

## NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER: INDIA IN RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITY

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Russia, by challenging NATO expansion and carrying out a Special Operations in Ukraine, has shaken the foundations of post-Cold War World Order that was characterised by unilateralism, unipolarity and hegemonism. The desperate effort by the West to defeat Russia at any cost has at its core the urge to weaken any challenger to the West-led World Order. However, the world is witnessing the likelihood of more challengers emerging in the future. The churning of the current international politics and economy may bring about a more equitable and just World Order in the future.

India, on its part has taken care not to condemn Russia at any international forum. Despite pressure, India's trade with Russia, especially in the energy sector continues at an enhanced scale. India's growing trade and economic relations should not be seen as ways just to benefit from the cheaper resources of Russia or helping a long-standing friend during a difficult period. Beyond these limited and short-term benefits, there is a long term vision of a different world that can emerge in cooperation with Russia.

*Keywords:* Unilateralism, Sanctions, Multipolar Order, Neutrality, Multilateralism, BRICS, SCO, G-20, De-Dollarisation

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## НОВЫЙ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ ПОРЯДОК: ИНДИЯ В ПРИОРИТЕТЕ РОССИЙСКОЙ ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ

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Россия, бросая вызов экспансии НАТО и проводя Специальную военную операцию на Украине, потрясла основания сложившегося после окончания холодной войны мирового порядка Russia, который характеризовался односторонностью, однополярностью и гегемонизмом. Отчаянные попытки Запада нанести поражение России любой ценой основаны на стремлении ослабить любого, кто угрожает прозападному миропорядку. Вместе с тем мир может стать свидетелем грядущих новых вызовов. Потрясения в современной мировой политике и экономике могут привести к более равноправному и справедливому миропорядку в будущем.

Со своей стороны, Индия постаралась не осуждать Россию ни на одной из международных площадок. Несмотря на давление, торговля Индии с Россией, особенно в энергетическом секторе, растет, и это не следует воспринимать просто как стремление воспользоваться дешевыми ресурсами или помочь

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старому другу в беде. За этими ограниченными и краткосрочными выгодами – долгосрочное видение нового мира, который может быть построен в сотрудничестве с Россией.

*Ключевые слова:* однообразие, санкции, многополярный миропорядок, нейтралитет, многосторонность, БРИКС, ШОС, G-20, дедолларизация

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## INTRODUCTION

The 11<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of High Representatives for Security Issues hosted by Russia's Security Council took place in Moscow Region between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023, where delegations of more than hundred countries participated to discuss the most pressing security challenges faced by the world. Addressing the Meeting, President Putin emphasised the need for a multi-polar world: 'I am confident that together we'll achieve the formation of a more just, multipolar world, and that the ideology of exclusivity, as well as the neo-colonial system, which made it possible to exploit the resources of the whole world, will inevitably become a thing of the past' [Russia Today, 24 May 2023].

Multi-polar world is a strategic goal of Russia and countries like India who share the same vision play an important role towards achieving this objective. Russia adopted on 31 March 2023 a New Foreign Policy Concept, which highlights the vision for a more equitable multipolar world order. Specific mention has been made of China and India. Mentioning India, the Concept states, 'Russia will continue to build up a particularly privileged strategic partnership with the Republic of India with a view to enhance and expand cooperation in all areas on a mutually beneficial basis and place special emphasis on increasing the volume of bilateral trade, strengthening investment and technological ties, and ensuring their resistance to destructive actions of unfriendly states and their alliances' [Concept of the Russian Federation, 2023].

Focus on India is not new and both countries have established a 'privileged strategic partnership'. However, attempts to isolate Russia diplomatically, politically and economically since February 2022 have created fresh imperatives to take the process of Indo-Russian partnership forward. Extensive sanctions and attempts to punish Russia in every way have made emerging powers like India very valuable partners. India's position of neutrality in the face of extreme pressures on New Delhi not only helps to take the India-Russia bilateral relations forward but also facilitates the efforts to move away from the US dominated world order.

