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BETWEEN MOSCOW AND THE WEST: INDIA'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

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ABSTRACT

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, India has adopted a foreign policy that is simultaneously baffling to both its Western partners and itself. It has refused to condemn the Russian aggression and abstained from nearly every United Nations resolution related to the war. India has dramatically increased its purchases of Russian crude oil at a discount, and it continues to depend on Russia for most of its military hardware while deepening its security cooperation with the United States. This paper examines these aspects of India's foreign policy through the lens of its doctrine of strategic autonomy, assessing its relationship with both Russia and the West and whether it can balance the two successfully. Through a qualitative research method that reviews the voting records of the United Nations, the statements of India's government, the country's military and trade data, and various scholarly and policy publications regarding India and its relationships between 2022 and 2026, it becomes evident that India balances these relationships for a variety of reasons rather than any one specific reason. Furthermore, by examining the changes in India's relationship with both the United States and Russia in 2025 and 2026, when the United States implemented tariffs on Indian goods and India reduced its purchases of Russian oil, this paper proposesthe concept regarding India's foreign policy: bounded strategic autonomy.

KEYWORDS: ***Strategic autonomy,Russia-Ukraine war, Non-alignment, Multi-alignment, Foreign policy, Multipolarity***

1. INTRODUCTION

On 24 February 2022, Russian forces began to cross into Ukrainian territory, marking the first time in over seven decades that Europe had seen a major land war between two forces. The response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was nearly uniform among the world's most developed democracies: financial sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and the arming of Ukraine's defence forces. India's response to the war was different. India was the nation not to name Russia as the aggressor in Ukraine, to vote against every resolution passed by both the Security Council and

the General Assembly of the United Nations, and to become the largest buyer of Russian oil (Verma, 2023). Such a stance has remained consistent over the last four years of the war, despite deepening ties with the United States through the Quad and various defence agreements between the two nations.

The apparent contradiction of India's geopolitical posture is the starting point of this paper. On the one hand, India is a close partner of the United States and its allies. On the other hand, India is Russia's most important lifeline after China and has purchased the majority of Russia's military equipment since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Tellis, 2022). This geopolitical stance is not a result of indecision by Indian leaders and politicians. Instead, it is based on the idea of "strategic autonomy," which has evolved from India's previous policy of non-alignment. This approach is applied according to India's circumstances rather than as a strategy indicating the nation's unwillingness to work with the West (Mohan, 2022).

Strategic autonomy refers to a country's ability to make its own decisions and pursue its national interests without being bound by another power's expectations (Khilnani et al., 2012). While non-alignment during the Cold War was fundamentally a normative and anti-colonial policy stance, strategic autonomy in the current era, often referred to in scholarly literature as "multi-alignment," takes a more transactional approach to foreign policy, allowing India to have strategic partnerships with several other powers simultaneously (Hall, 2016). The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has become the most important test of "strategic autonomy" since its development following the Cold War, as India must balance its strategic partnership with its oldest partner, Russia, with the demands of its more recent emerging strategic partnership with the United States.

This paper asks three interrelated questions regarding India's foreign policy during the war between February 2022 and August 2026. The first question investigates how India has balanced its relationship with both Russia and the West. The second question considers why India has been reluctant to condemn Russia for its actions in the war. Finally, the third question explores how the war may have influenced India's concept of strategic autonomy and the pressures it entails. These three questions are pursued not to assess strategic autonomy as a doctrine to be applied to India's foreign policy in general, but to examine it through India's experiences during the war.

Beyond India's borders, the Russia-Ukraine war matters because of India's status as a rising power. India has the world's largest population, a $4 trillion-plus economy, and growing representation in global diplomacy (Farrag & Robitaille, 2026). Thus, the way that India is handling the Russia-Ukraine war provides both a template for the other "swing states" of the Global South to follow in their own diplomatic relations with the great powers of the Global North (Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey, South Africa, and the Gulf monarchies), as well as a warning of the strategy that they should steer clear of (Nadkarni et al., 2024).

