



India, Russia and the Ukraine Crisis

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As a post-colonial state, India has long zealously guarded its sovereignty, both in the region and in the world. Indeed, it was only after much internal debate that it decided to intervene in East Pakistan during the 1971 crisis, as this required violating the sovereignty of its neighbor, Pakistan.¹ Not surprisingly, it has also been quite circumspect about wholeheartedly embracing the UN's doctrine of the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) on the grounds that that it could undermine India's devotion to the principle of state sovereignty.² Underlying this opposition is an unspoken fear: that the R2P could at some point be applied to India itself, thanks to its many lapses in protecting human rights, especially when dealing with domestic insurgencies.³

Despite this commitment to upholding sovereignty, in the wake of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, India scrupulously avoided criticizing Moscow in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and abstained from the UNSC resolution condemning the Russian invasion. At their strongest, India's statements simply called on Russia to respect international law without elaborating on what this might mean.⁴ Months after the invasion and as the crisis continued to unfold, Prime Minister Modi went so far as to tell President Vladimir Putin at a security summit in Uzbekistan: "This is not an era of war."⁵ Beyond this veiled criticism, India has issued a series of carefully-worded statements in various forums about the invasion, but has maintained normal diplomatic relations with Russia and abstained on multiple UNGA resolutions that have censured Russia.⁶ Most recently, on a December 2023 visit to Moscow, India's Minister for External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, met with his Russian

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counterpart Sergey Lavrov, as well as President Putin, and publicly referred to Russia as a “valued and time-tested partner” while reaffirming plans to jointly produce a range of weaponry with Russia.⁷

India’s studied unwillingness to condemn Russia’s blatant violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty might seem puzzling.⁸ There is little question that India has long felt it necessary to fend off any perceived challenges to its sovereignty through a shift in international norms and practices. It also faces a significant challenge on its northern border from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). As recently as the spring of 2020, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) had made significant incursions in the Galwan Valley along the disputed Himalayan border with India.⁹ Despite this challenge to India’s own sovereignty, it has, much to the disappointment of the United States, scrupulously avoided criticizing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Why, then, this lack of condemnation of Russia’s actions?

This essay argues that a number of factors—both international and domestic—explain Prime Minister Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government’s unwillingness to criticize Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Specifically, it will demonstrate that India’s circumspect position can be attributed to five main considerations. First, at an international level, India can ill afford to pique Russia, for fear that it could lead to a closer Sino-Russian embrace, particularly worrying given India’s troubled relationship with its behemoth northern neighbor.¹⁰ Second, India remains acutely dependent on Russia for sophisticated weaponry and spare parts for its conventional arsenal. Third, at a domestic level, a degree of Cold War nostalgia, stemming from the former Soviet Union’s assistance to India at critical junctures, still permeates the memories of significant segments of the Indian foreign policy elite, leading to a reluctance to criticize Russia.¹¹

India’s position can be attributed to five main considerations

Fourth, a significant segment of the Indian foreign policy elite remains wedded to promoting a multipolar world order. To that end, they believe that Russia can still play the role of a possible balancer against blustering American power. This interest in multipolarity stems, in considerable measure, from their deep-

seated misgivings about an American-dominated global order. Finally—and this is both a cause and a consequence of its unwillingness to criticize Russia—India has reaped significant economic benefits from its deafening silence on the crisis. As a desperately energy-deficient country, its unwillingness to upbraid Moscow has enabled it to obtain substantial amounts of Russian petroleum at lower-than-market rates.

Given these considerations, and barring unexpected developments at global, regional or domestic levels, this paper concludes that it is unlikely that New

Delhi will dramatically shift its position on Russia in the foreseeable future. In this regard, US policymakers may wish to temper their optimism about India's willingness to align its priorities with those of the United States. New Delhi remains wedded to the notion that the Soviet Union was a reliable partner during much of the Cold War and that Russia, its principal successor state, can still be an invaluable collaborator.

