

Defusing Ukraine Crisis: Need for Japan-India Coordination

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Abstract- Traditionally, Japan-India relations have been relatively warm. There is, however, little convergence between the two democracies on tackling the current Ukraine crisis. In the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Japan has fully aligned itself with the United States (US) and its allies. Tokyo has denounced Moscow's aggression while providing Kyiv with economic and military aid. On its part, India has expressed concern over the humanitarian cost of the war but has not condemned the invasion. In the backdrop of US policy reversals on Ukraine and its economic overtures to China, the two countries must harmonise their foreign policies. It has become evident under President Donald J. Trump that even close US partners will face economic coercion if their decisions diverge from Washington's strategic and economic calculus. This raises the central research question: Why do Tokyo and New Delhi, despite sharing common strategic interests, adopt a divergent stance on the Ukraine crisis? The current paper identifies the reason for the divergence in the approaches of Japan and India. It also explores the possibility of coordination between the two nations. The paper argues that this divergence stems from competing domestic and historical pressures that override shared grand-strategic interests.

Keywords: Ukraine crisis; Indo-Pacific; India and Japan; China; Cooperation, Grand strategy

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Introduction

The paper explains this divergence in policymaking not as a contradiction of shared interests, but as the outcome of competing pressures operating at different levels of policymaking. The study adopts a comparative framework examining how strategic convergence, shared foreign-policy priorities, and historical legacies shape policy outcomes. While Japan and India may share broad strategic goals, their foreign policies may diverge when domestic political processes, historical legacies, and diplomatic priorities influence strategic preferences differently. The central argument is that shared strategic interests create pressure for coordination. However, policy divergence emerges when domestic and foreign priorities reshape how those interests are interpreted and translated into action. In other words, convergence at the level of grand strategy does not guarantee convergence at the level of policymaking. This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How does strategic convergence between Japan and India operate within the broader Indo-Pacific framework?
2. Why do Japan and India diverge on certain policy issues despite having a shared strategic outlook?
3. What policy measures could improve coordination between Japan and India to support their long-term strategic interests better?

Although there is a growing body of literature on Japan's and India's responses to the Ukraine crisis, most of it is journalistic rather than systematic academic analysis. Moreover, existing scholarship has not sufficiently examined the comparative policy divergence between the two countries despite their shared strategic goals in the Indo-Pacific. Most studies address the crisis in a descriptive or single-country manner, rather than analysing how Japan and India, operating from different historical and strategic contexts, have arrived at distinct policy positions. As the crisis is still unfolding, there remains a clear gap in the literature on how to systematically compare and explain these positions while accounting for both the historical origins of the conflict and the distinct foreign policy positions of the two nations. This paper addresses this gap by offering a systematic comparative analysis of Japan's and India's policy divergence, grounded in a multi-level foreign-policy framework.

Research Method

This paper employs a comparative foreign-policy framework examining multiple levels of analysis. The methodology is qualitative and document-based, relying on primary sources like official government statements (Kantei, MEA/GOI, White House, MFA Russia), declassified diplomatic memos, and presidential/ministerial speeches. The paper has also referred to academic journals, and think-tank analyses. It has especially focussed on news report because of the contemporary

nature of the crisis at hand. The theoretical framework argues that shared grand-strategic interests do not guarantee convergence at the policymaking level, where domestic pressures and historical legacies intervene.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals a clear divergence in Tokyo and New Delhi's response to the Ukrainian crisis. As discussed in the sections that follow, Japan has taken a strongly pro-Western stance, committing over billions of dollars in aid to Ukraine and imposing sanctions on Russia. India, by contrast, maintained strategic neutrality, abstaining from UN resolutions, increasing Russian oil purchases, and limiting its engagement to non-military humanitarian aid. This divergence is rooted in each country's historical ties with Russia. Japan's strained relations over the disputed Northern Territories reinforced its Western alignment. Meanwhile, India's close-knit ties with Moscow has shaped its cautious stance. Pertinently, as elaborated later in the subsequent sections, the imposition of tariff barriers by Washington under President Trump nations has made Japan-India coordination a necessity.

The Indo-Pacific Scenario: Growing Convergence

Since the end of the Cold War, Japan has been increasing its cultural and diplomatic footprint in South Asia. Today, Japan and India share similar strategic and security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region. The two nations have upgraded their bilateral relations to 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' (MOFA (Japan), 2015). In the early phase of the conflict, former Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio stressed the need for deeper coordination with India and other countries, grounded in a spirit of co-creation (Kantei, 2023). In March 2023, during his speech at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in New Delhi, Kishida highlighted the centrality of New Delhi in Japan's strategic calculus. He considered India as indispensable to Tokyo's New Plan for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) (Kantei, 2023).

