



“Mediating the Ukraine Crisis: Can India's Non-Alignment Bridge the Divide? Global South Implications”

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Abstract:

This article explores the complex geopolitical landscape surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war, with a particular focus on India's potential role as a mediator. It examines the war's impact on the global order, highlighting the challenges faced by the Global South and the emergence of new trade blocs. The article delves into India's delicate position, caught between its ties to Russia and its desire to maintain good relations with the West. It analyzes India's balancing act, its reasons for neutrality, and its recent openness to mediation under specific conditions. It also explores the current stalemate in Ukraine, the need for increased Western support, and the bleak prospects for a diplomatic resolution in 2024. It concludes by outlining the potential consequences for the global economy, particularly for American businesses.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war, Global South, India Russia relations, India West relations, Trade Shift

I. Introduction:

In the past two years since Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine, the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the world has changed, with enlarged NATO members and newly development goals for countries which are directly and indirectly affected by the war, especially the Global South countries becoming more vulnerable to the crisis (Cummings,2024).

The conflict shockwave ripple far beyond its borders. Millions of people displaced by the humanitarian crisis, creating a huge refugee crisis disturbing neighboring countries and beyond, hindering access to healthcare, food, water and other essentials. Food and energy prices rising up, economies being crushed and stoking hunger. The war has disrupted global supply chains, breaking up the flow of goods and services. Global tensions increase, leading to a wider conflict. The environment too, bears the consequences of war. Damage infrastructure leads to pollution, hindering progress towards clean energy solutions and jeopardizing delicate ecosystems.

Reaching over to 180\$ billion supported by the western military aid has kept Ukraine in the fight. The two parties NATO and Russia are in no talks about a negotiation settlement. Despite high stakes for democracies and the global order, the Ukraine war's extended duration in 2024 throws American businesses into uncharted territory, reminiscent of Cold War uncertainties.¹

India's official stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict is like a tightrope walk. While uneasy with Russia's attack, they've chosen neutrality, avoiding condemnation and abstaining from UN votes against Russia. This disappoints the US and allies, who see it as undermining global order and legitimizing aggressive actions.(Tellis,2022)

Why the balancing act?

History: Deep ties with Russia dating back to the Cold War. Russia remains a key defense supplier.

Security: China is India's main threat, and Russia is seen as a potential counterweight.

Economy: India relies on affordable Russian oil and fears sanctions disrupting energy supplies.

West: India wants closer ties with the West, but can't alienate a crucial partner like Russia.

Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's interview on 21 Feb 2024 suggests a cautious approach to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. While expressing India's openness to playing a mediatory role, he emphasized that it wouldn't be self-initiated. This stance reflects India's complex strategic interests, considering its historical ties with Russia and growing tensions with China. The war also impacted India's energy security. Traditionally relying on Middle Eastern oil, India faced challenges when these suppliers prioritized higher-paying European customers after the conflict. As a result, India turned to discounted Russian oil, a

¹ Mahle, M.B. (2024a) *Global impacts of the Ukraine War Two years on*, Lexology. Available at: <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=df8d32d2-1332-4fef-b98d-2770a67ca5aa> (Accessed: 09 March 2024).



move triggering criticism from some Western nations. "In a certain way, we stabilized the energy market", he further added.(NDTV,2024)² So, while India remains willing to facilitate peace, it prioritizes maintaining its diplomatic balance and securing its energy needs within the constraints of the conflict's complex dynamics.

Impact of the war on Global South:

The war in Ukraine, sent shockwaves through the global food system, particularly impacting the already fragile economies of the Global South. Basic necessities like food became exorbitantly expensive, squeezing the life out of people already struggling with the aftermath of the pandemic. (Cummings,2024)

While the West portrays Russia as the aggressor, many in the Global South see a different picture. They see themselves as the true victims, bearing the brunt of price hikes and disruptions caused by the conflict. This perception is fueled by a deep-seated belief that the current international order, dominated by wealthy nations, actively disadvantages developing countries. China and Russia, offering alternative models, find fertile ground in this discontent. (Ashton,20204)

Unlike the West, which holds dear the norms and institutions of the established order, many in the Global South view them with skepticism. They see these systems as rigged in favor of the powerful, leaving countries like theirs behind. This disillusionment makes them more receptive to the promises, however risky, offered by Russia and China. In essence, the Ukraine War has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities, leaving many in the Global South feeling unheard and neglected by the current world order. This has opened the door for alternative voices and narratives, potentially reshaping the global landscape in ways yet to be fully understood.