Trying to Prevent a Sino-Russian Entente

India's hope of ensuring that Russia does not adopt a pro-China stance on matters related to Sino-Indian tensions may well prove illusory. Nevertheless, there is little question that Indian policymakers are acutely concerned that any public rebuke of Russia's invasion may prompt Moscow to cozy up to Beijing and further cement a strategic "no limits" relationship that has already burgeoned since the Ukraine war began. This concern, while understandable, may nonetheless make little difference to Moscow's eventual decision one way or other. At best, it may earn India a temporary reprieve from Sino-Russian coziness.

Since Mikhail Gorbachev's noted August 1986 speech in Vladivostok, the Soviet Union and then its principal successor state, Russia, has distanced itself from India on the critical Sino-Indian rivalry as it has sought to repair relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹² Indeed, any lingering hopes that Indian policymakers in New Delhi had entertained about Russia's unstinted commitment to India should have been dashed when Gorbachev visited India in December 1986. At a press conference, when pressed on the Soviet position on the Sino-Indian rivalry, he demurred from taking a clear stance.¹³ Gorbachev's successor, Boris Yeltsin, showed little to no interest in reviving the partnership with India despite issuing anodyne statements about the long-standing friendship between the two countries. In fact, following India's nuclear tests in May 1998, he actually issued a public condemnation.¹⁴

Matters have not significantly improved under President Putin's long stint in office, barring a brief moment or two when Russia sought to elicit India's cooperation on issues of concern to Moscow. For example, following the US decision to launch unilateral air attacks against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1998, owing to its apparent failure to adhere to various UN resolutions pertaining to its pursuit of nuclear weapons, Yevgeny Primakov, then Russia's Foreign Minister, tried to forge a transactional triad made up of Russia, the PRC and India,

New Delhi is concerned that rebuking Russia may lead Moscow to further cozy up to Beijing

hoping to forge a strategic bulwark against the growth of overweening American power. Despite some enthusiasm in New Delhi for this proposal, in the end little came of it.¹⁵ More recently, prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and much to India's dismay, Putin started to improve ties with both of India's main adversaries: Pakistan and the PRC.¹⁶

Policymakers in New Delhi may believe that avoiding public criticism of Russia's actions will enable them to prevent the emergence of a Sino-Russian security nexus.¹⁷ However, the available evidence and the historical record suggest that New Delhi may be overestimating the influence it wields over Moscow's current foreign policy priorities and choices.

Arms and Influence

From the mid-1960s onwards, and especially after the 1971 India-Pakistan conflict, New Delhi became reliant on Moscow for a steady supply of weaponry.¹⁸ The reasons for this were manifold. India's own defense industrial base had failed to produce the weapons that its armed forces needed. Western suppliers, especially the United States, insisted on significant end-user restrictions, were unwilling to transfer technology, and charged more for their products. Moscow, on the other hand, placed few—if any—restrictions on the use of weaponry that it sold India, was willing to transfer technological know-how, and especially during the Cold War, agreed to accept rupee payments (or barter arrangements) for arms transfers.¹⁹ India's reliance on the Soviet Union led to a military path dependence that has continued long after the dissolution of the USSR and the concomitant end of the Cold War.

After the Cold War, Russia was unwilling to accept rupee payments or barter arrangements for arms transfers. However, because a disproportionate segment of India's arsenal was of Soviet origin, Moscow was still willing and able to provide weaponry that no other supplier was. Because it still placed few restrictions on the weaponry that India acquired, it remained an important source of supply for India's conventional military capabilities. Among other items, the Russians leased two Akula class submarines to enable Indian submariners to become familiar with the workings of a nuclear-powered submarine.²⁰ Also, it sold India the Admiral Gorshkov, a refurbished Soviet-era aircraft carrier, albeit after significant cost overruns. Since no other country was willing to transfer a similar naval platform to India, New Delhi grudgingly accepted the higher costs.