Sanctions against Russia have deepened cooperation in areas where relations looked weak in the recent past like in trade and economic spheres. Increase in energy and goods trade, use of local currencies in trade and strengthening of multilateral organisations like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are in harmony with the goals of Russia and India. For both, it is a major objective to reshape the post-Cold War order that has been so far dominated by the US and its allies through unilateral actions and imposition of the so called 'rule based order'. Western actions to isolate and cripple Russia are not in the interest of countries that wish to see a new global arrangement.

This paper discusses the potential changes that facilitate progress towards a non-hegemonic world and how Russia and India are responding to the current developments.

## INDIA-RUSSIA TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

India has kept up its Russian oil purchases despite calls from the West to stop the imports. New Delhi has stressed that energy security is a top priority and it will choose suppliers to get a better deal. In his November 2022 visit to Moscow, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar stated, 'India will continue buying Russian oil as it is advantageous for the country' and asserted that he would 'like to keep that going' [The Indian Express, 8 November 2022]. Buying Russian oil is both economically and strategically advantageous for India. Russian oil comes at a discounted price, which benefits India as it depends on imports for 85 per cent of the total oil it consumes. According to Alexey Valkov, Director of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), 'The surge in bilateral trade came in the backdrop of India's huge purchase of discounted Russian oil'. Valkov said this while speaking to the *Economic Times* during a mega Indo-Russia business meeting organised by him in April 2023 in Delhi [Economic Times, 4 April 2023].

At the same time, India is emerging as a key supplier of medicines, cars and machine parts, textiles, clothing, and food products to Russia. Bilateral trade hit a record \$39.8 billion in 2022–23 [Roy Chaudhury, 4 April 2023]. According to the Russian ambassador to India, Denis Alipov, there is not only an unprecedented growth in bilateral trade, but India and Russia are also discussing ways to attract Indian employees to mitigate the problem of labour shortages. 'It is 'common knowledge' that certain sectors of the Russian economy are facing labour shortages', the ambassador told the India-Russia Business Forum. This is an area where India can meet to some extent Russia's labour requirements [Roy Chaudhury, 6 April 2023].

After the West imposed an oil price cap on Russia on 5 December 2022, Indian customers have paid for most of the Russian oil in non-dollar currencies, including in the United Arab Emirates Dirham and more recently the Russian Rouble. As Moscow seeks to De-Dollarise its economy and traders want to avoid sanctions, three Indian banks came forward to help in the transactions. For Indian refineries payments have been processed in part by the State Bank of India via its nostro roubles account in Russia. Other Indian banks — Bank of Baroda and Axis Bank — have handled most of the Dirham payments [Reuters, 8 March 2023].

Abu Dhabi-based Russian bank MTS had facilitated some non-Dollar payments by India for oil. Though MTS and most Russian banks have faced sanctions, Indian refineries and Russian suppliers are eager to keep trading in Russian oil — 'Russian suppliers will find some other banks for receiving payments', according to a source cited by Reuters. Alexandra Prokopenko, independent analyst and former adviser at the Bank of Russia, said, 'They're working on building a direct infrastructure between the Russian and Indian banking systems'. State Bank of India has a nostro (foreign currency account) in Russia. Similarly, many banks from Russia have opened accounts with Indian banks to facilitate trade [Reuters, 8 March 2023].

The volume of trade between the two countries grew largely on the back of a sharp increase in India's imports of Russian oil. In October 2022, Russia became the largest supplier of oil to India, overtaking Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Increasing import of Russian oil and payment in currencies other than Dollar suggests that India would not be dependent solely on Dollar for trade.

IMF Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath has commented that sanctions on Russia could erode the Dollar's dominance by encouraging smaller trading blocs using other currencies. 'The dollar would remain the major global currency even in that landscape but fragmentation at a smaller level is certainly quite possible,' she told the Financial Times [Reuters, 8 March 2023]. In fact, the Dollar share of official Forex reserves fell to a 20-year low of 58% in the fourth quarter of 2022, according to

International Monetary Fund data. The Dollar share in the foreign reserves of different central banks in the final quarter of 2022 hit a two-decade low [Reuters, 25 May 2023].

