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## Lavrov's visit to India: Understanding India's Significance for Russia



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On March 31, 2022, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited India amidst the ongoing Ukrainian crisis. In a meeting with his Indian counterpart, Minister of External Affairs Dr. S Jaishankar, Lavrov emphasised mutual respect and the search for a balance of interests between Delhi and Moscow. He further stressed on developing a 'special privileged strategic partnership' as one of the main priorities of Russia's foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> Both Foreign Ministers discussed a diverse range of topics for cooperation amidst the ongoing tension in Ukraine. Negotiations were conducted on topics related to activities of Russia-India-China, currencies for financial transactions, energy trade, and military-technical cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

On Ukraine, India has not yet criticized Russia and abstained from voting in the United Nations.<sup>3</sup> New Delhi's stand on the issue has drawn diverse reactions from countries around the globe. For instance, on one hand, India's position has not been appreciated by its Western allies, mainly the United States. The U.S. Deputy NSA has warned India of 'consequences' for conducting deals in local currency with Moscow or trying to bypass U.S. sanctions.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the White House reiterated when Jen Psaki said, "every country should abide by the sanctions that we (the U.S.) have announced and that we're implementing around the world."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Russia appreciated India's position when Lavrov said, "... India's foreign policy is characterised by independence... its own legitimate interest."<sup>6</sup>

Western countries need to realize that India's foreign policy is purely steered by its national interest, as stated clearly by Dr. Jaishankar when he said, "India's foreign policy decisions are made in 'national interest' and guided by our thinking, our view, our interest..."<sup>7</sup> So, it is immature and impetuous on the part of the U.S. when it creates a narrative like "... if China breaches the Line of Actual Control..."<sup>8</sup> to influence or intimidate the Indian policy-making process. As New Delhi is well aware of its interests at the regional and international level, Washington has no right to embroil the former in fulfilling its own goals against Moscow. As India is prepared with a 'two-front' war scenario, any kind of assurance for possible assistance from the United States concerning China remains ambiguous. Further, in the event any of tension with China in the future, India would like Russia to stay neutral, and deal with the issue bilaterally without any external influence.

### **Significance of India for Russia**

Many experts confined their analysis to selected areas of Indo-Russian bilateral cooperation during Lavrov's visit to India. They highlighted hotly debated topics such as oil and gas imports, purchasing defence hardware, and concern over the payment mechanism system. Undoubtedly,

these areas are a major component of Indo-Russian cooperation, but this time Lavrov's visit after Russia's 'special operation' in Ukraine is not merely a regular exchange.

Through Lavrov's visit to China and India, Russia wants to relay to the West that it is not isolated, and shares bonhomie with the world's second-largest economy, and the world's largest democracy. For nearly two decades, Western governments viewed Russia as an authoritarian state under Putin's administration. Therefore, in a way, India's neutrality helps Moscow to highlight the fact that all democracies do not share the same view on Russia. At the same time, as a setback for the West, India's stand nullifies Americans' effort to create a unified voice of democracies under Washington's leadership. With the U.S. and its allies in Europe targeting President Putin as an authoritarian, getting closer to the world's largest democracy dilutes the image of Russia that the U.S. is trying to paint.

Second, India fits into Moscow's notion of a multipolar world order. As a part of its foreign policy, the notion of a multipolar international system occupies a significant position for Russia which is evident in its Foreign Policy Concept of 2016. Moscow believes that a multipolar world order can be created only when other powerful countries for instance India (along with China, and Brazil) counters unipolarity. Russia sees multilateralism as a route to multipolarity, and it is apparent in Russia's promotion of multilateral organizations in Eurasia, as observed by Prof. Rajan.<sup>9</sup> As India is a partner country in BRICS, SCO, and both countries are currently working on FTA with the Eurasian Economic Union, the former's participation is of utmost priority for Russia.

Amidst Western criticism and their ongoing endeavour to isolate Russia, the significance of India has increased more than ever. With Lavrov's visit, the significance of India for Russia can be seen in two ways – first, strengthening political cooperation; and second, strengthening latter's commitment for a multipolar world order.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's opening remarks during talks with Minister of External Affairs of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, New Delhi, April, 2022," [https://www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/vizity-ministra/1807492/](https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/vizity-ministra/1807492/). Accessed on April 05, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's answers to media questions following talks with Minister of External Affairs of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, New Delhi, April 1, 2022," [https://www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/vizity-ministra/1807582/](https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/vizity-ministra/1807582/). Accessed on April 05, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> "Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov arrives in India amid Moscow's invasion of Ukraine," *The Indian Express*, March 31, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/russian-foreign-minister-lavrov-in-india-moscow-invasion-ukraine-7846709/>. Accessed on April 05, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Suhasini Haider, "U.S. Deputy NSA cautions India against trade deals with Russia," *The Hindu*, April 01, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/us-deputy-nsa-daleep-singh-cautions-india-against-trade-deals-with-russia/article65277933.ece>. Accessed on April 06, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Sriram Lakshman, "India shouldn't raise Russian purchases," *The Hindu*, April 06, 2022, Accessed on April 06, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's answers to media questions following talks with Minister of External Affairs of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, New Delhi, April 01, 2022," [https://www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/vizity-ministra/1807582/](https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/vizity-ministra/1807582/). Accessed on April 05, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> "EAM Jaishankar lists 6 principles behind India's response to Ukraine crisis," *The Mint*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/eam-jaishankar-lists-6-principles-behind-india-s-response-to-ukraine-crisis-read-here-11648136359738.html>. Accessed on April 06, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Pia Krishnankutty, "Daleep Singh, US Dy NSA who warned India on Russia ties, is a political inheritor & MIT grad," *The Print*, April 02, 2022, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/daleep-singh-us-dy-nsa-who-warned-india-on-russia-ties-is-a-political-inheritor-mit-grad/898700/>. Accessed on April 06, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Rajan Kumar, "Russia's Foreign Policy: An Overview of 25 Years of Transition," *International Studies*, 2018, Vol. 53 (3-4): pp. 218-19.