Herein, Kishida framed Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a strategic instrument for the next decade and set out Japan's policy direction accordingly. He further stated that Japan would introduce "offer-type" cooperation, establish a new "private capital mobilisation-type" grant-aid scheme to encourage private capital mobilization, and advance reforms to the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) Law (Kantei, 2023).

In March 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that the India-Japan relationship is based on the two countries' "shared democratic values, and respect for the rule of law in the international arena." (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2023). He acknowledged the need to strengthen this partnership to promote "peace, prosperity, and stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

(Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2023). Prime Minister Modi also affirmed India's commitment to a "free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific" during a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) summit in May 2023 at Hiroshima (Modi, 2023).

Ukraine Crisis: Divergent Trajectories

The lack of convergence between the two nations on the Ukrainian front, however, is notable. The Russian invasion of Ukraine saw Japan adopt a West-centric stance. Tokyo condemned Moscow's invasion, supplying Ukraine with military equipment (Singh, 2024). In February 2023, Japan announced it would provide approximately \$5.5 billion in financial support, including \$900 million in humanitarian assistance, to Ukraine (Yamaguchi, 2023). A month later, Tokyo announced an additional \$470 million bilateral grant aid and \$30 million for non-lethal defence equipment assistance to Kyiv (Kantei, 2023). Japan sent an additional \$471 million to the World Bank in Support of Ukraine Relief Efforts (World Bank, 2023).

In December 2023, Tokyo pledged another \$4.5 billion, including \$1 billion in humanitarian aid (Yamaguchi, 2023). By 2024, Japan had committed over \$10 billion to the Ukrainian cause (Kaizuka, 2024). In February 2024, Tokyo signed a full range of agreements with Kyiv to rebuild the latter from the war damage it sustained from the Russian invasion (The Yomiuri Shimbun, 2024). The agreements draw on Japan's extensive experience in disaster recovery and reconstruction, making it a natural partner for Ukraine's long-term infrastructural development and economic recovery.

This has continued under Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae. In December 2025, Takaichi announced \$20 billion in aid for Ukraine, including about \$6 billion in financial support (Kantei, 2026). Her government has also delivered generators and other essential relief items to support Ukraine through the winter. Like Kishida, she has reaffirmed Japan's support for Ukraine, aiming to reinforce the country's social and economic resilience through public-private partnership (Kantei, 2026). Both countries have displayed strong political interest in senior-level diplomatic exchanges. This includes a possible visit by Prime Minister Takaichi to Kyiv and a reciprocal trip by President Zelenskyy to Japan (Dominguez & Johnson, 2026).

As for India, in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, India sent 15 consignments of humanitarian aid, including "medicines, medical equipment, blankets, tents, tarpaulin, solar lamps, dignity kits, sleeping mats, and diesel generator sets" to Kyiv in 2024 (Haidar, 2024). New Delhi has expressed concern over the humanitarian cost (especially with regards to the Bucha massacre) of the invasion. However, it has fallen short of condemning or even calling it an "invasion,"

abstaining from all UN resolutions critical of the Russian invasion (Haidar & Peri, 2024). New Delhi has not sent any minister to Kyiv. It increased oil purchases from Russia and did not invite Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to address the G-20 in 2023 (Sharma, 2023; Silverstein, 2025).

The foregoing analysis suggests that closer coordination between the two countries has become strategically necessary. The US, under President Trump's leadership, is relentlessly pursuing its own economic and strategic goals. The performative berating of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office, as well as the signing of a deal with China to secure critical minerals, relax retaliation against key US firms, and reduce select tariffs in exchange for Chinese concessions on rare earths and fentanyl, are examples of this (The White House, 2025a) (The White House, 2025b). At the same time, Washington has imposed some of the most severe tariffs on India, with cumulative duties on many Indian exports approaching 50 percent, and locked Japan into a 15 percent tariff regime focused on autos and related goods, all framed as "reciprocal" corrections to foreign barriers rather than costs to the alliance (The White House, 2025c) (The White House, 2025e). This suggests that even close allies are vulnerable to American diktats if their policies differ from Washington's. This indicates that India and Japan cannot rely solely on American rhetorical commitment to shared principles. To engage the US, they must increase their own coordination on supply chains and vital minerals and strengthen regional security cooperation.

Japan-Russia Strains

The divergence on the Ukrainian question can be attributed to the relations Tokyo and New Delhi have with Moscow. Japan-Russia ties have long been strained over a chain of islands, namely Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai islet group. They are called the Northern Territories in Japan and the Southern Kurils in Russia. Tokyo maintains that the erstwhile USSR illegally seized the islands during the Second World War (Kimura, 2016).

In 2010 and 2012, Tokyo protested against repeated visits by senior Russian officials to the disputed islands, including by then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (Dyomkin, 2012). In 2015, Kishida even postponed a planned trip to Russia as Japan's foreign minister (Harding, 2015). In July 2021, Tokyo protested against Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's visit to the Kuril Islands (claimed by Japan as the Northern Territories) (Litvinova, 2021).