Stephen Jen, CEO of Eurizon SLJ Capital Limited, said that shift was more pronounced when adjusted for exchange rate. 'What happened in 2022 was a very sharp plummeting in the dollar share in real-terms,' Jen said. He also added that this was a reaction to the freezing of half of Russia's \$640 billion in gold and Foreign Exchange reserves following its 2022 action in Ukraine. This move by the US and its allies has initiated a re-think in countries such as Saudi Arabia, China, India and Turkey about diversifying to other currencies. India is purchasing Russian oil in UAE Dirham and Ruble. China switched to the Yuan to buy some \$88 billion worth of Russian oil, coal and metals since February 2022. Chinese national oil company CNOOC and France's Total Energies completed their first Yuan-settled LNG trade in March 2023 [Reuters, 25 May 2023].

With increasing trade, focus is shifting to transport corridors between India and Eurasia. Emphasis on multilateral infrastructure projects to boost trade has seen progress. Transport corridors like INSTC (International North-South Transportation Corridor) that will carry goods from Russia to India through Iran can benefit all the countries connected to this route.

The arrival of the first India-bound Russian cargo, sent by train using the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), reached Iran on 13 July 2022 after travelling around 3,800 km, from where it moved by ship to India. This route, bypassing the existing longer and expensive routes, has suddenly acquired significance and is expected to boost trade between Russia and India. Others like Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan would benefit with this link.

Following Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar's Moscow visit in November 2022, Russia and Iran agreed on the transit of 12 million tons of Russian goods via Tehran along the INSTC. With both Moscow and Delhi seeking to increase trade volumes through this multi-modal transport corridor, INSTC 'has been a game-changer in Indo-Russian economic partnership since the start of the Ukraine war', according to Dipanjan Roy Choudhury of the *Economic Times Bureau* [Roy Choudhury, 2022].

India's expanding trade also helps steady the Russian economy amid Western sanctions. India sees Russia as a 'steady and time-tested partner' and welcomes a multipolar global order in which Russia and other important countries would play major roles. This position is contrary to many Western countries that want to see a weakened Russia.

### **IMPACT ON THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

The continuation of NATO and its expansion after Soviet collapse created conditions for unipolarity and unilateralism. This looked possible because the demise of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact left the West in a dominant position to shape the post-Cold War World Order. States after states were pressured to follow a certain political and economic model. Force was used in the name of human rights and democracy to change governments that were either reluctant or refused to oblige. Terms like 'Rogue States' were used to isolate and impose sanctions against sovereign states. The 1990s and the decade after that witnessed efforts to create a unipolar World Order by the use of force. The United Nations was regularly bypassed in global affairs and wars were waged without its approval. The other method employed was that of orchestrating 'Colour Revolution' to overturn the elections results and install pro-Western leaders as was witnessed in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

However, things have changed in the last decade or so due to a variety of factors. The rise of China and India as economic powers at the global level and the re-emergence of Russia as a major economic and strategic player made them important players in global affairs. Russia has been active

not just in the post-Soviet space but also at the international level — Syria, for example. At the same time, the limits and negative consequences of unilateralism became visible. Most of the US troops left Iraq in 2011 and the country remained more instable than before. The same has been true of Libya.

The international order is both political and financial. The domination of the West in the 1990s was based on its geopolitical influence over various regions of the world as well as its control of international financial institutions. Thus, challenge to Western hegemony has to be at both economic and political levels. In this regard, the emerging powers have taken certain steps in the last decade and half that create hope for the future.

BRICS is an outcome of this process where non-Western countries seek to alter the world order. Illustrative of the alternative BRICS position to that of the West is on the issue of Ukraine. The 6<sup>th</sup> BRICS summit of 2014 took place in Brazil at a time when Ukraine crisis was unfolding. As a demonstration of their global dominance, the West and its allies removed Russia from G-8 after Crimean referendum and the peninsula's integration with Russia in March 2014. Even the G-8 meet to be held in Sochi in June of that year was cancelled. However, the BRICS grouping refused to participate in efforts to isolate Russia.

