

Invasion of Ukraine: Implications for the Indo-Pacific and India

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Summary

Ukrainian forces are engaged in pitched battles with the Russians, who have not yet employed the full power of their military capability. The economic sanctions from the West will have a crippling impact on Russia. Bugged down in Ukraine and facing the wrath of global economic and diplomatic isolation, Russia's President Vladimir Putin may retreat or may dig in his heels. Russia has already heightened fears of nuclear escalation. The Ukrainian crisis has truly transformed international politics. It has forced the United States to shift its strategic gaze towards Europe from the Indo-Pacific, left Russia with little choice but to align more closely with China, and, lastly, cornered India into a major diplomatic dilemma.

Introduction

Just as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) met for a second emergency session on 23 February 2022 to discuss the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian armed forces to launch a “special military operation” in Ukraine. As Putin outlined in a speech from the Kremlin, Russia’s aims were Ukraine’s demilitarisation and denazification, a euphemism for regime change in Kyiv.¹ Russian actions followed its recognition of the separatist breakaway territories of Donetsk and Luhansk as sovereign territories or people’s republics and the signing of treaties of mutual friendship, peace, and cooperation with Moscow. If Moscow’s recognition of the separatist regions destroyed any chance of a diplomatic settlement under the Minsk process, Putin’s actions also provided the finale for the three-month-long suspense over the end game of Russian military concentration around Ukrainian borders.

Russian invasion has plunged Europe into the darkest moment the continent has witnessed since World War II. It is also the first time a major power has openly defied the norm of national sovereignty and territorial integrity in Europe in the last 80 years. Since the Euromissile crisis of the early 1980s, the continent has not seen overt nuclear threats exchanged between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Moscow. Putin warned NATO not to interfere in the Russian military operation or otherwise face “consequences you have never seen in your history.”² Coming on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic instability, and an increasingly assertive China, the consequences for global and regional geopolitics are grim.

¹ “No other option’: Excerpts of Putin’s speech declaring war”, *Al Jazeera*, 24 February 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/24/putins-speech-declaring-war-on-ukraine-translated-excerpts>.

² Ibid.

Making of the European Tragedy

The current crisis has both historical and immediate causes. Ever since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the erstwhile Soviet Union, Moscow has been persistently complaining about the eastward extension of NATO. Though Russia has expressed its desire to join the alliance and the European Union (EU), NATO-Russia relations have often seen more friction than cooperation. Smaller East European countries view Russia with fear and disgust, having suffered the worst of Tsarist expansionism and Soviet authoritarianism. Their geographical proximity and vulnerability to Russia's power fan feelings of intense insecurity. Ukraine's bid to join NATO and the EU provides Moscow with the most compelling geopolitical cause to keep Kyiv out of NATO's orbit. Russia considers Ukraine to be under its sphere of influence and as the final buffer zone between her and the NATO militaries. Therefore, a pliant Ukraine is central to Moscow's core national interests.

However, domestic politics have turned pro-West in many former Soviet republics and Eastern European countries. Therefore, when most Ukrainians rallied to join the EU in 2014, Moscow rallied behind the pro-Russian Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovich. The Euromaidan revolution which followed forced Yanukovich to flee Ukraine. Putin saw the domestic upheaval as orchestrated by the West and as a threat to its interest in Ukraine and an example that could be emulated inside Russia. Ukraine's turn to the EU had national security and domestic political consequences for Russia.

Consequently, Russian forces occupied the strategic peninsula of Crimea and supported open rebellion by the Russian-majority regions of Donetsk and Luhansk against the Ukrainian state. Since then, Ukraine has suffered a debilitating civil war in its Eastern region between Kremlin-backed separatist forces and the Ukrainian military. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict resulted in the Minsk process in 2014. Facilitated by France and Germany, the tripartite group of Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe resulted in the Minsk I agreement. However, violence continued apace in the Donbas region. In 2015, another agreement called Minsk II was reached, which provisioned a ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine, the return of heavy weapons and the exchange of political prisoners. Most importantly, it required Ukraine to cede substantial autonomy to the two separatist regions in the renegotiated Ukrainian constitution before the Ukrainian military could again be stationed in the region. However, the agreement languished for another five years because of Ukrainian domestic politics, Russia's excessive demands and the downward spiral in United States (US)-Russia relations following the 2016 US presidential elections.