Kishida had condemned the Russian-led invasion, stating, "The world is now witnessing unbelievable aggression by an authoritarian state that is trampling on international law and humanity. We are shocked at the sudden collapse of the peace and order upon which all activities are premised" (Kantei, 2022).

Moscow has made its disapproval of Tokyo's diplomatic stance well-known. In December 2023, when rumours of Japanese arms supply to Ukraine were running

rife, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova warned against it, declaring that there would be "grave consequences." (Reuters, 2023). In March 2024, Russia's ambassador to Japan, Nikolai Nozdrev, similarly warned Tokyo of "severe consequences" if Japan attempted to arm Ukrainian forces further (Reuters, 2024).

In January 2025, Japan froze assets and banned exports from various Russian military-related entities suspected of aiding sanctions evasion (経済産業省, 2025). Moscow responded by imposing entry bans on several high-profile Japanese officials, including Minister Takeshi Iwaya (Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации, 2025). In turn, Minister Iwaya stated, "The resumption of the Northern Four Islands exchanges and visitation program is our top priority, especially gravesite visits, and we will continue to call for the resumption of this project strongly" (外務省, 2025). He clarified that Japanese sanctions were solely a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, calling out Moscow's attempt to blame Japan for the resumption of the Ukraine crisis. Tokyo's sanctions seem to have further complicated the dispute over the Northern Territories.

In an attempt to align Japan with international efforts to curtail Russia's war funding, the Kantei announced additional sanctions against Moscow in September (外務省, 2025). They were aimed at freezing assets of additional Russian individuals and entities, while lowering the price cap on Russian-origin crude oil from \$60 to \$47.60 per barrel (外務省, 2025). These actions were intended to adversely impact the Russian economy, which is heavily reliant on oil exports. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zakharova explicitly stated Moscow's displeasure over the newly announced sanctions, calling them "unfriendly" and ominously stating that they "will not go unanswered" (Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации, 2025).

Indo-Russian Bonhomie

Relations between New Delhi and Moscow have been warm for a long time. S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India, reaffirmed at the Munich Security Conference that "Russia has never hurt our interests" (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2024). India is heavily reliant on Russian military hardware. Russian T-90s and T-72s have been the backbone of the Indian Army since Soviet times. Russia has supplied arms worth \$13 billion to India over the past five years (Reuters, 2023). India today awaits the delivery of around \$3 billion worth of arms shipments from Russia. This includes the S-400 Triumf surface-to-air (SAM) missile system, Admiral Grigorovich Project 1135.6M frigates, and the Project 971 'Akula' (Schuka-B)-class nuclear-powered submarine (Bedi, 2023).

New Delhi may also bear in mind that there is no point throwing its weight behind Ukraine's counter-offensive against Russia. Reports are that the Ukrainian

counter-offensives against the Russian invasion of February 2022 have so far been a colossal failure. The Ukrainian army has made only limited gains in the so-called "grey zone", the fiercely contested strip of land ahead of the first line of Russian defences (Mate, 2023). In 2023, former Ukrainian military commander-in-chief General Valerii Zaluzhnyi alleged that Kyiv had received only a fewdequate arms from the West to defend itself against the Russian invasion (The Economist, 2023).

On the contrary, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stated in August of the same year, "We are seeing Ukraine continue to take territory on a methodical, systematic basis" (Ignatius, 2023). However, the ground realities seemed far different. It has been well documented that Kyiv is no match for Moscow militarily. Russia has a 5:1 numerical and capability advantage (Gady & Kofman, 2024). The Russians can mobilise a much larger army than Ukraine. They hold a substantial advantage in artillery, the most important weapon in Russia's attritional war with Ukraine (Mearsheimer, 2023).

At the Munich Security Conference in February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine needed more weapons, particularly artillery and long-range weapons. He warned that if Ukraine were left alone, "Russia will destroy us" (Ostiller, 2024). Russian strikes have significantly pressured Kyiv's defences, destroying its energy facilities and other essential infrastructure. Numerous reports suggest that Ukraine has faced shortfalls in the supply of critical defensive systems.

President Trump's criticism of the Modi government was also prompted by New Delhi's purported bonhomie with Moscow. Trump alleged that India was bolstering Russia's warmaking capabilities in the recent Ukrainian conflict. Washington's simultaneous imposition of tariffs on both India and Japan undermines the goodwill that the two countries had nurtured with the U.S. Trump has argued that the sanctions were required since India's oil purchases indirectly subsidised Russia's military operations.