The Ukraine crisis also provided another opportunity for the BRICS members to question the way Western powers dominate the narrative and actions in the international arena. In March 2014, the BRICS members abstained while voting at the United Nations General Assembly on a resolution condemning Russia over its actions in Crimea. India did not endorse the Western narrative. It even went a step further when then National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon stated, 'As far as we are concerned, we are watching what is happening in the Ukraine with some concern. We would hope that whatever internal issues there are within Ukraine are settled peacefully and that the broader issues of reconciling the various interests involved, and there are after all legitimate Russian and other interests involved, are discussed, negotiated, and that there is a satisfactory resolution to them' [Madan, 2014]. India then also did not support Western sanctions on Russia.

BRICS was formed with the major goal of creating a multi-polar world order in order to prevent the West from repeating Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya in other parts of the world. Since its first Summit in 2009, BRICS has reiterated its commitment to build a multi-polar world order. It has been highly critical of unilateral moves by Western powers to remove leaders of sovereign states by use of coercion or even military force. BRICS grouping opposes Western attempts to trample upon sovereignty of states on the pretext of humanitarian and non-proliferation principles.

Multipolar world order also depends upon changes in the global financial order, that requires not just pushing back against the Western domination of the global financial institutions but also limiting the influence of US Dollar as the global reserve currency. The sanctions following Russian operations in Ukraine have forced countries to look for alternative arrangements to continue trade with Russia and those steps could lessen the role of Dollar in the global economy.

Since the Special Operations in Ukraine began, followed by sanctions, Russia has reached out to many countries outside the Western alliance for diplomatic, economic and political support. Politically, Russia wants the focus to remain on building a multi-polar and non-hegemonic world order. There is more vigour today in multilateral organisations like BRICS and SCO. Diplomatic efforts of Russia are meant to prevent its global isolation and safeguarding the interests of friendly countries. It has been a success of Russian diplomacy that its SCO and BRICS partners did not vote against Russia at the United Nations, where many resolutions were brought to condemn Russia. Economic dimension includes finding alternatives to Western dominated global financial institutions and the domination of the Dollar.

In all these areas, diplomatic, economic and political, India is considered to be an important partner at a time when the West is doing everything at the global level to weaken Russia. India on its part has not been swayed by Western propaganda or pressure and has pursued its own national and strategic interests.

Despite Western push, India was among the 40 countries (5 against, 35 abstentions) that refused to vote against Russia in the UN General Assembly on 2 March 2022. These countries, including India, have more than half the population of the world. Again, during the vote on 7 April 2022 to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, 24 members voted against the Resolution and 58 members including India abstained. Though the Resolution was passed, the Western powers could not persuade as many as 82 countries to vote in their favour. The latest instance was on the first anniversary of the conflict on 24 February 2023, when India did not vote against Russia in the UN General Assembly. This was despite appeals from the West and Ukraine to take a clear stand and 'do the right thing'. India was among the countries that abstained. In fact, the action of India has been no different from other members of BRICS and SCO, who abstained on various resolutions over the last year or more [BBC News, 2023].

Role of India has been quite helpful to Russia in other platforms as well. This year, 2023–24, India is the President of the G-20 and a lot of pressure from the West has been building on New Delhi to take a stand against Russia. However, it can be said that India has very diplomatically managed to preserve its neutrality.

The G-20 Finance Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi concluded on 25 February 2023 without issuing any joint statement due to differences on Ukraine, when the West wanted to use this platform to condemn Russia. For the same reason no joint statement could be issued at the end of Foreign Ministers' meeting on 1 March 2023 in New Delhi. It appears that during India's tenure as President of G-20, Western powers would not find it easy to get their way like they did in Bali Summit in 2022, which ended with condemnation of Russia and demand for its unconditional withdrawal [The White House, 2022].

