

Europe is Looming Larger than ever in India's strategic calculus

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The Ukraine war has shown that India needs strong commercial and security partnerships with Europe that stand on their own merit and bring the many synergies between them into active play.

With the horrific war in Ukraine showing no signs of ending, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Berlin, Copenhagen, and Paris this week could give us a glimpse of India's post-Russian strategic future in Europe. As Russia, isolated by unprecedented Western sanctions, deepens its alliance with China, Europe has begun to loom larger than ever before in India's strategic calculus.

Last week, the focus was on engagement with collective Europe. In her visit to Delhi, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von Der Leyn, unveiled the new contours of the EU's strategic partnership with India by launching the India-Europe Trade and Technology Council. This is the EU's second such council. Last year, the EU signed a similar agreement with the US. This week, the focus is on India's key bilateral partnerships with European majors — Germany and France — as well as a critical northern corner of Europe, the so-called Norden that punches way above its small size. Modi's tour should give Delhi a better appreciation of the new mood in Europe that has been shaken by the Russian aggression. The PM will have an opportunity to find ways to limit some of the negative regional and global consequences of the war and explore the emerging possibilities for stronger cooperation with key European countries.

In Berlin, the PM will have an opportunity to commiserate with the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz — both the leaders have problems coping with President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. Having built up a significant engagement with Moscow over the decades, India and Germany are under pressure to disentangle from the Russian connection. Modi and Scholz could also exchange notes on how their long-standing illusions about China came crashing down. Both had bet that trading with China will moderate Beijing's behaviour, both are having second thoughts now thanks to Xi Jinping's muscular foreign policy.

In Copenhagen, the bilateral talks with Danish leadership are about Delhi finally finding time for the smaller European countries. In the last few years, Delhi has learnt that every one of them can contribute significantly to India's development.

The Nordic summit hosted by Denmark underlines India's discovery of the various sub-regions of Europe — from the Baltics to the Balkans and from Iberia to Mittleuropa. The Nordic Five — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden — have a population of barely 25 million but their GDP at \$1.8 trillion is greater than that of Russia.

In Paris — the enduring engine room of strategic Europe — Modi will have a chance to reflect with President Emmanuel Macron on the implications of the war in Ukraine for Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. Macron's return to power offers a good moment for Modi to imagine the next phase in bilateral relations. The two leaders laid the foundation for a strong strategic partnership in 2018.

Coming back to the war in Ukraine that will shadow Modi during the trip to Europe, there is much surprise in India at the level of international interest in India's strategic ties to Moscow. But the Western debate on Germany is even harsher. Berlin is tied far more deeply to Russia than India. Germany's annual trade with Russia is about \$60 billion while India's is at \$10 bn. Beyond trade numbers, Berlin's strategic dependence on Moscow is serious. Germany relies heavily on Russian natural gas, while Russian arms dominate India's weaponry. To be sure, Berlin and Delhi don't like the Western pressures to reduce ties with Russia.

Irrespective of their Russian preferences, Germany and India have no option but to live with circumstances over which they have no control. Expansion of India-Germany bilateral ties is part of that adaptation by Delhi and Berlin. In Germany, the Indian delegation is unlikely to be distracted by Germany's soaring rhetoric on global norms. The Social Democrats and the Greens, who dominate the current ruling coalition, are particularly prone to this. This is not very different from Delhi's righteous moralpolitik in the early decades after independence.

What really drives Germany is commerce. Making India an attractive new destination for German capital, now under pressure to reduce its exposure to Russian and Chinese markets, should be the highest priority for PM Modi. Germany is one of India's oldest economic partners, but the full potential of the commercial relationship has never been realised. If there ever was a moment to think big about the future of German trade and investment in India, it is now.

Germany is not the only European country shaken to the core by Russia's invasion. The Nordic world, which shares frontiers with Russia over land as well as in the waters of the Arctic, is even more rattled by the war. If Putin's war has compelled Berlin to end its resistance to larger defence expenditures, two members of the Nordic five — Sweden and Finland — are now rushing to end their long-standing neutral status and join NATO. The other three — Denmark, Iceland, and Norway — have been founding members of NATO, set up in 1949.

Listening to the Nordic leaders might help Delhi appreciate the deeply-held fears about Russia among Moscow's smaller neighbours. And there is more complexity to European history and security than the Indian narrative that Russia was "provoked" to launch the war on Ukraine.