Geopolitical Alignments: Implications for Japan and India

The divergence between Tokyo and New Delhi over the Ukrainian issue is detrimental to the interests of both nations. The American overtures to China highlight how precarious the strategic environment has become for India and Japan. Trump's public criticism of Zelenskyy revealed that he sympathizes with Russia's position, even if he has imposed a 50% tariff on India. It arguably reflects Washington's lack of commitment to its allies. In the Oval Office confrontation, Trump repeatedly told Zelenskyy that Ukraine had "no cards," was "not winning," and should accept a ceasefire on US terms. At the same time, Vice President J.D. Vance castigated him as "disrespectful" and demanded gratitude (The White House, 2025a). Vance's conduct demonstrated that the Trump administration would pressure and humiliate a frontline wartime ally if it did not follow

Washington's preferred pathway to "peace" (The White House, 2025a). At the same time, Trump struck a deal with Xi Jinping in which China suspended expansive new export controls on rare earths, relaxed retaliatory measures against US firms, and commitment to large, multi-year purchases of US agricultural products in exchange for only partial and time-limited US tariff relief. This arrangement secures critical inputs and market access for American businesses while preserving the leverage of a standing reciprocal tariff (The White House, 2025b).

For India and Japan, this is exacerbated by Washington's own "reciprocal" economic coercion, despite the fact that both countries continue to have strained relations with China. India faces additional US tariffs of up to 50% on numerous exports, and trade talks have been stalled due to US concerns over India's tariffs, non-tariff obstacles, and links with Russia (The White House, 2025c) (The White House, 2025d). Japan, meanwhile, has been folded into a "massive" trade agreement that fixes US tariffs on Japanese autos and related goods at 15%. This has left Tokyo's export sector vulnerable to continued political leverage from Washington (The White House, 2025c). Trump's willingness to cut a minerals-and-market access bargain with China, and weaponise tariffs against India and Japan under the banner of reciprocity, highlights Washington's increasing willingness to act in its own strategic and business interests. This makes it increasingly important for India and Japan to strengthen their collaboration. They need to align their foreign policies to better engage the US and manage China, rather than as two separately vulnerable economies.

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US and its allies extended support to Kyiv (Singh, 2024). This brought Russia closer to the People's Republic of China (China/PRC) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea/DPRK). Japan perceives this growing alignment between the three nuclear powers as a threat to its security. In Tokyo, it is believed that a possible Russian victory might embolden the PRC (mainland China) to undertake its well-documented expansionist designs in the region, including in the Republic of China (ROC/Taiwan). This validates former Japanese Prime Minister Kishida's fears that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow" (Kantei, 2022).

From 2024 onwards, Russia started receiving military hardware from North Korea. In late July, reports surfaced that Russia had begun deploying North Korean Bulsae-4 anti-tank missiles on the Ukrainian frontlines (Abrams, 2024). There has likewise been growing cooperation between the Russian and Chinese militaries, including routine intelligence sharing, military-technology collaboration, and joint exercises in the Far East and Europe (CNA Communications Team, 2023) (Stanko, 2022).

In March 2023, Russia's Pacific Fleet conducted large-scale naval exercises with

China, including a blockade of sections of the Sea of Japan (Xuanzun, 2023). It simulated responses to a potential attack on a handful of Russian islands claimed by Japan (Barrash, 2022). A month later, during a high-profile visit to Moscow, former Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu held talks with Russian President Putin. During the talks, Li made Beijing's willingness to "further enhance strategic communication between the two militaries, strengthen multilateral coordination and cooperation" with Russia known (Wang, 2023). According to leaked US government documents, China was alleged to have provided lethal aid to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

In the aftermath of World War II, Japan has pursued a policy of self-restraint. It focused, in cooperation with the US, almost exclusively on defending itself, first, against a Soviet threat and later, against China (Johnstone & Hornung, 2023). Nevertheless, Beijing's recent outreach to Moscow has heightened tensions in East Asia. In January 2024, at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel accused Beijing of "hypocrisy" and a lack of transparency. He criticised Beijing for its blanket ban on all Japanese seafood following Tokyo's release of treated water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the ocean (Dominguez, 2024).

In light of these developments, Japan has adopted a more assertive military posture to safeguard its maritime frontiers. Under Prime Minister Takaichi, Japan has earmarked a record ¥9 trillion for defence spending for the fiscal year 2026 (Dominguez & Johnson, 2026). Her government is seeking to remove a requirement that confines Japan's military exports to five non-lethal categories (Dominguez & Johnson, 2026). The move is intended to bolster maritime defence against growing threats from China around the southwestern islands (the Nansei Islands, including the Ryukyu Islands and the Senkaku Islands) and from Russia near the northern islands (Kuril Islands/Northern Territories).

In addition, the Kantei is expected to approve a ¥128.7 billion (\$809 million) plan to develop a multilayered coastal defence system called the SHIELD (Synchronized, Hybrid, Integrated and Enhanced Littoral Defense) (Dominguez & Johnson, 2026). The initiative reflects Japan's broader defence policy shift, as it seeks to modernise its military exports and develop a robust "drone shield" for the southwestern islands (Dominguez & Johnson, 2026). This may help foster deeper defence-industrial ties between Tokyo and Kyiv. Recently, Ukrainian Ambassador Yurii Lutovinov proposed a strategic defence partnership through which Ukraine could share its battle-hardened military expertise and drone technology with Japan (Dominguez & Johnson, 2026).