Even after the Modi-Biden Meet on 22 June 2023 in Washington following great hype and bonhomie, the Joint Statement was silent on Russia and nowhere blamed it for the conflict in Ukraine. The paragraph on Ukraine was general due to which both countries could agree to the formulation — 'President Biden and Prime Minister Modi expressed their deep concern over the conflict in Ukraine and mourned its terrible and tragic humanitarian consequences. The leaders underscored the serious and growing impacts of the war on the global economic system, including on food, fuel and energy security, and critical supply chains. The called for greater efforts to mitigate the consequences of the war, especially in the developing world. Both countries further pledged to render continuing humanitarian assistance to the people of Ukraine. The called for respect for international law, principles of the UN charter, and territorial integrity and sovereignty. Both countries concurred on the importance of post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine' [Roy, 2023, p. 3–4].

This time it has been different so far under India's Presidency. India is a leading emerging power and is close to most members in the G-20. Secondly, India is also presently the Chairperson of the SCO, where Russia is a leading member. Thus, India has to balance its role in both the G-20 and SCO. Western powers, realising the limitations of G-7, seek to use the G-20 to promote Western leadership at the global level. On the other hand, SCO and BRICS seek to create a different international order and build their own narrative.

According to some reports, as many as 13 countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America have shown interest to join BRICS. Saudi Arabia and Iran are among the countries that have formally

applied to join. Other countries that have expressed interest in joining include Argentina, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain and Indonesia, along with two nations from East Africa and one from West Africa [The Times of India, 2023].

### **GLOBAL ECONOMIC ORDER**

Apart from the international political issues, the other factor that brought the BRICS countries together was the economic crisis of 2008, from which they came out quickly without too much difficulty compared to developed economies. Since then the BRICS countries have tried to insulate the world from global economic shocks by developing their own institutional mechanisms like the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA) in 2014. The economic and financial arrangements that the BRICS countries are developing will in the long run change not only the global economic architecture but also the international political order. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is another institution that stands in contrast to West-led global financial institutions. As a multilateral development bank AIIB aims to improve economic and social outcomes in Asia by investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors.

The imposition of extensive and unilateral Western sanctions on Russia, disregarding the impact of such actions on the rest of the world, is pushing many countries to look for alternatives. With disruption of global supply chains, countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are faced with severe food and energy shortages, inflation and rising costs of living that are becoming unbearable. On the other hand, the West's concerns about its own difficulties and various attempts to mitigate these have not gone down well with the countries of the global South. That is why most of them have refused to bow down to Western pressure on sanctions against Russia.

Following Western sanctions, Russia made a quick shift over to trade in Ruble and in other local currencies with friendly countries. Already countries like Russia and China have started currency swap and trade in national currencies, while moving away from the Swift messaging network of global payment system by having their own system — SPFS (Systema Peredachi Finansovoykh Soobscheniy) in Russia, RuPay in India, and CIPS in China. In July 2022, the Reserve Bank of India put in place a mechanism to facilitate international trade in Rupees (INR), with immediate effect. Arrangement for invoicing, payment, and settlement of exports/imports in INR were put in place. This would facilitate India's trade with countries under sanction like Iran and Russia by easing of payment issues with these states.

Russia offered oil at discounted prices to friendly countries and the trade in local currencies. This has boosted Indo-Russian trade to record levels. Russian oil exports to India, the world's third-largest crude importer after China and the US, climbed to a record 1.62 million barrels per day in February 2023. Russia's share of India's oil imports increased significantly from less than 1% of India's energy market in 2021 to 35% of India's total oil imports. By February 2023 Russia had replaced Iraq and Saudi Arabia from the top of the list. In May 2023, the volume of crude imports from

Russia had increased to 2.16 million barrels per day. India's oil trade with Russia has meant a shift to other currencies that could prove lasting. [Russia Today, 5 March 2023; Sharma, 2023, p. 1–2]

BRICS Group is likely discuss in its next Cape Town Summit in August 2023 on the a new currency that could be backed by gold. According to reports, the member countries are accumulating large amounts of gold since 2022 and are among the top buyers. Analysts report that many countries are showing interest in the BRICS currency for future trade [Dsouza, 20 May 2023; Dsouza, 23 May 2023].