Global South and Russia

Countries like Brazil, India, and South Africa navigate their stance on the Ukraine war. Unlike many Western nations who strongly condemn Russia, these Global South players have a

more nuanced perspective. They acknowledge that the invasion violated international law, but their response is shaped by a mix of factors beyond just the war itself. Historical ties with Russia, economic partnerships, and even a resistance to perceived Western dominance all play a role.

Take the BRICS group, a collection of major Global South nations. They openly disapprove of sanctions against Russia, calling them "incompatible" with the UN Charter. But the UN itself criticized Russia's actions as a violation of the same Charter! This highlights the conflicting perspectives and priorities at play. For these countries, the Ukraine war isn't necessarily the top concern. They face complex internal issues like poverty, development, and concerns about Western interference. These factors influence their responses, making their stance more nuanced than simply "pro-Russia" or "anti-West."(Seshadri,2023).

The BRICS countries have a history of criticizing sanctions they see as unfair and imposed unilaterally, often by Western powers. They argue that such actions violate international law and norms, and don't always achieve their intended goals. This stance isn't unique to them, with countries like Turkey and Indonesia also expressing similar reservations about sanctions outside of UN-backed measures. In essence, these nations want to avoid being pressured into following sanctions they deem unjust or ineffective, and prefer to base their decisions on their own interests and assessments.

Not everyone is on the same page when it comes to the Ukraine war. While some countries, like Brazil and the UAE, openly condemn Russia, others, like China, India, and South Africa, hold back. These countries, often from the Global South, have their own reasons for not taking sides. Some, like India, have long-standing ties with Russia. Others, like Indonesia and Turkey, share economic interests with them. Even countries that condemn Russia, like Indonesia, might prioritize their own economic well-being over taking a stronger stance. It's not just about the present day, either. History plays a role too. In India, many see Russia as a reliable friend since independence. For Turkey, being a NATO member and supporting Ukraine creates a balancing act with their economic ties to Russia. So, while many condemn the war, others have complicated reasons for not taking a clear stance. It's all about history, economics, and navigating a complex geopolitical landscape.

Even though the war in Ukraine isn't directly on their doorstep, countries in the Global South are feeling the pinch. While the war itself

² India, P.T. of (2024) 'we're open': S jaishankar on India mediating to end Russia-Ukraine war, NDTV.com. Available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/were-open-s-jaishankar-on-india-mediating-to-end-russia-ukraine-war-5095658> (Accessed: 09 March 2024).



hurts Ukraine and its allies the most, its ripples are causing problems far and wide. The global economy is slowing down, going from 3% growth in 2022 to just 1.9% in 2023. This means less money flowing around, which affects everyone. Food, fertilizer, energy, and fuel – all essential items – are getting more expensive, making it harder for people in poorer countries to afford them. The war has messed up how goods move around the world, making it harder for countries to get the things they need.³

The West struggles to understand the Global South because their priorities are different. The Global South is primarily concerned with immediate issues like recovering from COVID's economic damage, fighting climate change's impact (floods, rising sea levels, etc.), and resolving border conflicts. They feel the West ignores these urgent concerns while pressuring them to focus on sanctions against Russia due to the Ukraine war. This can be seen as unhelpful and disrespectful, pushing the Global South away instead of bringing them closer.

Instead of just sanctions, the West needs to build bridges with the Global South. There's potential here, given the growing economic power of groups like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), which now represents a significant chunk of global GDP. Engaging with them on trade, politics, and culture could benefit everyone. The G20 offers another avenue for reaching out, involving public, private, and civil society players in the Global South. This could involve boosting private sector investment in essential areas like infrastructure, while also aligning with Sustainable Development Goals. Forget trying to force everyone into the same sanctions box. Instead, the West should deepen relationships with the Global South. This means acknowledging their unique priorities and concerns, and finding ways to work together on issues they care about. By offering incentives and collaborating on areas like climate change and

economic development, the West is more likely to gain the kind of support it seeks, ultimately helping to end the war.

Emergence of new trade blocs:

The world's trade landscape is undergoing a dramatic makeover. Cracks are forming in the old East-West trade routes, driven by sanctions and shifting political alliances. Russia and Iran, ostracized from the West, find solace in China's embrace, creating a new Eastward tilt in their trade flow. This, in turn, weakens the dominance of the US dollar as regional currencies like the yuan gain traction.

Meanwhile, the US is launching a counteroffensive. It's forging new alliances with "friendly" nations like India and Vietnam, aiming to build a tech and trade wall against China's rising economic power. This involves securing crucial technologies like AI and microchips, and creating "secure" supply chains within its newly formed partnerships.