Reinitiating the Minsk process and resolving the Ukrainian crisis was high on US President Joe Biden's agenda as he assumed office in early 2021. The conflict resolution was central to the evolving US grand strategy to confront China, which both the Donald Trump and Biden administrations had declared as America's most potent strategic adversary. For the first time in decades, Washington aimed to clearheadedly pursue China's containment. The April 2021 Annual Threat Assessment issued by the US Director of National Intelligence characterised China as America's "major adversary", "China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas – especially economically, militarily, and technologically – and is pushing to change global norms." Second, it helped

address the burden of European security over American shoulders and allowed the US to persuade its European allies to focus more on the Indo-Pacific and China. Lastly, avoiding the two-front competition with Russia and China also dovetailed with Biden's promise of a middle-class-oriented foreign policy and focus on addressing the pressing issues of the economy and development at home.

The June 2021 Geneva summit between Biden and Putin was reflective of greater recognition within the American administration that stabilising the US-Russia relationship is central to Washington's China policy. As Biden argued in a post-summit press conference, "President Putin and I share a unique responsibility to manage the relationship between two powerful and proud countries, a relationship that has to be stable and predictable."³ The US and Russia wanted to find a "*modes operandi*" to avoid a conflict in Europe. Both sides agreed to have a strategic stability dialogue, exchanged a list of facilities for a cyber non-attack agreement and to cooperate in humanitarian assistance in Syria. Most importantly, even when Biden supported Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, Washington was now willing "to pursue diplomacy related to the Minsk Agreement." For Russia, too, American backing for the Minsk agreement could help force Kyiv to walk the line on the promise of substantial autonomy to the separatist region in Eastern Ukraine.

The Normandy talks process between Russia, France, Germany and Ukraine started in September 2021. American blessings were central to its success. As the Russian Foreign Minister argued, "the Americans wield a dominating influence on [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky and his team", and "if the Americans are genuinely prepared to support the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, this issue can be settled very quickly."⁴ The process, however, stalled because of Kyiv's reluctance to speak directly to the representatives of the separatist regions, a Russian stipulation for any advance on the Minsk process. As Zelensky argued, "I have no intention of talking to terrorists, and it is just impossible for me in my position."⁵ Domestic politics in Ukraine had turned particularly hostile against any concessions to the separatists and Russian demands for autonomy. By November 2021, Moscow publicly held Ukraine responsible for sabotaging the Normandy process and accused Germany and France of deliberately misrepresenting the Russian position.⁶ If Russia felt that the US had failed to deliver on its promises and bent on Ukrainian nationalists, the defensive equipment supplied to the Ukrainian military also increased the opportunity costs of sitting on the sidelines. Putin resorted to military coercion and brinkmanship to extract maximum concessions out of Ukraine and the West, amassing substantial military forces across Ukrainian borders. The failure to extract concessions through pressure and brinkmanship has finally resulted in the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

³ The White House, "Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference", 16 June 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/06/16/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-4/>.

⁴ Interfax, "Lavrov: U.S. could significantly accelerate implementation of Minsk Agreements on Donbas if it wanted", 19 October 2021, <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/72929/>.

⁵ Ben Hall, "Ukrainian leader calls for revamp of peace process to end Donbas war", *The Financial Times*, 25 April 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/ed40d675-16b3-4a35-a157-b9bf0078b507>.

⁶ "France, Germany say Russia's publication of notes breaks diplomatic rules", *Reuters*, 19 November 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2021/11/19/France-Germany-say-Russia-s-publication-of-notes-breaks-diplomatic-rules>.

Putin's Gambit and the American Dilemma

Putin's military gambit will have significant consequences for American domestic politics, national security strategy and foreign policy. First, the crisis creates major domestic problems for the Biden administration. Sanctions issued by the US and its allies after Putin's military adventure will not only severely hurt the Russian economy but will also hurt the American consumer. Russian contribution to global energy supplies constitutes almost 10 per cent of the world's total, and Russia is the biggest producer of alumina in the world. The crisis has also engulfed two of the world's major wheat producers and other food grains. As Biden acknowledged in his press conference a couple of days back, "defending freedom will have costs for us as well, here at home. We need to be honest about that."⁷ However, Biden is already facing much domestic backlash over rising inflation and the cost of living in the US. The US economy faces its worst inflation in a decade, and gasoline prices have touched a record high. Much will depend upon how other oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia respond to Western pleas to pump more oil. However, given Biden's tumultuous relationship with the Crown Prince, the prospects are not very heartening.