## **RUSSIA-INDIA: LOOKING AHEAD**

From Russia's perspective, India is a very valuable partner that can play a bigger role in the global stage. Russia supports India's case on issues like UNSC reform and on Kashmir issue. There are qualitative changes in the nature of defence relations between the two countries. From being a market of Soviet arms, today both are jointly producing military hardware and intend to sell it to third countries. BrahMos Missile System and the licensed production in India of SU-30 Aircraft and T-90 tanks are examples of such new trajectory of cooperation. Russia agreed to supply latest weapons like S-400 air defence systems and construct frigates. Both sides also agreed to form a joint venture to manufacture Ka-226T helicopters in India.

Programmes such as the joint development or outright purchase of the Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft and Multi-role Transport Aircraft, as also the up-gradation of Su-30 MKI aircraft, are the ones that would take the defence relations to a new level.

It is clear that Russia wants India to be a major power in Asia for which defence, economic and trade co-operations between them are necessary. Russia was instrumental in the formation of BRICS. One can trace the origin of the idea of a multilateral organisation like BRICS to the vision of one of the most prominent statesmen of Russia — late Evgeny Primakov, who in 1996 floated the idea of Russia-India-China 'strategic triangle'. Primakov's vision was to achieve a multipolar world order by building what he called a 'Strategic Triangle' between the above three powers. But, it was not until Putin's presidency that Russia seriously considered multi-polar world order as a strategic policy objective.

The process later moved forward with the formation of RIC (Russia, India and China) forum and IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) Dialogue forum. The immediate background was provided by some of the unilateral actions by the US and its allies against states that have been traditional friends of Russia, India and China. The military actions against Yugoslavia and Iraq were taken outside the framework of the United Nations. The invasion of Afghanistan was used as a pretext to open US bases in Central Asia, close to Russian and Chinese borders.

RIC and IBSA were two important mechanisms for the evolution of BRICS, which came into existence before the 2006 formation of BRICS and its first Summit in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg in 2009. India being in both RIC and IBSA was the main common link that helped in the process of formation and expansion of BRICS (by inclusion of South Africa). Similarly, trust on Russia reduced New Delhi's apprehension about China dominating the Organisation. The same was true of the SCO also. After years of hesitation, India applied for membership in 2014 and joined as a full member in 2017. Persuaded by Russia and Kazakhstan, New Delhi joined the SCO and is currently the Chairperson of the Organisation for 2023–24.

India is also interested for a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union. New Delhi initiated a study to work out a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), an omnibus free trade agreement. India and Russia have decided to jointly study the possibility of India joining the grouping. Before the visit of President Putin to Delhi to attend the 15th annual India-Russia summit on 10–11 December 2014, a Russia-India working group was established in November 2014. This was to help the process move forward within the Eurasian Economic Commission, which is the permanent regulatory agency of the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Community [Srivastava, 2014]. The talks began in 2017 but were interrupted during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Hopefully, given the sharp rise in the level of trade and economic relations, this process would be expedited, as signalled by the leaders of both countries recently. Visiting Russian deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, who is also the trade minister of Russia, said that the two sides are also working on



an agreement to protect investments. Speaking at the India-Russia Business Dialogue hosted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in New Delhi on 17 April 2023, he said, 'We pay special attention to the issues of mutual access of production to the markets of our countries. Together with the Eurasian Economic Commission we are looking forward to intensifying negotiations on a free trade agreement with India'. At the same forum, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said, 'discussions for an FTA between India and EAEU were interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic', and the external affairs ministry will encourage resumption of the talks because the proposed pact 'will make a real difference to our trade relationship' [Laskar, 2023].