The result is a world divided into trading blocs, each with its own dominant power and currency. Countries like Turkey and Central Asia are emerging as key players, acting as bridges between these competing spheres. This new reality is filled with both risks and opportunities, as the global trade map continues to be redrawn. (Cummings,2024)

India's potential as a mediator:

India finds itself in a delicate position regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As a developing nation reliant on energy imports and a country with strategic ties to both Russia and Western nations, India has expressed disapproval of the war but has sought to maintain neutrality. Despite its stated commitment to international law and respect for sovereignty, India has refrained from outright condemnation of Russia's actions. Instead, India has consistently abstained from UN votes, preserved its diplomatic and defense ties with Russia, and even bolstered energy and trade with Moscow, effectively sidestepping Western sanctions. This stance reflects India's complex balancing act, attempting to appease both sides while prioritizing its own economic and strategic interests. (Johny,2024) Not everyone is on the same page when it comes to the Ukraine war. While some countries, like Brazil and the UAE, openly condemn Russia, others, like China, India, and South Africa, hold back. These countries, often from the Global South, have their own reasons for not taking sides. Some, like India, have long-standing ties with

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Even though the war in Ukraine isn't directly on their doorstep, countries in the Global South are feeling the pinch. While the war itself hurts Ukraine and its allies the most, its ripples are causing problems far and wide. The global economy is slowing down, going from 3% growth in 2022 to just 1.9% in 2023. This means less money flowing around, which affects everyone. Food, fertilizer, energy, and fuel – all essential items – are getting more expensive, making it harder for people in poorer countries to afford them. The war has messed up how goods move around the world, making it harder for countries to get the things they need.⁴

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India's potential as a mediator:

While India's increased energy imports from Russia post-war may seem opportunistic, their defense ties run much deeper – Russia is a crucial source of essential military equipment for India. India views Russia as a vital strategic partner in managing regional challenges, but the growing Russia-China alliance is a major concern. After

⁴ *Western sanctions on Russia and the Global South's stance (2023) Royal United Services Institute.* Available at: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/western-sanctions-russia-and-global-souths-stance> (Accessed: 09 March 2024).



Western sanctions pushed Russia towards Asia, and especially China, there's been a debate within India. Some believe the Russia-China partnership necessitates a shift in India's Russia policy. Others, however, argue that openly aligning with the West against Russia risks pushing Moscow even closer to China. They feel India is better positioned to subtly influence and diversify Russia's Asian interests by maintaining some level of engagement with Moscow. (Bajpayee,2024)

S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, recently addressed the issue of Russia's international relationships during the Raisina Dialogue. He stressed the importance of offering Russia diverse options rather than isolating it, as this could inadvertently push Russia towards closer ties with China. Jaishankar's remarks highlight India's concerns regarding the growing partnership between China and Russia. He acknowledged that many Western countries have restricted their ties with Russia, leading Russia to seek alliances elsewhere. Jaishankar suggested that it would be prudent to provide Russia with multiple avenues for engagement instead of limiting its choices. In essence, he advocated for a more nuanced approach to Russia's diplomatic positioning, recognizing the complexities of global geopolitics. (Johny, 2024)

In recent statements, India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, expressed India's openness to mediating in the Russia-Ukraine conflict if approached, emphasizing that India does not intend to take unilateral action. He highlighted India's reliance on Russian crude oil due to shifts in energy procurement by Middle Eastern suppliers prioritizing Europe, where prices were higher. Jaishankar defended India's procurement of Russian crude oil, asserting that if no one had bought it, global energy prices would have soared, leading to higher inflation, particularly impacting lower-income countries. He questioned Europe's stance on sanctions, suggesting that if principles were paramount, economic relations with Russia would have been completely severed. Jaishankar pointed out Europe's exceptions, such as pipeline gas, and individual country relationships, implying pragmatic political management. (Chakraborty, 2024)

⁵Regarding India's border conflict with China in 2020, Jaishankar emphasized the natural

differences in perspectives between India and Europe, particularly regarding China and Russia. He underscored India's historically stable and friendly relationship with Russia, contrasting it with the fluctuating dynamics of other powers' relationships with Russia. Jaishankar addressed India's arms cooperation with Russia, acknowledging Russia's historical significance as India's primary arms supplier.

However, he noted diversification in recent years, with the US, France, and Israel also becoming significant suppliers. He attributed this shift partly to Western countries historically favoring Pakistan over India in arms sales. (PTI,2024)

Overall, Jaishankar emphasized India's pragmatic approach to international relations, grounded in its historical experiences and national interests. He advocated for understanding the complexities of India's relationships with Russia and China, urging Europe to respect India's perspective while acknowledging inherent differences. Jaishankar's remarks reflect India's commitment to stability and cooperation in global affairs, balancing its interests with evolving geopolitical dynamics.

