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Premium

One year of War in Ukraine: How India's position has evolved over time

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.

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People use carts to transport belongings near a building, which was destroyed during Ukraine-Russia conflict in the besieged southern port city of Mariupol, Ukraine March 17, 2022. (REUTERS Photo)

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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.

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.

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India, which has maintained a diplomatic balancing act and has walked the

tightrope between US-led West and Russia, has abstained on most occasions.

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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.



HOW INDIA VOTED

UNSC: Discussed 47 times since Jan 31, 2022; voted on 5 Resolutions; India abstained. In Procedural Votes, India abstained on 2 occasions regarding holding of Ukraine meeting in UNSC and UNGA; voted in favour of allowing virtual participation by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

UNGA: Voted on 6 Resolutions; India abstained. In 6 Procedural Votes, India supported procedural matters/decisions on virtual participation of Zelenskyy in 77th UNGA, recorded vote on UNGA resolution on Russian referenda in Ukraine, and not to defer UNSG report on Chernobyl in UNGA; India abstained/ voted against in other Procedural Votes/ Decisions.

UNHRC: 2 Resolutions and 2 Procedural Votes; India abstained

IAEA: 1 Resolution; India abstained

UNWTO: Voted on Russia's suspension; India abstained

UNESCO: 1 Resolution; India abstained

WHO: 2 Resolutions; India abstained

ICJ: 1 decision on dispute raised by Ukraine; Indian judge (in personal capacity) voted in favour

UPU: 3 Resolutions; India abstained

ILO: 1 Resolution; India abstained

IPU: 2 Resolutions; India abstained

ITU: 1 Resolution; India abstained

WIPO: 3 Decisions/Motions; India abstained



India's voting record on Ukraine and Russia since the war began.

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.

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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.

This was the template for India's statements, and was seen as largely a diplomatic balancing act since it needed cooperation from both Russian and Ukrainian sides to evacuate its citizens from the conflict zone. After its last batch of students were airlifted by the second week of March, the Indian position focussed on the other elements: respect for UN charter, territorial sovereignty and integrity.

The needle moved after the Bucha massacre in which innocent civilians were killed and India joined the western chorus in condemning the incident, and even asking for an international probe.

This is the most significant shift and the most vocal criticism of Moscow's actions, where Delhi called for an international probe into an incident in a country.

India has always been wary of calling for an international probe, since it has always rejected similar calls for probe by Pakistan into what Islamabad calls "human rights violations".

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So, while India has not explicitly condemned the Russian invasion, this incident made Delhi shift towards the West in its remarks.

As months passed, as Russian President Putin and other Russian leaders made nuclear threats, India expressed concern at the sabre-rattling. This too was another point where Delhi wanted to portray that it doesn't condone nuclear threats. As a country that has declared no a first-use policy and has declared unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests, its position was in sync with a responsible nuclear-armed country. Also, India is mindful of similar threats from Pakistan, and wanted to be consistent in its approach.

New Delhi was approached by Ukraine and other partners to intercede when the issue of food grains being blocked was raised. And Delhi stepped in to convey its

message to Moscow.

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Through the year, its calls for dialogue and diplomacy culminated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's now-famous remark to Russian President Putin in Samarkand in September on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: that "this is not an era of war". This became India's mantra, which even found its way into the G-20 declaration in Bali.

New Delhi's position also evolved as it felt the impact of the rising energy prices and prices of commodities went up. So, it took up the issues of rising prices of food, fuel and fertiliser, and that too became part of its statements as the war continued.

In January this year, India hosted the first virtual summit of the Voice of the Global South, where it raised the issue of rising prices of food, fuel and fertiliser, and flagged the concerns of the developing and the less-developed world on energy and food security. This will now be the consistent theme till the G-20 summit.

With a year of geopolitical turmoil due to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, India — as the chair of G-20 — will face the challenge of negotiating a declaration while balancing between Russia and the West.

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In this context, one of the ways it will look to address the Russia-Ukraine war will be to talk about the adverse impact of the war in terms of energy and food security. The framing of the argument is expected to be on the humanitarian concerns of the

war, whether in the conflict zone or the wider impact on the rest of the world, especially the Global South, which has over 120 countries under its umbrella.

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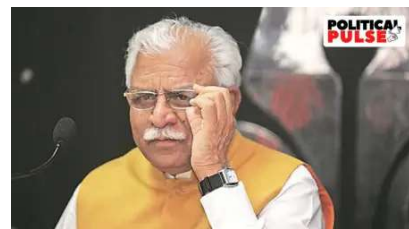
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