

India's Abstention on UNSC Vote over Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

What is the issue?

India has abstained on a US-sponsored UN Security Council resolution that deplores Russia's aggression against Ukraine, with New Delhi saying dialogue is the only answer to settling differences and disputes.

What is the resolution about?

- The UN Security Council voted on the draft resolution 8979 presented by the US and Albania, and co-sponsored by several other nations.
- The resolution deplores **Russia's aggression against Ukraine** and decides that Russia shall immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine and shall refrain from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any UN member state.
- The resolution added that Russia shall immediately withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.
- It also asked Moscow to immediately reverse the decision related to the status of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.
- The Council's resolution reaffirmed its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.
- India abstained on the vote on draft resolution.
- Russia which chaired the meeting of the UNSC vetoed the resolution and China abstained along with the United Arab Emirates.
- Despite the remaining 11 members of UNSC, including US, UK, France, voting in favour of the resolution, it did not pass since Russia vetoed it.

What are the options that India could choose from?

- There are four potential options India can/could choose from:
 - Condemn Russian aggression
 - Support Russian aggression
 - Stay silent on Russian aggression
 - Express displeasure and call for diplomacy
- The first option will pit India against Russia, the second will pit it against the U.S. and its allies.
- The third option will be read as pro-Russia, and the fourth option which it has taken is the least harmful.
- But the one that abstains from voting on a UNSC resolution calling for condemning Russian aggression and withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine is indeed a pro-Russia position.

Why did India abstain?

- India wants to maintain a balance between the Western bloc led by the US, and Russia, since it has strategic partners on both sides.
- India's past record has been maintaining balance between the West and Russia.
- Recently, India abstained on a procedural vote on whether to discuss the issue of Ukraine.
- India said that it is deeply disturbed by the recent turn of developments in Ukraine.
- It reiterated its appeal for cessation of violence.
- It flagged its core concern about Indian nationals in Ukraine who are stuck, most of whom are students.
- India touched upon "territorial integrity and sovereignty" which was the contemporary global order built on the UN Charter, international law, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.
- It also advocated diplomacy, urging the parties concerned to return to the negotiating table.
- Apart from the India-Russia defence and strategic partnership, Russia is India's most trusted P-5 ally when it comes to blocking intrusive resolutions on Kashmir.
- Moscow may or may not be able to moderate Chinese antagonism towards New Delhi, but an India-Russia strategic partnership may be able to temper New Delhi's growing isolation in a rather friendless region.
- New Delhi needs Moscow's assistance to manage its continental difficulties through defence supplies, helping it return to central Asia, working together at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or exploring opportunities for collaboration in Afghanistan.

What does India's action signify?

- The contemporary Indian strategic landscape necessitates that India balances the two sides, but doing so without a subtle Russia tilt may not be feasible at this point of time.
- India's position shows the unmistakable indication that when it comes to geopolitics, New Delhi will choose interests over principles.
- By abstaining, India retained the option of reaching out to relevant sides in an effort to bridge the gap and find a middle ground with an aim to foster dialogue and diplomacy.
- While India's hesitation to take a stand against Russia is understood, New Delhi must now consider whether its aspirations to be a leading power can be achieved without having a clear position on a conflict that threatens global security.

References

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