Developments in the war itself, like changes in battlefield positions or diplomatic overtures could create new openings for a mediator, possibly prompting India to act.

Ukraine in 2024:

The war in Ukraine has entered a grueling stalemate. After the spectacular Ukrainian counteroffensive of 2022, the conflict has devolved into a war of attrition. Ukraine's forces, though brave and bolstered by Western aid, desperately need a renewed commitment from NATO and the United States to break this deadlock. More manpower, superior training, and decisively more powerful weaponry – particularly long-range missiles and modern tanks – are essential. Allies must overcome their hesitant approach, dictated by a fear of escalating tensions with Russia, if they wish to see Ukraine triumph.

Alongside conventional military support, Ukraine is aggressively pursuing the development of AI-powered drone technology. While such innovations have the potential to alter the battlefield, analysts caution that technological

⁵ India, P.T. of (2024) 'we're open': S Jaishankar on India mediating to end Russia-Ukraine war, NDTV.com. Available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/were-open-s-jaishankar-on-india-mediating-to->

end-russia-ukraine-war-5095658 (Accessed: 09 March 2024).



superiority alone will not dislodge Russia's entrenched forces.

Sadly, a diplomatic resolution in 2024 appears increasingly unlikely. Russia insists on Ukraine's abject surrender, while Ukraine vehemently refuses to cede any of its sovereign territory. This fundamental divide extends to broader questions about the future of European security. There's no comprehensive plan beyond the obvious need to reinforce NATO's deterrent posture in the face of Russian aggression. The lingering concern is that even a defeated Russia could metastasize into a destabilizing force in the region for years to come.

The economic repercussions for American businesses are set to continue in 2024. Uncertainty lingers, despite Ukraine's success in reopening the Black Sea for grain shipments. Russia could easily reverse this progress. Witnessing Russia's unchecked aggression, other nations may be tempted to achieve their foreign policy goals through force. This potential for broader destabilization requires businesses to maintain a heightened awareness of global risk factors, bracing themselves for possible disruptions to trade and rapidly shifting regulations in response to evolving conflict zones.

Overall, the situation is grim. Ukraine's military capability hinges on Western support, with fears of escalation hamstringing a truly decisive flow of advanced weaponry. On the diplomatic front, the chasm between Russian demands and Ukrainian resolve seems unbridgeable. Meanwhile, the economic landscape for US businesses remains fraught with risk due to the persistent threat of the conflict widening. (Cummings,2024)

II. Conclusion:

The Russian-Ukraine war has cast a long shadow, disrupting the global order, impacting the Global South disproportionately, and fostering emergence of new trade blocs. India too has been caught in this web, nation cautiously balancing its ties to Russia with its desire to foster closer relationship with the West. While India has expressed its openness to mediating the conflict under specific circumstances, the war's current stalemate and the unshakable position of both sides make a diplomatic solution appear unlikely.

For Global South, the war has worsened the already existing economic inequality. Food and energy price hike have crushed already fragile economy, stoking resentment towards a world order perceived as rigged in favor of the wealthy. This discontent creates a fertile ground for alternative

narratives offered by China and Russia, potentially leading to a more multi polar world with competing spheres of influence.

The war has also led to the formation of new trade blocs. The US is forging alliances with countries like India and other developing nations to counter China's economic clout. Meanwhile, Russia, criticized by the West, finds solace in China's embrace, creating an eastward tilt in its trade flow. This trend weakens the US dollar and could lead to a fragmented global trade landscape.

India's position in this evolving order is complex. It relies on affordable Russian oil and views Russia as a crucial defensive partner. However, India also desires close ties with the West and is careful of being seen as condoning Russia's aggression. This tightrope walk is further complicated by India's long standing border conflict with China. An overly pro-West stance risks Russia pushing towards China, a development India desperately wants to avoid.

India's potential role as a mediator hinge on several factors. The war itself need to be progressing, to create an opening for dialogue. Additionally, the West needs to acknowledge India's position and strategic concerns. If India is to play a meaningful role, a more nuanced approach from the West is essential.

The future remains uncertain. The war in Ukraine is still ongoing, with the potential for escalation posing a significant threat. The economic repercussions for the US and the world are likely to continue. For India, navigating this complex geopolitical landscape will require a delicate balancing act, safeguarding its strategic interests while emerging as a responsible player in the global stage. The coming months will be crucial in determining whether India can leverage its unique position to bridge the divide and nudge the warring parties towards a peaceful resolution.

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