Of late, China has also been upset over the outcome of the US and Japan (South Korea) summit held at the US presidential retreat Camp David in August 2023 (Briefing Room, 2023). This summit produced a Statement of Principles and a Joint Statement. The summit saw the three countries commit to consulting on

shared threats, ramping up joint military exercises, sharing intelligence on missile threats, and strengthening supply chain resilience and economic security throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Beijing viewed the summit as a "deliberate attempt to sow discord" between China and two of its Asian neighbours (Xiaoci, 2023). During the summit, Washington, Tokyo (and Seoul) criticised China's "dangerous and aggressive behaviour" in the South China Sea. It reaffirmed the "importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" (Briefing Room, 2023). Beijing views this statement as a warning against China's attempt to take Taiwan by force. It views Camp David as part of the US-led campaign for the "all-around containment, encirclement and suppression of China" (Bradsher, 2023). Chinese leaders do not like the prospect of Japan (and South Korea) becoming involved in a dispute that has traditionally been restricted to the US, China, and Taiwan.

There have been similar concerns in New Delhi. Since the Galwan crisis of 2020, China has been more aggressive towards India. In December 2022, People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops attempted to alter the status quo along the LAC by crossing into the Yangtse area of Tawang (Explained Desk, 2022). Former Defence Minister Li Shangfu attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Defence Ministers' Meeting in India in April 2023 (Fang, 2023). His visit occurred shortly after India and China held the 18th round of Corps Commander-level talks aimed at resolving the border standoff in eastern Ladakh (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2023). In 2024, the two countries concluded a standoff agreement to demilitarise their borders (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2024). However, prospects for meaningful de-escalation between India and China in the near term remain limited. New Delhi continues to deploy its troops along the LAC with Beijing.

In recent history, there have been several agreements between India and China on their border issue. These include the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement (BPTA), the 1996 Confidence-Building Measures Agreement, the 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Border Question, the 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement, amongst others (Joshi, 2022). Beijing has continued its territorial aggression and cartographic warfare with New Delhi. India and Japan could therefore act to curb the growing Russo-Chinese alignment (Singh, 2024). This is a must for both New Delhi and Tokyo, as they are confronted with a growing threat from Beijing.

To understand why India's position on the Ukraine conflict diverges so markedly from Japan's, it is necessary to examine the contested history of NATO's enlargement in Eastern Europe. This has played a huge role in the lead-up to the 2022 invasion. The diplomatic history of these interactions heavily influences New Delhi's reluctance to assign sole responsibility for the Ukrainian crisis to Russia.

Causa Prima of the Crisis: NATO's Eastward Expansion

From Moscow's perspective, the Russian invasion was significantly driven by concerns over NATO's (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) eastward expansion. While many Western officials and scholars argue that Russia's invasion constitutes a clear violation of international law, the Kremlin's stated rationale merits examination to understand the full range of factors shaping Japan's and India's positions. In the past, the Kremlin had expressed its concerns about the continued expansion of NATO into former Warsaw Pact countries, starting with Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic in 1999 (NATO, 2024). Moscow's continued isolation from NATO created a fear of encirclement amongst the Russians. Russian President Putin also holds the West accountable for funding pro-democracy Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that brought about the Colour Revolutions in former Soviet republics (Seddon, 2022). The invasion was partly sparked by US President Joe Biden's positive reception of Ukraine's request for NATO membership, which further antagonised Moscow (Polityuk, 2021; Williams & Zinets, 2021).

Washington has reneged on many of its past verbal commitments. During the Malta Summit of 1989, the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) President Mikhail Gorbachev stated to US President George H.W. Bush: "We are moving from a bipolar to a multipolar world. We both will have to deal with an increasingly integrated Europe . . . we have to abandon the vestiges of images of an enemy . . . there must be patterns of cooperation to take account of new realities" (Savranskaya & Blanton, 2020)

The Soviets wanted German unification to take place under the format of the Helsinki Agreement of 1975 (also known as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), an agreement aimed at unifying Europe under one forum, replacing NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In the 1990s, Shevardnadze had suggested that the Soviet Union "would like to see (German) unification take place in the CSCE process" (US Department of State, 1990). In 1994, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev proposed the CSCE as a replacement for NATO, the Western European Union (WEU), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (US Department of State, 1994).

The US administration viewed it as a potentially veiled attempt by Russia to dominate European affairs. This suspicion was underscored by a critical memo from the US Deputy Secretary of State, Tony Lake, highlighting Russia's ambition to become the "architect and engineer" of European security, with a prominent role in "European peacekeeping" (US Department of State, 1994). For Western countries, the immediate concern was German reunification.

