

HOME AND ABROAD: ON INDIA'S ROLE AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN POLARISED NATIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: UNO and its various Agencies

Delivering [India's statement at the United Nations General Assembly](#) (UNGA) this year, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar spoke of several challenges in India's past, present and future, with a special emphasis on the [immediate "shocks" arising from the war in Ukraine](#), the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and terrorism. In stark contrast to the Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, [who made pejorative remarks about India](#), Mr. Jaishankar made no direct comment on Pakistan. Nor did he directly mention India's challenges at the Line of Actual Control, although he criticised China's habit of politicising and [blocking UN Security Council terrorist designations](#). His comments on Ukraine were watched, as they came days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi was lauded by western countries for telling Russian President Vladimir Putin that the "era of war is over". Mr. Jaishankar expanded on Mr. Modi's theme without seeming to either criticise Russia or condone its actions: instead, he said, India stands on the side of peace, of respect for the UN charter, dialogue and diplomacy, and with all those now grappling with the "escalating costs of food, of fuel and fertilizers". His words were even-handed, and require global stakeholders to consider both the risks from the conflict in Ukraine, and from U.S.-EU led sanctions that could exacerbate global economic fragmentation and inflationary trends. The prognosis seems even bleaker, given that just prior to the UNGA, Mr. Putin delivered a speech committing to Russia's ability to use "all weapons", indicating nuclear options, while the Ukrainian President said no dialogue could bring an end to the war, calling instead for more weaponry and a global effort to "punish" Russia.

Above all, Mr. Jaishankar hailed what he called the "New India" under Mr. Modi, spelling out five pledges made at the 75th Independence day anniversary, which includes making India a developed nation by 2047. He added that India is ready to take on enhanced responsibility at the global body, and called for a reformed UN with an expanded Security Council, as a means at righting the "injustice" done to the global south. The year ahead, where India will host the G-20 summit, will, no doubt, test the will and the ability of the Modi government to play the role of global uniter, and what Mr. Jaishankar called a "bridge" between nations polarised by bitter divides. It is a goal which will only be achievable if New Delhi is able to play a similarly uniting role in its own neighbourhood, and bring polarising and divisive forces within India under control.

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