In Copenhagen, Modi would want to build on the unique bilateral green strategic partnership with Denmark. Modi's first Nordic summit in 2017 produced a framework for an ambitious bilateral agenda on a range of issues—including technological innovation and sustainable development. The Denmark summit will review the progress and expand its ambit.

On his way back, Modi is stopping over in Paris to set the tone for the next phase in the strategic partnership with France. Modi might have hoped that Macron's bold effort at avoiding war in Ukraine and developing a political framework for the peaceful integration of Russia into the European order would succeed. But Putin had other plans. For some time now it has been said that France is India's "new Russia" — Delhi's most important strategic partner. In recent years, France has emerged as a strong defender of India's interests in the United Nations Security Council and a regional ally in the vast Indo-Pacific theatre. France has also been a major supplier of advanced arms to India.

But Delhi and Paris have been some distance away from demonstrating full possibilities of their defence partnership. France has a critical role in making a success of India's ambitious current plans to expand domestic production of weapons with greater participation of private and foreign capital. Can Modi and Macron push their bureaucracies to come up with a major project for defence industrial collaboration? Can they get going on the development of a fighter jet engine in India? And can Delhi and Paris match India's strategic collaboration with Russia on maritime nuclear propulsion?

There is no doubt that Western Europe has moved from the margins to the centre of India's foreign and security policies. The crisis in Ukraine, which has shattered the regional order that emerged in 1991, intensifies the imperatives for deeper strategic cooperation between India and its European partners.

In the colonial age, India looked at Europe through the British eyes. The so-called Great Game was about keeping Britain's European rivals — including France, Russia, and Germany — away from the Subcontinent. In the post-colonial age, India flipped the paradigm by aligning with Russia to limit European influence in the region. After the Ukraine war, a new paradigm is beckoning India — strong commercial and security partnerships with Europe that stand on their own merit and bring the many synergies between them into active play.

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IN THE NEWS

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Why in News?

- ➔ The organization that is being discussed the most in Russia and Ukraine dispute is the organization NATO (NATO).
- ➔ Its role is being discussed and it is being said that NATO is running away from its duties.
- ➔ Most Europeans agree that NATO did not do enough to prevent Russia from invading Ukraine.

What is NATO?

- ➔ It was created in the year 1949 between 28 European countries and 2 North American countries.
- ➔ NATO aims to guarantee freedom and security to its member states through political and military means and to prevent conflict between countries through cooperation on defense and security related issues. It was built after the Second World War.
- ➔ Its headquarter is in Brussels (Belgium).

What is NATO's operational area?

- ➔ An attack on any one country of NATO would be an attack on the entire organization. That is, all the countries of NATO will respond to an attack on one's country.
- ➔ NATO does not have its own army or any other defense source, but all the member countries of NATO will contribute with their respective forces on the basis of mutual understanding. Only NATO member states can take advantage of its protection. NATO will have no accountability to other countries that are not members of NATO.
- ➔ Along with this, another special thing is also that NATO is accountable for defending its member countries from any external aggression, but if civil or any other war happens in any member country then NATO will have zero participation in it.

How is NATO funded?

- ➔ The funding of NATO is done only by its member countries and if we talk about the funding of NATO, then America is called its backbone because America gives three-fourths of its budget.
- ➔ The combined military expenditure of all NATO members in the year 2020 was 57% of the total expenditure of the world.
- ➔ The members agreed that they aim to reach a target defense spending of at least 2% of their GDP by 2024.

NATO member

- ➔ Currently NATO has 30 member states, with North Macedonia becoming the latest member to join the alliance in the year 2020.
- ➔ However, in 1949 the original members of NATO were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

Q. Consider the following statements in the context of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):-

1. It is a military alliance, which was established on 4 April 1949.
2. NATO was formed after the Second World War.
3. It currently consists of 28 member states, with North Macedonia becoming the latest member to join the alliance in the year 2020.

Which of the above statements is /are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2
- (c) 2 and 3
- (d) 3 only

Expected Question (Mains Exams)

Q. For the first time since independence, the interests of India are now merging with the interests of Europe. While highlighting the factors shaping the transformation of India's relations with Europe, discuss what is the significance of India's position on the Russia-Ukraine war for EU relations? (250 Words)

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.