

Assessing the Response of the Global South to Russo-Ukrainian War:

Case Study of India

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, resulted in a prolonged war between the two countries. It creates a worldwide geoeconomic impact, including stagflation due to the disruption of the supply chains, profoundly affecting the economies of Global South countries. Additionally, the aggression contradicts the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence that the Global South countries hold dear (United Nations, 2015). Despite these, most Global South countries, including India, refused to condemn Russia for its actions, except for the UN General Assembly vote to condemn Russia on March 2. This situation begs the question: Why would not India, one of the significant Global South countries, blame Russia for its detrimental actions to the ideals of the Global South? We argue that when national interests and values come into conflict, Global South countries may prioritize their interest rather than uphold the values deeply held by the Global South—a vindication that Realpolitik still held preeminence within the foreign policymaking of the Global South countries, including India. This is evident in India's response to the Russian aggression, as India still maintains a strategic partnership with Russia even after Russia tramples the values of the Global South via its war in Ukraine. At the same time, India tries to avoid being engaged closely with Russia as India still needs the support of the United States to balance China's geopolitical moves, given India's territorial disputes with China.

Keywords: *Global South; Russo-Ukrainian War; India; Realpolitik*

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022, trapped Ukraine and Russia in a prolonged war. The war caused a domino effect in geoeconomic sectors, including trade, energy, and agriculture. In mainland Europe, the war heavily impacted people and goods mobility, partic-

ularly the rise in the risk of fuel supply shortage and the increasing fuel price (European Council, 2022). Moreover, the sanction policy—enacted by the Western governments toward Russia—also creates a ripple effect on the global economy. For example, as Russia is blocked from the international banking and electronic payment system—SWIFT,

international trade between Russia and the rest of the world becomes more complicated. Thus, it will raise the commodities price, including energy and agriculture, that are internationally strategic. This situation is worsened by the decision of the Kremlin to retaliate economically through severe measures, including requiring to pay the energy import using the Rouble (Harlan & Pitrelli, 2022). So far, as calculated by the World Bank (2022), the impact of the invasion is severe for both sides. Russia's economy plummeted by 11.2%, with a 35% shrink in Ukraine's GDP.

Per the UN Charter, the invasion also crosses the internationally recognized sovereignty, integrity, and independence principles that appertain to all UN members. Vladimir Putin's speech evidence it at the beginning of the invasion—a decision he called a “special military operation”—to unilaterally support the Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic, two secessionist states that formed in eastern Ukraine in 2014. He stated that the Ukrainians, as the brother of Russians, have an “undeniable right” to support the Russian interest in the region (Al Jazeera, 2022). However, Ukraine, which gained independence from the Soviet Union on August 26, 1992, is a sovereign state recognized as an independent entity by the United Nations (UN). Thus, the country is equal to the rest of the UN members and has independent authority to determine its political decision and protect its territorial integrity.

The Global South upheld and promoted the value of sovereignty, integrity, and independence, most of which had been

under the great power's colonization. The 1955 Bandung Declaration became the cornerstone of the initiative to encourage and unify those values among its member that brought up the Global South as an “alternative power” to challenge the two hegemonies of the United States and the Soviet Union. Lately, within the UN General Assembly, the Global South created a loose coalition called “Group of 77” (G77) to encourage an equal sharing of power among the members in the decision-making process in the UN (Mark et al. (ed.), 2020). Nevertheless, the Global South's response to the invasion could be more apparent; instead of bearing its core values and consolidating support for Ukraine's political position against Russian aggression. During the UN General Assembly vote to condemn Russia's warmongering decision on March 2, 2022, the G77 members, as a representative of the Global South, gave mixed responses. Thirty-five members gave abstention, while North Korea, Eritrea, and Syria supported Russia's decision.

At the same time, the relations between Russia and the Global South are primarily unchanged compared to the pre-invasion. One example, India, one of Russia's most significant economic partners, concluded US\$ 8.8 billion in bilateral trade in 2021 (OEC World, 2022). In the strategic sector, Russia remained India's most prominent source of arms; arms transfers reached US\$ 1.4 billion in 2021. Russia is also the largest arms supplier to Southeast Asia and various Middle Eastern states. Another instance is in the energy sector, where Russia is the world's largest oil producer and exporter, and most

of its oil is sold to China—another Global South member—with a value of US\$ 23,8 billion (OEC World, 2022). This situation indicated that the Global South is still reluctant to set up a solid understanding of its core values due to the dominance of the *Realpolitik* principle within foreign policymaking. Thus, rather than continuously upholding its core values by offering solidarity to Ukraine—a country with similar experiences of occupation by the great power—the Global South chooses a more pragmatic step by keeping its strategic partnership with Russia.

