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### Editors

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### Contacts:

website: <http://ukraine-analytica.org/>  
e-mail: [Ukraine\\_analytica@ukr.net](mailto:Ukraine_analytica@ukr.net)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ukraineanalytica>  
Twitter: [https://twitter.com/UA\\_Analytica](https://twitter.com/UA_Analytica)

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# IN PURSUIT OF INTEREST: INDIA AND RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

*Olha Vorozhbyt*

*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv*

*Ukrayinskyi Tyzhden weekly*

***After Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there was an expectation that India would join the coalition of countries that stood up against it. Yet New Delhi has continued to walk a diplomatic tightrope, condemning the war atrocities, but abstaining during the voting for UN resolutions that condemned Russia for the war in Ukraine. Besides that, New Delhi has boosted economic cooperation with Moscow in recent months, while Western countries imposed sanctions on Russia. India explains such a position as one that is neutral in terms of the conflict and follows its national interests. This paper provides an overview of the reasons and visions that have shaped such an approach.***

## **India's Pre-war Approach**

Since the annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas in 2014, India has chosen the path of a 'silent position' on the conflict and the violation of international law. Except for the short commentary by the then National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon that there were "legitimate Russian interests involved"<sup>1</sup> in Ukraine, other statements were purely neutral. Yet, in fact, it meant a politically pro-Russian position (a "special and privileged strategic partnership"<sup>2</sup> with Russia established in 2010 was further ongoing) with multiple

meetings between Russian and Indian leaders, and the continued boosting of economic cooperation with both Ukraine and Russia, and a slowly decreasing military dependence on Moscow.

After the full-scale invasion in February 2022, the approach has hardly changed. The current position of local politicians and governors has been called 'neutral'<sup>3</sup>, yet in fact, it has a pro-Russian bias. Over the course of five months, India has abstained during voting in the United Nations (before the full-scale invasion, it voted against the annual Ukrainian resolutions on


- 1 *Russia has legitimate interests in Ukraine: Shivshankar Menon, NSA*, "The Economic Times", 6 March 2014 [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/russia-has-legitimate-interests-in-ukraine-shivshankar-memon-nsa/articleshow/31546699.cms]
- 2 *Joint Statement: Celebrating of India-Russian Federation Strategic Partnership and Looking Ahead*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 21 December 2010 [bit.ly/3BTSqAc]
- 3 *Ukraine-Russia crisis: MEA says India's stand neutral, hopes for peace*, "Business Standard", 24 February 2022 [https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/ukraine-russia-crisis-mea-says-india-s-stand-neutral-hopes-for-peace-122022400716\_1.html]

human rights violations in Crimea and the militarisation of the peninsula), condemned the hostilities, but at the same time sharply increased the level of imports from Russia (namely crude oil and fertilisers). Among the representatives of the Indian political elite, like former Secretary General of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Ram Madhav<sup>4</sup>, or prominent foreign policy speaker of the main opposition party Indian National Congress (INC) Shashi Tharoor<sup>5</sup>, this war is also seen as an opportunity to gain global power while becoming a mediator in the conflict.

Just before the full-scale invasion, the level of attention in India concerning the situation in Ukraine was very high. One of the reasons was that around 20,000 Indian citizens had stayed in the country. Over 18,000 of them were students, whose parents, taking into consideration the news about a possible full-scale war and the evacuation of the citizens of other states, were pushing their local MPs and the government to evacuate their children<sup>6</sup>. After the Russian attack, India announced an evacuation operation under the name 'Operation Ganga'. On February 28, four ministers were sent to neighbouring countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland) to coordinate the evacuation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally met students who returned from Ukraine during his election campaign tour in Uttar Pradesh. Some observers<sup>7</sup> stressed that the PM was using the war in Ukraine as one of his campaign issues in that state (Modi spoke about the success of the evacuation, though one of the students was killed in Kharkiv<sup>8</sup> by Russian shelling, and one was injured<sup>9</sup>).