Europe was initially reluctant to sanction Moscow. Germany only withdrew the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia but did not cancel the project. Germany imports almost 40 per cent of its energy needs from Russia. French imports of Russian energy supplies stand at around 20 per cent. Even after the invasion, Germany and the US initially refrained from cutting Russia off from the global SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) standard for bank payments. The challenge of economic hardships is real for all Western liberal democracies, given how strong the right-wing conservative movements have become in their domestic politics. However, authoritarian governments have shown far more resistance to the demands of their constituents. Putin has also prepared himself for the anticipated economic pain. Ever since 2014, Russia has reduced its economic vulnerability by building its foreign exchange reserves to the tune of almost US\$650 billion (S\$883 billion) in gold and by exiting the American sovereign debt market. One of Putin's gameplans would be to tolerate the sanctions for as long as possible, hoping that reeling under higher inflation and economic hardships, Western democracies would either retract or face electoral reverses. However, Ukrainian resistance has galvanised the European response in the last couple of days. The West has enforced a suspension of SWIFT for some Russian banks and sanctioned Russia's central bank from using its sovereign funds.

Second, in an era where China is the primary American adversary and the US moment of unipolarity is fast eroding, an active European theatre risks dividing America's limited energy and resources against two major revisionist powers in Eurasia. The Ukrainian crisis has forced the US to strengthen the NATO alliance, even when European economic giants like Germany have contributed very little to NATO's military resources. Biden has dispatched trip-wire troops to forward NATO states in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. However, the real problem for Biden would be in the post-conflict scenario, especially after Russian occupation where Ukraine sees a significant uptick in guerrilla warfare, and Ukraine's NATO neighbours

⁷ The White House, "Remarks by President Biden Announcing Response to Russian Actions in Ukraine", 22 February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/22/remarks-by-president-biden-announcing-response-to-russian-actions-in-ukraine/>.

support insurgencies against the pro-Russia government in Kyiv. That would render the whole NATO-Russia border extremely active and volatile, sensitive at any time to escalation. Such a scenario poses the severe risk of entrapping the US military into the adventures of its NATO allies in Eastern Europe.

Emerging Axis of Eurasia's Continental Authoritarians

In almost what might be called a diplomatic coup by future historians, Putin travelled to Beijing in the first week of February 2022 for a summit meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. It almost appeared as if Putin had pulled off a Nixonian trick, only that this time Moscow courted Beijing to balance the US. Rivals during the Cold War – Beijing and Moscow – have found each other's company reassuring, primarily as a response to mutual antagonism with Washington. Russia has one of the world's most powerful militaries but economically, it is a declining power; China is the rising superpower that is slowly but surely translating its economic heft into military capability. Since the West sanctioned Russia in the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Moscow has steadily moved into the Chinese orbit. China has emerged as Russia's principal economic partner; China, too, has benefitted from Russian natural resources and top-of-the-line military technology. In addition, both have a stake in continuing the authoritarian domestic governance models. This emerging strategic convergence between Eurasia's two continental powers with authoritarian regimes was in full display in the joint statement released after the Xi-Putin summit.

First, the penchant for revisionism of the current international order – both territorially and normatively – is deeply shared; so is their mutual distrust of the US. As the joint statement argued, "Some actors representing but the minority on the international scale continue to advocate unilateral approaches to addressing international issues and resort to force; they interfere in the internal affairs of other states, infringing their legitimate rights and interests, and incite contradictions, differences, and confrontation, thus hampering the development and progress of mankind."⁸ Second, if China has supported Russian anxieties over the eastward movement of NATO, Moscow has extended a helping hand to Beijing over its claims in Taiwan. Both also shared their condemnation of the US Indo-Pacific strategy and the emerging cooperation between the Indo-Pacific's maritime democracies such as India, Japan, the US and Australia in the form of the Quadrilateral Security Initiative.

Coming on the heels of the Xi-Putin summit, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised eyebrows worldwide over Beijing's complicity in Moscow's actions. Notwithstanding whether Beijing knew of Putin's plans or believed that Putin would 'not walk the talk' on his threat of military coercion, it has undoubtedly been caught off guard. As Stimson's Yun Sun argues, "Having subscribed to the theory that Putin was only posturing and that US intelligence was inaccurate as in the case of invading Iraq, the Chinese were not anticipating a real invasion by Russia."⁹ However, Beijing maintained stoic support for the Russians in the UNSC deliberations, declining to name and shame Moscow as many other members did. The

⁸ "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development", 4 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>.