The following section reviews the literature on strategic autonomy in general and India's response to the Ukraine war in particular, identifies the three factors the literature has invoked to explain India's behaviour in the past, and outlines the gap this paper aims to address. The Method describes the study conducted to investigate India's response to the Ukraine war. The Results present the findings. The Discussion integrates those findings with the existing literature on the topic, introduces the concept of bounded strategic autonomy, and explains how that concept helps explain India's behaviour in the 2022-2026 phase of the war. Finally, the Conclusion summarises the study's findings, discusses its limitations, and suggests avenues for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 From Non-Alignment to Strategic Autonomy

India's policy of non-alliance and non-alignment dates back to Jawaharlal Nehru, who founded the doctrine of non-alignment, which eventually became the Non-Aligned Movement alongside other founding members of the then-emerging Cold War blocs. (Non-Aligned Movement, 2024) The ideology of non-alignment aimed to give newly independent nations the right to choose their allies and interests, rather than being forced to align with either the American or Soviet blocs. With the end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalisation in 1991, the ideological basis of non-alignment eroded. However, the policy's structural aim to maximise India's freedom of manoeuvre remained intact (Khilnani et al., 2012).

The clearest articulation of this doctrine in the present day exists in non-alignment 2.0, a 2012 strategy document produced by a group of Indian strategists that outlined a doctrine of strategic autonomy, which encouraged expansive partnerships with a variety of countries, including rivals of one another, without creating any formal alliances with any nation (Khilnani et al., 2012). Hall (2016) coined the term "multialignment" to describe this doctrine under India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, noting that India developed strategic partnerships with the United States, Russia, Japan, Israel, and the Gulf states from 2014 to 2016. In subsequent literature, the terms "multialignment" and "strategic autonomy" are used largely interchangeably, with the former generally referring to the nation's actual behaviour and the latter to the doctrine that justifies it.

2.2 Explaining India's Ukraine Response

Since February 2022, substantial academic and policy analysis has emerged on India's reluctanceto condemn Russia, with arguments organised around three primary areas of discourse.

The first such explanation for India's abstention from condemning Russia is based on realism and national security concerns. Authors such as Tellis (2022) assert that India's abstention stems from a desire to use Russia to thwart China's influence over India's borders. Authors like Miller and Jordan (2022) and Joshi (2022) argue for the same reasons, but also note India's dependence on Russian-origin systems, with Russia supplying up to seventy per cent of India's military weapons (Michael, 2022; Mohan, 2022). Additionally, Verma (2023) notes that India is also concerned that Russia's weakening may lead to closer ties between Russia and Pakistan. Finally, the U.S. Congressional Research Service (Kronstadt, 2022) also concludes that India's refusal to condemn Russia is rooted in both its dependency upon Russian weaponry, its concerns for the food and energy security of the nation, as well as its desire to utilise Russia as a counterbalance to the power of China.

A second body of literature emphasises the economic pragmatism between the two countries, especially regarding energy resources. Authors like Vickery and Cutler (2024) and Dolbaia et al. (2025) show that Russian crude oil has accounted for a substantial share of India's crude oil imports since 2022, and that Indian refiners have begun to reap the benefits. Indian officials, however, have maintained that these purchases are unrelated to the political relationship between the two countries, and are driven instead by the energy needs of Indias 1.4 billion people. Furthermore, authors like Vickery and Cutler (2024) indicate that the savings that India realises from these Russian crude oil imports are actually quite small relative to the size of the Indian economy, suggesting that energy-related pragmatism is also not a factor in explaining India's relationship with Russia.

A third strand of literature focuses on India's motivation to pursue status and leadership within the Global South. Authors like Verma (2024a) suggest that India's policies incorporate elements of both differential outcomes and strategic opportunism.This indicates a nation that balances its principles with its interests on a case-by-case basis, while also aspiring to assume a leadership role for the Global South and criticising the West for its double standards. Authors such as Nadkarni et al. (2024) explain that India is one of a group of countries within the Global South that includes China, Brazil, South Africa, and Iran, each of which has taken stances against the Western-led sanctions against their countries, citing the West's history of invading and sanctioning countries like Kosovo, Libya, and Iraq as evidence of such double standards. Furthermore, because India presided over the Group of 20 in 2023 with the theme of the "Voice of the Global South," many scholars believe India used this platform to signal its intent to increase its status within the organisation (Kumar, 2023; Grossman, 2023). Additionally, authors like Bajpaee (2025a) argue that India is not the same as other leaders of the Global South, such as Russia and China, but rather is another power that is both "non-Western but not anti-Western."

