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One year of War in Ukraine: Evolution of India's position

Published On: 24-02-2023

Why in News: As the Russia-Ukraine war completes a year, the United Nations General Assembly is discussing a resolution calling for "the need to reach, as soon as possible, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace" in line with the founding United Nations Charter.

A Brief about Ukraine-Russia Crisis

Ukraine was a cornerstone of the Soviet Union, the archival of the United States during the Cold War.

Behind only Russia, it was the second-most-populous and -powerful of the fifteen Soviet republics, home to much of the union's agricultural production, defence industries, and military, including the Black Sea Fleet and some of the nuclear arsenal.

Ukraine was so vital to the union that its decision to sever ties in 1991 proved to be a coup de grâce for the ailing superpower.

In its three decades of independence, Ukraine has sought to forge its own path as a sovereign state while looking to align more closely with Western institutions, including the EU and NATO.

However, Kyiv struggled to balance its foreign relations and to bridge deep internal divisions. A more nationalist, Ukrainian-speaking population in western parts of the country generally supported greater integration with Europe, while a mostly Russian-speaking community in the east favoured closer ties with Russia.

https://thehindu.com/public/incoming/dwmqo1/article66433739.ece/alternates/FREE_1200/TH26_Ukarain%20lead.jpg
Ukraine became a battleground in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and began arming and abetting separatists in the Donbas region in the country's southeast.

Russia's seizure of Crimea was the first time since World War II that a European state annexed the territory of another. More than fourteen thousand people died in the fighting in the Donbas between 2014 and 2021, the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s.

The hostilities marked a clear shift in the global security environment from a unipolar period of U.S. dominance to one defined by renewed competition between great power

In February 2022, Russia embarked on a full-scale invasion of Ukraine with the aim of toppling the Western-aligned government of Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

India's evolved position during the war

For India, the Ukraine war has been an opportunity to practice strategic autonomy.

Adopting a "nuanced" neutrality [Delhi](#) has maintained its relationship with Moscow and worked around Western sanctions to buy oil from Russia.

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As much as 25% of India's oil purchase is now from Russia, from less than 2% before the war. But the longer the war continues, the more pressure on India from the Western alliance to choose the "right side".

In the last year, the UN and its bodies have voted on resolutions pertaining to the Russia-Ukraine war at least 39 times: 38 times since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 and once on January 31.

India, which has maintained a diplomatic balancing act and has walked the tightrope between US-led West and Russia, has abstained on most occasions

An analysis of India's voting record and the explanation of its votes at the UN and its bodies show a nuanced and calibrated stance adopted by [Delhi](#) in the past one year — much to the frustration of its western partners who have always asked India to condemn Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions.

But Delhi has also evolved its position as the facts of the conflict became clearer and the world felt the impact of the war.

While the 15-member UN Security Council discussed the Russia-Ukraine conflict 47 times since January 31 last year, India abstained on all five resolutions. At the 193-member UN General Assembly, it abstained on all six resolutions.

In both UNSC and UNGA, it voted in favour of the procedural votes to allow virtual participation of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

It abstained on votes at the UNHRC, IAEA, UNESCO, and WHO among other bodies, but Indian judge Justice Dalveer Bhandari had voted in favour at the International Court of Justice. Indian officials say he had voted in his "personal capacity".

India's position has been articulated by its diplomats in New York through several statements. In the statements made in the early stages of the conflict, it had articulated five basic points.

First, it had said it was "deeply disturbed", but did not name Russia at all. It had voiced concern, and that has been a recurring theme throughout the year of conflict

Second, it called for "cessation of violence and hostilities". It had maintained that "cessation of hostilities" is a broader term that is more permanent in nature, and had used it instead of a "ceasefire" which is perceived as a narrow term, which means temporary stopping of hostilities, after which the fighting can begin post regrouping and rearming.

Third, it had flagged its core concern about Indian nationals. About 22,000 Indian nationals, mostly students, had had to be evacuated by special planes.

Fourth, it called for respect for "territorial integrity and sovereignty", and respect for UN charter and international law. This was important since a P-5 country (a permanent member of the UN Security Council) had invaded a neighbour, and Delhi viewed this from the lens of its northern neighbour, China, with which it shares a 3,500-km contested border and has had an ongoing border standoff for the last three years.

Fifth, it advocated diplomacy. It maintained that dialogue and diplomacy is the path forward. This has been Delhi's prescription when it comes to its own border standoff as well.

The Way Ahead

Recently, Ukraine asked India to support a UNGA resolution timed for the first anniversary of the war, asking Russia to withdraw from its territory. The vote was to come up later this week. So far no serious diplomatic effort has been made to end the war. This will entail compromises on both sides. At this time, neither is ready to do that.

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India has expressed the hope that it can use its G-20 presidency to bring peace.

Status of the Russia-Ukraine war

All sides are gearing up for a major escalation in the conflict. Russia, which suffered some setbacks last year after its initial thrust into Ukraine, is trying to build back battlefield momentum. This has left Ukraine desperately in need of heavier weapons from its NATO allies



Battle stations: Ukraine soldiers prepare weapon systems near Soledar, Ukraine on January 14. REUTERS



Sources: Institute for the Study of War, Reuters

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