

# INDIA MAY COME UNDER PRESSURE ON RUSSIA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Hard line: Antony Blinken, Marise Payne, S. Jaishankar and Yoshimasa Hayashi at the Quad meet in Melbourne. File photo | Photo Credit: HAMISH BLAIR

European countries will make a push for India to take a stronger line on Russia as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar travels to attend the annual Munich Security Conference (MSC). He is likely to meet his counterparts, including the European Union's Josep Borrell and Germany's Annalena Baerbock, during the conference, which is expected to focus on the fears of a conflict in Ukraine.

According to sources involved in the preparations for the visit, the discussions will build on similar conversations held with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the Quad Ministerial meeting in Melbourne last week, and high-level meetings in South Block with visiting British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development (FCDO) Officials in the past two weeks.

A White House spokesperson said on Monday that Mr. Blinken discussed the "challenges Russia poses to the rules-based international order," "throughout his talks" with the Quad partners, including Mr. Jaishankar.

In a departure from previous years, when Russia has sent officials to the conference, it has decided not to attend this year, a government spokesperson said in Moscow last week. This is understood to be due to the ongoing tensions over Ukraine, where more than 1,00,000 Russian troops are ranged along its boundaries and involved in massive military drill with Belarus. In particular, the sources said the officials would discuss a "Joint sanctions package", including stringent economic and financial strictures against Russia if there was any increase in hostilities.

## 'Principled' stand

New Delhi has thus far held firm on what Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials call a "principled" stand, which involves encouraging diplomatic solutions between the NATO and Russia, abstaining from a vote on the discussion at the U.N. Security Council, not publicly criticising Moscow despite western pressure given the close India-Russia strategic partnership, and refusing to follow "national sanctions", or sanctions not mandated by the U.N.. However, the sources said the EU members of the NATO in particular have made it clear that they hope that India "upholds Ukraine's territorial integrity" in the face of any Russian aggression.

To that end, India's decision to issue its first travel advisory to citizens in Ukraine to leave the country temporarily is being seen by Ukraine's European associates as a sign that New Delhi is recognising the precarious security situation caused by the troops build-up, said diplomats, but doesn't yet match up to their expectations.

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