In 1990, Secretary of State James Baker suggested securing Germany's membership in a reorganised NATO to stop it from developing a nuclear arsenal. He contended that "a Germany that is firmly anchored in a changed NATO... that

is far less of a military organization, much more of a political one, would have no need for independent (nuclear) capability" (US Department of State, 1990). Baker reassured that NATO's reach, both in terms of jurisdiction and military forces, would remain strictly confined to its current borders. He said, "There would, of course, have to be ironclad guarantees that NATO's jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward" (US Department of State, 1990). Baker reassured Gorbachev, "If we maintain a presence in a Germany that is a part of NATO, there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east" (US Department of State, 1990). President Bush assured Gorbachev that the joint declaration would "ensure non-aggression" by NATO (George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 1990).

French President Francois Mitterrand echoed Gorbachev's desire for a collective security apparatus. In his letter to American President Bush, he stated that he had promised Gorbachev that "the Western side would ensure that 'guarantees' are made 'for his country's security' in exchange for Germany's participation in the Atlantic Alliance" (George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 1990). In his conversation with Gorbachev, Mitterrand proposed creating a framework that would not isolate the USSR (which was formalised as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE). He said that the Soviet Union should not be isolated if "the two-bloc state of Europe" is to end, giving "more weight to the substance of the OSCE".

Shifting Boundaries: Unresolved Border Issues from the Soviet Past

In 1994, US President Bill Clinton proposed expanding NATO at a summit in Budapest, Hungary. In what became known as the "Budapest Blow Up," Russian President Boris Yeltsin stated, "Europe, not having yet freed itself from the heritage of the Cold War, is in danger of plunging into a cold peace . . . Why sow the seeds of mistrust? After all, we are no longer enemies. We are all partners" (Williams, 1994). He said, "It is a dangerous delusion to suppose that the destinies of continents and the world community, in general, can somehow be managed from one single capital" (Williams, 1994). He asked Clinton, "How do you think it looks to us if one bloc continues to exist while the Warsaw Pact has been abolished? It is a new form of encirclement if the one surviving Cold War bloc expands right up to the borders of Russia" (Williams, 1994).

In 2000, during an interview with David Frost of the BBC, then acting President of Russia, Putin said, "I would not rule out such a possibility (of Russia joining NATO)" (Frost, 2000). He said, "Isolationism is not an option" (Frost, 2000). In an interview with Tucker Carlson on February 8, 2024, Putin revealed that he had raised the question of Russia's NATO membership with then-U.S. President Clinton in 2000. Clinton said, "It is not possible now" (Carlson, 2024).

A decade after the USSR's disintegration in 2004, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia,

Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania joined NATO; Croatia and Albania followed in 2009 (NATO, 2024). When NATO took cognizance of Georgia and Ukraine's aspiration to join the alliance during the Bucharest Summit in 2008, then President Dmitry Medvedev warned that their inclusion would be the 'red line' in Russia's relations with the West (Gray, 2023). He said that NATO's "endless enlargement" was one of the "main external threats of war" to Moscow (Reuters, 2010). Reportedly, Putin warned US President George W. Bush, "If Ukraine joins NATO, it will do so without Crimea and the eastern regions" (Zygar, 2016).

Moscow consistently expressed its reservations against the NATO expansion. In March 2007, President Putin complained, "NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders" (Kremlin, 2007). It was seen as a "serious provocation" that reduced "the level of mutual trust" between Russia and NATO (Kremlin, 2007). He questioned, "Against whom is this expansion intended... what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact?" (Kremlin, 2007). Putin forewarned that Moscow will not overlook a possible NATO expansion into Ukraine (and Georgia), the two Black Sea basin states. He ordered the annexation of Crimea in 2014, only after the Obama administration succeeded in replacing a pro-Russia president with a pro-West/NATO one in Kyiv (Menon & Ruger, 2023). Before attacking Kyiv, Putin spent more than two decades trying to reason with the West. He drew the line when President Zelenskyy, in January 2021, urged President Biden to support Ukrainian membership in NATO (Zelensky, 2021). President Biden's openness to Ukraine's membership exacerbated tensions with Russia (Williams & Zinets, 2021) (Denisova, 2024).

Charting a Course Forward

The strategic and geopolitical imperatives mentioned above highlight several avenues for India and Japan to coordinate further to address the current geopolitical dilemma. It may be argued that neither Tokyo nor New Delhi has much to gain from distancing itself from Moscow. It may be argued that the eastward expansion of NATO prompted Russia to take military measures against Ukraine. This is a reality that Japan and India have to engage with if they are to act as credible mediators. S. Jaishankar has observed that "a lot of our problems with China have nothing to do with Ukraine, have nothing to do with Russia" (Barman, 2022). If New Delhi seriously mediates between Ukraine and Russia, it is plausible that such engagement between the two warring sides could create conditions for greater mutual accommodation. Similarly, Japanese collaboration in Ukraine can help address several long-standing problems in its relationship with Russia.

