

MOUNTING PRESSURE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON WHY INDIA SHOULD KEEP ITS OPTIONS OPEN ON UKRAINE

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

It is certainly no coincidence that a string of foreign leaders, Ministers and officials are descending on New Delhi this month, as the [Russian invasion of Ukraine](#) continues for its fourth week, and without a clear end in sight. There are [summits with the Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia \(virtual\)](#), and one soon with the Israeli Prime Minister, and [visits by the U.S. Under Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland](#), as well as European Foreign Ministers and delegations. What the visits by NATO and Quad allies of the U.S. all have in common is their planning at short notice, and putting discussions on India's stand on Ukraine at the top of their talks. Even Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, who had a full bilateral agenda to discuss with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at their much-delayed annual summit meeting, arrived in Delhi on a very short visit, and made it clear that finding a common position on Ukraine and telling India that it must not "condone" Russia's actions was a "priority". The message from the West is clear: that India must shift its position on three counts: to do more at the UN, where New Delhi has consistently abstained from resolutions criticising Moscow; to join the sanctions regime; and to avoid contracting for more Russian oil, or sending civil or military supplies to the Putin regime until the war ends. The flurry of visits, comments by officials, and press statements by diplomats indicate that tensions between Russia and the West have reached a point of no return, and New Delhi is being asked to make a very pointed choice between them.

While there are several reasons why New Delhi has declined the attempts to steer it from its course on Russia that are linked to its strong partnership with Russia, there are some global interests that the Modi government must consider more closely. The civilian toll in Ukraine is mounting, and while Russia has denied reports of targeted attacks on schools and theatres, it is necessary for New Delhi to acknowledge any Russian violation of human rights, especially as the Kremlin has not yet fully clarified its endgame. Second, while India has expressed concerns over nuclear safety, it must be willing to make this an issue with Moscow, if necessary. Another area is the threat of chemical and biological warfare, and while the Indian representative spoke strongly at the UN Security Council about the importance of fully implementing the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Government must be prepared to vote on the issue and call out any side that violates these. As the war progresses, more such debates will arise, and New Delhi must retain its ability to judge and shift its position from "being neutral" and "abstentionist" to one more wholly seized of the issues, and as a leading nation that is able to exercise its "strategic autonomy" on matters of principle, when required.

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