3. GAP IN THE LITERATURE

The existing literature on India's responseto the Russian invasion of Ukraine has either considered one of these three possible explanations of India's action or limited itself to the early stages of the war (between 2022 and 2023). Few studies consider these three factors together, and even fewer extend into the 2025-2026 period of the war, during which the United States began to directly coerce India by imposing tariffs on goods purchased from Russia (Bajpaee, 2025a). This later period of the war is especially important to analyse in relation to India's concept of strategic autonomy, as it was when the United States tested whether India could maintain its strategic autonomy at low cost and for an indefinite period. Thus, by constructing an empirical study of India's actions during the war (from the beginning of 2022 until early 2026) and reviewing the concept of strategic autonomy itself, this paper aims to fill this gap in the literature.

4. METHOD

4.1 Research Design

This paper employs a qualitative, interpretive single-case study design, using India's foreign policy during the Russia-Ukraine War (February 2022-early 2026) as the case. A case study methodology is appropriate for observing the evolution of India's foreign policy during this period, particularly given the nature of the policy object itself (which was not an event, but India's behaviour over time across multiple policy domains). The data used for this investigation is primarily based on analyses of the documents and their contents.

4.2 Data Sources

The main categories of sources used in the investigation of India's foreign policy during this period includes both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources that were used for this analysis include the voting records of the UNGA and Security Council, as published by the US Department of State in its annual report of the Voting Practices of United Nations Members (United States Department of State, 2024); statements of officials, such as its Ministry of External Affairs and its Prime Minister Modi; US government documents, such as the Congressional Research Service report on India and Russia relations (Kronstadt, 2022); and finally, the reports on each of these events themselves, especially those reports that relate to India's foreign policy during the Russia-Ukraine war, as published by various news organizations from around the world. Secondary sources that will be

used in the research will include both peer-reviewed journals, such as The Round Table, The Chinese Journal of International Politics, Global Policy, Pacific Focus, and International Studies, as well as analyses of foreign policies by various research institutions, such as the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the RAND Corporation, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Chatham House, the Council on Foreign Relations, the National Bureau of Asian Research, and the Centre for Policy Research.

4.3Analytical Framework

Following the three explanatory logics identified in the literature review- security, economic, and status-based the analysis is organized thematically around four empirical dimensions of India's conduct: (a) diplomatic behaviour in multilateral forums, particularly the United Nations and the Group of 20; (b) the defence and security relationship with Russia, including its trajectory of continuity and change; (c) the energy and economic relationship with Russia and its consequences for India's relations with the United States; and (d) the discursive strategies Indian officials have used to justify and legitimate the overall posture. Findings within each dimension are then read against the three explanatory logics to assess their relative and combined explanatory power, and against the concept of strategic autonomy itself to assess how the doctrine has been exercised, tested, and revised over time.

5. LIMITATIONS

This design has some limitations. For example, most reviewed sources were open-source and in English, excluding references to Russian-language or Indian policy sources. Additionally, because there were no interviews with India's policy elite, the motivations behind those policies were inferred from the articles rather than directly from the individuals responsible for creating them. Given that the Russia-Ukraine war was still active at the time of the writing of this paper, the India policy was also evolving; thus, the most-up to date information regarding India's policy is somewhat lacking and only reflects the developments that had emerged at the time of publication of the paper, such as the February 2026 tariff agreement between the two countries, discussed within the Results and Discussion sections. Finally, because this study employed a single-case study design, the findings cannot be generalised to other countries unless they are broadly useful to other countries, which is only roughly reflected in the comparison of India's policy with that of China in the paper.

6. RESULTS

6.1 Diplomatic Behaviour in Multilateral Forums

India's conduct within the United Nations has been the most visible of its wartime posture. On 25 February 2022, the day after the war began, India chose to abstain on a resolution drafted by the United States and its allies within the UN Security Council that condemned Russia; India joined China and the United Arab Emirates in its abstention, as Russia itself vetoed the resolution. India also abstained on several emergency resolutions submitted to the UN General Assembly in March of 2022, which called for the withdrawal of Russia from Ukraine, as well as on the resolutions that followed those proposed in 2022 and 2023 regarding the annexation of Ukrainian territory by Russia and the resulting humanitarian crisis, as well as in the resolutions proposed at later sessions after these resolutions (U.S. Department of State, 2024). India's representatives have indicated a preference for

dialogue and diplomacy to end the war between Russia and Ukraine, but have not placed responsibility for the war on either of the two participating nations.