The confrontational nature of Russo-Japanese ties has obscured how closely their structural interests align. Both countries share deep interests in stable energy flows. It seems pertinent that the two countries diversify away from Russia's

structural energy dependence on China and Japan's reliance on Gulf energy supplies (Goldstein & Kozyrev, 2006; Calder, 2015). Japan's role in post-war reconstruction and diplomacy around Ukraine could serve as a platform to renew rules-based cooperation in Siberia, offering Russia capital, technology, and markets from a major democratic partner. The engagement could reduce Japan's vulnerability to sea-borne supplies from the Middle East and also help facilitate dialogue to resolve the issue of the Northern territories (Calder, 2015).

For Japan, Siberia has the world's greatest stocks of untapped resources, precisely the resources that Japan itself lacks. Historically, Japanese economic and strategic elites saw Siberia as "virgin soil" (Time, 1968). Earlier ventures, such as the Siberian timber-cutting project, demonstrated how economic complementarity could be harnessed even without a formal peace treaty. The project involved a 133-million-dollar Japanese loan, repayment in millions of cubic feet of timber, and the granting of privileges to a consortium, including Mitsui and Mitsubishi, to sell consumer goods to Soviet settlers (Time, 1968). This economic participation expanded to include pipelines, mining projects, and Sakhalin shelf exploration, all supported by a Japanese doctrine of *seikei bunri*, which separates politics and economics so that trade and resource cooperation can continue despite unresolved sovereignty difficulties (Time, 1968). Today, Tokyo can use economic cooperation as a tool to create conditions for political progress as a more strategically conscious version of *seikei bunri*. This would allow Tokyo to shape a framework in which Siberian projects and Northern Territories talks move in tandem.

The urgency is sharpened by the rise of the "China factor" in Siberian development and East Asian geopolitics (Goldstein & Kozyrev, 2006). China's rapid growth, surpassing Japan as the world's second-largest crude oil importer in 2003, has driven demand for secure overland supplies. Eastern Siberian oil and gas deposits, located near China's industrial heartland, are particularly appealing. Moscow's goal of redirecting around 30% of its oil exports to Asia, with a substantial share coming from Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East, has taken place in the midst of fierce competition between Beijing and Tokyo (Goldstein & Kozyrev, 2006). Since the late 1980s, proposals for pipelines such as Angarsk–Daqing and Angarsk–Nakhodka have been shaped not just by economics but by internal Russian politics. It is shaped by Russia's desire to retain flexibility between Japan's preferred route, Taishet–Nakhodka, and China's Taishet–Daqing, as evidenced by the downfall of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an exiled Russian oligarch (Goldstein & Kozyrev, 2006).

In the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, the strengthening of the Sino-Russian energy nexus has far-reaching geopolitical implications (The Moscow Times, 2025). The overland pipelines from Siberia to China reduce Beijing's dependence on vulnerable maritime sea lanes that pass through chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. These routes can be jeopardized in a Taiwan

or South China Sea crisis. It reduces China's vulnerability to external military pressure. Chinese commentators have defined involvement in Russian pipeline projects as an expresslyational security requirement (Goldstein & Kozyrev, 2006). This regional reconfiguration is problematic for Japan, which heavily relies on the Arabian Gulf for more than four-fifths of its crude oil and a large share of its LNG (Calder, 2015). It reinforces Tokyo's vulnerability to disruptions in the Gulf and Indian Ocean sea lanes and risks solidifying Russia's eastward tilt toward China in the Siberian territories nearest Japan.

In light of these developments, Japan's active involvement in Ukraine can redefine its role in Eurasia, better addressing its interests. Japan can build political capital with both Russia and Ukraine by facilitating dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow. Tokyo can support Ukraine's reconstruction and advocate for a settlement that respects Kyiv's sovereignty without damaging its ties with Moscow. This can then be utilised to support energy projects in Siberia and the Far East that intentionally counterbalance Chinese influence. Japan's proactive diplomacy in Ukraine could improve the geostrategic situation in Northeast Asia.