Departing from the backgrounds above, this analysis will answer the question: amidst the Russian invasion of Ukraine, why does India still maintain a close engagement and pragmatic stance towards Russia? Using the concept of Middle Power by Easley and Park (2017), we argue that in the circumstances critical to their interest—especially in the political and economic contexts—India tends to prioritize and justify their interests first rather than uphold their core values. This case is evidenced in India’s decision to maintain a strategic relationship with Russia, despite its opposition to the interventionist international community (Mehrotra, 2022). Simultaneously, the country is in the stance of “not fully supporting the invasion,” considering its membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)—an initiative created by the US to counterbalance China in the Indo-Pacific region.

To understand the ambiguous decision of the Global South, particularly India, towards Russia’s military action in Ukraine, this analysis is divided into several essential

parts. First is the explanation of the general response of the Global South regarding the invasion, especially when it comes to the contradiction between the compliance of Global South’s values and their national interests. *Realpolitik* will be the main focus of the next part, explained further by the case of India, which focuses on the country’s behavior. Indeed, as a middle power, India tends to continue its ambiguous stance whenever it faces any complex international affairs that pertain to its interest. This part will explore further the two main aspects encompassing the relationship between India and great powers—Russia and the US—and its reaction to the invasion. First is the strategic association between India and the Soviet Union and Russia, especially from both the Cold War and post-Cold War era, which somehow pressure India to remain close to Russia. The second is the relationship with the US—as Russia’s main adversary—that India tries to seek closer to counter the Chinese regional expansion and hegemonic narratives. These complex geopolitical affairs coerce India to make a more thoughtful decision in responding to the invasion and retain its global political position.

Theoretical Framework: Middle Power (Easley & Park, 2017)

In international relations, some research is interested in explaining the behavior and role of states categorized as middle power in the international system. As a concept, it first appeared in the 19th century to describe the necessity rather than the existence of a state that is geographically

located between great powers and capable of resisting attacks from great power for a while (Holbraad, 1971, p. 79). There are two approaches to defining middle power in the development of middle power studies. First, its capabilities or power. Middle power is a state with less power than a great power and is more significant than a small power. Second, its behavior. A middle power tends to support multilateralism and maintain the existing international order. However, studies by Joordan (2003) found that not all middle powers espouse multilateralism and the status quo, with the emerging middle powers tending to support reforming the existing international order.

In some cases, the middle powers' behavior did not correspond with their expected behavior. Easley and Park (2017) attribute this phenomenon to the identity and interest of the middle power. The identity of a state is influenced by how elites perceive the state based on their political values. In contrast, national interests are influenced by geographical, economic, military (hard power), and non-material (soft power) factors. The state did not have a single identity or interest; instead, states had multiple identities and interests. There is contestation between the different identities and interests, with the dominant identity and interest shaping state behavior in the international system. Other identities and interests sometimes sideline the identity and interest of a middle power.

This approach helps this paper explain India's behavior related to the Ukraine-Russia conflict. India is one country that can be categorized as a middle power of its materi-

al capabilities and behavior. Since the Cold War, India already had a significant population and economy than its neighbors in South Asia or other countries in Asia (Holbraad, 1984). On international institutions and global governance, India supports the existing order but resists the element of liberalization and seeks to reform institutional institutions to become more representative (Stephen, 2012).

Global South “Solidarity” in the Face of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

This section will specifically discuss the general response of Global South countries to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Note, however, the word “general.” This section will only discuss the average reaction of Global South countries, while the more detailed response of India will be explained in detail in the next section. Firstly, this section will describe the general response of Global South countries to the war in Ukraine. This discussion will be followed by the argument that the response is due to Global South countries prioritizing their self-interests over the interest of safeguarding the values held by the Global South. Finally, this section will discuss the March 2 UN General Assembly vote that overwhelmingly condemned the Russian aggression and argues that Global South countries will only act to reprimand Russia under the umbrella of the UN or other intergovernmental organizations due to the weak power of the UN General Assembly resolutions.