These signals of discomfort with Russia's actions were relatively rare and limited to a couple of instances. The first of these occurred during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Samarkand in September 2022, when Modi directly remarked to Putin that "today's era is not an era of war," remarks that were made public by Western governments as an indication of India's discomfort with Russia's actions (CNBC, 2022). Similar remarks appeared in the New Delhi Declaration released after India's Group of 20 (G20) presidential term in September 2023. During India's G20 presidency, it used its platform as the "Voice of the Global South" to hold the Voice of the Global South Summit. It committed to finding a compromise to the ongoing war that was acceptable to both Russian and Western members of the G20 (Grossman, 2023).

India's management of its bilateral relations with Russia and Ukraine represents this balance. Modi visited Russia in July 2024 to hold a summit with Putin, and the two embraced for a widely publicised photograph that drew condemnation from both Kyiv and Western capitals. Modi visited Kyiv in August 2024, the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the nation since its independence from the Soviet Union, where he met with Zelensky to discuss India's support for peaceful resolutions to the conflict (CNN, 2024). Thus, Modi's visit to Kyiv helped signal India's efforts to keep its diplomatic relationships with both Russia and Ukraine balanced and symmetrical.

6.2 The Defence and Security Dimension

India's reluctance to abandon Moscow was rooted in its deep dependence on defence equipment; analyses from multiple authors estimated that India's military featured between sixty and seventy per cent of Russian-origin equipment at the outset of the war (Michael, 2022; Mohan, 2022; Joshi, 2022). Such analyses relate to the purchase of Russian S-400 air defence system in 2018, which was subject to potential sanctions from the United States under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA); the United States, however, provided a waiver to Russia's sanctions in recognition of its own calculations that the cost of the relationship with India deteriorating due to the purchase of the S-400 systems was likely to be greater than the cost of permitting the purchase to occur (Kronstadt, 2022).

Yet, though the war has not severed the relationship between India and Russia, it has also been visibly strained by the war. The demands of the war and the losses of Russian forces have led to delays in the delivery of major defence systems from Russia to India, including systems related to both the S-400 air defence system and naval platforms; India, therefore, has been compelled to diversify its suppliers by procuring military equipment from France, the United States, and Israel, as well as to increase the development of domestically-produced military systems under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) initiative (Dolbaia et al., 2025). While these diversifications have occurred, India still relies on Russian systems in its military forces during crises with Pakistan; thus, the country's military will likely continue to rely on its relationship with Russia in the near future, despite its declining relationship with the nation. Overall, the relationship between India's and Russia's militaries is experiencing a "managed decline": a relationship that remains established yet declines in strength over time, even as the diplomatic relationship between the two countries remains warm.

6.3 The Energy and Economic Dimension

The major shift in the relationship between India and Russia since 2022 has emerged in the energy sector. Before Russia invaded Ukraine, Russian crude oil accounted for less than 2 per cent of the crude oil India imported. (Oil Energy, India-U.S. Relations, and the Russia Conundrum, 2023) However, Russia has become India's largest crude oil supplier, and India has become the largest importer of Russian crude oil (Swain, 2026). Indian oil refiners, both public and private, such as Reliance Industries, purchased discounted Russian crude oil sold below the crude oil price cap set by the Group of Seven countries. These Indian refiners imported crude oil, processed it, and exported it to other countries, including Europe, prompting criticism from Western countries. (Vickery & Cutler, 2024).

To insulate its trade from Western financial sanctions, India proposed establishing a system that would allow the exchange of Indian rupees for Russian rubles. However, India ended up with a significant amount of rupees in Russian bank accounts because the size of the country's purchases of Russian energy exceeded Russian demand for Indian exports (VOA News, 2022). Despite these difficulties, Indian officials made it clear on numerous occasions that the purchase of Russian oil was related to energy security in a country with 1.4 billion people, not Russia's political stance (Vickery & Cutler, 2024).

In 2025, Washington increased pressureon India to align U.S. policy. In August 2025, the Trump administration announced an additional 25% tariff on Indian exports to the United States. This tax was to be imposed on top of an existing twenty-five per cent tariff on those exports from India to the United States, established to counter the country's purchases of Russian oil (Al Jazeera, 2025). This newly imposed fifty per cent tax on Indian goods placed India (along with Brazil) among the countries whose goods were most heavily taxed in the United States. India's reactions to the tax were negative; Indian officials called it "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable" (Al Jazeera, 2025). Other than the United States' major trading partners in Russian energy resources, India was the only country to receive such a penalty; the Trump administration had previously stated that other countries that imported significant amounts of Russian oil faced no such taxes (Al Jazeera, 2025). Furthermore, the relationship between the two countries declined to levels not seen in years (Bahree, 2025).

