

Why India is right not to take sides on Ukraine

AMRITPAL KAUR

Critics from either side of the foreign policy matrix may have issues with India charting an independent and balanced course on Russia's invasion of Ukraine as against Nato allies and European Union opposition to this intrusion.

Pro-Nato and European think tanks have made out that India missed the bus in playing a decisive role in world affairs yet again by staying away from the conflict. Soviet-era Russia backers have hailed India's 'sensible' decision not to go whole hog with the Nato alliance given her varied offensive and defensive interests. However, the Modi government hardly had many options in changing the course of events leading to military aggression on Ukraine by Russia while both Nato and the European Union went ahead with severe sanctions against Moscow.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's telephonic conversation with President Vladimir Putin is a significant step to convey India's message and concerns to the Russians. Since Indian students studying medicine in Ukraine are caught in the crossfire, the government has expressed its concerns that Indians be allowed to return home safely. India's appeals for peace and getting back to diplomatic dialogue on outstanding issues relating to Ukraine cannot be ignored by the world community.

Russia's 'military operation' in Ukraine has virtually sealed the possibility of rapprochement with Europe that continued to hang in balance during the last 30 years. India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar rightly assessed the genesis of the Ukrainian issue to lie in the complexities of 'Post Soviet Politics, expansion of Nato and relationship between Russia and Europe.'

In the last three decades, Russia



concluded numerous arms-reduction treaties with Western countries including the 1997 Russia-Nato Act, Budapest Memorandum, Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (1990), Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (1987) and Open Skies Treaty that put an end to the cold war in Europe and opened avenues for cooperation between Russia and Europe.

Within Russian circles there is a genuine belief that they did not reap benefit of the cooperation with Europe, the point of affliction being the grant of Nato membership to Ukraine that brings Europe's sphere of influence to Russia's doorstep. In this context, President Putin's statement that Russia wants demilitarization of Ukraine and it 'does not intend to occupy' the country implies that the conflict goes beyond bilateral relations and points to involvement of greater Western powers.

In the larger struggle for supremacy, one country which has been asked to pick sides is India. As an emerging market economy, credible and substantial international power, India has largely seen herself as a stabilizing factor that pushes seriously for peace and prosperity. Such is the case especially after India became an equivalent member of Quad after shunning 'hesitations of

history' that defined non-alignment. The Indian position has come into greater focus due to its close relations with Russia, the US and the European Union. Its membership and current chairmanship at UNSC have only accentuated India's stake given that she has been a longtime votary of an independent foreign policy and plural-lateral world order.

Since India has had close civilizational links with both sides, it is pragmatic and logical to abstain from voting on the Ukraine issue at UNSC. India's representative at UN, T N Tirumurti spelt out India's stand and asked countries to find peaceful, diplomatic solutions through the Minsk mechanism. Also, it should be kept in mind that being a member of Quad does not make it imperative for India to jump into a European crisis. S. Jaishankar has poignantly said that during the Galwan crisis Europe did not support India right off the bat, they took their own strategic calculations into account. In return, as an independent country, India has the right to decide her course based on her strategic calculations.

At the same time, it is rather impractical to expect India to sever its relations with Russia that has been her single largest defense partner with 60 per cent share in India's defense inventory. On the other hand,

India has also nurtured progressive relations with the US as well as Europe for over 20 years, since the Vajpayee-Clinton era. India as a fast-developing country has its own pressing needs with over 1.4 billion to feed. Therefore, expectations on either side for India to align may not fit into New Delhi's scheme of things. Her compulsions to lift a vast majority out of poverty and put herself on the growth trajectory are what drive India's foreign policy. In fact, these imperatives pushed India's position, striking a fine line between Russia and the West at large.

However, instability on the eastern flank of Europe brings home the acute need to develop in-house inventory of defense mechanisms and systems without depending on imports. Self-reliance is the key to great power status. 'Make in India' initiative in the defense sector is a significant component of the policy choice made by the Indian government.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is bound to create ripple effects already being felt in India though New Delhi has stayed away from swinging either way. Crude prices touching \$105 per barrel in spot markets would translate to a larger fuel import bill thereby upsetting budget numbers outlined by Finance Minister Nirmala Sithara-

man.