General Response of Global South Countries to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

The best word to describe the response of Global South countries to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine is “ambivalent.” Most Global South countries decide not to unilaterally condemn the Russian aggression and continue to resort to conventional lip-service statements such as calling for a succession of hostilities and calling on both parties to resolve their differences through negotiation and dialogue. The statements of other Global South countries are nearly similar. Generally, it contains the following: calling for respect for the UN Charter, a succession of hostilities, a peaceful resolution of the dispute, and (sometimes) condemning the attack without naming the aggressor. For another example, Egypt, one of the Global South countries, also made the same statement as Indonesia, emphasizing international law and its opposition to military attacks without naming the aggressor (Hendawi, 2022). This means that Global South countries as diverse as Indonesia and Egypt have relatively the same response to the war in Ukraine. One exception may be Singapore, where its government has harshly condemned Russia and put sanctions on Russian officials (Goh, 2022).

This phenomenon baffles some observers. It is important to note that the Russian invasion violated many norms enshrined in the Bandung Conference of 1955: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and refrain from using military means to resolve

international disputes. One could also argue that Ukraine is a member of the Global South due to its similar history to other local South countries: its developing country status and Ukraine only gained its independence in 1991 after centuries of Moscow rule.¹ The response of Global South countries to a flagrant violation of values deeply held by the Global South is baffling and will be discussed in more detail in the following subsection. Therefore, the Global South is in neutral and ambivalent solidarity.

The Realpolitik of Global South Countries

Another reason for the Global South’s ambivalence to the war in Ukraine is the most straightforward. All countries, including those included, will always prioritize their selfish national interests over the interest of maintaining the values dearly held by the Global South. To put it another way, when there is a conflict between the selfish national interests of Global South countries and the need to uphold Global South values, countries will almost always prioritize the former over the latter.

Another way of saying this is that Global South countries pursue a *de facto* realpolitik foreign policy, even though their rhetoric may suggest otherwise. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Realpolitik is based on “...practical and material factors rather than on theoretical or ethical objectives.” In other words, it is a pragmatic foreign policy that seeks to fulfill its urgent

¹ This raises the question of what the “Global South” actually is. Is it a geographical designation or a slogan representing the newly independent and developing countries that emerged post-World War II? If it is the former, then Ukraine is not a member of the Global South as Ukraine is physically located in the European Continent. However, if it is the latter, one could argue that Ukraine is a member of the Global South as it is a newly independent and developing country. Despite this, a complete discussion on this issue lies beyond the scope of this article.

national interests within the present condition. This foreign policy is, ostensibly, free from any moral, ideological, or normative consideration and considers how to achieve a state's national interests. It is synonymous with the international relations theory of realism, which postulates that states will continuously pursue power and other essential objectives to ensure survival and fulfill a state's vital national interests (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014).

Of course, there are several indications that countries of the Global South are following the *realpolitik* diktat. According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba (2022),

“It is unrealistic to suggest that Ukraine sacrifice its people, territory, and sovereignty in exchange for nominal peace. These recent calls for compromise are merely a byproduct of growing fatigue. I have spoken with some decision-makers in African, Arab, and Asian states. Some started our conversations by affirming their support for our cause before making a hard pivot, politely proposing that we simply stop resisting. It's an unthinkable proposition, but their reasoning is simple: *They want the grain trapped in our ports by Russia's naval blockade, and they are willing to sacrifice Ukrainian independence to get it.* Other policymakers peddling concessions have expressed concerns about similar Russian-provoked economic crises, including spiraling inflation

and energy prices.” [emphasis added]

This statement means that the Global South countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are tired of the war that disrupted their countries' ordinary lives. As a result, they are willing to do things pragmatically to rectify the situation, including sacrificing Ukraine and letting the trapped grains in Ukrainian ports go to their respective countries to be used to feed their people. Of course, the fast way to ensure a speedy conclusion of the war is to let Ukraine capitulate to Russia. Even though this is against the values held by the Global South, this makes sense seeing from the *realpolitik* perspective where urgent national interests are prioritized over ideological interests.