The dispute was substantially, though not entirely, resolved in February 2026. A new trade agreement between the United States, India, and Russia reduced the United States' combined tariff rate on goods from India from fifty percent to eighteen percent, which eliminated the rate that was implemented as a punishment for the Russian Federation's exports of crude oil, in exchange for the Indian Government's promises to reduce its purchases of Russian crude oil, to purchase alternative oil sources (including from the United States or Venezuela), and to purchase over five hundred billion dollars of goods from the United States each (over time). In January 2026, India's imports of Russian oil had already dropped to 1.2 million barrels per day, a rate expected to fall further (Al Jazeera, 2026).

6.4 Discursive Justification and the Language of Autonomy

Overall, the approach that the Indian government has employed in relation to each of these three dimensions is the same: that India's alignment with Russia is not one of pro-Russian alignment, but of defending its own interests as a nation and region against the double standards that the West employs towards the remainder of the Global South. Such a statement was made by Jaishankar at the GLOBSEC forum in Bratislava in June of 2022, in which

he stated: "Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems" (The Wire, 2022). Such a statement helps to position India within the category of what Bajpaee (2025a) terms as a "non-Western, not anti-Western" power - one that is reformist in nature rather than revisionist, and which does not exhibit the same anti-Western sentiments as Russia and China.

Despite the foundations of India's foreign policy, the discourse of legitimating it remains durable. Verma (2024b) explains that while India's foreign policy incorporates various principles, it also makes efforts to achieve great-power status. India's strategy is called "varied consequentialism," which balances the country's foreign policy principles with its foreign policy interests on a case-by-case basis. The continued use of this foreign policy discourse during the tariff disputes of 2025-2026, despite India's declining purchases of Russian oil, indicates the durability of this discourse despite changes in the material aspects of India's foreign policy.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that there was no single logic explaining India's behaviour in the Russia-Ukraine war. Rather, the three different logics discussed in the literature review all applied to the country in relation to the war. For instance, India's reluctance to condemn Russia stemmed from its dependence on the Russian defence industry and its desire to balance power with China. India's purchases of Russian energy were both a demonstration of India's economic interests and a way to push back against Western efforts to impose sanctions on Russia. Finally, India's desire to position itself as the leader of the Global South was enabled by its willingness to suffer the diplomatic and economic costs of maintaining diplomatic relations with Russia. These explanations for India's behaviour during the Russia-Ukraine war are therefore the paper's main finding regarding the country's motivations. (Verma, 2024a) These findings both support and extend the idea proposed by Nadkarni et al. (2024) regarding the motivations of the remaining countries of the Global South.

Yet the events of 2025 and 2026 represent a turning point that the existing literature on India and the Indo-Pacific region has yet to recognise. For the past three years, India has been able to exercise its autonomy at relatively little cost. The United States, recognising the value of its partnership with India within the Indo-Pacific region as greater than the value of punishing Russia when it came into conflict with India, opted for the "long game" as described by Kronstadt in 2022. However, the fact that the US decided in August 2025 to impose punitive tariffs on India specifically for the targeting of Russia and the eventual agreement between these two nations as a result of India's promise to reduce its purchases of Russian oil suggests that the United States was both willing and able to utilize the nation's economic power to influence the behaviour of India (Al Jazeera, 2026).

This episode further refines the concept of strategic autonomy. The doctrine of strategic autonomy, as proposed in the framework of Nonalignment 2.0 and as explained by Hall (2016), holds that a great power of sufficient size and diplomatic strength can maintain partnerships with its rivals in the great power balance. India's experience in 2025 and 2026 shows that such strategic autonomy can only be maintained within the limits of a hostile major power's coercive power. Unlike Russia, the US can threaten India with significant economic consequences. India's strategic autonomy is therefore not a fixed capability that the nation possesses equally in its relationships with all its great-power partners. Rather, the strategic autonomy India experiences in its relationships with each great power partner is bounded by the degree of leverage those powers have over India. While the doctrine of strategic autonomy continues to frame India's statements and actions in relation to its great power partners, the

degree of strategic autonomy India can exhibit in each relationship is bounded by the coercive power either the United States or Russia may exercise at any given time.

