

Analyzing the Renovation of Global World Power Balance and Effect on India in Reference to the Russia-Ukraine War

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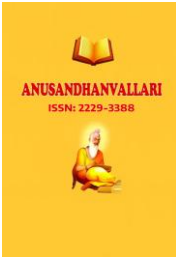
Abstract: Russia-Ukraine conflict, coupled with the subsequent economic sanctions imposed by the West, has profound ramifications for international strategic stability, the functioning of global governance institutions, and the delicate balance of power, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic region. The resultant turbulence arrives at a time when global economies were already struggling to stabilize prices and re-establish supply chains disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounding the difficulty of finding stable solutions. India, positioning itself as a major democracy and a leading voice of the Global South, faces unparalleled calculated pressure to either align with the Western liberal order or consolidate its ties within the emerging Eurasian alliance. This quandary positions an essential challenge to India's long-standing pursuit of strategic autonomy. The present study investigates how the macro-level alteration of the global power balance, specifically catalyzed by the conflict and the resulting deepening of the Sino-Russian alignment, constrains the policy space available to India.

Key Words: COVID-19, Global South, Eurasian alliance, strategic autonomy, Sino-Russian alignment, Russia-Ukraine conflict, economic sanctions, global governance, balance of power, Western liberal order, India's foreign policy, energy security, defense diplomacy, supply chain disruptions, multilateralism, great-power politics, NATO, Indo-Pacific strategy, emerging geopolitical order, international strategic stability

Introduction

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022 creates a major systemic shock to the international order, accelerating trends of geopolitical fragmentation and power transition that were already underway. This conflict, coupled with the subsequent economic sanctions imposed by the West, has profound ramifications for international strategic stability, the functioning of global governance institutions, and the delicate balance of power, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic region. The resultant turbulence arrives at a time when global economies were already struggling to stabilize prices and re-establish supply chains disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounding the difficulty of finding stable solutions.

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The primary proposition of this analysis is that India's sustained multi-alignment policy, while succeeding tactically in securing essential discounted energy and maintaining critical defense support from Russia, is increasingly destabilized by the structural pressures exerted by a hardening Sino-Russian geopolitical axis. This systemic constraint forces India into a near-term ranking of immediate regional security goals (countering China/Pakistan) over long-term strategic alignment with Western partners.

Hypothetical Anchoring

The conceptual framework for understanding India's response rests upon two key theoretical doctrines: strategic autonomy/multi-alignment and the Neo-Realist conception of security imperatives.

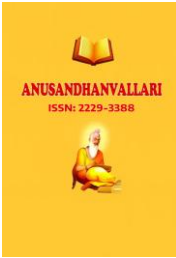
Strategic Multi-Alignment and Autonomy

India's current foreign policy is defined by "multi-alignment," an evolution from its Cold War-era policy of Non-Alignment (NAM). Multi-alignment seeks to reduce reliance on any single major power, thereby preserving strategic autonomy while concurrently attaining the threesome of national interests: economic development, security, and enhanced status. This policy is characterized by a flexible, issue-specific tactic, exemplified by India's ability to purchase cheaper Russian oil without risking essential partnerships with the West. India's commitment to this approach ensures that, despite external pressures, its foreign policy choices remain anchored in maximizing its national interests.

Neo-Realism and the Security Dilemma

The decision to maintain close ties with Russia, despite international calls for censure, is most clearly understood through the lens of Neo-Realist theory. India's strategic calculus is overpoweringly dominated by the structural authoritative of national defense against immediate regional threats posed by China and Pakistan. India retains a critical dependency on Russia for military hardware, spare parts, and maintenance capabilities. This structural necessity dictates that India must order preventing a complete shift by Russia into an exclusive, stronger strategic partnership with its challengers, China and Pakistan, a development that would primarily undermine India's security and territorial integrity.

The geopolitical cost India has experienced—Western criticism regarding its defense of democratic principles—is tolerated because the policy serves a higher security goal. The willpower shown by India to maintain the Russia connection confirms that the country's security controls are driven by Neo-Realist imperatives concerning regional threats (the Sino-Pakistani alliance) rather than devotion to the normative frameworks of Western liberalism or democratic cohesion. India's policy decisions, such as abstaining from UN censure votes and securing discounted oil, are thus rational responses to professed security threats, ranking the tangible balance of power in Asia over intellectual ideological alignment.



