

UKRAINE'S SITUATION, INDIA'S NATIONAL INTEREST

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

A demonstration in support of Ukraine in London | Photo Credit: Getty Images

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, in his televised speech on the night of February 21, 2022, had announced a “special military operation to protect people who have been abused by the genocide of the Kyiv regime for eight years.” Mr. Putin further said: “We will strive for the demilitarization and de-Nazification of Ukraine, as well bring to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians.” Who is ‘We’? In the 21st century, why is Mr. Putin using despicable 19th century Imperialist language?

There is, or was, however no genocide in Ukraine proved by any documented report. Moreover, the Ukrainian government is nowhere close to be legitimately called “Nazi”. For example, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is a Jew. He is also proud of his Jewish grandfather who had fought against Hitler’s German army. In fact, Mr. Putin’s actions during the last few days are making Mr. Putin himself sound more like the hated Nazis. As of now, Russian bombs are pounding Ukraine. Russian soldiers are pouring into Ukraine. The only question on everyone’s lips is: “Why? What does Russia hope to accomplish with this bloody invasion?” The Ukrainian people from the very top, from President Zelensky himself, have decided to fight and Russian troop movement is thus down to a crawl and behind announced schedule.

Mr. Putin seems to believe that “Ukraine is an illegitimate country that exists on land that is historically and rightfully Russia’s”. But even the most biased Russian history book does not suggest even remotely this outrageous Nazi-like belief of Mr. Putin.

Thus, the talk of a “de-Nazification” of the Russian establishment, while absurd at the factual level, nonetheless reveals that Mr. Putin is “acting on his long-held autocratic belief that the Ukrainian government has no right to exist”. His ultimate goal seems to be to make Ukraine into a vassal of his future as yet imaginary, Russian-led Soviet Empire.

In his earlier 2005 Declaration, Mr. Putin had stated that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster”. There are not many takers for this view even inside Russia. “The most relevant formulation, for the purposes of understanding the current invasion, however came in Mr. Putin’s inflammatory speech on Ukraine policy delivered on February 20 last, in which the central contention of his address is that Ukraine and Russia are, in historical terms, essentially inseparable. Mr. Putin’s narrative is twisted history: It is simply incorrect to say that Ukraine has had no independent national identity that is separate from Russia”.

The Narendra Modi government had decided to abstain on the vote on the United Nations Security Council Resolution (moved by the United States and its allies against Russia over the Ukraine invasion). But Prime Minister Modi should surely recognise that BRICS, in its New Delhi Declaration (paragraph 22 in the XIII BRICS Summit), had resolved that the five BRICS nations were opposed to the unilateral use of force against any state, and wanted all disputes resolved by peaceful means, and categorically ruled out the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State (September 9, 2021).

The text adopted was as follows: “We (BRICS) underscore the inadmissibility of the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes and principles of United Nations.”

Thus, the New Delhi BRICS Declaration commits to resolving all disputes by peaceful means and is opposed to unilateral use of force against any state. Russia by invading Ukraine has violated that resolution to which India also was a prominent party.

This declaration was in fact approved and signed by Russia in the presence of Mr. Putin along with China's President Xi Jinping. Yet, six months later, Russia, a founder-member of BRICS, has forgotten that resolution by Russia's unilateral illegal violent military action against Ukraine.

That is why I have been advocating, since long, for India walking out of BRICS since I had earlier apprehended the coming collapse of BRICS. In 2015 I had declined Prime Minister Modi's offer to me, conveyed by Bharatiya Janata Party leader Amit Shah in the presence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh representative, of accepting to become the first President of the BRICS Bank. I conveyed to the Prime Minister directly later that China would soon be turning hostile to India, and BRICS would lose credibility. Today the invasion and aggression against Ukraine has in effect cremated the spirit of BRICS.

“By casting the Ukrainian regime in the most negative possible light — and officially linking Russia's official war aims to ‘de-Nazification’ and ‘demilitarization’ — Mr. Putin is all but openly acting on his belief, that Ukraine is not a legitimate sovereign state, into aggressive action. The Russian case for the war is thus built on an unwitting lie about Ukraine's history”, as an article says.

From this juncture onwards, India has to take stock since the apparent goal of India becoming a “Viswa Guru” is now, at best, a mirage. From Jawaharlal Nehru onwards, India has failed to become one since it cannot be a reality in the present global dispensation. Instead, India needs friends and collaborators but without bowing before any country.

One way for India to begin asserting itself is to suggest to Russia to withdraw its armed forces from the entire Ukraine in keeping with the aforementioned Delhi Resolution of BRICS. If Russia does not give weight to India's suggestion, the Modi government should announce in the UN General Assembly, consideration of the U.S. proposed Draft Resolution; India would vote for it after the United Nations General Assembly adopts any reasonable amendments proposed.

India should also urge the United States to re-structure the objectives and the priorities of the Quad, outline a clear strategy to achieve the objectives, and mobilise the resources required.

For India, a President Xi-led China is a hostile nation directly, and in global competition. India is potentially capable of meeting this Chinese threat — a threat that is evident by China grabbing 50,000 square kilometres of Indian territory.

The potential strength of India can become actual capability with a little help from the United States. As for Russia, its position in global affairs will depend on the outcome of the Ukraine invasion. At present Russia is falling behind its announced schedule. Ukraine has by its bravery caused delays in Russia's schedule. With help from members of the United Nations, Ukraine can become the David against the Russian Goliath and become a free democratic nation again.

Subramanian Swamy, a PhD in Economics from Harvard, has been in Parliament for six terms. He was also a Union Cabinet Minister of Commerce and Law & Justice

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