More recently, and much to the chagrin of the United States, in 2021 India acquired the S-400 Triumf missile battery from Russia.²¹ New Delhi turned to Moscow to purchase this sophisticated air defense system for two familiar reasons. First, the United States was unwilling to sell India a comparable

system. Second, even as the United States reconsidered its initial reluctance to provide an equivalent missile battery, its cost was considerably greater.²²

At any event, despite some recent efforts at diversification, anywhere between 70 to 85 percent of India's military equipment is of Russian origin.²³ A breakdown along the lines of the country's three armed forces is even more revealing: 90 percent of the Indian Army's weaponry is of Russian origin, 40 percent of the Navy's, and 70 percent of the Indian Air Force's. These figures, in turn, require a bit of discussion; even though the Indian Navy's share is considerably smaller than those of the other two military counterparts, it is a bit misleading. The only working aircraft carrier that India possesses at the moment, the *INS Vikramaditya*, is a former Soviet-era vessel, the *Admiral Gorshkov*, which was refurbished and sold to India. The possession of this aircraft carrier gives India some strategic advantages over Pakistan and even the PRC in the Indian Ocean region. Also, Russian technicians were responsible for guiding their Indian counterparts in the miniaturization of the reactor of India's only nuclear-powered submarine, the *INS Arihant*. India also co-manufactures the highly effective BrahMos medium-range, ramjet supersonic missile with Russia. Finally, discussions are currently underway between New Delhi and Moscow on the development of a fifth-generation fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force.²⁴

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Breaking free of these arms transfer and production arrangements would be neither cheap nor easy. Given that such a large segment of its extant military capability is of Soviet/Russian origin, India also remains reliant on Russia for spare parts and components for many of its weapons systems. There is more than a hint of irony here: for all of India's much-vaunted commitment to a foreign policy doctrine which underscores its "strategic autonomy," it remains acutely dependent on Russia for weaponry.²⁵ Consequently, its foreign policy choices on certain critical issues are severely constrained. Its inability to take an unequivocal stance on the Ukraine crisis is a clear demonstration of those limitations.²⁶

Cold War Nostalgia

Beyond the obvious military dependence on Russia that has hobbled India's choices, another factor—a degree of trust in Russia that has lingered long after the Cold War's end—has also played into New Delhi's calculations. This trust metric is not easy to measure, but nevertheless of considerable significance for

an important segment of India's foreign policy elite. Compelling historical reasons encourage continued faith in Russia. For a substantial span of the Cold War, the Soviet Union was one of India's most reliable and staunch supporters, and this relationship was forged at a critical moment for India in terms of its foreign and security policy concerns.

In the late 1960s, New Delhi maintained a cordial but not especially close relationship with Moscow. India rebuffed Leonid Brezhnev's 1969 proposal for a "collective security" system in Asia, as it correctly viewed any such effort as an attempt to contain the PRC.²⁷ Matters changed quite dramatically, however, in 1970-1971, as in the wake of Sino-Russian border clashes along the Ussuri River in 1969, the United States saw an opportunity to widen the Sino-Russian schism. Accordingly, Henry Kissinger, Nixon's National Security Adviser, decided to reach out to the PRC with a view toward exploiting the rift through the normalization of relations with the United States.²⁸ To that end, Kissinger covertly sent out diplomatic feelers through Pakistan, a staunch ally of the PRC, to facilitate his trip to Beijing. Kissinger's trip to Beijing through Islamabad, however, came at a particularly fraught moment in Pakistan's domestic politics.

The country had just held its first free and fair elections, but their outcome was not to the liking of the powerful Pakistani military establishment, nor the political elite in West Pakistan. A deadlock ensued about power-sharing between the country's two wings. As negotiations broke down and demands for autonomy from the east became strident, the Pakistani military embarked upon a relentless and brutal crackdown in East Pakistan. The harshness of military repression led to an indigenous armed uprising, even as millions of civilians fled to India to escape the violence. Faced with this unprecedented refugee influx, India attempted to alert the international community of the scale of the humanitarian disaster it confronted. However, beyond providing limited amounts of humanitarian assistance, the global community—and especially the great powers—did little to exert pressure on Pakistan to rein in its brutal policies in East Pakistan. The Nixon administration, beholden to Pakistan for facilitating its overture to the PRC, turned a blind eye toward the crisis.

