

Putin's War Has Brought Xi Factional Trouble

By Srikanth Kondapalli

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The members of China's powerful Politburo Standing Committee generally tend to take a consensual approach on foreign policy issues. But when issues concern Russia (or the Soviet Union earlier), they tend to cause acute differences among them. Putin's war on Ukraine is having the same effect now, just as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) begins its 'two sessions' (parliament and advisory body meetings) and plans to hold its 20th congress later this year. Much of it had to do with the love-hate relationship between the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties, their ideological agreements and differences. The Soviet Union helped to create the CCP in 1921 but also sought to keep it under its thumb. The CCP took the Soviets' help but resented their bid to control it.

In the 1950s, China adopted the Soviet model of development and took its help to build 156 basic industries to modernise. But the CCP also threw out Defence Minister Peng Dehuai in 1959 for being close to Moscow. Senior politburo member Liu Shaoqi was accused of being a "Chinese Khrushchev" and paraded on the streets. In 1989, Zhao Ziyang, the party General Secretary, was accused of being the "Chinese Gorbachev" for siding with students in the Tiananmen Square protests. Yet, interestingly, when Xi Jinping took over as President in 2013, it was to Moscow he made his first foreign visit. The Kremlin even gave Xi a peek into the Russian military's most secretive command and control centre during this visit.

Russian influence in China today is reflected in their semi-alliance relationship, signed in 2001, specifically in Article 9 of the joint statement. It is also reflected in the "multipolar world" campaign they launched against the West's "neo-interventionism" and "coloured revolutions".

The CCP congresses do generally attract high-intensity factional struggles, but in the background of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China's nationalists, globalists, militarists, conservatives, liberals and others are all fanning out to mobilise influence in favour of their own factions. Among these is former President Jiang Zemin's faction – which came under Xi's intense anti-corruption onslaught. This faction has come out with two reports that defy the general consensus.

First was a critical report on February 4 in the Duoweiwang paper, believed to be close to Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong, on India's diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics to protest the participation of Qi Fabao, a PLA soldier who was involved in the death of 20 Indian soldiers in Galwan in June 2020, as an Olympic torchbearer. Earlier, on January 19, it had published "An objective evaluation of Xi Jinping", which was highly critical of Xi's tenure.

These two reports, and the recent silencing of a few security officials such as Sun Lijun, Meng Jianzhu and others, or the defection of Dong Jingwei, have exposed fissures in the CCP. Xi is already under tremendous pressure due to the spread of the Coronavirus from Wuhan to the rest of the world, the continuing tariff and technology wars with the US, and human rights issues in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong. Xi's support to Putin's actions have further complicated CCP struggles.

The Communist Youth League, another powerful faction, previously headed by Hu Jintao and now by Premier Li Keqiang and his deputy Hu Chunhua, has also been active, specifically as Hu Chunhua missed being named a sixth-generation leader in 2017.

Though the sixth plenum of the CCP in November 2021 had glorified Xi, suggesting the possible extension of his rule at the 20th CCP congress, the intensification of factional struggles since has been unnerving.

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Is Unobtrusive Security A Mirage?

By Shri. Sanjay Sahay

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How much have we progressed from the completely obtrusive security in the direction of making it a fully unobtrusive one is a parameter, which a hapless citizen is always looking forward to. Security coming in the way of our day-to-day functioning, is certainly a handicap in the ease of living. Factoring in time for security related checks in large part of our activities also adds a level of strain. How much of it can be handled by easing processes? How much of it can be handled at a certain point and declare the rest of the area to be safe? Is multilevel security, leading to an extremely obtrusive security the result of lack of faith in systems / security protocols put in place. Has the same security system become more robust with the passage of time and led to easing of some controls, while maintaining the same level of security?

With technology making deep inroads into the area of security, the consequent change in the obtrusive environment should have happened, but that does seem to be the case. It looks as menacing as ever or might be more. Technology cannot be used in the manner of gun toting police and defence forces in a war zone. It is high time that thought should go in for easing out the security processes, where it is cumbersome for the person, who has to face it. He might be a traveller or an office employee or a person going to a critical infrastructure on a regular basis. Or can the load on access control be brought down, by having more such utilities?

Conversely, the entry or access at one point can take care of multilevel hassle through the whole process; an air passenger from the entrance gate to the entrance of aircraft. Can security protocols of different agencies be ironed out, when they are working for the same purpose? Because of lack of understanding of the whole process, and what the other party has done in the same exercise, everyone wants to err on the side of caution. But that caution is creating a nuisance to the person who is facing it. Can he be eased out of that predicament? Can facial recognition become one method of access control, across the location? The merging of a large number of requirements with one access control criteria can be very helpful. If two essential tech based requirements can be integrated into one, facial and number plate recognition, that itself would mean a lot of relief.

