

EXPRESS VIEW ON MODI-PUTIN CALL: THE NEW MULTI-ALIGNMENT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Russia

The current moment in international affairs is marked by renewed great power rivalry. The conflicts in Europe and West Asia – between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Hamas – and the broader tussle between the US and China on economic, technological and strategic fronts make it tempting to view the global scenario in binaries. Two recent events, however, show that New Delhi has managed to engage with diverse partners who are often at odds with each other. If India's non-alignment during the Cold War was — in principle if not practice — defined by its claim of equidistance from the two blocs, its current “multi-alignment” is guided by national interest and the need to forge bilateral relationships.

On Monday, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) had a phone conversation in which they reportedly discussed the “special and privileged strategic partnership” between the two countries, the [Ukraine](#) conflict and a further deepening of bilateral ties. Around the same time, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar was concluding a two-day visit to Iran, where he met his counterpart and other senior officials and finalised cooperation on developing the Chabahar Port. Russia and Iran are, in a sense, on the “other side” vis-a-vis India and China.

In the early stage of the Ukraine conflict, the US put considerable pressure on [Delhi](#) to take a stronger position against Russia's aggression. Iran, too, is embroiled in a regional cold war with Israel and Saudi Arabia — India has deep partnerships with both nations. That it has managed to maintain these bilateral ties even as its partnership with the US and Europe grows is significant. Significantly with both nations, Delhi hasn't compromised on its core principles: PM Modi reportedly reiterated India's position to Putin — that war cannot be a solution and Jaishankar communicated zero tolerance for terror and how the Houthi attacks on merchant vessels harm India's interests.

It is equally important to recognise the underlying conditions that have allowed New Delhi room to manoeuvre on the global stage. The first of these is India's continuing economic rise. The size of its market as well as its potential for future growth give Delhi both strategic and diplomatic heft. Second, as China has grown more aggressive in Asia, and beyond, many in the US and the West see India as a crucial regional counterbalance. Among the many factors that make India an attractive partner is its credentials as a liberal, pluralist democracy. As it continues to navigate the choppy waters of geopolitics and geoeconomics to secure its interests, India must ensure it does not slip on either front.

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