After India learned of the US overture to the PRC, fearing the emergence of a US-China-Pakistan nexus, it signed a treaty of "peace, friendship and cooperation" with the Soviet Union in August 1971. Article Nine of this treaty, for all practical purposes, provided India with a security guarantee.²⁹ This effectively ensured that in the event of a war with Pakistan, the Soviets would hold down the PRC. Meanwhile, India's relations with the US deteriorated in the fall of 1971. Seeing no end to the refugee crisis, India considered intervening in East Pakistan to end the ongoing disaster and ameliorate its refugee burden. To its dismay, in a conversation with the Indian ambassador to

the US on October 8, Kissinger warned that the United States would cut off all economic assistance to New Delhi in the event of any Indian military action in East Pakistan.³⁰

In any event, after a Pakistani air raid on its northern bases in December 1971, India did in fact invade East Pakistan. The US promptly sought to censure India at the UN Security Council, but repeatedly confronted the Soviet veto. This third Indo-Pakistani war was brief and resulted in the creation of the state of Bangladesh. In its wake, the Indo-Soviet relationship was solidified, as India came to depend on the Soviet Union for weaponry, access to its markets, and diplomatic support in the UN, especially on the highly sensitive issue of the Kashmir. The Kashmir dispute was of particular concern to New Delhi because Pakistan was especially prone to dredge it up in the UNGA following its decisive defeat in the 1971 war.

In the wake of this war, India's foreign policy elite became acutely wary of the United States. Apart from the diplomatic support that the United States had extended to Pakistan during the crisis leading up to the war, another American decision particularly rankled Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Indian foreign policy establishment: President Nixon's 1971 decision to send a naval task force into the Bay of Bengal, spearheaded by a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. This American resort to coercive diplomacy, though ultimately ineffective as the Indians had already achieved their military objectives, nevertheless infuriated New Delhi.³¹ It reinforced a visceral distrust of the United States, particularly on the part of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and many members of her Cabinet. As a result, New Delhi concluded that the Soviets were India's only reliable and trustworthy strategic partner. Over time, this view—shored up by Moscow's military largesse—became a truism in Indian foreign policy circles. Despite a significant improvement in US-India ties, especially since the conclusion of the civilian nuclear accord of 2008, its foreign policy elite remains unwilling to loosen or diminish its ties to Moscow.

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Thus, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, India was the only democratic state that refrained from issuing a condemnation in the UN General Assembly.³² During the decade-long Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, India maintained a studious public silence on the subject. To no particular surprise, during this time it continued to benefit from Soviet military largesse. To ensure that India did not break ranks on this critical issue, the Soviets proved willing to provide it with a range of military equipment, including advanced

jet fighters which it was unable to obtain elsewhere, especially on the favorable terms Moscow offered.³³

These arms transfers were crucial to India's security because in its attempts to dislodge the Soviets from Afghanistan, the US had embraced Pakistan and provided it with substantial amounts of economic and military assistance without any consideration of its impact on India's security concerns. This American obliviousness to India's security needs was hardly surprising; India's close relationship with the Soviet Union, coupled with its unwillingness to publicly condemn the Soviet invasion, had not endeared it to the Reagan administration.

Even though the historical record also shows that Russia has not been a consistent strategic partner, those whose attitudes toward the Soviet Union were shaped during the Cold War years remain willing to overlook its occasional fickleness on key strategic matters. Consequently, a significant swathe of India's foreign policy establishment is in accord with the mostly neutral stance that the Modi government has adopted toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing crisis.³⁴ At this juncture, it remains unclear if a new, emergent generation of India's foreign policy practitioners will inherit and adopt the views of the previous generation.

The *Idée Fixe* of Multipolarity

A fourth factor explains India's unwillingness to criticize Russia's invasion of Ukraine: the Indian foreign policy establishment's obsession with the pursuit of a possible multipolar world order. India's policymakers remain firmly convinced that India will attain greater room for diplomatic maneuver in the global arena in a multipolar as opposed to unipolar (American-dominated) world order.³⁵ In considerable part, this view can be traced to the US-Pakistan strategic nexus which formed during the Cold War. The Eisenhower administration's decision to forge an alliance with Pakistan as early as 1954, the subsequent US willingness to work with a range of military regimes in Pakistan, its ambivalent position on Pakistan's role in initiating the 1965 war, and above all, the Nixon administration's pro-Pakistani tilt during the 1971 war remain deeply embedded in the collective memories of the Indian foreign policy elite.³⁶

