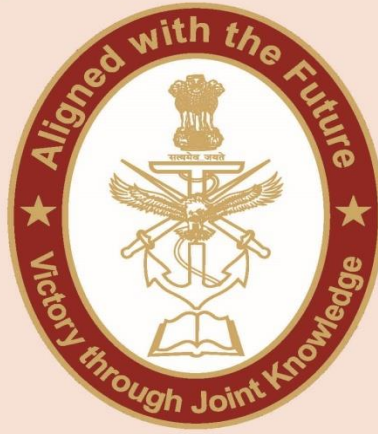


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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UKRAINE WAR: INDIA AND CHINA SAILING IN DISSIMILAR BOATS IN THE STORMY BLACK SEA



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It is all about geo-politics and money, Honey; Human lives don't count!

Strategic Review of the War. The Ukrainian War is into its second month with no end in sight; in fact, western press is talking of a stalled Russian offensive, leading to a desperate Putin getting more brutal with more indiscriminate bombings and rocket attacks in civilian areas. The Russians deny any deliberate targeting and accuse Ukrainian forces of using civilians and civil structures to target Russian troops. The truth lies in between. I assess that Russia is not done yet, her major strategic military objective of surrounding and isolating Kyiv, cutting off Ukrainian and other probable forces access to the Black Sea and Sea of Azov, and capturing major portions of Donetsk and Lohansk enclaves with the aim of absorbing it along with formalising the absorption of Crimea is still within reach. There is a general consensus, that actions of the USA and NATO in the last two decades precipitated the crisis, leading to the war which undoubtedly is President Putin's creation. However, while easy to condemn Putin, it is debatable, that with a distinct probability of NATO suddenly including Ukraine into its fold (in the backdrop of continuous expansion despite repeated Russian request: interestingly membership of Ukraine was not once denied by NATO or Ukraine, except after the invasion), if any other Russian leader would have taken a similar drastic step. Let us not forget that NATO membership provides Ukraine collective

security guarantees under Chapter 5 which follows 'all for one and one for all' guiding principles, allowing the deployment of forces and weapon systems (including nuclear assets, missiles and rockets) within member nations. Putin using extensive EU, NATO support to Ukraine significantly impacting Russian security has placed his nuclear deterrent forces on high alert. The equally powerful and potent domain of 'information warfare' leading to weaponization of social media is undoubtedly being waged by all sides, but being comfortably won by Ukraine supported by the West.

Complex Geo-political Cauldron: Getting more Volatile. Russia 'the energy superpower and a nuclear power' is unlikely to stop the war till its redline demands are met (guaranteed formal agreement of Ukraine not joining NATO, Crimea becomes part of Russia, with an aim plus of Luhansk and Donetsk region merging with Russia and no locating of NATO forces and weapon systems East of an agreed designated line). Ukraine an independent proud nation with deep linkages with Russia has found its national calling under Zelensky, and will not surrender thanks to the brave and selfless armed forces and citizens, helped diplomatically, economically, militarily and geo-politically by USA and NATO (except for physical deployment of forces; however presence of using US and NATO special forces are circulating with dangerous implications of widening the conflict, as also employing mercenaries by both sides making a volatile situation even worse as they have neither loyalty nor scruples). NATO finds its raison d'être in evil hegemonistic, revisionist Putin rearms, gets stronger and more united, plans to live life sans Russian energy. USA gets the cake and eats it too: it stabilises Europe with resurgent EU and NATO confronting a weakened Russia, searches for alternate sources of energy with erstwhile adversaries and backburner friends like Venezuela, KSA and even Iran by softening its nuclear stance; which allows it to focus on its officially stated peer competitor and adversary China and the Indo-Pacific region; the pivot of the future. Unfortunately, the bottomline is that the Ukrainian people are suffering immensely, and the situation has created the largest refugee crisis in Europe, and the geo-political and economic impact will adversely affect the world and its alignments profoundly.

