which its foreign policy is unconstrained by the policy decisions of its Russian partner or the forms of leverage Moscow has over it. But it will do this at its own pace, in line with its own interests, and it is unlikely to be significantly hurried down this path by external pressures. In any case, the leverage that Western powers could bring to bear for this purpose could also weaken their own strategic interests with regard to China, in the Indo-Pacific in particular. Indian diplomacy will still have to navigate the challenges thrown up by a polarised world in which Russia may increasingly be little more than a nuisance, but one strong enough to cause India problems at every stage of the decoupling process. In this light, India's full autonomy vis-à-vis Russia is at best a medium- to long-term prospect, and it will also involve retaining at least a degree of cooperation with Moscow.

India's position after the invasion of Ukraine

India's UNSC abstention over the Ukraine invasion was not the first time that the country had refrained from voting against Russia at the UN. In March 2014, India abstained in the vote on UNGA resolution 68/262 related to the territorial integrity of Ukraine following Russia's annexation of Crimea; India was already balancing its principles against its security interests.

Still, in 2022, India's failure to condemn Russia caused particular consternation in the West, and generated considerable pushback against the country. Indian representatives found themselves questioned about their lack of support for Western positions on Ukraine. Just prior to the Russian invasion, and as it was becoming increasingly obvious that Russia would attack Ukraine, India's minister of external affairs, Subramanyam Jaishankar, said that "principles and interests are balanced", when quizzed about his country's differentiated application of norms and principles. He therefore intimated that India's security prevailed over all other considerations. He moreover suggested that Europeans had failed to show solidarity with India in the recent past, clearly alluding to incidents on

the India-China border in summer 2020. Equally, on 3 March, State Department official Donald Lu indicated to US lawmakers that the Biden administration was considering punishing India for its arms trade with Russia. The US also issued similar statements about India's oil acquisitions. (Washington eventually eased off because of the risk that hurting India would weaken it vis-à-vis China, and therefore undermine a key pillar of the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy.)

Despite India's relative reticence, its statement to the UNSC emphasised the importance of the UN Charter, international law, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. India's position on the war in Ukraine is much closer to Europe's than it is to Russia's. Interestingly, the country's abstention at the UNSC seemed to upset European governments much more than their Ukrainian counterpart, which asked India to act as a "bridge" with Russia.

And the Ukraine crisis has triggered a debate in India about its Russia policy. Some have compared Modi's policies to those of India's first post-independence prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, observing continuity between the two: "Like it did in 1956, New Delhi has responded to the crisis in Ukraine with 'all sides,' 'de-escalation,' 'diplomatic engagement' and 'stepped-up diplomacy'." There is a clear body of opinion within India arguing for a move away from past non-aligned policies. Influential analyst Raja Mohan has insisted that India "can't forever view Central Europe through Moscow's prism" and should "appreciate [the] region's salience, independence". In the political arena, P Chidambaram, an Indian parliamentarian from the opposition Congress party, tweeted: "The Government of India should stop its verbal balancing act and sternly demand that Russia stop immediately the bombing of key cities in Ukraine."

The Indian government's indirect criticism of the Russian invasion derives from its worries about the potential consequences of direct opposition to Russia. India has so far sought to meet three increasingly divergent objectives in response to the war: to preserve its strategic partnership with Russia in order to prevent Moscow from slipping ever deeper into Beijing's orbit; to defend its long-standing principles of non-interference; and to protect itself from potential collateral damage resulting from Russia's actions, such as Western sanctions or retaliation from Russia if India were to actively oppose the invasion. Reconciling these objectives will prove challenging for India, although Russia's aggression also runs directly counter to India's cherished principle of sovereignty, while the value of the two states' strategic partnership is increasingly doubtful. The only way for India to manage the situation is to secure greater freedom of manoeuvre vis-à-vis Russia.

India's Russia policy: Intricacies of an Asian triangle

The main logic underpinning India's current stance on Ukraine derives from the intricacies of the relationship triangle between India, Russia, and China, and the evolution of the balance of power between them and the outside world. The key determinants of India's relations with Russia are slowly losing their force, but those that remain are central to India's security and provide Moscow with significant leverage in its dealings with New Delhi.