Reordering the Global Balance of Power

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has initiated a comprehensive debate among analysts regarding the trajectory of the international system. The system faces three theoretical, and potentially sequential, scenarios for global alteration: "restoration," "reformation," and "revolution". Restoration implies a return to the pre-war order dominated by Western institutions. Reformation involves managed change, perhaps a re-organization of global governance and controlled competition. Revolution suggests disordered, fundamental shifts in international norms and stability. Expert analysis suggests that the "reformation" scenario would be the least dangerous and most acceptable option for most major international players, indicating a systemic favorite for managed, rather than radical, change.

However, the nature of the conflict and the responses of major powers confound this hopeful viewpoint. Some argue that the war accelerates a clear shift toward a renewed form of bipolarity, pitting the Western idea of an alliance system led by the United States against a looser, geographically connected Eurasian vision anchored by China. Equally, others predict a "multiplex order," arguing that the succeeding global order will be regionalized, pluralist, and shaped not just by official organizations but also by casual partnerships and the growing influence of non-Western civilizational norms, including those resulting from Chinese, Indian, and Islamic legacies.

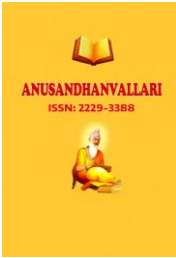
The conflict has also theatrically redesigned regional subtleties. The war brought instability directly to the North Atlantic Alliance's doorstep, prompting a significant re-formation of NATO. This includes dramatic changes to its plans, command structures, force models, and competences supplies, driven by the insistence of evaluating Russia's dimensions to quickly reconstitute and expand its military forces, especially land forces which have been significantly attituded in Ukraine.

The Sino-Russian Imperative and the Eurasian Axis

The most significant structural shift arising from the conflict is the demonstrable deepening of the strategic alignment between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. This convergence, led personally by President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, has matured into a "durable strategic alignment". This axis is explicitly driven by a shared mission to forge a new global order intended to counter the West and disrupt the existing international status quo. The military and economic cooperation has deepened in ways few would have predicted before the 2022 invasion, drawing in other strategic partners such as North Korea and Iran.

The cooperation between Russia and China extends far beyond symbolic joint drills and public statements, reaching critical areas of military interoperability and shared combat experience. Documents obtained by analysts detail intricate military cooperation, including Russia's agreement to equip and train a Chinese airborne battalion and share specialized expertise in the airdropping of armored vehicles. This transfer is significant because Russian capabilities in this domain still surpass those of the Chinese military. Moscow, increasingly dependent on China for dual-use items to sustain its sanctions-hit military industry, is simultaneously enabling Beijing to tap into its battlefield expertise to accelerate Xi Jinping's drive to build a modern military capable of matching or surpassing the United States.

The synergistic combination of Russian military experience and Chinese technological capabilities is poised to significantly impact future military developments, potentially challenging existing arms control regimes and



regional security arrangements across multiple theaters. However, this cooperation is not limitless, constrained by China's unwillingness to risk its broader economic interests for certain Russian military objectives.

The depth of this military-technological relationship between Russia and China suggests a shared, long-term commitment to systemic change. When Russia becomes an 'enabler for the Chinese', providing high-value expertise to accelerate China's modernization, it undermines the prospects for the managed global change envisioned in the "reformation" scenario. This strategic partnership, therefore, increases the likelihood that the international system will move toward the more disordered Bipolarity or Revolution trajectories.

This strategic linkage creates a difficult geopolitical feedback loop for the West. China is obtaining high-value technical and combat experience as a direct consequence of the conflict, demonstrating a weakness in Western strategic planning that seeks to divert resources from defending Ukraine and Europe to focus solely on countering China in the Asia-Pacific region. The US challenge of containing Russia in Europe while simultaneously challenging China in Asia is compounded when the two adversaries functionally become inseparable strategic enablers. This convergence directly increases pressure on India, which must unilaterally counter a newly strengthened Sino-Russian axis in its immediate neighborhood. Consequently, India is compelled to keep diplomatic and defense channels with Russia open as a critical, albeit limited, strategic countermeasure against the full consolidation of the Sino-Russian alignment.