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The issue of the students is one of those that bring the Russian war in Ukraine much closer to the attention of the Indian audience. In the Indian media, there were a number of articles that criticised the Indian government<sup>10</sup> for its delay in making decision on those students who had to flee Ukraine. They have no other options on where to study. The students' issue was

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- 4 R. Madhav, *How India needs to deal with the Ukraine question*, "The Indian Express", 12 July 2022 [https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/how-india-needs-to-deal-with-the-ukraine-question-8023368/]
  - 5 Sh. Tharoor, *Why the world needs peace in Ukraine*, "The Hindu", 12 July 2022 [https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/why-the-world-needs-peace-in-ukraine/article65626597.ece]
  - 6 *Parents of Students in Ukraine anxious, seek govt help*, "The Indian Express", 15 February 2022 [https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/parents-of-students-in-ukraine-anxious-see-govt-help-7775510/]
  - 7 U. Poddar, *Ukraine Pradesh: How Modi is Trying to turn Putin's invasion into an election issue in UP*, "Scroll.in", 02 March 2022 [https://scroll.in/article/1018516/ukraine-pradesh-how-modi-is-trying-to-turn-putins-invasion-into-an-election-issue-in-up]
  - 8 I. Qureshi, *Ukraine Invasion: Indian Student Killed as He Tried to Buy Food*, "BBC News", 01 March 2022 [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-60567585]
  - 9 *Indian Student Shot at While Fleeing Kyiv*, "The Times of India", 04 March 2022 [https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/god-gave-me-second-life-injured-indian-student-in-ukraine-makes-fervent-appeal-to-embassy/articleshow/89994404.cms]
  - 10 M. T. Raju, *5 months on, education of Indian med students from Ukraine still uncertain*, "The News Minute", 28 July 2022 [https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/5-months-education-indian-med-students-ukraine-still-uncertain-166302]

one of the main topics of conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy when they corresponded in late February and March.

## UN Voting

Since 2014, India has voted against the annual Ukrainian resolutions on Crimea in the United Nations: *Resolution: Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov and Resolution: Situation of Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine*. There were also cases when representatives of the illegal occupational government in Crimea visited India<sup>11</sup>. In the Russian<sup>12</sup> and local media, the trip was presented as a working visit, but the Indian government, according to statements in the press<sup>13</sup>, rejected such a presentation, saying that it was a private one.

Since the start of the full-scale invasion on February 24 2022, India has abstained during voting on the UN resolutions that condemned Russian aggression. This was seen as a partial climb-down after the previous positioning. Yet it was also greatly criticised, as there was an expectation

that India as the world biggest democracy would take a stronger stand against Russian aggression. During the first vote in the UN Security Council on February 25, India together with China and the UAE abstained, with an explanation afterwards that “it urges that all efforts are made for the immediate cessation of violence and hostilities”. It also stressed that “the contemporary global order has been built on the UN Charter”<sup>14</sup>. Voting on March 2, India again abstained on the resolution that deplored Russian aggression against Ukraine. India was also among 12 nations that abstained from voting on the UN Human Rights Council resolution seeking to address the deteriorating situation in Ukraine “stemming from Russian aggression”<sup>15</sup>. During the July 29 UNSC discussions on Ukraine, deputy permanent representative of India to the UN, R. Ravindra repeated the previous position of his country on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states, and stressed that PM Modi had talked to the presidents of both countries, and reiterated the Indian position and calls for dialogue<sup>16</sup>.

The UN voting became an important political marker in the relations between Ukraine and India. It also created debates in the Indian media<sup>17</sup> on why India should

11 *Crimean politician in delegation sets tongues wagging*, “The Times of India”, 12 December 2014 [<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/crimean-politician-in-delegation-sets-tongues-wagging/articleshow/45485336.cms>]

12 *Sergej Aksénov, vmeste s prezidentom RF posetil Indiú*, “Argumenty i Fakty”, 11 December 2014 [<https://krym.aif.ru/politic/gover/1403972>]

13 *Crimean politician in delegation sets tongues wagging*, “The Times of India”, 12 December 2014 [<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/crimean-politician-in-delegation-sets-tongues-wagging/articleshow/45485336.cms>]

14 T.S. Tirumurti, *Explanation of vote*, Statement by Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti, Permanent Representative of India to the UN, UNSC Adoption of Resolution on the situation in Ukraine, 25 February 2022 [bit.ly/3R0nank]

15 *India, Pakistan Among 12 countries that abstained from UNHRC vote on Ukraine*, “The Economic Times”, 13 May 2022 [<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/india-pakistan-among-12-countries-that-abstained-from-unhrc-vote-on-ukraine/articleshow/91530909.cms>]