The principal influence on India's Russia policy is the presence of China, its large neighbour in the Indo-Pacific region. Ever since the 1962 war between India and China, Indo-Soviet, and later Indo-Russian, relations always had an anti-Chinese dimension. During the cold war this was formalised by India's and Russia's August 1971 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Even since the end of the Soviet Union, India has considered Russia an essential element of its balancing strategy regarding China, helping prevent Chinese hegemony in Asia, and as a provider of weapons systems. However, India gradually lost any illusion that Russia would come to its rescue should relations with China become too tense. Typical of this was a brawl that took place between Indian and Chinese forces in June 2020. Dubbed the Galwan incidents, the episode resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and (officially) four Chinese soldiers. But Russia spent no political capital vis-à-vis China in support of Indian interests, while the badly needed delivery of Russian spare parts and ammunition to India happened to be delayed around this time.

In 1998, however, the Russian prime minister, Yevgeny Primakov, had proposed a Russia-India-China strategic partnership. Although it failed to materialise into real diplomatic practice during his time in office – and was even rejected at the time by India and China – by 2002 it had crystallised in the form of a series of meetings. That year the foreign ministers of the three countries gathered on the sidelines of the UNGA, followed shortly afterwards by official visits by Putin to Beijing and New Delhi. These developments did not alter India's objective of containing China, but they did create a different dynamic, one in which simultaneously engaging Russia and China would allow for the peaceful management of any difference that could arise, with the India-Russia partnership creating a balance to China's growing pre-eminence.

Substantively, this 'Asian triangle' was based on a shared willingness to combat Islamic militancy and, even more so, their common negative perception of the US as a power bidding for global hegemony. The format provided the three countries with a platform to project a status commensurate with their

own individual aspirations; the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization find their roots in Primakov's legacy. Russia, which traditionally supports India in the UNSC (in particular over the status of Kashmir), also helped India become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in order to balance China's influence (even if Beijing managed to neutralise that move by inviting Pakistan to join too). Moscow and New Delhi also cooperate in other multilateral formats such as the Russia-India-China grouping, the G20, and the East Asia Summit.

However, none of this ended the existing rivalries between India and China, while the subsequent political trajectories of India and Russia started to diverge significantly. The interests of Moscow and Beijing increasingly aligned, and Russia grew more hostile to the US and the West. It became closer to China, while India drew increasingly closer to the US and other Western countries because of China's rise, as well as because of domestic pressures to reform the Indian economy. At the same time, Moscow did not wish to simply become Beijing's junior partner, and so it maintained its cooperation with New Delhi as part of its portfolio of relationships. Nevertheless, India-Russia relations stagnated overall, and gradually lost most of their economic substance. The progressive disconnection of Russian and Indian interests was accelerated by the weakness of the Russian economy and India's opening up to more advanced markets, which were much more attractive than Russia's. The relationship reached a low just as India-US relations started to blossom in the early 2000s.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 hastened India's decoupling from Russia. The invasion caused a severe deterioration in Russia's relations with the US and India's arms procurement from Russia declined significantly. In parallel, the ascent of Xi Jinping to power in 2013 was accompanied by increased tensions: the number of problems along the India-China border multiplied, leading in June 2020 to the Galwan incidents, which was the first lethal encounter between the two countries' armed forces since 1975.

However, even during this period, India sought to preserve its relationship with Russia. For example, in August 2017 a standoff took place between India and China in the Himalayan border area of Doklam. Shortly afterwards, Russia and India made efforts to revive their relationship by holding an informal summit in Sochi between Putin and Modi in May 2018, followed in October the same year by the annual bilateral summit. This had an economic dimension: India took steps to open some of its sectors up to Russia in an attempt to strengthen the relationship. Nevertheless, the two countries continued to drift apart.

With the US as their shared adversary, Russia's and China's relationship remains uneasy but solid: each for the other is the only significant, reliable, and sizeable partner they have against America. And, today, Russia has become a problem for India's foreign policy at almost every level. India's

failure to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put it under pressure from many partners. This includes US pressure in April over the Indian purchase of some three million barrels of discounted Russian crude oil, which was not covered by US sanctions.

If Washington has lately calmed its threatening rhetoric vis-à-vis India because of the latter's importance to counterbalancing China in the Indo-Pacific, stubbornness remains among EU member states about the strategic rationale of India's policy. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific acknowledges that India is a partner to the European Union in the region. But, despite the stark alignment between Russia and China in the Ukraine crisis, most European capitals seem to refuse to acknowledge that a more confrontational Indian posture towards Russia would weaken New Delhi's position in its relationship with Beijing. This was demonstrated, for example, during the 2020 border brawl, which forced India's defence minister, Rajnath Singh, to fly to Moscow to ensure that existing arms contracts between India and Russia would be respected.