The most overt example is the Ukrainian grain trapped in ports since the war began. According to Swanson (2022), Russia and Ukraine collectively provide a quarter of the world's wheat supply. Additionally, 40% of the wheat the UN World Food Program uses comes from Ukraine (Green, 2022). After the war began, the Ukrainian Institute of Agrarian Economics (quoted by Interfax, 2022) estimated that the volume of Ukraine's grain exports through its main ports dropped by approximately 90% before the sea blockade of Ukraine was lifted in August 2022, allowing grain exports to flow freely once more. This crippling situation had enormous impacts on vulnerable countries of the Global South that depend on grain imports (Tobin, 2022). Despite this, many Global South countries refuse to condemn Russia's war that caused the food cri-

sis. Instead, many African countries warmly welcomed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, when he visited several countries on the continent (Crawford, 2022). Consequently, this proves that countries of the Global South will try to connect closely with both sides of the conflict and reap their benefits.

UN General Assembly Vote to Condemn Russia on March 2: (Rhetorical) Global South Solidarity

However, the UN General Assembly vote to condemn Russia on March 2 has proven our argument wrong. On that occasion, 141 countries voted to condemn Russia's invasion, including many Asian, African, and Latin American Global South countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Brazil, Argentina, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Kenya (Basu & Saric, 2022). Consequently, one could argue that the vote has shown that the Global South is united in its opposition to the Russian-Ukrainian war, thus nullifying our previous arguments.

Despite this, a closer examination of how countries see the UN will prove that our arguments still stand. According to Abbott and Snidal (1998), states act through international organizations as international organizations serve two critical purposes: centralization and independence. The former implies that international organizations could centralize resources due to their formal and transparent organizational structures and administrative staff. The latter means that international organizations are independent entities ostensibly free from any state's vested interest. Consequently, the indepen-

dence of international organizations "often entails the capacity to operate as a neutral in managing interstate disputes and conflicts" (Abbott & Snidal, 1998). Thus, states are more confident and willing to present their views on a conflict if it is done through international organizational channels, such as the United Nations.

This phenomenon manifested in the UN General Assembly vote on resolution ES-11/1 to condemn Russia. The resolution itself condemns Russia's "special military operation" in no uncertain terms and demands that Russia cease its military attacks on Ukraine. Therefore, a Global South country can argue that it stands for the values held by the Global South. The vote and their diplomats' speeches are delivered on the ostensibly neutral UN General Assembly floor, thus benefiting from the supposedly-neutral nature of the United Nations. It is also striking that many Global South countries that voted to condemn Russia in the UN General Assembly, such as Indonesia, do not directly condemn Russia in their official unilateral statements.

A closer look at UN General Assembly resolutions would *bolster* our argument. A UN General Assembly resolution is a non-binding document. According to the UN (n.d.-a) itself, the UN "General Assembly's resolutions are *recommendations* and *not legally binding* on Member States [emphasis added]." Consequently, the UN General Assembly resolution does not have the power to compel Russia to stop its war. Instead, it only consists of "recommendations," and it is up to the states to implement them. It is,

effectively, nothing more than the UN telling Russia to stop without any consequences if Russia violates the resolution. Of course, many Global South countries are more comfortable voting to condemn Russia in the UN General Assembly. Russia has no consequences (other than a rhetorical rebuke). Thus, Russia can continue business as usual even after the resolution. Russia would not impose harsh punishment on countries that voted for the resolution and continue friendly relations with them.

India followed its long-standing policy of not voting in favor of the UN General Assembly resolution that condemned Russia. On February 25, 2022, India abstained from a UN Security Council resolution condemning Russia. In explaining the vote, the Indian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, T. S. Tirumurti (2022), stated that “It is a matter of regret that the path of diplomacy was given up. We must return to it” without any explicit reference to who is the belligerent or who started the war first. This should not be surprising. On the UN General Assembly vote to condemn Russia on March 2, India also abstained from the UN. Since the Cold War, Russia – then the Soviet Union – and India have always protected each other from international criticism in the UN and other international forums. Such mutual protection was due to the warm relationship between India and the Soviet Union at the time, even though India was officially a non-aligned state in the Cold War. The Soviet Union had long opposed international intervention in the conflict in Kashmir, considered by India as a part of its sovereign

territory, and used its veto power to protect India in the UN Security Council when it annexed Goa in 1961 (Price, 2022). In return, when the UN Human Rights Commission wanted to condemn Russia for its disproportionate use of force in Chechnya in 2001, India voted against the resolution (Roy, 2022).