⁹ Yun Sun, "The Ukraine Crisis: Beijing's Support of Russia and Its Limit", Stimson Center, 22 February 2022, <https://www.stimson.org/2022/ukraine-crisis-beijings-russia-limits/>.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi subsequently stated that Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected and blamed the current crisis on the failure to implement the Minsk agreement.¹⁰ However, in a phone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, he noted that the Ukrainian issue has a "complex and special historical context", and China understands "Russia's legitimate security concerns." Wang Yi also urged all parties to "abandon Cold War mindset and strive for a balanced, effective and sustainable European security mechanism through dialogue and negotiation."¹¹ China has also criticised the sanctions imposed by Western partners on Russia. As the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson argued, "We believe that sanctions are never the fundamental and effective way to solve problems. China always opposes any illegal unilateral sanctions." As Russia faces significant sanctions on its trade, China has lifted all wheat imports from Moscow. To override the crippling effect of Western financial sanctions, China's support will be critical for Russian oil and other natural resource exports.

Russian actions will help Beijing in the short term. First, they will draw global attention to the European theatre and distract from the Indo-Pacific. The more the US invests in NATO and remains engulfed in the crisis with Russia, the more would be the freedom for Beijing to manoeuvre in the Indo-Pacific. The second scenario, though unlikely, would involve the West seeking Beijing's assistance to pressure Russia diplomatically in the United Nations (UN) and by participating in the economic sanctions imposed so far. It may provide Beijing a shot at recalibrating its highly competitive relationship with the US. Lastly, Putin's actions have forced him into a strategic corner. Moscow, by default, has no other option but to cling to Beijing's coattails. Lastly, the US and NATO's inability to intervene in Ukraine may create doubts among American allies in the Indo-Pacific about the credibility of the US to follow through with its security guarantees in the region.

Yet, the Russian-induced Europe crisis would galvanise resistance against China in the Indo-Pacific in the long term. First, the Russian invasion will finally force European powers to reinvest in their military capabilities. It will lend greater credibility to NATO and encourage more significant contributions by the European powers to the defence of Europe. China's perceived support for Russia will also entail greater hostility against authoritarianism in the world. Second, the fundamental contradictions in Chinese and American national interests in the Indo-Pacific will not evaporate. Insofar as Xi's ambitions in extending Chinese influence – coupled with Beijing's bid to replace American primacy in the region – remain unchanged, Sino-US competition will only intensify. Third, the Russian invasion will also galvanise the region's middle powers to invest further in their military capabilities, both conventional and nuclear. As Robert Ward of the International Institute for Strategic Studies argues, Tokyo will now "table key economic security bill imminently" and "revise its National Security Strategy [NSS]."¹² Japan is currently reviewing its 2013 NSS, and the revised NSS

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ CGTN, "China understands Russia's legitimate security concerns, Wang tells Lavrov", 24 February 2022, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-02-24/Chinese-FM-holds-phone-conversation-with-Russian-FM-Lavrov-17UV2UChajq/index.html>.

¹² Robert Ward (@RobertAlanWard), "Ukraine crisis will surely also accelerate Japan's own security reforms given its concerns about...", Twitter, 25 February 2022, 2:51 PM, <https://twitter.com/RobertAlanWard/status/1497101894975643648>

may witness a Japanese strategy devoid of past taboos on the use of military power.¹³ India, too, may accelerate greater defence indigenisation to reduce dependence on Russia. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already emphasised greater indigenisation amidst the Ukrainian crisis. The AUKUS powers (the US, the United Kingdom and Australia) have also expedited greater cooperation to “strengthen intelligence and security ties.”¹⁴ Lastly, Russia’s blatant violation of Ukrainian sovereignty may accelerate nuclear acquisition by local powers. In a recent survey, the South Koreans have overwhelmingly supported the acquisition of nuclear weapons.¹⁵ Strategists in the US are now arguing to put atomic weapons at the forefront of America’s deterrent strategy vis-à-vis China. On the other hand, the Japanese may seek the stationing of US nuclear weapon islands in the mainland.¹⁶

