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Why India should reconsider its ties with Russia (/index.php/spotlight/why-india-should-reconsider-its-ties-russia)

To expect that in a possible future armed conflict with a neighbor, India can rely on the Russian army is lunacy. The Russian army itself demonstrated in Ukraine what actually it represents, write Prof (Dr) Vesselin Popovski, Prof Abhinav Mehrotra and Surabhi Bhandari for South Asia Monitor



(/contributors/21248/Prof (Dr.) Vesselin Popovski, Prof Abhinav Mehrotra and Surabhi Bhandari) **By**

Prof (Dr.) Vesselin Popovski, Prof Abhinav Mehrotra and Surabhi Bhandari (/contributors/21248/Prof

(Dr.) Vesselin Popovski, Prof Abhinav Mehrotra and Surabhi Bhandari) | May 06, 2022



Russian President Vladimir Putin meets PM Narendra Modi. (Photo: PIB)

Russia has been removed from the Human Rights Council and Council of Europe. Various countries and blocs, including the US, the European Union and the UK, have imposed sanctions against Russia, targeting banks, oil refineries and military exports following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Two of Russia's largest state-backed banks -- Sberbank and VTB Bank -- are sanctioned. Russia is cut off from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) international payment system. In this light, an important question arises about India's future relations with Russia. So far, India's role has been limited to declaratory statements and absenting itself from votes in the United National General Assembly (UNGA). Is there more to be done? Like taking a stand against Russia by imposing sanctions and being more proactive at the international level.

Historically, India's leadership has been appreciative of the Soviet support leading to India's independence. The diplomatic relations commenced post-India's independence in 1947. The Indo-Soviet relationship is said to be based on pillars of continuity, mutual trust and confidence, special bilateral trade and economic relationship.

India-Russia worldview

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In practice, both India and Russia support the concept of a multi-polar world, where there is one superpower and there are multiple poles that are important centers of economic and political power acting as independent actors. What this means is the co-existence of multiple powers and possibilities in the international system, collective security that is inclusive, greater regionalism to foster common regional interest, negotiated settlements, the possibility of independent foreign policy, and that international bodies like the UN that should be strengthened, democratized and empowered.

One of the most unique characteristics of the economic and political relationship between India and Russia has been the evolution from a purely buyer-seller relationship to joint research, design development and production of state-of-the-art military platforms. To illustrate, a successful example of it is the Brahmos missile. The two are also involved in the indigenous production of tanks and fighter jets, along with the upgrade of existing systems.

However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought all these aims, aspirations and economic relations under question as there are rampant violations of the territorial sovereignty and integrity by Russia. These have further dented its image and put the relationship it shares with India under contention. At a larger level, the damage caused to Russia at the regional and international level is something that needs to be taken account of for future Indo-Russia relations.

Ukraine war

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It seems that with the continuation of the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the scenes of horrendous war crimes being revealed in many cities occupied by the Russian army, and the continuous denial by Kremlin of any wrongdoing, the conflict is not approaching an end soon. Russia is reluctant to withdraw from the occupied land and negotiate meaningfully, keeps repeating various imaginary lies of being under attack itself by Ukraine and gradually losing power in all aspects – military, economic and political.

In the circumstances where the world is almost united in support of Ukraine and in the accusation of Russia, it is time for India to reconsider its ties and historical relationship with Moscow. Otherwise, it faces the unpleasant isolation of remaining in the camp of the few remaining dictators – Russia, China, North Korea and Belarus – and lose its reputation among the rest of the world.

There are three reasons why India should reconsider its ties with Russia – moral, pragmatic and geopolitical.

Risks for India

This is a historic moment and where someone stands in the fight between an aggressor and a victim does matter. After WW II, for a long time – 10 years -- those countries that collaborated with Hitler were considered 'enemy states', and they were accepted into the UN only in 1955. If we move outside the high politics and ask any regular Indian person on the street where should India belong between an aggressor and a victim, the answer will be crystal clear. India itself has been a victim of many foreign interventions and occupations historically and everyone naturally and instinctively would take the side of the victim.

But even if we put the moral aspect aside and try to be pragmatic, to regard Russia as a future strategic partner is also wrong. It will not bring any benefit -- economic or military – to India. The Russian economy is already crippled by the sanctions, even its gas and oil industry is highly dependent on imported reserve parts and once these no longer arrive from abroad, the extraction of oil and gas will decrease.

Same with the weapons industry; it will not be plausible to expect Russia, whose economy and banking system are gradually collapsing, to be able – even with its best intentions -- to supply the weapons and military equipment that India used to import in the past.

Moral issue

To expect that in a possible future armed conflict with a neighbor, India can rely on the Russian army is lunacy. The Russian army itself demonstrated in Ukraine what actually it represents -- both in terms of disorganization and disrespect for the rules and norms of war. India in the time of Mahabharata respected the rules of war much more that Russia does today in Ukraine. Is this army that massacred civilians the one India would like to consider its ‘future strategic partner’?

Finally, let’s consider future geopolitics. If India does not reconsider its foreign policy and moves it away from Russia, it will remain more and more isolated, among those fewer and fewer remaining ‘Russian friends’ in the world. In the long term, India will continue to lose its international reputation, will be unfriended and sidelined at the UN and G-20, and regarded as non-reliable. This will bring additional economic and reputational costs. India can simply forget any pretence to be given a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and in the shaping of the future global order.

(The authors are Prof (Dr.) Vesselin Popovski, Professor, OP Jindal Global University and Executive Director, Centre for Study of United Nations; Prof Abhinav Mehrotra, Assistant Professor, OP Jindal Global University and Assistant Director, Centre for Study of United Nations; and Surabhi Bhandari, LLM Student, OP Jindal Global University and Researcher, Centre for Study of United Nations. Views are personal)

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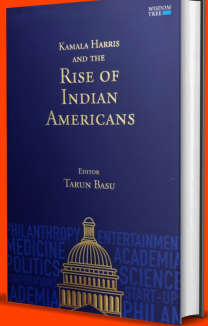
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