Therefore, looking at this historical pattern, it should not be surprising that India continued to, at the very least, not protect Russia in the UN. As mentioned above, the UN General Assembly resolution is not legally binding on its member states. Instead, it is only a rhetorical and political rebuke with a minuscule legal weight. Given Prime Minister Modi’s re-rapprochement with the West in recent years, it would be imperative not to be seen as overtly friendly with India. Consequently, India’s vote on the UN Security Council on February 25 and the UN General Assembly on March 2 can be seen as a way for India to maintain good relations with Russia and the United States pragmatically. On the one hand, India can continue its good relationship with Russia based on historical and defense matters. On the other hand, India can continue to maintain its good relationship with the West as India could argue that, while it does not condemn the Russian invasion, it does not support it either.

Consequently, the UN General Assembly March 2 vote to condemn Russia reinforces our argument that Global South countries are acting in Realpolitik and pragmatically to safeguard their interests. They pay lip service to the need to defend Global South values by voting in favor of a non-binding resolution while also enjoying good rela-

tionships with Russia at the same time. The same can also be seen in the case of India. Due to India's historical relationship with Russia and the close cooperation between India and Russia on defense matters, India chose to abstain from maintaining its good relations with Russia while not rupturing its relationship with its Western partners.

The Case Study of India

Among other Global South countries, India stands out as one of the fiercest hedgers in its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Due to its 'non-alignment' foreign policy and the geopolitical developments in its surrounding environment, India is the perfect example of how Global South countries pragmatically orient their foreign policies to fulfill their interests during the Russo-Ukrainian war. This section will be divided into three parts. Firstly, this section will discuss the history of India's foreign policy and military relations with the Soviet Union and, later, Russia. Secondly, this section will also discuss the growing Indian-US ties in recent years, especially concerning China. Finally, this section will dissect India's response to the Ukraine war.

India's Association with the Soviet Union and Russia

The Indian 'non-alignment' foreign policy has its roots in the Cold War. The 'non-alignment' foreign policy stipulates that India must remain neutral to "...survive and negotiate with a world that was getting dragged into the politics of the cold war" (Harshe, 1990). According to Harshe (1990),

this is due to three reasons: the newly-independent states of India, which wanted to focus on its development, its geographical proximity to China and the Soviet Union, as well as the Indian economic and political systems that mix parliamentary democracy (more similar with the West) and a planned economy (more identical with the Soviet bloc). Consequently, India could not be neatly inserted into either of those camps. This policy enabled India to focus on its development while, at the same time, exploiting the Cold War hostilities for its benefit by courting both the US and the Soviet Union (Raghavan, 2017). After the Cold War had ended, India continued to maintain and cultivate the 'non-alignment' foreign policy. The fall of the iron curtain has enabled the rise of several newly-emerging economies. Consequently, using the 'non-alignment' foreign policy as a backdrop, India continued cultivating friendly relations with all the newly-emerging economies (Raghavan, 2017). However, other forces underpin India's relationship with the newly-emerging economies, such as India's relatively favorable reputation as a non-aligned power during the Cold War and ideological and political factors.

However, it is essential to note that, in reality, India was not entirely neutral during the Cold War. Instead, seen through a continuum, it can also be said that India was leaning more toward the Soviet bloc. To quote Mastny (2010), "[t]he partnership between India and the Soviet Union during the Cold War has been widely regarded as a *success story* [emphasis added]." This is exemplified by the fact that, according to the Stockholm In-

ternational Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (quoted in Anthony, 1998), India was the top 3 largest recipient of weapons from the Soviet Union and later Russia between 1982 and 1996. Additional SIPRI (quoted in Anthony, 1998) data also shows that in 1991—the year that the Soviet Union disintegrated—roughly one-third of India's aircraft and missiles originated from the Soviet Union.