As Russia, apart from OPEC, has been a large exporter of hydrocarbons in particular to Europe, the crisis will increase fuel prices and shortages in almost all of Europe. For instance, Finland imports most of its crude while Hungary gets 83 per cent, Austria - 62 per cent and Germany imports 46 per cent of its natural gas directly from Russia.

Russia's output had kept fuel prices competitive while curbing the Gulf's dominance; its engagement otherwise will give space for the Gulf monopoly that is bound to distort market prices, distribution as well as access. Most importantly, it will create crude-induced inflationary pressures in countries such as India where over 80 per cent fuel demand is met through imports.

The World Bank report, Global Economic Prospects, 2022 argues that the world is walking towards global slowdown as the fiscal support in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic wanes, increase in debts and inequalities would kick in across the world. It will be a blow to the precarious growth of the world economy going through post-Covid impact.

There is no denying that Europe and the world at large is treading choppy waters. Though the ongoing invasion may not go the cold war way, it will certainly wreak havoc on lives of innocent people caught in the crossfire.

Human cost involved in the war should act as a deterrent and the countries involved should focus on progressive de-escalation measures. At the same time, there is a need for recognizing bullies that do not allow a sustainable global order to emerge. As Gandhi said, an eye for eye attitude will make all of humanity blind!

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Towards a new era of imperialism?

ABHIROOP CHOWDHURY AND ARMIN ROSENCRANZ

On 24 February, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, announced that his country was under threat from its neighbour, Ukraine. Following this, Russia launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine. This is the first time since the end of World War II in 1945 that a nation has tried to expand its borders through military conquest.

In his 'Invasion of Ukraine' speech, Putin questioned Ukraine's statehood and asserted that it had always been an integral part of Russia's 'history, culture and spiritual space'. He drew references from imperial Russia under the Tsars and blamed the Bolsheviks and their leader, Lenin, for creating Ukraine as a separate country. His speech echoed Hitler's March 1938 'Anschluss Österreich', where Austria was annexed into Nazi Germany because it had a German-speaking population. That invasion had pushed the world into World War II, which cost more than 50 million lives.

After the end of WWII, the world has seen proxy wars where two ideologies have collided often: US-led democracies vs non-democratic regimes. The Korean war (1950-1953), the Vietnam war (1955-1975) and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) were examples of these proxies where two ideologies had collided. But when Saddam Hussein tried to annex Kuwait in 1990, the United Nations and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members took firm action, dissuading other nations from using military power to expand their borders.

Russia's veto against its invasion



in the UNSC and the abstention of the world's two largest populations - India and China to condone this war crime, has left the world skeptical of the effectiveness of the United Nations as an arbiter in international conflicts.

Surrounding Ukraine are Western-affiliated states, namely Germany, Poland, Romania, Lithuania,

Latvia and Estonia, who are voicing their discontent over this event but doing little to help the nation under attack.

India is fighting the expansionist ambitions of China under Xi Jinping - at Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh. Just like Putin, Xi has been advocating the redrawing of borders with frequent reference to the 'Chin dynasty'.

But still India abstained from condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the UN.

The lack of solidarity with Ukraine can be understood through the strong strategic position Russia holds: India is one of the largest purchasers of military hardware from Russia. In addition, sixty five percent of Germany's gas and 40 per cent of

the EU's gas comes from Russia's hydrocarbon reserves in the Caspian and Volga basins. Half of India's overall military assets are of Russian origin. Ninety percent of India's tanks are from Russia. India's air force consists primarily of Russian-made planes. India depends on Putin's Russia to maintain and operate its military machine. This effectively illustrates why India chose to sideline human rights concerns at Ukraine in favour of its own security.

In major wars Russia or the USSR was India's ally. At the time of Bangladesh's independence in 1971, when Nixon's USA was ready to send its fleet to defend Pakistan, USSR was the only support India had in the UN Security Council. Thus, India is reluctant to sideline its long alliance with Moscow.

The failure of US interventions in Afghanistan and previously in Vietnam have raised doubts about the extent of the country's commitment to protect other democracies. The current dilemma is even more bleak. The US's apparent unwillingness to help Ukraine, and the reluctance of EU powers to act with hard power, seem to question the current role of the US and EU in global geopolitics.