16 *UN Security Council Session on the situation in Ukraine*, Online recording, 29 July 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmtLmmjVRNE&t=4714s>]

17 *Times when Ukraine had voted against India in UNSC*, “NewsBharati”, 26 February 2022, [<https://www.newsbharati.com/Encyc/2022/2/26/Times-when-Ukraine-had-voted-against-India-at-UNSC.html>]

support Ukraine in the UN, if Kyiv had previously rejected resolutions important for New Delhi (Ukraine opposed India's nuclear tests in 1998). But there are other more significant arguments explaining the reasons for such positioning of India in the UN. Historically, India has not supported resolutions that criticised Russia and previously the USSR. Thus, it abstained from voting for resolutions that condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968) and later of Afghanistan (1979). Also, it voted against condemning Russian actions in Chechnya and Abkhazia<sup>18</sup>.



***The UN voting became an important political marker in the relations between Ukraine and India. It also created debates in the Indian media on why India should support Ukraine in the UN, if Kyiv had previously rejected resolutions important for New Delhi***

The case of Czechoslovakia resembles the current Indian stance on Ukraine. While there was widespread popular sympathy for the Czechs in India, the Indian government only expressed mild “regret” and abstained in the Security Council vote<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, in the case of the Russian war against Ukraine, irrespective of the influence of Kremlin propaganda, there is also popular sympathy

for the Ukrainians. Thus, according to a global survey by Ipsos, 72% of urban Indians supported taking in refugees from Ukraine<sup>20</sup>, while at the same time almost 79% rejected the idea of Indian military involvement in the conflict.

### **Self-vision as a Global Player and a Mediator**

Among the politicians on different parts of the political spectrum in India, there is a common vision of New Delhi as a possible mediator in Russia's war against Ukraine. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly stated that he supports the path of dialogue and diplomacy between Russia and Ukraine. During the debates in the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian parliament) on April 5, when representatives of different political parties expressed their visions on the position of India in the conflict, this idea was supported in many presentations. Shashi Tharoor, MP from the opposition Indian National Congress party (INC), stressed this issue during his speech, as well as in his later publications in the local media<sup>21</sup>. A right-wing politician, and former National General Secretary of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Ram Madhav<sup>22</sup>, in an op-ed, also called for India to take the role of mediator in the war. He stressed that India had such experience during the Korean War in 1953. During the debate, an MP from the local Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party (DMK), Thamizhachi Thangapandian also said that “India should take more

18 G. Price, *Ukraine war: Why India abstained on UN vote against Russia*, Chatham House, 26 March 2022 [<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/03/ukraine-war-why-india-abstained-un-vote-against-russia>]

19 H.V. Pant, *Indian Foreign Policy: An Overview*, Orient BlackSwan, 2019, p.103

20 *7 in 10 urban Indians support taking in Ukrainian refugees: Ipsos survey*, “National Herald”, 13 May 2022 [<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/7-in-10-urban-indians-support-taking-in-ukrainian-refugees-ipsos-survey>]

21 Sh. Tharoor, *Why the world needs peace in Ukraine*, “The Hindu”, 12 July 2022 [<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/why-the-world-needs-peace-in-ukraine/article65626597.ece>]

22 R. Madhav, *How India needs to deal with the Ukraine question*, “The Indian Express”, 12 July 2022 [<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/how-india-needs-to-deal-with-the-ukraine-question-8023368/>]

responsibility to be the honest mediator between Ukraine and Russia”<sup>23</sup>. In March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seeking such an opportunity, speaking multiple times with President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as President of Russia Vladimir Putin. Moreover, that interest was strengthened by the desire of the Indian government to successfully evacuate its citizens from Ukraine. At the same time, at the end of March, Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba, commenting to Indian media channel NDTV on such a possibility, said that if Prime Minister Modi was willing to play such a role, Ukraine would welcome his efforts<sup>24</sup>. At the beginning of April, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov visited India, and said that India might support the process of mediation if it wanted “to play the role”<sup>25</sup>. Yet over the period of almost six months of Russian war against Ukraine, New Delhi left this possibility just as a part of the talks and discussions.