India’s Unenviable Position

The fact that New Delhi did not evacuate 20,000 Indian students in Ukraine, even when the war clouds were gathering for the last three months, highlights that just like Beijing and many other states, New Delhi saw the amassing of military hardware around Ukraine as a mere coercive bargaining exercise. India’s initial reaction to Russia’s announcement of the breakaway republics’ independence was an appeal to restore the diplomatic process; New Delhi even declined to identify with Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in the UNSC meeting on 23 February 2022. The gap between American and Indian approaches to the Ukrainian crisis was reflected in Biden’s press conference after he announced the first set of sanctions on the same day that the issue of Russian invasion needs to be “resolved” with the Indian government. Even after the attack on 23 February 2022 and substantial global outcry over Putin’s resort to violence, New Delhi tried to walk a tightrope. India abstained from the UNSC vote, along with China and the United Arab Emirates, in condemning the Russian invasion. However, India’s explanation of its decision was far harsher than its initial reaction. Elaborating further, the Indian permanent representative at the UN emphatically asserted that the “contemporary global order has been built on the UN Charter, international law and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.”¹⁷

Indian tightrope diplomacy is not new. In December 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and then again in March 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine,

¹³ Sasakawa Peace Foundation, “Requirements for Crafting Japan’s New National Security Strategy”, <https://spfusa.org/event/requirements-for-crafting-japans-new-national-security-strategy/>

¹⁴ “Visit to AUKUS partners to strengthen intelligence and security ties”, 24 February 2022, <https://www.senatorpaterson.com.au/news/media-statement-visit-to-aukus-partners-to-strengthen-intelligence-and-security-ties>.

¹⁵ Mitch Shin, “Nearly Three-Quarters of South Koreans Support Nuclear Weapons Development”, *The Diplomat*, 22 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/nearly-three-quarters-of-south-koreans-support-nuclear-weapons-development/>.

¹⁶ Japan Today, “Ex-PM Abe says Japan should discuss nuclear sharing arrangement”, 28 February 2022, <https://japantoday.com/category/politics/ex-pm-abe-says-japan-should-discuss-nuclear-sharing-arrangement>

¹⁷ Shubhajit Roy, “India abstains on UNSC resolution that ‘deplores’ Russian aggression against Ukraine”, *The Indian Express*, 26 February 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-vote-ukraine-russia-uns-resolution-7791593/>

India moved stealthily or warily around any overt condemnation of Moscow. Though New Delhi communicated its reservations in private, it has always tilted towards Moscow in public. Yet, the current situation in Ukraine is unprecedented because of the brazenness of Russian actions. Unlike in 1980 or 2014, Putin's intervention against a democratically elected government in Kyiv is impossible to justify, even by historical measures of disregard for international law by major powers.

India's decision to abstain invited significant criticism from the Western policy community. Richard Haas, President of the US Council for Foreign Affairs, accused New Delhi of being "unprepared to step up to major power responsibilities or be a dependable partner."¹⁸ All the other Quad members – Japan, Australia and the US – have imposed sanctions on Moscow. The antics over India's behaviour are troubling. New Delhi's choices have forced her to be seen as siding with Russia and China, the global revisionist powers accused of violating some of the basic principles of contemporary world order. Why is India walking such a tricky tightrope?

First is India's military dependency on Russia. Almost 60 to 80 per cent of India's military inventory is Russian in origins.¹⁹ Such military dependency is a legacy of India's military relationship with the Soviet Union and its continued reliance on Moscow after the Cold War. Though India has diversified its military procurement from vendors such as France, Israel and the US, Moscow remains India's primary source of military equipment for several reasons. For example, some of the most technologically sensitive defence products could only be obtained from Russia, such as leasing Akula class attack nuclear submarines as well as technical help needed for India's indigenous nuclear ballistic missile submarine force. Russian inclination to co-develop military equipment is equally attractive: the supersonic cruise missile Brahmos, which India recently exported to the Philippines, results from technological co-development with the Russian military industry. Second, Russian equipment is, in some cases, simply the best and cheapest, as is the issue with the controversial missile defence system such as the S-400. Third, Russia's readiness to provide military equipment quickly and without many conditionalities has helped continue its stranglehold on India's military imports. India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's visit to Moscow in the immediate aftermath of the 2020 Galwan Crisis for emergency military supplies is a case in point. Successive Indian governments have also continued to source military equipment from Russia to support India's strategic autonomy, lest excessive shifts towards Western sources may be viewed as bartering India's strategic autonomy.