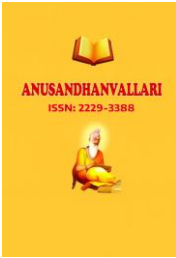
Analysis of India's Strategic Calculus

The Defense and Diplomatic Tightrope

India's calculated neutral stance in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is fundamentally a matter of strategic self-protection. The policy of non-condemnation is integral to mitigating the risk of a regional pincer movement. By strengthening bilateral ties with Russia, India strategically reduces the likelihood of Russia establishing an exclusive strategic relationship with China and Pakistan, a development that would profoundly compromise India's security and territorial integrity. This strategic calculus demonstrates realism, defining the India-Russia relationship less by ideology and more by strategic autonomy and sectoral interdependence, particularly in defense and energy. While India is expected to increase procurement from Western countries and invest heavily in indigenous defense capabilities as part of a global defense rebalancing, reliance on Russian support will persist in the short-to-medium term.

India's diplomatic approach requires simultaneous assignation with two dissimilar and increasingly aggressive global alliances: the US-led alliance systems (such as the Quad and G-7) and non-Western groupings (such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SCO). India uses its participation in non-Western institutions as a thoughtful counterweight to its growing presence in the Western-dominated groupings. This balancing act provides alternative frameworks and indexes to Western models, especially in the wake of the war. Russia and China are actively leveraging BRICS to serve as a counterweight to US-led institutions, placing India at the pivot of this geopolitical contest.

India leverages its role as a key voice of the Global South to shape another diplomatic story. Its official posture, articulated by figures like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is often framed not as traditional "neutrality," but as being "on the side of peace". This policy involves routinely refraining from UN votes related to the conflict while urging diplomatic solutions and adherence to international law. India's stance, characterized by the statement that the



Ukraine war is "not our creation, or priority," highlights its focus on domestic and regional imperatives over distant geopolitical alignments.

This cultured tightrope walk is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in the disjointed global order. India's strategic ambiguity, particularly its lack of clear condemnation of Russian aggression, has led to frustration among Quad members and Western allies. Critics warn that walking this tightrope risks eroding trust on both sides. Furthermore, while multi-alignment provides flexibility for maximizing immediate national interests, the persistent need to manage Western expectations while mollifying Russian dependency perpetually compromises India's aspiration to achieve elevated global status. True global influence and status often require decisive moral or political clarity. India's strategic autonomy, in this context, restricts its diplomatic role to that of a non-aligned balancer, limiting its potential to act as a decisive global power or effective mediator in international security coalitions.

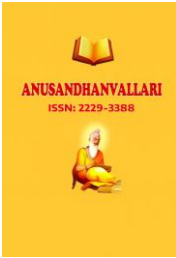
Geo-economic Constraints and Opportunities for India

The war created both disruptions and opportunities for the Indian economy. The disruption to global supply chains and rising crude oil prices due to Russian supply disruptions necessitated securing stable energy sources. The geo-economic opportunity materialized through access to discounted Russian oil, specifically the Urals grade. This procurement helped India maintain its economic stability and manage domestic inflation, a significant challenge inherited from the post-COVID period.

Indian refiners, driven by commercial logic related to economics and logistics, plan to continue these purchases into the near future, exemplified by Reliance Industries' long-term supply agreement with Rosneft. Furthermore, the reduction of exports from Ukraine and the Western markets halting cargo from Russia created new trade opportunities for Indian agricultural exporters, who saw increased demand for wheat, millet, and processed foods, providing an economic boost and helping them expand into new markets.

India's robust trade with Russia exposes it to the growing risk of secondary sanctions or punitive tariffs from Western partners, particularly the United States and the European Union. The US has already imposed secondary tariffs on India for its purchases of Russian oil. This action highlights the inherent tension between India's geopolitical alliances (deepening strategic and defense ties with the US) and its *realpolitik* economic needs (securing cheap energy).