A renewal of the US-Pakistan strategic nexus after the 9/11 attacks bolstered this distrust of the United States in India. This resurgent security relationship was especially galling to New Delhi because India's security and intelligence apparatus was (rightly) convinced that Islamabad was pursuing a two-faced policy when it came to cooperating with the United States in combating global terror. In their view, Pakistan's counterterrorism cooperation was entirely transactional and limited.³⁷ Islamabad, New Delhi believed, was mostly interested in

obtaining invaluable economic and military assistance from Washington, and only willing to provide highly limited counterterrorism support, even as it continued its dalliance with various terrorist organizations.³⁸

Most recently, the abrupt US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in August 2021 without informing or consulting New Delhi was also highly vexing. Thus, despite a dramatic improvement in US-India relations, particularly since the highly consequential US-India nuclear accord of 2008, a degree of distrust of the US still animates the views of the Indian foreign policy establishment.³⁹ This continuing distrust of the United States stems from a pervasive belief that many US policy choices in South Asia during the Cold War and even beyond were genuinely inimical to India's security interests. This fickle perception of Washington has convinced India's foreign policy decision-makers that they cannot become overly reliant on the United States and must therefore maintain some leeway when it comes to foreign policy choices. Accordingly, they have a strong preference for a global order where New Delhi can enjoy both the diplomatic and strategic support of other major powers and also the leeway of pursuing its particular foreign policy interests and choices. A globally dominant power, in their view, will hamstring India's ability to pursue a genuinely autonomous foreign policy.⁴⁰

A degree of distrust of the US still animates the views of the Indian foreign policy establishment

The Economic Fallout of India's Pro-Moscow Tilt

Long before Russia invaded Ukraine, India was acutely dependent on external oil purchases. Over 80 percent of its petroleum needs prior to the invasion of Ukraine were met by imports, and in the wake of the Russian invasion and the consequent spike in global oil prices, its dependence on foreign oil has only worsened.⁴¹ Given these circumstances, India's policymakers have been forced to strike a Faustian bargain with Russia: New Delhi has been willing to purchase oil from Moscow at lower than market rates because of its acute domestic needs, the lack of suitable alternative suppliers at similar prices, and the global inflationary pressures that it has faced, ironically caused thanks to the Ukraine crisis. Its pressing domestic economic demands encourage it to overlook the ethical issues involved in purchasing oil from Moscow and adopt a blatantly pragmatic stance on the matter. While the US has publicly expressed misgivings about India's willingness to purchase Russian oil, it has not exerted nearly the same degree of pressure that it had previously brought to bear to induce India to dramatically curtail its oil imports from Iran.⁴²

When pressed, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, forthrightly argued India's case. Following a December 2022 meeting with his German counterpart, Annalena Baerbock, he bluntly stated that India had no intentions of scaling back its oil purchases from Russia.⁴³ On a subsequent occasion, he also highlighted that Europe had imported six times more Russian oil than India since February 2022.⁴⁴ While Jaishankar's statistics are no doubt correct, they also overlook an obvious asymmetry between Europe and India. Though India is far more populous than all of Europe, its level of industrialization pales in significance in comparison to that of most parts of Europe. Consequently, its per capita consumption of energy does not even approach European levels. Furthermore, Europe, far from taking advantage of Russian oil and natural gas in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, has, at some domestic political as well as economic cost, sought to reduce its dependence on Russia. Thereby, it has sent what scholars of international relations scholars refer to as a "costly signal" to Russia.⁴⁵ India, on the other hand, has chosen not to bear similar costs.

Additionally, and in a most ironic fashion, Moscow quickly became the principal beneficiary of the historic US-India nuclear accord of 2008. A nuclear liability law that India passed in 2010 placed the onus of any nuclear accident on the suppliers of nuclear equipment. Since the cost of obtaining insurance against such a contingency would be all but prohibitive, no American firm sought to invest in India's civilian nuclear infrastructure. Russia's principal nuclear power company, Rosatom, was thereby able to step into the breach in the 2010s, as it enjoyed insurance guarantees from the Russian government.⁴⁶ More recently in February 2024, New Delhi and Moscow signed another agreement to bolster cooperation over the production of nuclear energy in India. Specifically, Moscow agreed to build additional reactors at the existing Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project and construct reactors elsewhere.⁴⁷