Think of a big commercial, hospitality and entertainment area controlled only at the perimeter, that too with the least amount of human intervention as possible. Once you are in and you have all the freedom to move around, wherever you want, depending on your requirements. Will it not get more customers and will they not be more satisfied ones? Security remains uncompromised, transforming into a seamless one; dynamic and real time, while the technologies work for you. Computer vision in a variety of ways does the job; face, number plate, loitering, objects displacement, sensor triggered electro mechanical devices et al. Data and business logic work in tandem to create the digital rules, to make it run seamlessly and to react and respond as the case may be.

TECHNOLOGY CAN FOR THE FIRST MAKE USER EXPERIENCE PLEASURABLE, WHATEVER MIGHT THE NATURE OF ACTIVITY, SECURITY BEING UNOBTRUSIVELY INTEGRATED.

The Ukraine War Could Transform India's Military Preparedness

By Dhruva Jaishankar

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India's position on the Russia's invasion of Ukraine has elicited a surprising amount of scrutiny. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, India along with the United Arab Emirates chose to abstain on resolutions against Russia. At the UN General Assembly, India was the most noticeable democracy among the 35 countries to abstain – even the UAE voted to censure Moscow – while Russia could only rustle up four other countries to support its position. Unlike, say, Singapore, India has also not thrown its support behind international sanctions led by the United States and its allies.

There are good reasons for all this. The most immediate was that about 20,000 Indian citizens were caught in the crossfire, and Russian cooperation was needed to ensure their safe extraction. Another important factor is India's continued dependence on Russia for defence imports. These include maintenance and spares for front-line Su-30MKI aircraft, cooperation on nuclear-powered submarines and jointly developed BrahMos hypersonic missiles, and the acquisition of S-400 ballistic missile defence system and new frigates. Beyond that, India had in the past expressed some sympathy for Russia's concerns about NATO expansion.

But since the outbreak of hostilities, India's position on the conflict has also evolved. This is most apparent in the increasingly critical tenor of the explanation of its UN votes.

Diplomatically, India has reached out to both Moscow and Kyiv, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking to President Volodymyr Zelensky at least twice. The leaders of the Quad – involving the United States, Japan, Australia, and India – have met virtually, with Ukraine on the agenda and mentioned in their joint readout. India has also provided some humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

The reasons for this shift are unclear, but several factors might account for it. Russia's difficulties in the field may have called into question its leadership's decision-making and the effectiveness of Russian equipment and planning. The danger to Indian citizens in Ukraine may also have hardened Indian opinion against Moscow. And the broad unanimity and severity of Western sanctions have certainly made a strong statement of intent, with potentially far-reaching consequences.

Notwithstanding its immediate positioning, India is going to find its partnership with Russia difficult to sustain over the long run.

At this point, some combination of five outcomes is possible.

One, Russia "wins," resulting in a Ukrainian government in exile, a military occupation, and further international isolation. But as the United States found in Iraq and Afghanistan, such a long-term military commitment in a large country will be costly. Two, Ukraine is administratively divided: a new iron curtain falls across Europe.

Three, a permanent ceasefire is negotiated, resulting in some combination of territorial exchange and political commitments. Even then, many sanctions will remain in place and Europe will continue to diversify its energy imports away from Russia.

A fourth possibility is that Russia and Ukraine become locked in a brutal and long-term war of attrition, with potentially serious escalatory effects. And five, Russia "loses" by not achieving its military objectives and withdrawing as a consequence of economic fragility and domestic opposition.

Noticeably, in none of these scenarios does Russia emerge stronger.

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Lend-Lease 2022: How The US Can Back Ukraine Against Putin

By Thomas S. Warrick

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The failed effort to get Polish MiG-29 jets into the hands of Ukrainian pilots highlights the need for the United States to take calculated risks in the struggle to stop Russian President Vladimir Putin. With Ukraine still in desperate need of more military aid, it is now time to revive the Lend-Lease program signed into law eighty-one years ago on March 11, 1941.

Under Lend-Lease, US President Franklin Roosevelt "loaned" or gave military materiel to the United Kingdom when Britain stood alone in Europe against Adolf Hitler. Congress should immediately pass pending bipartisan legislation, S.3522, to authorize Lend-Lease arrangements for any non-nuclear weapons systems US President Joe Biden determines Ukraine can use to defend itself.

Ukraine's need for the MiG-29 fighters was urgent. Russia's February 24 invasion has stalled in part because Russia has so far failed to establish air superiority. While the number of MiG-29s in Poland would not have been enough to defeat Russia's far larger air force, the longer Ukraine holds out, the greater the probability—still small today—that Putin's backers in the Kremlin may force him to end the war.