If international agencies do not take a strong stance soon on the Russia-Ukraine issue, the situation can spiral out of control and prove institutions like NATO and UN to be ineffective. The world may not be able to maintain its hard earned peace, as military giants will begin a game of control, to satiate their imperial ambitions.

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100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

For the present, at least, the Corporation of Calcutta is more or less solvent - a condition sufficiently rare among municipal, local, and even Imperial Governments today to warrant subdued expressions of satisfaction from its friends and admirers. But, as we are warned by Mr. J.N. Gupta, in his recently published Note, this state of things is too good to last. The commitments of the Corporation, actual and prospective, are steadily increasing, but the revenue fails to follow suit, so that while "the prospect of raising the rates during the next year might be put off, and the Budget has been prepared on these lines, there is very little likelihood of the Corporation being able to avoid an increase in 1923-24, particularly as a much larger amount will have to be borrowed in 1923-24 for the water supply scheme, than in 1922-23, and there will be heavier expenditure in connection with the primary education scheme." Thus, even though no new schemes are undertaken for the public advantage, fresh finance must be found for existing enterprises; and the borrowing capacity of the municipal body is almost exhausted. In these circumstances, the City Fathers may be expected to call upon the ratepayers to surrender whatever pittance may be left to them after the rapacity of the Imperial tax-gatherer has been satisfied.

NEWS ITEMS

STRIKE SITUATION LESS BRIGHT

The optimistic spirit raised by Tuesday's news regarding the East Indian Railway strike position was more or less completely dispelled yesterday - the twenty-eighth day of the deadlock - when it became known that Swami Darsanand, president and organiser of the East Indian Railway Labour Association had succeeded not only in preventing a large number of the traffic staff at Ondal from returning to work but also in inducing a no small number who had already taken up duty again to join the strikers. The moral effect of this "victory" will no doubt be great, but the steady pressure of economic necessity is bound to wear out the men's allegiance even to such an energetic personality as that of Darsanand.

COLLECTION OF RENTS IN GUNTUR

MADRAS, MAR 1
Collections in the Guntur District up to February 23 amounted to nearly 32 and half lakhs, out of a total land revenue demand for the year of 58 and three fourth lakhs. Collections on February 23 totalled nearly 4 lakhs. The District Magistrate has continued his tour in Palnad taluk and effected the arrest of ten men, belonging to Jangamaheswarapuram, who had been concerned in the forcible rescue of a prisoner from custody, also of the leaders of a lawless party in Jetipalem who had forcibly rescued from pound over 100 cattle which had been found grazing without permits in the forest. His assertion of the authority of the Government is having a good effect in every direction and there are hopes that the villagers will not again be led away by evil advice.