Moreover, Russia's invasion of Ukraine will inevitably raise questions for Europeans and Americans alike regarding their military, diplomatic, and financial resource allocation between Europe and the US in the Indo-Pacific. Following the adoption of the EU's cautious but useful Indo-Pacific strategy, New Delhi's foreign policy establishment is just beginning to see Europe as a potentially useful partner outside the economic domain. It has welcomed Europe's change of attitude on military power in the Indo-Pacific, as it is keen to prevent China from filling any potential strategic vacuum. But Indian policymakers wonder how the Ukraine crisis will affect European resolve in the matter and if the Indo-Pacific will remain on Europe's agenda.[1]

Regional matters: Afghanistan and Pakistan as forms of leverage

The management of the regional situation in south Asia, where Russia has developed ties with all India's foes, also illustrates the weakening of the India-Russia relationship. New Delhi is facing a deteriorating security environment, with Afghanistan and Pakistan the focal points. Traditionally, India and Russia have always publicly supported each another's policies on Afghanistan and Pakistan. But developments in these two countries have become a new source of leverage for Russia over India, especially since the US exited Afghanistan.

India and Russia differ on how to approach Afghanistan's government. India is sceptical of the possibility of ever forming a productive relationship with what it views as an extremist regime, even though tensions between the Taliban in power and Pakistan have somewhat assuaged its fears for the

time being. Russia built a relationship with the Taliban in the mid-2010s as a way of countering the American presence, whereas India saw the latter as a guarantee that Pakistan would not acquire a dominant position in Afghanistan. It actively cooperated with the US to achieve this.

The American withdrawal in 2021 moved Moscow and New Delhi closer together on the terrorism issue. Both agree on the need to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a training ground for terror attacks. And, like Russia, India retains an interest in seeing stability in Afghanistan. But New Delhi still regards a Taliban-run Afghanistan as a potential springboard for terrorist operations against India, as happened during the 1990s when the country was a sanctuary for radical Islamist groups. In contrast, Russia does not detect any direct or imminent threat emanating from the country. Its foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has even declared that the Taliban have given assurances that they have no intention of destabilising neighbouring countries. This difference over Afghanistan also places Russia closer to China, which wants to prevent instability spilling over into neighbouring Xinjiang province. But Beijing is ready to deal with the Taliban if they respect the condition of non-interference.

On the question of Pakistan, while the country was India's main enemy following partition in 1947, China has been Pakistan's traditional ally and always supported Islamabad as the key balancer to India's power in south Asia. In contrast, Pakistan and Russia have never viewed each other as priorities for their foreign policy action. With Pakistan being a longstanding US ally in Asia and having sheltered mujahideen groups during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the countries inevitably looked askance at each other. However, in the mid-2010s Russia initiated small-scale maritime counter-narcotic exercises with Pakistan, and soon afterwards lifted its arms embargo on the country, allowing for the sale of military equipment, including military helicopters. In 2018, Russia and Pakistan concluded a naval cooperation agreement.

Military cooperation between Russia and Pakistan remains mostly symbolic. Pakistan lacks the funds to become a significant client (let alone partner) of Russia. Moscow has sold it only four Mi-35 attack helicopters and a handful of Mi-17 transport variants. Yet, New Delhi views this cooperation as a means to pressure India. Russia's strengthening relationship with Pakistan is an important signal of the decline of the relationship between India and Russia.

Exemplifying this point is the recent visit to Moscow during the Ukraine crisis by Pakistan's prime minister, Imran Khan. For the Pakistani side, the trip was part of an attempt to diversify relations away from Washington. Not much, if anything, was achieved during the trip. But the visit, which took place at Putin's invitation, was interpreted by some Indian officials as a signal that Russia, too, could diversify its relations away from India in south Asia. Indeed, its relations with Islamabad are part of Moscow's communication strategy towards New Delhi. The message is that India should not oppose

Russia at the UNSC or any other future vote in the UN, or join any future anti-Russia coalition of any kind. Russia is putting India under pressure to maintain neutrality in the Ukraine war, as was apparent during Lavrov's recent visit to New Delhi.

India's military dependence on Russia

Reflecting the wider decline in bilateral relations, following Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 trade in arms between Russia and India fell steadily. This trend is likely to continue. That being said, India remains the largest importer of Russian arms globally and it is extremely dependent on Russia for its defence systems and their maintenance. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, between 2016 and 2020 India absorbed 23 per cent of Russia's arms exports.