Moreover, India's infatuation with the Soviet Union also had an ideological underpinning. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, supported socialism in India. As early as 1928, Nehru rejected the portrayal of the Soviet Union as a sworn enemy by the British colonial authorities, noting that there needed close cooperation between India and the Soviet Union. After Nehru became the Prime Minister of an independent India in 1950, Nehru implemented socialism across India, rejected Western capitalism, and made constructing a "socialist pattern" a principal goal of the Indian economy in 1954 (Tchitcherov, 1994). This adherence continued even after Nehru left office in 1964. In 1966, after previously being rebuffed by the Soviet Union, Prime Minister Indra Gandhi successfully convinced Soviet leaders to give much-needed assistance to Indian military modernization due to her fidelity to the "Indian way of socialism" (Mastny, 2010). The closeness of the relationship between India and the Soviet Union was also manifested by the Soviet displeasure towards China during the Sino-Indian border conflicts of 1962 (Stein, 1967). Therefore, even the ideological underpinning of India-Soviet Union relations had to be cemented by concrete actions.

The collapse of the Soviet Union does not reduce the intensity of India's military relations with the Soviet Union's successor, Russia. Due to the need to continuously maintain the bought military armaments, India required reassurance from Russia that it would continue to service Russian-made military armaments (Anthony, 1998). Soon, India began talks to continue buying Russian arms. In June 1994, during the visit of Russian President Boris Yeltsin to New Delhi, Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao requested approval to purchase MiG-29 fighter aircraft. This request materialized in the following year (Anthony, 1998). Near the end of the millennium, India bought 40 Su-30M Flanker fighter aircraft and two additional Kilo-class submarines (Anthony, 1998). Later in October 2000, India also received a technological transfer from Russia so that it could design and build the Su-30s by itself, under the license from Sukhoi. Recently, India was also looking to buy the Russian-made S-400 air-defense systems, a point of consternation in India-US relations (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). These purchases continued to increase until today, just before the Russo-Ukrainian war, India was the biggest consumer of Russian arms (Ghoshal & Ahmed, 2022).

Additionally, the Russo-Indian relations were underpinned by ideological and normative considerations after the world war. While the ideology of socialism no longer worked as a unifying ideology, the fundamental principles of international law do. According to the former Minister of External Affairs of India, Kanwal Sibal (2008), India

and Russia were united in their continued commitment to respect other countries' sovereignty (at least rhetorically), intervention in the internal affairs by an external power, and "combating international terrorism without double standards." Plus, according to the current Minister of External Affairs of India, S. Jaishankar (2020), India also strived to achieve strategic autonomy in its foreign relations after the Cold War. While India continued to develop friendly relations with the West, especially during the Global War on Terror, India also cultivated and enhanced its friendly relations with Russia to avoid being 'dependent on the West' in its foreign relations.

Furthermore, India's nuclear weapon testing in 1998 was also designed to enhance its strategic autonomy, and India used this justification to oppose any international restrictions on its nuclear program (Smith, 2020). It is possible that India felt that it needed an independent nuclear deterrent to avoid being dependent on another nuclear power for its defense. Even in the case of the Indian nuclear test, Russia extended its goodwill to India by refusing to condemn the Indian government for its nuclear tests and not supporting any international sanctions on India due to its normative belief that international sanctions do not have the necessary efficacy to force a behavioral change (Gordon, 1998).

However, there are several signs that India is trying to wean off its dependence on Russia after it invaded Ukraine. Wary of Western sanctions, India has started diversifying its arms' origins and invigorating its domestic arms industry, thus making the Indian

armed forces more self-sufficient (Ghoshal & Ahmed, 2022). It proposes US\$324 million of arms purchases from national defense corporations. Additionally, according to SIPRI (2022), India has significantly reduced the number of weapons it bought from Russia. These decisions suggest that, in the coming years, India will be less likely to be cordial with Russia all the time, as India will not need much Russian assistance for its arms maintenance. Despite this great relationship with Russia before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, India will be forced to turn to Russia's main global rival, the United States, for problems caused by Russia's leading global partner, China.

India's China Dilemma

The relationship between India and China is interesting to explore. Even though they had friendly relations at the beginning of the Cold War, their relationship has turned sour over India's border dispute with China. Consequently, India has cultivated a strong relationship with the United States and its regional allies, primarily Japan and Australia, to balance China. This could explain why India began to avoid earning the ire of its Western partners, as India needs its Western strategic partners to help balance China.