Irrespective of their political party, during the April 5 debates, the politicians stressed that India must maintain this ‘neutral’ position, though it was also ‘not to sit on the fence’. “Friends also have to be told”, stressed Manish Tiwari from the INC, pointing out that India has to express its condemnation of Russian aggression “privately”. He also stated that the “Anglo-American alliance bears equal responsibility”, and what is more, “Ukraine should have been far more sensitive to Russian concerns”<sup>26</sup>. President of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference party, Farooq Abdullah, during

the same debate, called the war a “failure of the UN”, but also said that Ukraine was asked by Russia “please don’t have an enemy on my border”, probably referring to Russian propaganda on NATO membership as a reason to start the war.

Foreign minister S. Jaishankar, while speaking to the MPs in the Lok Sabha, pointed out that “foreign policy is a matter of consensus” in India. This is what can be derived from the speeches on the Russian war against Ukraine there on April 5. It is also a summary of the decades-long position of various Indian political parties: while disagreeing on internal issues, their foreign policy positions stayed close. “We are against the conflict. In this age dialogue and diplomacy are the right answers to any disputes. If India has chosen a side, it is a side of peace,” said the Indian foreign minister during his speech. But it is not just Mahatma Gandhi’s legacy that influences him. One of the core principles of Jaishankar’s foreign policy is what he himself calls “plurilateralism”. It could be defined as working with unlikely partners for the common good. French researcher C. Jaffrelot, while explaining Indian plurilateralism, points to the famous quote from Jaishankar’s book “The India Way”: “This is a time for us to engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbours in, extend the neighbourhood and expand traditional constituencies of support”<sup>27</sup>. In interviews, the foreign minister stresses that India has been capable of managing the China problem, which means that other rivalries

23 T. Sumathy Thamizhaci Thangapandian, *Discussion Under Rule 193 on the Situation in Ukraine*, 05 April 2022 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8McsSobWbI]

24 “If PM Modi is Willing to Play Role of Mediator...”: *Ukraine Minister to NDTV*, NDTV, 30 March 2022 [https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/welcome-it-if-pm-modi-considers-being-mediator-ukraine-minister-to-ndtv-2853257]

25 *India can be a mediator between Russia and Ukraine: Lavrov*, *The Statesman*, 01 April 2022, [https://www.thestatesman.com/world/india-can-mediator-russia-ukraine-lavrov-1503056702.html]

26 M. Tiwari, *Discussion Under Rule 193 on the Situation in Ukraine*, 05 April 2022 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HsTiSDaGUc&t=530s]

27 S. Jaishankar, *The India Way. Strategies for an Uncertain World*, HarperCollins Publishers India 2020



and wars could also be processed through dialogue<sup>28</sup>. C. Jaffrelot also adds that from the current Indian foreign policy vision “a strong Russia is important because it adds a pillar to the multipolar world that New Delhi wants to see”<sup>29</sup>. The fact that Russia is too far from India to pose a threat to the country also influences such an approach. Both countries also share the same strategic approach to world order, and are strong



***Indian cooperation with and long-time friendship with the USSR, and Russia as its state successor, have had one of the most significant impacts on the Indian position in Russia's war against Ukraine***

proponents of spheres of influence<sup>30</sup>. For the Indian ‘plurilateral’ approach in foreign policy, Russia is seen as an important pillar.

S. Jaishankar also sees the Russian war in Ukraine through the lens of Indian postcolonial criticism of the West. “Europe has to grow out of the mindset that its problems are the world’s problems, but the world’s problems aren’t Europe’s problems<sup>31</sup>,” he said, answering a question

on India’s position on the war. He mentioned that India has one-fifth of the world’s population, and is among the biggest economic players, which makes it entitled to take its own sides and “weigh his own interests”. While speaking about an increase in the level of trade with Russia, the Indian foreign minister also redirected this issue to Europe which “is still much bigger consumer of Russian energy resources”.