The primary danger is the potential for further escalation, which could involve full financial restrictions or exclusion from the US financial infrastructure. This would force an economically devastating choice upon India. The application of such measures requires careful calibration by the US, factoring in the potential repercussions on global trade and the US economy, and whether the pressure would genuinely compel India to curb purchases. Interestingly, while Europe calls for sanctions on buyers, and the US has levied tariffs on India, the US has not yet applied similar comprehensive secondary sanctions to key players like China. This difference suggests a diplomatic calculation by the US that seeks to avoid disrupting its strategic goals regarding the Indo-Pacific.



Financial Infrastructure: Limitations of De-dollarization Efforts

In response to Western sanctions that banned multiple Russian banks from the SWIFT system and weaponized the dollar, India and Russia have advanced efforts to establish alternative payment mechanisms. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) facilitated the creation of Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVAs), allowing authorized dealer banks to open these accounts for foreign correspondent banks without prior RBI approval. SRVAs facilitate invoicing and settlement of international trade in Indian Rupees, allowing Indian importers to pay for Russian oil directly in Rupees, bypassing the US dollar, reducing currency conversion risks, and mitigating delays.

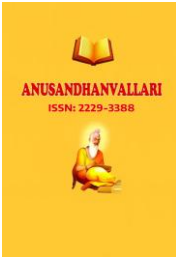
India's drive toward the SRVA mechanism and rupee internationalization is fundamentally a *sensitive* security measure taken against the use of the dollar as a geopolitical weapon. While this initiative serves the crucial goal of sanctions proofing, its long-term viability is structurally limited by the persistent trade imbalance. India imports significantly more from Russia than it exports. This oil-driven trade deficit results in the rapid accumulation of non-convertible Rupees in Russian SRVAs. This saturation complicates settlements, particularly since many Russian firms, despite sanctions, prefer dollar payments due to the Ruble's volatility and tightly controlled valuation. Therefore, the SRVA mechanism currently functions more as a necessary workaround for operational hurdles rather than a structural solution for large-scale de-dollarization.

For the Rupee-Ruble mechanism to achieve true strategic utility, India must structurally resolve the issue of accumulated INR. If the SRVA remains saturated with unused Indian currency, the commercial viability of the oil trade will decrease for Russia, compelling Moscow to seek alternative payment methods or prioritize partners (such as China) that can offer more convertible currency or direct investment mechanisms. This demonstrates that the tactical gain from discounted oil is conditional on the success of these structural financial reforms.

Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine war represents a calibrated exercise in strategic autonomy. India has successfully navigated initial diplomatic and economic disruption by maximizing geo-economic opportunities and securing critical strategic dependencies, which ultimately buffered its domestic economy and strengthened its overall negotiating position vis-à-vis the West. However, the analysis demonstrates that this success is inherently fragile and finite. India's strategic space is fundamentally delimited by two major structural constraints: the escalating threat posed by the deepening Sino-Russian axis (the security constraint) and the persistent risk of Western financial weaponization (the geo-economic constraint).

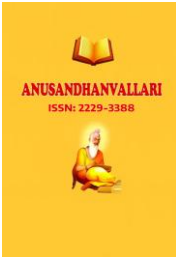
The current moment for India is defined by a high-stakes temporal imperative. The effectiveness of India's multi-alignment policy is intrinsically linked to the transitional chaos of the international system. If the world quickly coalesces into the Sino-US Bipolarity model described by some analysts, Russia will be structurally locked into supporting China, irrespective of India's efforts to maintain balance. India's strategic space would then rapidly close. Therefore, the current maneuvers are high-pressured, finite strategies aimed at buying time to achieve autonomy. The most critical future direction for India involves aggressively accelerating indigenous defense manufacturing and rapidly diversifying essential defense procurement away from Russia. Continued reliance on Moscow exacerbates the risk of a regional pincer movement by indirectly aiding China's military development while binding India to a financially complicated, sanctions-prone partner.



India is also likely to revert to its historical strategy of hedging its economic bets by strengthening ties with other middle powers to shield itself from the turbulence of a volatile global order. Future policy will demand increasingly complex management of diverse, sometimes contradictory, relationships—for instance, balancing US security concerns with historically key partners like Iran. This challenge of "omni-alignment" will be particularly acute during periods of potential Western political change.

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