Furthermore, this interpretation is also consistent with, and helps to explain, the more pointed critique of India's approach to strategic autonomy offered by Bajpaee. Bajpaee (2025b) criticises India for its traditionally passive approach to strategic autonomy, which has required the nation to refrain from attempting to become strategically indispensable to either of the region's dominant powers. Therefore, India must instead change its policies to become more "strategically indispensable" to the international system as a whole, which inherently differs from the concept of strategic autonomy in that it suggests that the nation must become more powerful and self-sufficient in areas like the economy, technology, and other key indicators of the nation's power and influence(Bajpaee, 2025b).

It would be a mistake, however, to understand the February 2026 agreement as a sign of India's abandonment of its strategic autonomy, or even its definitive realignment towards Washington. The agreement was limited to the energy relationship between the two countries, leaving the defence relationship with Russia untouched. Furthermore, India has continued to maintain its other commitments to Russia, such as its role within BRICS, or its commitment to the growth of a multipolar international order as opposed to one in which the major powers of the West dominate the planet's resources and influence other nations. As author Kapoor explains of India's current relationship with Russia in one of the book's chapters, India's strategic autonomy is based upon the country's assumption that it must have diversified relationships with its partners, including with Russia even if it is currently diminished in relation to the rest of the world's powers, as a means of ensuring it does not become too dependent upon any one nation - a risk that the United States is likely to take advantage of (Vaishnav, 2026). This self-reinforcing logic was also recognised by Joshi (2022) at the outset of the war between Russia and Ukraine, who recognised that attempting to isolate Russia would lead the nation to become even more dependent upon China - a relationship that India has sought to avoid through its own hedging strategy. Thus, India's continued relationship with Russia helps avoid the development of a Russia-China alliance altogether, which would complicate its strategy of maintaining a multipolar balance of power.

These implications for India may apply to other nations as well. India's strategy is just one of the many hedging strategies that nations within the Global South have pursued in response to the world's great powers (Nadkarni et al., 2024). As such, these strategies are likely viable only in an environment in which the great powers are relatively restrained in their areas of influence. As the great powers compete more intensely with one another, however, the viability of the hedging strategies of the rising and middle powers is likely to diminish. Thus, India's strategy of establishing alternative financial and trading partners (which the country has already begun to pursue) is an effort that should be continued and further developed. (Vinodan& Kurian, 2024, pp. 475-495)

8. CONCLUSION

This paper examined how India has balanced its relationship with Russia and the West during the Russia-Ukraine war, why India has refused to condemn Russia for its actions, and whether India's doctrine of strategic autonomy has been sustainable over the past four years of the war. Through examining India's voting records within the United Nations, India's defence and trade relationships with Russia, and by examining various scholarly articles discussing these topics, it becomes evident that India's relationship with Russia is the result of India's dependence upon Russian weaponry, India's reliance upon Russian energy at discounted rates, and a strategy to stand as a

voice of the Global South in the face of the geopolitical conflicts between the West and the remainder of the globe. Furthermore, India has been able to maintain such a relationship at relatively low cost to the nation for roughly three years (until 2025) until the United States began to place economic pressure upon India for its purchases of Russian oil, leading to an agreement in February of 2026 to reduce (though not eliminate) India's relationship with Russian energy sources in exchange for the reduction of United States tariffs upon India's goods.

The key concept the author introduce is bounded strategic autonomy for India. By recognising that while India has a degree of freedom of manoeuvre between Russia and the West, that freedom has some constraints according to the abilities of each of those great powers to coerce the Indian government, the authors can provide a more nuanced understanding of the debate between those who either affirm or deny the ability of India to utilise its strategy of strategic autonomy successfully. The evidence in the article qualifiesboth positions, indicating that India does exhibit strategic autonomy in its dealings with Russia, but that its economic strategies are subject to the coercive power of the great nations with which it conducts trade.

In recognising the limitations of this study, which was conducted as a document-based, single-case qualitative study, the researcher acknowledges the study's dependence upon mostly English-language open sources, the lack of original interviews with the country's elite, and the fact that any discussion of the crisis is based upon a tentative account of the crisis in progress. Future research into this topic could extend this study through the observation of the changes in the trade between India and Russia following the agreement of February 2026; the comparison of India's approach to those of other "swing states" within the Global South; and, should the Russia-Ukraine war end with a negotiation or ceasefire, by examining how the new geopolitical arrangement of Russia as a diminished country that may be either dependent upon China or in need of renewed engagement with the Western nations will impact the calculations that India has employed throughout this war. Thus, India's continuing struggle to balance Russia and the West may be the clearest example of the autonomy strategy's potential and limits within the multipolar world that is emerging as the new order of the world's nations.

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