### **The USSR Legacy in the Indo-Russian Friendship**

Indian cooperation with and long-time friendship with the USSR, and Russia as its state successor, have had one of the most significant impacts on the Indian position in Russia’s war against Ukraine. There were historical episodes where observers in India supposed that Soviet support was essential to New Delhi. Mainly, there is a shared conception that Soviet engagement during the 1971 conflict helped to deter US military action against India<sup>32</sup>. In 1971, India also signed its first political treaty with another nation, and it was with the USSR – the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, thus deviating its position as a non-aligned state during the Cold War. This history is transmitted into Indo-Russian relations, together with its core element – military cooperation. A total of 86% of the equipment,

28 *Europe ‘mischaracterizing’ India’s position in Ukraine conflict: Jaishankar*, “Business Standard”, 07 June 2022 [[https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/europe-mischaracterising-india-s-position-in-ukraine-conflict-jaishankar-122060300888\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/europe-mischaracterising-india-s-position-in-ukraine-conflict-jaishankar-122060300888_1.html)]

29 C. Jaffrelot, *Indian debates on the War in Ukraine: All Roads Lead to a Consensus*, Institut Montaigne, 07 June 2022 [<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/indian-debates-war-ukraine-all-roads-lead-consensus>]

30 S. Lalwani, F. O’Donnell, T. Sagerstrom, A. Vasudeva, *The Influence of Arms: Explaining the Durability of India-Russia Alignment*, “Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs”, 15 January 2021 [<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2473328/the-influence-of-arms-explaining-the-durability-of-indiarussia-alignment/#sdenote92sym>]

31 *Europe ‘mischaracterizing’ India’s position in Ukraine conflict: Jaishankar*, “Business Standard”, 07 June 2022 [[https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/europe-mischaracterising-india-s-position-in-ukraine-conflict-jaishankar-122060300888\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/europe-mischaracterising-india-s-position-in-ukraine-conflict-jaishankar-122060300888_1.html)]

32 S. Lalwani, F. O’Donnell, T. Sagerstrom, A. Vasudeva, *The Influence of Arms: Explaining the Durability of India-Russia Alignment*, “Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs”, 15 January 2021 [<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2473328/the-influence-of-arms-explaining-the-durability-of-indiarussia-alignment/#sdenote92sym>]

weapons, and platforms currently used by the military in India is of Russian origin<sup>33</sup>. This arms supply dependence has its roots in Soviet-era cooperation, and the necessity to counter threats from both Pakistan and China.

In the last few years, India has been looking for an opportunity to diversify its arms supplies through purchases from France, Israel, and the US. Washington is the second largest defence partner of India, yet the quantity of deliveries is far lower than those from Russia. Other countries have boosted arms sales from nothing to USD16–18 billion since 2005. At the same time, India signed USD15 billion contracts for arms sales with Russia, just between 2018 and 2019. S. Lalwani also mentions the Russian options that make cooperation with Moscow so attractive to New Delhi. For over a decade, India has been seeking to deepen indigenisation of production. “Russia was more open to India’s demand for licensed production or joint development on some technologically advanced systems, like cruise missiles, nuclear submarines, fighter aircraft, nuclear energy, and surface ships (including an aircraft carrier)”<sup>34</sup>.

The US is also working on decreasing Russian arms deliveries to the individual states, which they are actively cooperating with. Since 2017, Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) is aimed at punishing Moscow for its aggression. In 2020, Turkey was sanctioned under this act for buying an S-400 surface-to-air missile

system. Since last year, India and the US have been actively negotiating about the cancellation of the Indian agreement with Russia on buying S-400 systems. Such a deal should have been sanctioned under the CAATSA. Yet, New Delhi did not cancel the agreement, stating that such systems are of urgent need, and will be stationed on the country’s border with China. The first system was delivered by Russia in December 2021, and is now stationed on the northwest India border, to repel the threat both from China and Pakistan. However, India cancelled other military agreements with Russia, namely the purchase of 48 additional Mi-17 V5 medium-lift helicopters, as well as “deferred” the acquisition of 21 more MiG-29 and 12 Sukhoi-30MKI fighters<sup>35</sup>. In July 2022, the US House of Representatives voted on an exemption from CAATSA for India. If India were sanctioned, this would worsen its relations with the USA significantly, and the strong cooperation between the two states is seen by both as necessary in terms of countering Chinese threats in the region. Indian-American Congressman Ro Hanna, who introduced the amendment, said that the “US should take additional steps to encourage India to accelerate India’s transition of Russian-built weapons”<sup>36</sup>.

