



## India and the World

*Perspectives on India in world affairs. Issued on a regular basis by the Project for Nordic-India Relations at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI).*



### India, Russia, and Ukraine

India's position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused initial concern in Washington and EU capitals. Consequently, diplomatic activity was significantly raised. During the spring the Head of the European Commission [von der Leyen visited Delhi](#), Prime Minister Modi visited Europe, a 2+2 dialogue was held in Washington with President Biden present and Modi on link. External Affairs Minister Jaishankar has interacted with no less than 24 EU Foreign Ministers and representatives of the EU since February 24. Now, the parties seem to have arrived at an unofficial consensus to "agree to disagree".

While sending humanitarian relief to Ukraine, calling for independent investigations of atrocities, and stating the need to respect international law and territorial integrity, Delhi has not officially condemned Russia's actions. In addition, India has significantly increased its import of crude oil from Russia and explored mechanisms for trading without using USD. The share of oil imports to India from Russia rose from just above 2% in January 2022 [to almost 20% in June](#), but has since then dropped. Imports of [fertilisers](#) have increased as well. Arms imports are also pursued, although there are reports of disruptions due to problems on the Russian side.

What explains India's behaviour? Let me list three factors. First, India's domestic needs in general, and post-pandemic, in particular. An overarching aim for India is that its foreign policy must contribute to the country's economic modernisation. Other goals like becoming a "leading power" are understood to be dependent on sustained high growth. Fuel and energy shortages would also have long term effect on poverty reduction as India rebounds from the pandemic. However, that India gets oil from Russia at a bargain has not gone unnoticed in [Ukraine](#).

Second, history. It is worth remembering that India relied heavily on [treaty-based cooperation with the Soviet Union](#) during the cold war. Although the US is now India's most prominent partner, Delhi's relations with Washington were fraught for almost 60 years. Moscow's support for India's positions on Kashmir in the Security Council, its security guarantees when India intervened in East Pakistan and the US sent part of its fleet to back (West) Pakistan in 1971, US rapprochement with China during the 1970s are not easily forgotten by older generations in India's bureaucracy and intelligentsia. Yet the trajectory is clear: India moves away from its dependencies on Russia by diversification of partners, suppliers as well as increased indigenous production. The arms industry is a case in point. In the late 1980s Russia's share of India's arms import was about 88%. During the period 2017-2021 that [figure was 46%](#). In fact, India's overall trade with the EU and the US is 17,5 times larger than with Russia. There are about 6.6 million people of Indian origin living in Europe and the US combined, compared to 30 000 in Russia.

Finally, China. Delhi's position on Russia's war in Ukraine was initially reported in Swedish media as placing India in the China camp. In fact, the opposite is true. [India views China as its primary strategic challenge](#). It is not in New Delhi's interest that an isolated Russia moves even closer to China. Delhi aims at balancing China in Asia by providing an alternative for Russia.

To sum up. Delhi's position has evolved, but India has persisted in clearing its own path based on legacy and interests. Both the US and the EU have accepted although not agreed with India's choice. Whether India's positioning comes with a political cost is still too early to assess.



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