Russia and India are both interested in supporting each other not just at the bilateral level but also at the multilateral level. India has good relations with Russia as well as with the US and its allies. It is in a vantage position to be a common link if and when needed by both sides. Similarly, Russia is a common friend of both India and China. Moscow can be of use to both in case there is a total break down in their relations, and they need informal channels for communication for some reason.

India and China have many contentious issues like on the issue of Sino-Pak nexus, China's negative position on India's permanent membership in certain multilateral organisations like the UNSC and NSG, and China's Projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in disputed areas of Pakistan occupied Kashmir, etc. Added to these are clashes among troop on both sides, first in Ladakh in June 2020 with loss of life on both sides and again on Arunachal Pradesh border in December 2022. The border remains tense with mobilisation of troops from both sides.

Though not in favour of third party mediation, New Delhi might expect that Moscow play the role of a catalyst. India, Russia and China meet at various forums like BRICS and SCO. This gives Moscow an opportunity to break the ice, when the relationship between New Delhi and Beijing are very tense, like it happened in 2020 and 2022. That brings a new dimension to the India-Russia relations. India understands Russia's position on strengthening relations with China, as much as Russia tries to allay India's concerns about its relations with others that are not at the cost of India. The trust and friendship between India and Russia are so deeply entrenched that both can discuss and resolve any issue that is of concern to the other side.

## CONCLUSION

By challenging the military and economic might of the West, Russia has shaken the foundations of post-Cold War World Order that was characterised by unilateralism, unipolarity and hegemonism. The desperate effort by the West to defeat Russia in Ukraine at any cost has at its core the urge to weaken any challenger to the West-led World Order. The churning of the current international politics may bring about a more equitable and just world order in the future. From this perspective, Russia's standing up to the West could be a turning point in world politics. Sadly, the people of Ukraine are paying a heavy price for the West's incessant pursuit of its ambition to contain Russia and ultimately maintain a unipolar World Order under its hegemony.

Russia has put up a strong challenge to this and many countries are likely to take a cue to stand up to the West's aggressive behaviour. This is already happening at the diplomatic and economic levels, which could ultimately lead to a multipolar World Order in the real sense.

India, on its part has taken care not to condemn Russia at any international forum. Despite Western displeasure and pressure, India's trade with Russia, especially in the energy sector continues on an enhanced scale. During India's chairpersonship of SCO, two more countries, Iran and Belarus, are likely to join as full members. Similarly, many countries are showing interest to join the BRICS group.

All these developments are coming in the background of the West's proxy war in Ukraine. This should be good sign for the future of the international order.

India's growing trade and economic relations should not be seen as ways just to benefit from the cheaper resources of Russia or helping a long-standing friend during a difficult period. Beyond these limited and short-term benefits, there is a long term vision of a different world that can emerge in cooperation with Russia. From the perspective of India, the present international order should not be replaced by another bipolar world where US and China become dominant. To avoid this situation, Russia needs to remain a strong power in global politics, along with other emerging powers. Thus, it is in India's interest that Russia is not diplomatically isolated, economically weakened and remains one of the strong pillars of organisations like the BRICS and SCO. Since the start of Russia's Special Operations, India's actions and policies have been driven by this imperative, while wanting that the conflict ends with mutually agreed peace.

Unlike the 2022 "G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration", the final document of the 2023 BRICS Summit refrained from deploring Russia's actions in Ukraine. The 'Bali Declaration' had demanded "complete and unconditional withdrawal" of Russia's armed forces from the territory of Ukraine. The 'Delhi Declaration', however, made no such demand on behalf of the G20.

At the same time, A new stage for BRICS was reached with the inclusion of six new members who will join on 1 January 2024 (Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia and Argentina). The attendance of some 35 African nations at the Johannesburg summit, is a testimony to the attraction that BRICS holds for the Global South. Though at the moment six have been accepted, it is safe to assume that more members will join the grouping in future.

However, the bigger story is that despite political and ideological differences, many nations from the Global South are queuing up to join the Organisation which is just 15 years old.

It appears that Russia and India's outreach to Global South is gaining traction, which is a positive indicator for moving towards a democratic and non-hegemonic World Order.

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