In 1950, India was the second Asian country to officially recognize the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China (Harsche, 1990). Afterward, the two countries began an amicable and close relationship under Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (Hersche, 1990). This cordial relationship is symbolized by

the saying “Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai,” meaning “India and China are brothers” (Arpi, 2015). Both countries tried to solve the border dispute and the problem of Tibet. During a meeting between Prime Minister Nehru and the young Dalai Lama in Beijing in 1954, Nehru appeared to be “...motionless, no speech, not looking in the eyes...” and refrained from supporting Tibetan independence (Arpi, 2015). However, India-China relations took a turn for the worse in the 1960s. Caused by the rising tension on the Himalayan border as well as the Sino-Soviet split (India was closer to the Soviet Union at the time), the Sino-Indian relationship turned sour, and both countries even fought a minor skirmish on the disputed Himalayan border in October 1962 before tensions simmered down a month later. (Malik, 1995). The conflict was eventually managed after both countries signed an agreement in 1993 to address the border dispute (Malik, 1995). The suspicion and tension between China and India have not receded despite this.

Fast forward to today, and China-India relations have again turned sour due to clashes on the Himalayan border. In 2017, after China began illegally constructing buildings in the Bhutanese-claimed Doklam Plateau, India (on behalf of Bhutan) intervened and sent troops and bulldozers to demolish the Chinese structure. In response, China also sent troops, and a 2-months-long stand-off occurred before the troops retreated on August 28 (The Times of India, 2017). On May 28, 2020, after allegations that Chinese troops had illegally occupied Indian territory around the Pangong Tso lake, Chinese

and Indian soldiers clashed using rocks and other melee weapons. Worse, in June 2020, Chinese and Indian troops fought in Galwan Valley, killing 20 Indian and 4 Chinese soldiers (Reuters, 2021).

As a result, to balance China, the Indian government, under the premiership of Narendra Modi, started to deepen its cooperation with the US and her allies. This makes sense as India’s long-term defense partner, Russia, is unwilling to pressure China due to its strategic relationship with Beijing (Borah, 2020). Consequently, India began attending the meetings of the newly-resurrected Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a security grouping allegedly to counter China made up of the US, Japan, India, and Australia (Griffith & Souza, 2022). In this spirit, India has agreed to contribute to the Quad’s efforts to counter China’s vaccine diplomacy and contribute to the COVAX vaccine alliance (Smith, 2022).

India’s conflict with China and its approach to the West are at the heart of its conundrum. On the one hand, India wanted to enlist the help of its Western partners in the struggle with Beijing over its border in the Himalayas and other issues. On the other hand, India does not want to lose its crucial defense and military relationship with Russia, given that a substantial proportion of Indian armament is Russian-made or made under license from Russian companies. Such defense equipment means that India would depend on Russia for the spare parts and equipment of its war machine, at the very least. India brilliantly navigated this dilemma before the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine,

when the geopolitical tensions between Russia and Ukraine were, at least, not overly hostile—given India’s increasing importance and centrality, Western countries, at the very least, tolerated India’s burgeoning relationship with Russia. India also went to lengths to ensure that its cooperation with the West will not impede its cooperation with Russia. For example, when the Quad was resuscitated, India was reluctant to include a significant increase in military cooperation in the Quad’s framework (Sharma, 2021). Such reluctance was due to India’s desire to avoid Quad being seen by Moscow as a threat that would, by extension, damage New Delhi’s relations with Moscow.

However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine changed this equilibrium. Western countries view this war as a war against the international order that merits the immediate response of all nations on the side of Ukraine. India, meanwhile, refused to take this position. Several Western governments have criticized India for its reluctance to condemn Russia outright (see Martin & Sen, 2022). India’s way of navigating through this conundrum will be discussed in detail in the next part.

India’s Response to the Russian-Ukrainian War

India’s response to the Russian-Ukrainian war is similar to that of the majority in the South. In the UN Security Council (UNSC), India voted to abstain from resolutions on the situation in Ukraine. Furthermore, the country representative in the UNSC explained that the current international order is based on the UN Charter,

international law, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, but at the same time, refused to mention Russia at all (Permanent Mission of India to the UN, 2022). India also voted to abstain at the UN General Assembly (UNGA), voting on Russia’s membership in the Human Right Council (UN News, 2022).

