

US presses India to back war drive against Russia

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Washington is intensifying pressure on India to line up with the US-NATO war drive against Moscow over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, undermining India's precarious balancing act between its strategic partnership with the United States and its longstanding defence ties with Russia.

India has long maintained close ties with Moscow as well as Washington, claiming it was thus preserving "strategic autonomy" while allying with Washington against China. Despite having secured high-tech US military equipment after being designated a "major defence partner" by Washington, India still substantially depends on Russian military supplies. According to a study by the Stimson Center, 86 percent of Indian military equipment is of Russian origin. Russian technology and material are also crucial for India's civil nuclear program.

And so US State Department spokesman Ned Price addressed India after it abstained in the voting at an emergency session of United National Security Council (UNSC) condemning Russian invasion in Ukraine, during a daily press briefing on Friday. He began, "We share important interests with India. We share important values with India. And we know India has a relationship with Russia that is distinct from the relationship that we have with Russia. Of course, that is okay."

However, Price made clear Washington expects India to toe the US line against Russia: "And again, we have asked every country that has a relationship, and certainly those countries that have leverage, to use that leverage in a constructive way."

The next day, Republican Senator John Cornyn more explicitly expressed "disappointment" over India's abstention in the UNSC vote against Russia. Cornyn is the co-chair of the Senate India Caucus—the US

Senate's only country-specific caucus, founded by Cornyn and then-Senator Hillary Clinton during the Bush administration, pointing to the significance Washington places on its military-strategic partnership with India.

Cornyn said, "Disappointing: India has avoided publicly denouncing Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, as New Delhi tries to balance a strategic relationship with Moscow and its role in an emerging coalition of democracies."

Cornyn advocates close US relations with India. He has campaigned to intensify US military relations with India and to waive sanctions on India over its purchase of Russian S-400 air defence missile system. His comments on the Russian-Ukraine war indicate, however, that Washington could use sanctions to try to force India to support its war drive against Russia.

Writing on February 24 in the US magazine *Foreign Policy*, Michael Kugelman, who directs work on South Asia at the Wilson Center think tank in Washington, said: "India's public statements on the current crisis [Russian-Ukraine war] have so far pleased Russian officials ... But Russian aggression in Ukraine poses major threats to Indian interests, from driving Moscow into Beijing's arms to distracting Washington from countering Chinese power in the Asia-Pacific."

On Sunday, India abstained from a procedural vote at the UNSC to call for a rare special emergency session of the UN General Assembly to discuss the Russian invasion of Ukraine. India joined China and the UAE in abstaining while Russia voted against. As such procedural votes are exempted from the UNSC veto, however, the special session of the UN General Assembly convened accordingly on Monday; a nonbinding resolution denouncing Russian aggression is set to be voted on Wednesday. This is to be grist for the

mill of NATO war propaganda against Russia.

After Sunday's UNSC vote, India's Permanent Representative to the UN T. S. Tirmurti appealed for dialogue and de-escalation to avoid all-out conflict. "It is regrettable that the situation in Ukraine has worsened further since the Council last convened on this matter," Tirmurti said, adding: "There is no other choice but to return to the path of diplomacy and dialogue. ... Dialogue is the only answer to settling differences and disputes, however daunting that may appear at this moment. It is a matter of regret that the path of diplomacy was given up. We must return to it."

However, sections of the Indian ruling elite are beginning to demand that India line up with Washington against Russia. Sashi Tharoor, a senior leader of the opposition Congress party, criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-supremacist government for not denouncing Russia. On Thursday, he tweeted: "So Russia is conducting a 'regime change' operation [in Ukraine]. How long can India, which had consistently opposed such interventions, stay silent?"

In *The Wire*, Susil Aaron criticized India's abstention in the UNSC vote against Russia in an article titled "India's Abstention on Russia's Ukraine Invasion Will Shift Perceptions in Washington." Complaining that "the Modi government underestimates how large Russia looms in the American political imagination," he lamented, "New Delhi has alienated US, Europe and other allies at one go with this vote."

While Modi calls for "dialogue" and tries to balance between Washington and Moscow, the NATO powers are rapidly moving towards war with Russia, using Ukraine as a pretext. In this context, they will not be satisfied with anything less than India's total submission to their anti-Russian campaign.

Over the 30 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy, Washington has systematically worked to establish its domination over all of Eurasia. NATO expansion into Eastern Europe to surround Russia was key to this agenda. Above all, it entailed decades of endless neo-colonial wars, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Libya and Syria, that cost millions of lives.

The development of US-India strategic partnership for nearly two decades under successive Indian governments, both of Modi's Hindu-supremacist

Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) and the Congress, India has become a front-line state for US war preparations against China. Now, moreover, Washington is demanding India line up with it not only against China, but also against Russia.

This exposes the political bankruptcy not only of the BJP and the Congress, but of the Congress party's Stalinist allies. India's principal Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, reacted to the war in Ukraine in a brief Polit Bureau statement, expressing "grave concerns at the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine."

Lamenting that "it is unfortunate that Russia took military action against Ukraine," the CPM pleaded for "an immediate cessation of armed hostilities and the establishment of peace." While criticizing NATO moves for "steadily expanding eastward, contrary to the assurance given to Russia," including moving to integrate Ukraine into NATO, it wrote: "The process of negotiations should be restarted and the earlier agreements reached by both the parties should be adhered to."

What the Stalinists leave out is the growing preparations of the NATO powers for war, driven above all by Washington. This means covering up the danger that the provocations of Washington and its NATO allies could trigger a nuclear Third World War, with deadly consequences for billions worldwide. They aim not to mobilize the international working class but to lull it to sleep, hoping the Russian and Ukrainian capitalist governments will somehow resolve a dispute driven by Washington's targeting of Russia and China.

Contrary to Stalinist claims, the crisis developing over Russia's invasion in Ukraine is not an isolated dispute, but a global imperialist-led drive to war in which the Indian ruling elite is politically complicit. The only way to prevent the eruption of such a war is to build an international anti-war movement of the working class, independent of Stalinist or nationalist parties, and mobilizing workers in India and across Asia in a struggle for socialism



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