The deepening of Tokyo's ties with New Delhi provides an opportunity to coordinate further engagement on the Ukraine dilemma, particularly given Kyiv's consideration of the Indian leadership as an alternative to contacting the Russian leadership. Zelenskyy's proposed peace plan calls for Russia to withdrawal all its troops from Ukraine, restoring the 1991 post-Soviet borders (Zelenskyy, 2022). Russia may find it acceptable on the condition that Ukraine declares it would never join NATO. In March 2024, Ukrainian FM Kuleba, in his visit to New Delhi, underlined the importance of India's participation in Switzerland's peace summit (Laskar, 2024). New Delhi should convince Tokyo of its approach regarding Moscow. India may see to it that Japan, too, participates in the summit. Fortunately, the atmosphere in New Delhi for mediating between Moscow and Kyiv is conducive today. Kremlin has shown its willingness for 'active and substantial talks' with Kyiv aimed at ending its military action against Ukraine. In a media interview, Russian President Putin said, "We are willing to negotiate... You (the U.S. government) should tell the current Ukrainian leadership to stop and come to the negotiating table" (Carlson, 2024).

Knowledgeable sources say the Kremlin insists Ukraine recognise Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Crimea as Russian territory and give up its bid to join NATO. Besides, Russia wants the lifting of all sanctions against it by the US and its allies (Bloomberg News, 2024). There are over 700,000 Russian troops in Ukraine today. On July 8, 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Vladimir Putin during a visit to Russia. During the visit, PM Modi stated, "For a bright future for the new generation, peace is most essential... Peace talks do not succeed amidst bombs, guns and bullets" (PTI, 2024). Earlier, Prime Minister Modi had emphasised the "path of peace" and the importance of "democracy,

diplomacy and dialogue" to President Putin (Pratap et al., 2022).

In Japan, there does not seem to be any radical departure from Kishida's policy. In his first policy speech on October 4, former Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru echoed Kishida's concerns, declaring, "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow" (Shigeru, 2024). However, during Ishiba's reign, the LDP won 191 seats, and Komeito gained 24 (Konno, 2024). There were many uncertainties about the future of Japanese foreign policy when the LDP weakened under the leadership of Ishiba. However, things seem to have taken a turn for the better with the emergence of Takaichi. LDP has strengthened its support base, especially after its realignment with the conservative Japan Innovation Party (Nippo Isshin no Kai) under Prime Minister Takaichi. Takaichi will probably steer Japan towards a more conservative path of strongly defending Ukraine diplomatically and, if possible, through military aid (Solis, 2026).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is in India's and Japan's interests to formulate an appropriate joint policy response to defuse the Ukraine crisis. Russia is not an enemy in contemporary geopolitics. It retains significant geopolitical relevance for India and Japan in the broader Indo-Pacific and Eurasian strategic landscape. The Western response to the Ukrainian crisis has brought Moscow closer to Beijing (and Pyongyang). Beijing's aggressive designs across the Himalayan borders and the Indo-Pacific have been well documented. This will only worsen if the Ukrainian crisis drags on. New Delhi and Tokyo may take steps to prevent the Russo-Chinese bonhomie from deepening further.

This paper examines the divergence in Japan's and India's responses to the Ukraine crisis through a comparative foreign policy framework. The analysis demonstrates that while the two countries share broad strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific, competing domestic priorities, historical ties with Russia, and differing threat perceptions have produced distinct policy trajectories. Three policy recommendations follow from this analysis. First, Japan and India should establish a bilateral consultative mechanism on Ukraine, building on their existing '2+2' format for Foreign and Defence Ministers. Now that both countries face US economic pressure, neither can rely solely on Washington's rhetorical commitment to shared principles. A standing bilateral dialogue would allow Tokyo and New Delhi to coordinate their diplomatic stance and present a coherent joint position without abandoning their existing relationship with Moscow.

Tokyo, New Delhi, and Moscow would all gain from this framework of collaboration. It has the potential to gradually rewire Eurasia's political geography. It provides Japan with a diversified, close-by source of gas and oil while reducing Russia's structural reliance on China. India would be able to engage freely with its democratic partners in the West, ridding itself of accusations that cast doubt on its

dedication to peace and development. It would also improve the political environment around the Northern Territories by grounding Siberian initiatives in open, rule-based agreements with democratic partners.


Second, Tokyo and New Delhi should focus on deepening their already growing mutual ties. They should use all available diplomatic mechanisms, including the QUAD, to address any remaining points of friction on the Ukrainian issue. New Delhi needs to strike a balance with Tokyo, synchronising its foreign policy to better address the geopolitical realities of the contemporary times. A more balanced collaboration between Japan and India on Ukraine can help rectify territorial imbalance caused by Russia-China coalescence in Asia. New Delhi's proximity to Moscow and Tokyo's economic outreach to Kyiv are likely to nudge both sides towards a negotiated settlement.

Third, Japan and India should jointly engage Moscow on Siberian energy projects and Ukrainian reconstruction, drawing on Japan's historical doctrine of *seikei bunri* and India's established economic ties with Russia. Such engagement would give Russia an alternative to its deepening dependence on China. It will also strengthen the energy security imperatives of both Tokyo and New Delhi. Such measures are sure to create the political conditions necessary for India and Japan to mediate more effectively between Kyiv and Moscow crucial for peace and prosperity in the entire region.

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