India’s rhetorical commitment to international order, international law, and sovereignty, while refusing to condemn Russia, shows how interests in its relationship with Russia influence India’s behavior. Historically, India and Russia (formerly the Soviet Union) had a close relationship due to ideological reasons, such as rejecting capitalism and arms trade. However, India is interested in Russia beyond their past ties because it wants to avoid becoming tied to any one nation or political group. While India began to align itself with the United States, Australia, and Japan through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, it only partially aligned its foreign policies beyond the interest of containing China in the Indo-Pacific. India can maintain its alignment option by refusing to follow the step of the US and its allies in condemning Russia. In the context of the Indo-Pacific, India is quite vocal about economic cooperation with Russia. There is a proposal for a sea route between Chennai and Vladivostok, which Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said is a confluence of rivers of Eurasia and Indo-Pacific, to increase trade between the two countries (Saha, 2022).

India’s reasons for not taking a firm position against Russia also can be attribut-

ed to its role in the former's efforts to develop and maintain its military capacity. As described in the previous section, until now, Russia (formerly the Soviet Union) has been India's leading supplier of armaments, such as fighter aircraft, submarines, and air defense systems. Strongly condemning Russia for what is happening in Ukraine could harm India's relations with that state, particularly regarding arms supplies and natural resources. To guarantee the continuation of Russia's purchase and maintenance of armaments, India chose to provide a soft response to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It did not condemn Russia directly but noticed what happened in Ukraine concerning sovereignty and territorial integrity. It satisfied Russia but created a problem in India's relationship with the US and its allies.

Conclusion

From the explanation above, in the context of the global crisis, the Global South countries prioritize their national interests rather than upholding their ideals. This situation departs from the reiteration of the *realpolitik* concept that is not monopolized by the great power but also the middle power that made up the Global South. Characterized by modest political power, limited leverage and resources, and bounded by international structure, the Global South was forced by the structure into a dilemma. They must choose between obeying their values or continuing to appease the great power. Some Global South countries with sufficient political leverage and economic resources, such as India, are more pragmat-

ic and strategic in maintaining connections with the great powers, which may flagrantly flout their ideals.

Using the lens of the middle power-ism concept by Easley and Park (2017), this paper emphasizes India's middle power behavior and interest in hedging any political rift with Russia—that, in this context, is characterized as a great power. Even though Russia's action is detrimental to Global South's value of independence, self-determination, and sovereignty invading Ukraine in 2022, India still maintains a strategic relationship with Russia in various sectors. This is reflected by the significant bilateral trade volume—especially in the energy sector and arms transfer between them, even in a crisis. India sought to maintain this status quo by not voting in favor of the UNSC resolution condemning Russia and avoiding any official statements that adverse to Russia's action. At the same time, as scripted through Subrahmanyan Jaishankar's *India's Way* and numerous statements from its top officials, India is also foraging its strategic partnership with the West, again, for its strategic benefits. It can be concluded that for India, it is safer to diversify its relationship with as many parties as possible for its national interests.

We could infer these situations by analyzing India's considerations to responding to Russia's action, both in normative and strategic aspects. From the normative side, it should be noted that India and Russia have been in the same ideological camp since the Soviet Union era, as both countries upheld the value of socialism, and leaders of both countries respect each other's foreign poli-

cy principles. While both countries were no longer explicitly “socialist” throughout the post-Cold War era and the dependency between each other are weaning, both continue to respect each other’s value and principle of sovereignty. While Russia respects India’s way of strategic autonomy, India also continues to convince Russia by maintaining its distance from the West. It could imply that India is trying to maintain its strategic autonomy, portraying itself as a “friendly country for every country in the world” and gaining support for its foreign policy strategy, including its regional vision of the Indo-Pacific. From a strategic perspective, India still views Russia as a vital partner for its military development despite gradually reducing its dependency on Russia’s arms. A series of bilateral technological transfers, defense industrial cooperations, and license production of various arms means that there are immeasurable impacts that both countries could not bear if the strategic partnership between them is wholly cut off. Both aspects are crucial for India to exist, expand its leverage, and maintain its status as a regional power.

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