Moscow's power in this domain derives not only from the sheer volume of sales but from its willingness to provide weapons systems and technologies that no other country will export to India because of their own national regulations, or would only do so at an unaffordable cost. It is difficult for India to find alternative providers, including those willing to cooperate within the "Make in India" framework. Modi launched this initiative in 2014 to transform India into a manufacturing hub – but its provisions often require technology transfers that producers of high-tech weapons systems are normally unwilling to consent to.

India may soon be forced to confront this issue directly. The West's recent Ukraine-related sanctions could constrain the ability of Russian suppliers to fulfil existing contracts with India in defence procurement, and curtail in particular the delivery of spare parts, which, as noted, has been a worry in the past. New Delhi has already expressed its renewed concern. And whether as part of an effort to pressure India, or because of the bite of sanctions, Russia could immobilise a substantial part of the Indian armed forces by ending or delaying spare parts or ammunition deliveries. According to a 2021 report by the US Congressional Research Service, "many analysts in India and beyond conclude that the Indian military cannot operate effectively without Russian-supplied equipment and will continue to rely on Russian weapons systems in the near and middle terms." Indeed, the same report indicates that 96 per cent of the Indian Army's battle tank force is of Russian origin, while the Indian Navy's sole operational aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, is a refurbished Soviet-era ship. The report states that all six of the Indian Air Force's air tankers are Russian-made Il-78s. The two countries are also involved in the joint production of a series of weapons systems, while India produces some Russian equipment under licence.

India and Russia have leverage over one another in this area, although it is asymmetrical and weighted against India. But if the dependence is mutual, it is also changing as the strategic landscape

evolves. In a tense regional environment, Indian policymakers fret about their country's vulnerability. Therefore, India's effort to maintain a relationship with Russia, even a declining one, in this arena is reflected by its decision in 2018 to buy the S-400 missile system from Russia. As one observer notes, "consummating the S-400 deal [enabled] India to minimize the irritations in relations with Russia" – not least because India had cancelled its high-profile involvement in co-developing Russia's fifth-generation fighter, and had already begun to diversify its arms acquisitions away from Russia over the previous two decades. But in signing up to the S-400 deal, India deliberately ignored the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

Russia's growing arms relationship with China also inserts a new, destabilising factor into the triangular relationship. Since the end of the cold war, Russia's posture has changed from refusing to sell weapons systems to China; to providing Beijing with systems similar to those it sells to India, but with less advanced technology; to providing both countries with identical technologies. In doing so, it has helped fundamentally reverse the technological balance between China and India, at the expense of the latter. Today, India's deployment of the S-400 allows it merely to keep abreast with China, as Russia is providing China with the same system. And, more immediately, the threat of Russia interrupting supplies has a direct bearing on India's security concerns with regard to China: as one notable Indian commentator put it, "India can't risk interrupting its primary military supply chain when 60,000 Chinese troops are stationing in forward positions along India's north-west border."^[2]

India is exploring ways to avoid a major disruption in the supply of Russian-made weaponry. This is precisely the sort of nuisance capability against which the Indian government is obliged to assess each of its moves away from Moscow. India is not condemned to eternal dependence on Russia for its arms procurement. But it must ensure at each stage that it has satisfactory alternatives to Russian materials and technologies available, while ultimately undertaking a longer-term modernisation of its enormous defence apparatus.

India and Western economic sanctions on Russia

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered significant sanctions that aim to isolate the former from the global trading and financial systems. The US, the EU, and the United Kingdom have frozen the assets of key Russian personnel and limited the country's ability to trade or transfer and receive funds. That being said, the potential impact of sanctions on India's trade with Russia is likely to remain muted, as the latter represents only a small part of India's total trade, while New Delhi has put in place mechanisms to reduce its vulnerability to sanctions from third countries.

According to India's Commerce Ministry, bilateral trade with Russia totalled \$8.1 billion in 2020-

2021, representing just 1.19 per cent of India's total trade, with imports amounting to \$2.6 billion and exports \$5.5 billion. Besides military equipment, imports from Russia include mineral resources, precious stones and metals, and fertilisers, while exports include pharmaceuticals, tea, coffee, and vehicle spare parts. Major industries in the energy, steel, or even automobile sectors may therefore be severely affected: key Indian energy companies such as ONGC Videsh, Indian Oil Corporation, Oil India, and Bharat PetroResources are said to have invested about \$13.6 billion in Russian oil and gas projects.

