



## The world is in flux. Self-reliance is vital

Trusted connectivity, diversified sources of materials, and resilient financial and trading arrangements have become strategic imperatives for India.

### Three contemporary developments:

1. Three contemporary developments have challenged India's engagement with the world and its security concerns in the past 24 months. The first was the decision by China's Xi Jinping to pick a line from a map in imagined history and send 100,000 troops and more to alter the current political equation in the Himalayas.
2. This was a whimsical and perverse exertion of the power that resulted in a bloody clash and a still continuing face-off between Indian and Chinese troops.
3. Next, in August 2021, the world's mightiest superpower, the United States (US), finalised an unethical and tragic arrangement with a band of terrorists and deserted Afghanistan overnight. Women's rights, individual freedoms and the "values" that were propagated while waging the so-called liberal war against terror were all discarded in favour of what was expedient.
4. The professors of democracy and the radical Taliban found a common cause and sent Afghanistan back to the 1990s. For India, terrorists armed with American weaponry were no longer just a threat scenario but a reality at its door — one it would have to handle by itself.
5. And now, Putin has decided to go one up on Joe Biden and take Europe back to the early 20th century. Russian troops invaded a sovereign country to enforce a political writ driven solely by the desire to preserve Russia's influence over geographies that increasingly disagree with the politics and propositions of the Kremlin.
6. While Russia's fears of the purpose and method of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s expansion must not be discounted, the use of force and violation of a country's sovereignty cannot be accepted as an expression of disagreement.

### Implications on India:

1. The invasion of Ukraine has put India in an unenviable position of choosing between what is right and what it believes is right for itself. India's tough

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words on Russian action in its statement at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), even as it abstained from voting, demonstrated this.

2. Yet this is insufficient for many in the liberal West who seek India to be part of the normative liberal order, as well as of a performative chorus against Russia.

### **Few strategic questions:**

1. Several questions confront New Delhi. First, does strategic autonomy equal neutrality, or is it the freedom to choose what is best for the country at any given time?
2. Can we disregard growing strategic expectations from partners? What are the dependencies that are being created by our economic and security choices?
3. Which of them are inimical to our interests? And, how can we integrate this aspect as we make choices in a multi-layered world?
4. Finally, there is a question about the trans-Atlantic order. Its tough line on Russia's military adventurism, gaming of economic relations, and cyber and information operations have been compelling.
5. Will it hold this line when it comes to China's actions? Or will the happenings in Asia continue to be appraised through a "dollar"-driven values framework?

### **The weaponization of everything:**

1. Between China, the US and now Russia, we have witnessed the weaponization of everything. Innocuous supply chain components for electronics, minor supplements for medicines, components for vaccine packaging, energy and gas grids, SWIFT system and currency and minerals and sundry materials have all been used for political coercion, waging war, or for undermining others' interests.
2. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for Atma Nirbharta (self-reliance) has acquired a new salience and ironically, achieving it requires astute global interlinkages and perhaps even more dense global networks for a country that houses a sixth of humanity.
3. Trusted connectivity, diversified sources of materials and components and resilient financial and trading arrangements are no longer buzzwords but a strategic imperative requiring all of India's consensus, including within its business community, lawmakers and all stakeholders.