## Interest-based Neutrality

In recent months, India has increased its imports from Russia. According to information provided by the Indian Ministry of Commerce, the total number of imports from Russia grew by almost three times for

33 S. Singh, *86 per cent of Indian military equipment of Russian Origin: Stimson Center Paper*, “The Indian Express”, 22 July 2020 [<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/86-per-cent-of-indian-military-equipment-of-russian-origin-stimson-center-paper-6517136/>]

34 S. Lalwani, F. O’Donnell, T. Sagerstrom, A. Vasudeva, *The Influence of Arms: Explaining the Durability of India-Russia Alignment*, “Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs”, 15 January 2021 [<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/IIPA/Display/Article/2473328/the-influence-of-arms-explaining-the-durability-of-indiarussia-alignment/#sdcnote92sym>]

35 R. Pandit, *India to deploy 2nd S-400 squadron at China Front as PLA jets buzz near LAC*, “The Times of India”, 25 July 2022 [<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-to-deploy-2nd-s-400-squadron-at-china-front-as-pla-jets-buzz-near-lac/articleshow/93096672.cms>]

36 R. Singh, *Explained: US exempts India from CAATSA, what is it*, “The Indian Express”, 15 July 2022 [<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/us-caatsa-india-russia-s400-missile-weapons-system-8016536/>]

the period of April-May 2022, in comparison to the previous year. For only three months (from April to June), India imported two-thirds of its previous yearly import of fertilisers from Russia<sup>37</sup> – 7.74 million tons. It is a similar situation with spending on Russian energy. During April-June, oil imports from Russia rose to 682,200 bpd from 22,500 bpd in the same period last year<sup>38</sup>. Previously, Russia has also been the second largest supplier of crude oil to India, but since February 2022, it has boosted its share up to 19.8% in June. Iraq, which was the biggest supplier of oil to India in June, had a share of 26% of all imports.



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Such an economic approach corresponds with the political position that the conflict is 'European centred', and Asian countries can follow what they see as a convenient path for themselves. Both active politicians like foreign minister S. Jaishankar, as well as former ones who represent the expert community, now point to this narrative while commenting on the Indian position on the Russian war against Ukraine. Another justification is that Russia, with its invasion of Ukraine is doing the same as the West was doing in Asia in earlier times. Former national security advisor in the government

of Manmohan Singh, Shivshankar Menon has repeatedly mentioned this, naming the US invasion of Iraq and the Vietnam War as examples. Taking into consideration such an approach, India sees itself as free to make decisions on its trade partnerships. Also, its close partnership with Russia, and a long-time portrayal of the country as a close friend, influence the narratives and positions. In the Indian mainstream media, it is often mentioned that the current 'neutral' position in the Russian war against Ukraine corresponds with Indian national interests, as Russia is a big security guarantor for the country – it provides the largest number of arms to India. These supplies are vital for India, which has territorial disputes with both China and Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

India calls its position in Russia's war against Ukraine 'neutral' and 'based on national interests'. Yet this stance is just as much a result of post-colonial history, and previous active cooperation between Moscow and New Delhi. Countries have a similar vision of the world order, and support the idea of spheres of influence. Their current position on the conflict also resembles the Indian stance towards the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when Indians shared a common sympathy towards the Czechs whose freedom was destroyed by the Soviet invasion, but officially 'abstained' in the UN and did not express harsh criticism.

Among the Indian elite, there is also a vision of this war as a 'European' conflict, which Europe and the West must manage along with Russia. At the same time, India

37 N. Masih, *India turns to Russian fertilizer, showing challenge of isolating Moscow*, "The Washington Post", 04 August 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/04/india-russia-fertilizer-oil-imports/>]

38 N. Verma, *Russia's share of India's June oil imports surges to record*, "Reuters", 11 July 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-share-indias-june-oil-imports-surges-record-2022-07-11/>]

is ready to be a mediator between the two sides of the conflict. Many speakers also see the Russian invasion as an understandable reaction to the desire of NATO to expand along the Russian borders. Thus, the current Ukrainian position is rooted in the deep history of relations with the West, and Ukraine could try to challenge it only through cooperating with the Western countries. Only a mutual approach of the West and Ukraine can make the position of the biggest democracy in the world truly pro-democratic.

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**Olga Vorozhbyt** is deputy editor-in-chief of the Ukrainian weekly 'Ukrainskyi Tyzhden'. She is also a PhD candidate at the Ivan Franko National University in Lviv where she is writing her dissertation on the institutionalization of the Indian party system. Olga graduated from the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy in 2013 with an MA in European and German studies. Since 2013, she has worked both as a journalist and a researcher.

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