The unprecedented scope of the sanctions as well as the number of participating countries may make it difficult for India to avoid their consequences. Indeed, there are concerns in India that secondary sanctions – which are imposed on third country companies that do business with sanctioned entities – could harm trade between India and the US or US companies. But India's overall economy may be exposed only in a limited way to the consequences of Western sanctions against Russia.

India has, moreover, in the past managed to reduce its vulnerability to sanctions on Russia. In 2019, the government selected the Chennai-based Indian Bank to transact with Russian bank VTB on the grounds that it had the least exposure to the US dollar. In addition, the two countries have a rupee-rouble arrangement in place for government-to-government transactions. Such measures may therefore allow India to partially bypass sanctions. More broadly, they may enable India to manage its relationship with Russia at its own pace. But they could still form a source of irritation, if not tensions, in India's relations with the US and Europe.

Conclusion

A major question facing India's current international positioning is less whether it can distance itself from Russia without incurring the wrath of the Kremlin – and more how it can do so. Success in this regard will require sustained action on several fronts, although New Delhi is likely to move forward only cautiously.

On one front, India will need to find alternative sources for the commodities that it traditionally imports from Russia. Like the rest of the world, the country is unlikely to avoid inflationary pressures brought about by the covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. This in turn may affect the government's efforts to revive the Indian economy ahead of the general election in 2024. But, besides difficulties obtaining items such as fertilisers, this is unlikely to be more than a limited and temporary problem. On this matter, at least, it has some room for manoeuvre and fewer constraints than, say, the EU.

On the next front, finding alternative providers of high-tech defence systems may prove much more complex. India cannot afford to see Russia transferring major defence systems to China without having the possibility to acquire comparable weapons, which alternative providers' national legislation and policies make, at best, extremely difficult. Arms sales are a major source of leverage for the Kremlin, not least as it could extend these to India's other adversaries, such as Pakistan. It would not be beyond Moscow to look past its longstanding deep mistrust of Islamabad and find ways to develop its defence relationship even with an impecunious government struggling with a weak domestic economy.

Finally, on the broader international stage, India risks finding itself isolated vis-à-vis China should Russia decide to withdraw its political support in regional or multilateral forums, even if issues such as Kashmir are today much less important for India than its border disputes with China. India will therefore continue to walk a fine line in its response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as any excessive or precipitous reaction could have consequences for its own security.

In this context it is all the more important for European policymakers to understand that India's current position on the Ukraine crisis is not a deviation from its long-term trend of reducing its dependence on Russia. On the contrary, Indian officials relate that Russia's invasion of Ukraine will only reinforce this direction of travel. India's posture is a product of its political management of its relations with Russia and of its position in the Indo-Pacific region. Avoiding harsh consequences on the Chinese front is a much more significant matter for India than enduring the heat from Western diplomats.

Europeans should take care not to push New Delhi into some form of isolation. India's balancing act of appeasing both Russia and the West in the Ukraine crisis caught the EU off guard and is doubtless a source of disappointment in the short term for European officials. While Europeans would no doubt have appreciated India's active support at the UN, such a stance would not have changed the outcome of the various votes related to the war in Ukraine. India is not a direct participant in the Ukraine crisis and was never likely to adopt a position that would weaken it in relation to both Russia and China at the same time.

Ultimately the EU should consider its relationship with India in the larger Indo-Pacific context and, for the moment, place any unhappiness at India's position on Ukraine to one side. The war in Ukraine confronts European decision-makers with difficult choices about how to allocate resources between Europe and the Indo-Pacific, where they only recently pledged to be more active. Many European officials privately admit they do not yet know how to approach this question. India's positioning will therefore be crucial in this context, since it has so far proved able to manage its relations with China

and play the role of balancing power, even if reluctantly so. India's posture on Ukraine may be frustrating, and its caution with regard to Russia may come across as excessive. Nevertheless, the EU's interests in the wider geostrategic landscape will be best met if India has the space to manage its extrication from its Russian dependencies – and retain the freedom and ability to be an effective partner for Western powers in the Indo-Pacific.

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[1] Interview with Prमित Pal Chaudhuri, foreign editor, Hindustan Times, 15 March 2022.

[2] Interview with Prमित Pal Chaudhuri, foreign editor, Hindustan Times, 15 March 2022.

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