China and India: Caught in the Centrifugal Forces of Events. Caught up in the centrifugal force of events are two nations; China an emerging superpower and India increasingly playing the balancing role in Asia and now the world. The Ukraine war has added both similar and contrary layers to the geo-political environment enveloping both countries. Simplistic assessments in black and white, of them caught between a rock and hard place between two competing orders does not truly illuminate the nuances of a multi-polar world in throes of change. So far both China and India have walked a fine line by not calling out Russia for its aggression,

but concurrently supports the sovereignty of nation states and diplomacy and peace instead of war (interestingly both have not recognized the 2014 annexation of Crimea). Many feel that Xi was taken by surprise at Putin's war, and India too would have hoped for better sense to prevail amongst all direct actors to pull back from the brinkmanship displayed. **Ideally both China and India would like to continue maintaining strong ties with Moscow, safeguard relationship with Ukraine (specially trade), strengthen economic ties with EU, ensure nil or minimum impact of sanctions, and concurrently strengthen/ maintain ties with USA and neighbourhood.** Obviously, though similar and common aspirations, the nuances are markedly different; for example, while China would be keen to ensure no further deterioration of ties with USA, NATO and EU (specially trade), India would like to continue enjoying a strong strategic partnership with both Russia and USA keeping its unique requirement vis-a vis China and Indo-Pacific region. It does make one wonder, if both nations had set aside their differences, found common ground to address the Ukraine crisis together: would it have made a difference or even avoided the War? Obviously, realising all aspirations will be impossible, and the stance taken by both nations will be increasingly difficult to maintain and will come at a cost. Given the current strategic climate post COVID, and events leading to the war specially a belligerent, assertive China, she may well bear the heavier cost. India thanks to its rising stature and growing geo-political clout and current adversarial relations with China has so far been able to weather the storm. As the war prolongs, with corresponding economic (certainly the most vital in this hardened 'real politik' world), human, material, infrastructural costs, coupled with the massive refugee influx in Europe, it is going to get harder to maintain strategic autonomy or stay neutral. Already both sides (West and Russia) are getting more strident in asking both China and India to back them more overtly and unequivocally.

China - at Crossroads: Larger the Power the more you Gain or Lose. We need to be clear that the Chinese ship bears the flag of Xi and CCP and not of China. China has openly blamed the actions of NATO's eastward expansion with full support and encouragement by the 'West' (NATO, EU, Japan, South Korea, Australia and nations aligned to them) for causing the war. The Ukraine war is exposing the vulnerabilities and limitations of Chinese President Xi Jinping's foreign policy. Beijing's global aspirations are now clashing with its desire to remain selectively ambiguous and aloof. Although Chinese leaders may not recognize it, their country's closer alignment with Russia may rebound at least in the short and medium term. Relations with Europe has already taken a hit, Washington has warned of severe repercussions, Japan, South Korea and Australia apprehending the Russia-China alliance have already indicated closer ties with West and getting militarily stronger, and traditionally nonaligned countries and Africa could revolve away. FM Wang visit to

India on 24 Mar 22 indicates that China is deeply concerned about the longevity of the Ukraine war and its international ramifications to itself. China is realising that her 'no limits' relations with Russia has limits after all. India seeing the closer and strengthening (and isolated ties) between China and Russia may well start aligning openly and strategically with USA and the West; with far reaching consequences to Chinese Indo-Pacific interests. Chinese continued support to Russia could consolidate a return to 'cold war geo-politics' with USA and rejuvenated, more potent West (and many others who currently prefer non-alignment or strategic autonomy/ neutrality like India) on one side, and China and Russia (the weaker pole) on the other. China which always supports a multi polar would be destroying its own dream of becoming a global power. A weakened isolated Russia might someday return the favour by supporting Chinese territorial aspirations or cooperating on revising the structures of global governance (this eventuality needs a separate article as it now increasingly within the realms of probability). It may not be out of place to say the current China's position appears confused; supporting Russia overtly but urging respect for a nations' sovereignty.

What could be Xi' Rationale? Xi does not run China's political system alone, but as with Putin, the consolidation of personalized authority over an extended period of time has rewired the decision-making processes in his favour and his advisers. As a result, on issues ranging from Taiwan, India to Ukraine, the entire political system in China is dictated by Xi. The foreign policy directive till 2027 enunciated in the 20th Party Congress will be driven entirely by Xi's subjective view of international events and the increasingly isolated decision-making ecosystem that surrounds him. Xi may perceive that by stopping short of providing any direct military aid to Russia, it will at most suffer secondary sanctions for its political and economic support. While the West is focussed on Ukraine and Europe, China could play her hand in the Indo-Pacific and Asia, specially Taiwan, boundary dispute with India along LAC and China seas. It is possible that Xi seeing the bleak security environment post COVID against China, with little possibility of change around, and increasing cooperation within the 'West', views close partnership with Russia a credible response to build on (also implying its confidence in her own global heft), thereby providing an alternate credible order, with Russia obviously playing the junior partners role (which could be a problem in times to come).