However, military dependence is only part of the explanation. India has historically seen Russia as an essential factor in Asia's balance of power. During the Cold War, Sino-Soviet tension was a fundamental factor in India's grand strategy to deter China. Though the element of hostility has ceased between the two erstwhile Cold War adversaries, Moscow's

¹⁸ Richard Haas (@RichardHaas), "India's careful, avoid angering Putin at all costs response despite Russia's blatant aggression vs Ukraine highlights...", Twitter, 25 February 2022, 8:34 PM, <https://twitter.com/RichardHaas/status/1497188337483980801>

¹⁹ Sushant Singh, "86 per cent of Indian military equipment of Russian origin: Stimson Center paper", The Indian Express, 22 July 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/86-per-cent-of-indian-military-equipment-of-russian-origin-stimson-center-paper-6517136/>

unambiguous alignment with Beijing will be a significant force multiplier for China. Eurasia's two most considerable continental military powers will be tough for Indo-Pacific democracies to counter. Free-flowing energy supplies from Russia will resolve China's Malacca dilemma, and its relatively sophisticated military-technological complex can transform the Chinese military into a competent force. Most distressing would be Moscow's active support for Beijing vis-à-vis New Delhi, both on the Sino-Indian border dispute. Moscow can delay or deny military equipment under pressure from Beijing or, worse, support Chinese actions on the border both materially as well as diplomatically. The growing Moscow-Islamabad bilateral relationship has also been a thorn for New Delhi.

The logic of Indian reactions, however, does not alleviate its predicament. First, India's silence has contradicted its normative battle for upholding international law, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and unjustified use of force against China. It is currently embroiled in a significant confrontation along the Himalayan border with Beijing. The contradiction facing Indian decision-makers is simple but acute: if India won't stand for Russia's disregard of the values and norms of the international order, why would the world stand for India against its similar recriminations against China? Fighting over principles notwithstanding, India's material interests are also at stake. Greater dissonance with the West would create difficulties for India's growing alignment with not only Indo-Pacific democracies but also European powers such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany, which are critical to maintaining a favourable balance of power in Asia and in India's fight against China. Second, the Russian gambit and Western reaction will force Moscow to cling to Beijing more tightly, despite India's efforts to cushion Moscow's fall. Russian interests are independent of what India may want, and given its economic and diplomatic isolation, it will be forced to embrace China more tightly. Unlike Beijing, New Delhi neither has the financial nor the diplomatic heft to bail Moscow out of its difficult position. Unlike China, India has no axe to grind against the West in supporting Russia's actions.

Moreover, as economic sanctions begin to bite, India's military imports from Russia will have to adjust accordingly. New Delhi's short-term strategy would be to overcome Western economic sanctions by special financial arrangements such as the Rouble-Rupee exchange agreement. But the sanctions will bite in the long run. It would be challenging for New Delhi to arrange a US waiver for S-400 missile defence systems imports. New Delhi has a treacherous diplomatic path to tread in the following days and months.

Conclusion

The ground situation in Ukraine is incredibly fluid. Yet, the Russian invasion and the ensuing crisis have fundamentally changed international politics. First, the US' gaze has shifted from the Indo-Pacific to the European theatre. The US' capacities to face two significant powers – Russia and China – in two different geographic theatres will stretch American capabilities and its will. However, the spin-off of the Russian invasion is the re-emergence of Europe as a formidable military player. Overall, the Western military and economic response will strengthen the liberal international order, which is not a bad result for many in the Indo-Pacific. Second, Russian actions and the Western response will inevitably force Moscow closer to Beijing. The emerging Eurasian alignment between China and Russia will strengthen further, with Russia being a junior partner. Such a development will exert

significant pressure on the Quad member countries. Lastly, Russia's actions have laid bare the deep fault lines in India's foreign policy. India's famed strategic autonomy is under severe strain. On the one hand, it seeks to maintain its special relationship with Moscow both because of military dependency and the need to keep Russia neutral in the ongoing Sino-Indian competition. On the other, Moscow's dangerous gambit can potentially create a wedge between India and its Indo-Pacific partners. It also corners New Delhi on the wrong side of international morality when it faces a revisionist power on its northern borders.

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