However, the Poles were reluctant to transfer the fighters to Ukraine directly. They presumably feared that if they did so, Russia would retaliate by attacking Polish cities. While this would constitute an attack against all NATO members under article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Warsaw has a residual nervousness that the United States will be reluctant to mobilize for all-out war if a Polish city gets attacked.

By declining to offer the Ukrainians the MiG-29s from a US airbase, Biden recognized that there is a greater risk in transferring a highly visible weapons platform like the MiG-29 to Ukraine compared to Javelin or Stinger missiles.

Nevertheless, Biden will need to take some calculated risks to defeat Putin's plans.

Franklin Roosevelt took similar calculated risks with US "neutrality" in July 1940 when he transferred fifty old destroyers to Great Britain. In March 1941, Lend-Lease passed with a narrow congressional majority, allowing Roosevelt to replenish Britain's stocks that were depleted during both Nazi Germany's defeat of France and the months of unrestricted German submarine warfare against the convoys Britain needed to stay alive.

A Lend-Lease program to counter Putin's war should focus, like Roosevelt did, on what the West has on hand that Ukraine needs most urgently. Three NATO nations operate Soviet-era air defense systems like the S-300 that have proven devastatingly effective in Ukrainian hands. Every one of the S-300s should be sent as quickly as possible to Ukraine.

The United States should backfill these systems by selling NATO allies state-of-the-art replacements so that no aircraft or missile can threaten Central European NATO cities. In addition to high-tech equipment like anti-aircraft and unmanned aerial systems, there is also an urgent need for the basics that were the hallmark of the original Lend-Lease program: medical supplies, mobile hospitals, secure tactical radios, night-vision equipment, uniforms suitable for Ukraine's weather, and equipment that citizen-soldiers can learn to use very quickly.

The campaign to thwart Putin's invasion needs to use many of the elements of Russia's own hybrid warfare strategy, which combines conventional warfare with political warfare, irregular warfare, cyberattacks, disinformation, and other means to achieve strategic victory. Invoking the 1941 Lend-Lease program in 2022 is a powerful symbol of political warfare for three reasons.

The first is to counter Russia's efforts to divide the American people. As divided as the United States is today, there is probably as much if not more bipartisan support now for a Lend-Lease bill to help Ukraine against Russia than Roosevelt had in 1941. Lend-Lease passed with a vote of 260-165 in the House and 60-31 in the Senate. We could see even greater unity today on a Lend-Lease bill.

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Besides China, Putin Has Another Potential De-dollarization Partner in Asia

By Zongyuan Zoe Liu

Russia's de-dollarization efforts mean that China and India can help Russia skirt sanctions by jointly building an alternative global financial system, but they risk facing severe consequences on their own financial entities.

Within two weeks of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the United States and its allies have collectively imposed a series of sanctions to isolate Russia's financial system. Recent stringent Western sanctions are a stress test of Russia's de-dollarization initiatives and an emerging nondollar financial system. Besides de-SWIFTing Russian banks, Western sanctions have targeted the assets of the Russian central bank and sovereign wealth funds, the Russian Ministry of Finance, and Russian oligarchs. These punitive measures effectively wiped out the thirty-year post-Cold War Western financial engagement with Russia. I have discussed a Russia-China de-dollarization partnership in the Foreign Affairs article titled *The Anti-Dollar Axis*. It seems that Putin's Russia has more partners for de-dollarization in Asia, such as India.

So far, Putin has not been completely isolated, at least in Asia. Asian countries' response to President Putin's war in Ukraine has been far from unified. Japan and South Korea, two key U.S. allies in East Asia, have slapped severe sanctions on Russian entities. Although not a treaty ally, Singapore has also imposed sanctions on Russia. In contrast, the Philippines, a U.S. treaty ally, has decided to proceed with its purchase of 17 Russian military transport helicopters worth \$249 million. India, a major U.S. ally, has neither condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine nor imposed sanctions, although it abstained from the UN Security Council vote. Similar to India, China has not called Russia's military action against Ukraine an invasion but abstained from the UN Security Council vote. China's abstaining rather than casting a veto has been considered a diplomatic victory by the West.

An unintended consequence of Western punitive sanctions could be strengthening a Russia-China de-dollarization partnership. Joining such a partnership may also appeal to India. India has reportedly expressed interest in jointly exploring with Russia and China an alternative to SWIFT that would allow it to trade with countries under U.S. sanctions. While India currently does not have its own domestic financial messaging system, it plans to link a service currently under development with Russia's SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages, Russia's equivalent of SWIFT), which could connect with China's CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System, the Chinese version of SWIFT). Once materialized, the linked systems would cover most parts of the world. The global coverage of this alternative system could appeal to countries that are either vulnerable to U.S. sanctions or discontent about the U.S. dollar's dominance. China's CIPS currently has three direct participants in Europe and none in the United States.