India

World leaders are descending in New Delhi, and those who are not, are calling up; Japanese and Australian PMs with \$42 billion and \$ 282 mn investment, Israel PM expected shortly, visit of Chinese FM Wang, UAE signed 100 \$ bn trade pact, and QUAD confirming India's strategic

importance; and incredibly PM Imran Khan of Pakistan praised India's independent foreign policy. They appear to conveying a clear message and one request; understanding of India's nuanced stance due to her own geo-political compulsions, and requesting India's considerable clout to stop Putin from continuing the war. When it comes to the Indo-Pacific region and Asia, leaders are at pains to tell India that their relationship will NOT be impacted by India's stance regarding Ukraine. The icing on the cake was the visit of China's FM Mr Wang, who was treated very firmly and courteously with the unequivocal message that business as usual is only possible if the LAC impasse is resolved. I have had confidence in India's growing international stature in all realms be it economic, diplomatic, military or geo-strategic; which now stands amply vindicated, given decades of mature, consistent foreign policy stands and actions.

False Narrative of India on Shaky Ground. The widely written and heard narrative that India's current stances on Ukraine, will considerable weaken/ dampen the global reaction in case China attempts to use force along the LAC is in my opinion flawed. Finally, it's all about national interests and Economy; a revisionist, belligerent, offensive China will be met with even more resistance by the West, given Chinese potential and comprehensive national power (CNP) intertwined with the global economy, especially when the West and the Rest perceive that in partnership with Russia she is trying to change the World order. The reaction could be muted if at all, not because of India's stance in the current Ukraine war which all have accepted, but due to economic compulsions. Led by the USA and her allies, most nations will support India in all domains less the kinetic/ military domain. They will do so gladly, as it means tying up China within South Asia/Asia, divert her focus from her China dream (superpower by 2050), reduce her potency in the China seas and against Taiwan and most importantly slow down her growth aggravating the adverse domestic dissensions. They will assist, also because India is not a small power, but a potent, experienced, professional military power with economic resources, with the potential of grinding down China and keep it engaged.

A word on our relationship with Russia; this too has undergone subtle changes in the last decade with both nations seeking more alignments and alternatives to meet their strategic compulsions (however, we cannot ignore the military hardware dependence of nearly 70 %). For obvious reasons of growing stature, flexibility in military domain, niche technologies, and belligerent China (and Russia getting cosier to China and even Pakistan), India has strengthened her relations with the West, dampening the deep relations with Russia. Currently, we need to maintain our strategic autonomy as we need both the poles.

Current Status and Conclusion.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine war continues in multi-domain mode, the visible kinetic hybrid war between Ukraine and Russia; non-kinetic, non-contact operations in other domains of economic, diplomatic, political, information and cyber between Russia and the US led West; over three million refugees and counting; not to mention human casualties of soldiers and civilians.

Realisation has come that a China-led global order can be quite detrimental, and urgent steps are needed to stall China's rise. Naturally, some nations mostly governed by authoritarian regimes/ dictators do find common cause with Xi and CCP style of governance. Security alliances such as NATO, QUAD, and AUKUS have got rejuvenated with a renewed sense of purpose. Though Xi has resisted attempts to play the mediator role requested by Ukraine, it is clear that the costs of defending Russian President Vladimir Putin are rising, specially with Russia getting bogged down, and increasing collateral damage and refugees. After meeting the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Xi described the situation as 'worrisome', and has announced that it is providing war-torn Ukraine with about \$790,000 in humanitarian aid. Let us be clear that China is NOT worried about its global status on being closely associated with Russia, but is worried about the economic consequences, given her slow growth rate and rising internal challenges. Supply chains of Russia and China (which are more global) will be impacted as all nations will try to lessen their dependence and vulnerabilities, which is already happening globally. In this dynamic and volatile climate, India must now focus on 'Aatma-nirbharata' for all sensitive and critical domains and technologies, as also strengthen her CNP especially her military and economic power. Finally, India is uniquely positioned not just to strengthen her geo-political status, but also to prevent a deeply destabilizing and extremely violent conflict from escalating.

CERTIFICATE

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