Lessons Learned

Given India's web of ties to Moscow, New Delhi has unsurprisingly continued to avoid any condemnation of its actions.⁴⁸ No joint communique was issued out of the G-20 meeting in Goa in July of 2023 thanks to India's unwillingness to include any language that would censure Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Indian officials asserted that brokering peace between Russia and Ukraine exceeded the remit of the G-20.⁴⁹

Is India's stance on the Russian invasion and the ensuing crisis in Ukraine likely to change dramatically in the foreseeable future? And is India going to reduce its military dependence on Russia anytime soon? One key structural factor that will inhibit New Delhi from loosening its ties with Russia is the

anemic state of its own defense industrial infrastructure. Despite Modi's much-vaunted launch of the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" ("self-reliant India") program in May 2020, designed to boost India's indigenous manufacturing capabilities across a range of sectors, progress—especially in defense production—has been woefully slow.⁵⁰ Consequently, despite the fanfare associated with this program, India will remain dependent on weapons imports for quite some time. Furthermore, even though New Delhi has encountered various hiccups in the arms transfer relationship with Moscow and supply disruptions due to the exigencies of the Ukraine war, India is simply not in a position to sharply curtail its acquisitions from Russia.⁵¹ Worse still, its limited financial resources will not enable it to easily turn to alternative suppliers. Faced with these constraints, it will be loath to disrupt its diplomatic ties to Moscow.

Furthermore, key members of the Indian foreign policy elite believe that unlike Russia, which treats India as a mostly equal partner, the US has only subordinate relationships. Even its allies, they contend, must accept American superiority.⁵² Consequently, New Delhi cannot forge a long-term strategic relationship with Washington on terms that it deems acceptable. Fashioning a tighter strategic partnership with the US would, in their eyes, also amount to an acceptance of American unipolarity—a deeply distasteful outcome and one that would necessarily undermine India's hard-won autonomy.

Additionally, India has historically made only incremental changes in its foreign policy orientation. This tradition of incrementalism is fairly deeply rooted in its political culture. It has undertaken significant changes in its foreign or security policies almost exclusively when confronted with acute domestic crises, compelling security threats, or in the wake of dramatic power shifts in the international system.

Finally, India's fragmented domestic politics and institutions have also often contributed to what an Indian scholar of the country's foreign policy has described as "policy drift."⁵³ There is every likelihood that this propensity for policy drift is likely to endure for some time, especially in the absence of significant institutional reforms or an end to the sandbagging effects of India's convoluted domestic politics. Consequently, unless it faces insurmountable domestic challenges or confronts extraordinary external pressures, India will only make minor alterations in its foreign policy calculus—trimming its sails to tack with the prevailing winds without dramatically changing course. Any marked changes in India's relations with Russia are only likely to emerge in the long term, if and when the costs of maintaining them start exceeding the possible benefits, especially in the critical realm of arms transfers.⁵⁴ It is also possible to envisage a shift in Indian policy if Russia, owing to its growing dependence on the PRC, becomes an increasingly less reliant strategic partner.⁵⁵ Given India's very legitimate security concerns vis-à-vis the PRC, which are not likely to

abate anytime soon, a closing of ranks between Moscow and Beijing may force New Delhi to reappraise its relationship with Russia. Short of such an outcome, despite various vicissitudes, the partnership is likely to endure.

India's enduring partnership with Moscow may well limit its ability to forge a closer relationship with the United States. Washington, which has expended significant political capital for close to two decades and across administrations, may

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well conclude that there are distinct limits to India's willingness to partner with it on a range of bilateral and multilateral issues. Such an outcome is likely to be costly for the strategic interests of both states. India may find the US unwilling to expend additional costly political capital on a partial and reluctant partner. The United States, for its part, may also conclude that despite dispensing with many of its Cold War misgivings about New Delhi and its persistent efforts to court it, India will nevertheless maintain a certain

distance. Such an upshot might well give the PRC, in concert with its now junior partner, Russia, a freer hand in limiting US influence in Asia and pursuing its revanchist ambitions in the region.

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