Although India has not been an enthusiastic advocate for such a de-dollarization partnership, it has developed ways to trade with Russia while bypassing sanctions. India has been exploring a rupee-ruble trade arrangement with Russia following Western sanctions on Russia. India is no stranger to such an exchange arrangement. In the 1953 Indo-Soviet Trade Agreement, India and the Soviet Union inked a similar exchange scheme in which the two sides agreed to settle all bilateral payments in rupees. Although this Soviet-era arrangement ceased to exist in 1992, the Russian state and the Indian state have been developing new mechanisms, such as the use of rupee debt for joint investment to promote Russian-Indian strategic partnership. Between 2014 and 2019, bilateral trade between India and Russia settled in rupee-ruble exchanges surged by five times during Prime Minister Modi's tenure, increasing from 6 percent of the total bilateral trade to 30 percent.

India and Russia have already arranged a rupee-ruble exchange mechanism to settle Russian arms sales to India to avoid sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). India is the biggest customer of Russian arms. According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, between 2016 and 2020, Russia accounted for about 49.4 percent of Indian arms imports, whereas India consumed about 23 percent of Russian arms exports. In 2019, Russia and India agreed to settle India's purchase of more than \$5 billion worth of Russian S-400 air defense systems through a rupee-ruble transfer precisely to avoid sanctions under CAATSA.

In 2021, the two countries abandoned the dollar when conducting arms sales. Rosoboronexport, Russia's sole state intermediary for arms exports and the primary target of CAATSA's sanctions, has almost entirely moved away from dollar settlement. Anatoly G. Punchuk, deputy director of the Russian Federal Service for military-technical cooperation, observed that the "dollar is no longer the universal currency for trade in defense."

Other actors besides governments have an incentive to develop alternative mechanisms to bypass sanctions. Corporate entities want to hedge the risk as well. Russian companies that are not directly impacted by U.S. sanctions have also been actively seeking to develop alternative payment mechanisms as a hedge against the dominance of the U.S. dollar. Since 2018, Russian state-owned miner Alrosa PJSC, the world's largest producer of rough diamonds in carat terms, has successfully tested ruble payment with foreign clients from India and China.

Russia's best hope is that its de-dollarization mechanisms developed with China and India could provide immunization against Western sanctions. China and India now both have their Russian dilemma. Should they choose to help Russia skirt sanctions, their financial entities will face severe consequences of secondary sanctions in addition to reputational damage if exposed. Should they choose not to provide Russia with relief, the bankruptcy of Putin's government could cause a major setback to their attempt to build an alternative global financial system. A failure to save Russia from Western sanctions would suggest that the aspirational de-dollarization partnership cannot withstand the stress test imposed by the United States and its allies.

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Nation is Indebted to:

Dr. Sruti Mohapatra

The 'Crusader in a Wheelchair'



From spurning a career in the Indian Civil Services to becoming a leading crusader for disability rights, Dr. Sruti Mohapatra's relentless struggle and never-say-die-attitude have been a source of inspiration for all those fighting odds to make it big in life. It was 1987 and she had everything going for her at the age of 23, but a major accident that turned her life upside down. After prolonged treatment she returned on a wheelchair, with her body paralysed from neck below for life. She lost her job and marriage but did not give up on life, supported by a brave family.

She let nothing stand in her way, the initial reluctance of university professors, humiliation of wetting her clothes on many occasions, being stared at, having to ask for help to all, and much more to get the MPhil and PhD degrees. Thereafter, she began to train civil services aspirants. By 2009, she had trained over 300 civil service aspirants now working in various positions in government, banks, and other services.

Amid the anger of rejection and humiliation, she joined DPI, started Swabhiman and started working towards empowering persons with disabilities and her efforts has resulted in many positive changes in Odisha and India including policy changes, increasing public awareness on the issue of disability and working towards accessible cities.

To initiate an inclusive platform for children with disabilities and those without, she started a project called Anjali. The festival has brought together around 40,000 children (disabled and non-disabled).

The crusader of disability rights is associated with many forums and is a member in various committees. She has won 69 awards. She also gives motivational speeches at various institutions and corporate houses.

President Ramnath Kovind conferred Nari Shakti Puraskar to Sruti Mohapatra on the occasion of International Women's Day for the year 2021 recently at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. She has received this prestigious award for her invincible spirit and distinctive contributions towards the upliftment and empowerment of Divyangjan. Sharing her experience after felicitation by the President, Sruti said, "I am elated that for the first time, my hard work has been recognised at the national level". Indeed a great moment in the life of Sruti Mohapatra.

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