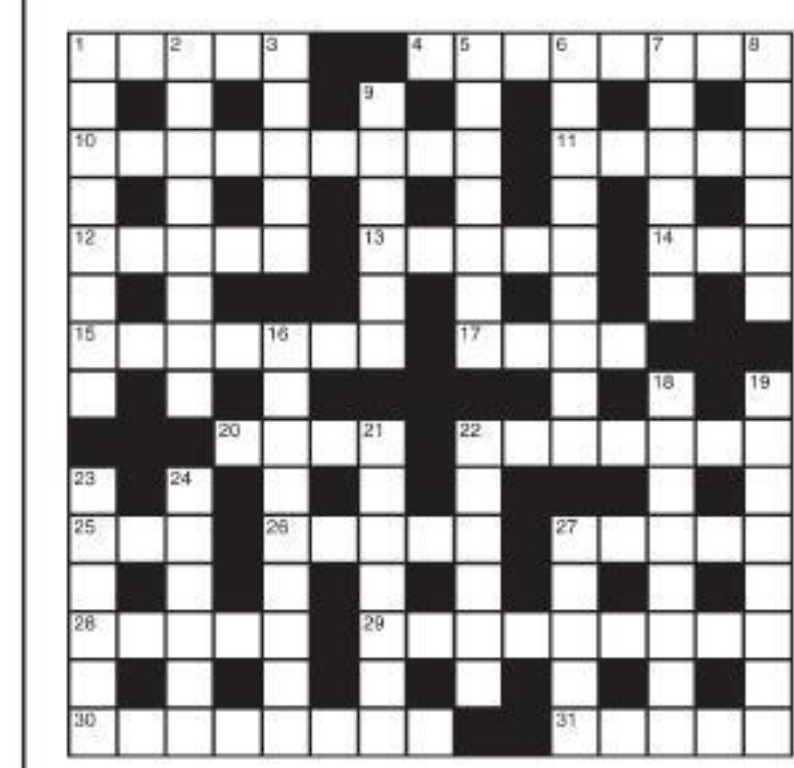
SCHOOLS OF INDIAN SCULPTURE

In the course of an interesting lecture on "Schools of Indian Sculpture," at the Indian Museum, Calcutta, on Tuesday night, Mr. Ramprasad Chandra, Superintendent of the Archaeological Section of the Museum, said that though the field of ancient Indian history stretched as far as the eye could see, so to speak, the absence of any road marked by the milestones of chronology and metallised by the debris of ancient monuments offered very great difficulties to the explorer. The pathway revealed by a century of archaeological investigation came to an abrupt termination in the third century B.C., in the reign of the Emperor Asoka, and what little authentic materials they had of pre-Mauriyan sculpture did not warrant them in postulating the existence of any school in the ordinary sense.

FRENCH GRATITUDE TO MOSLEMS

A Havas message from Paris says that in grateful memory of Moslem soldiers who so gallantly fought and died under the French Flag in the Great War, the French Government has decided to erect a stately mosque and Islamic College on ground donated by the City of Paris to the Rector of the world-famous Sorbonne University. A dedicatory ceremony, with full Moslem rites, is to be held today, and will be attended by members of the Government. Field-Marshal Lyantey, Governor-General of Morocco, by special envoy of the Sultan of Morocco, the Turkish Ambassador, the Envoy of the Sultan of Egypt, and representatives of practically all the Moslem peoples, notably Persia, Afghanistan, Khorrassan and Mauretania, and all Deputies and Senators representing French Moslem Colonies will also be present.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

U T A O S M A G
M O O N L I G H T E D D I E
B H T E A O O N
E Y E S O R E V E W T R E E
L A G W E
L E V E E T R I P L E S E C
I E T H T A A
F E N C H U R C H S T R E E T
E E E T E X S
R E S U R G E N T T O P I C
A S A T I A
V I N C E N T C O C H R A N
E D D E T K I N
G R A V E P E T U L A N C E
A L I N S Y E G R

ACROSS

- Writer making copper three dimensional (5)
- Angels missing out on one Hotel New Hampshire (9)
- Have habit that's a bit much - no more doctors keeping tabs (9)
- See 7 Down
- Server dropping one drink (5)
- Minister assuming party position (3-2)
- Irving's first novel's last line is off-colour (3)
- Fiction Professor taking week's rest (3,4)
- Toy Show (4)
- Digital photo of Judge, for example (4)
- Take me dancing with gangster, ultimately becoming part of mob (7)
- Staff regularly reading magazines (3)
- Cast out and about with musical, mostly touring (5)
- Lengthy pedestrian crossing built up (5)
- Regrets accommodating fifty guides (5)
- In retrospect, number is up for invested wealth (9)
- Vegetable put, essentially, by one of Irving's characters, in salt water (5,3)
- Steals 6 seconds (5)

DOWN

- Old Republican, Romney halved weight in prison accommodation (8)
- Setting Free The Bears is pants (9)
- Alcoholic drink thrown up somewhat predictably (5)
- He Finally paused awkwardly and relaxed (5,2)
- Very adult books saw covers getting interest (9)
- Twisted River echoes form of epic poetry (6,5)
- Cloth, largely covering English breakfast? (6)
- Initially Owen Meany worked as a petty officer with clerical duties (6)
- Quiet journalists wearing glasses start to rattle tyrant (9)
- Missing exercise (8)
- Bosses welcoming hospital department's trainees (8)
- Sight exam's soft for Charlie (7)
- Manner of drug overdose (6)
- Smiles smugly as text describes distress (6)
- International organisation cleared out petrol refined by government to remove the lead (6)
- Show bust and get all naked for audience (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

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