

# Kyiv and New Delhi are both critical to Russia-China relations, say LSE experts

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When analysing the future of China-Russia relations, Beijing's relationship with Kyiv must not be overlooked, nor should Moscow's relationship with New Delhi, caution new insights from LSE IDEAS, the London School of Economics' foreign policy think tank.

According to Lukas Fiala (Project Coordinator of China Foresight at LSE IDEAS), Dr. Leon Hartwell (Senior Associate), and Hugo Jones (Programme and Research Associate), Ukraine is strategically situated on the map of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which prior to the invasion allowed Kyiv to market itself as the "bridge to Europe".

China has maintained an official stance of neutrality on the Russia-Ukraine war, though state media often repeats Russian propaganda and Beijing has been openly critical of Western sanctions. The researchers say this has contributed to a souring of relations with Kyiv, and influential Ukrainians such as Oleksandr Merezhko, chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, increasingly perceiving China as being aligned with the enemy.

Still, China remains Ukraine's largest trading partner, which the researchers believe makes it hard for Kyiv to simply go "cold turkey" in light of the dire economic situation that looms over the country. However, they say this growing sentiment will still complicate any part Beijing seeks to play in facilitating peace negotiations.

Similarly, the more visibly Russia and China align themselves, the greater they predict India's concerns will grow, especially as it appears that Moscow is increasingly becoming the second fiddle in the relationship.

In 2022 China became Russia's largest trading partner, while Russia doesn't even rank among China's top ten. Around half of Russian exports to China are crude petroleum, whereas China exports manufactured goods to Russia which increasingly cannot be obtained due to severed trading ties with western countries. "This means Russia is rapidly finding itself in a peripheral position vis-à-vis China, a trend that was accelerated by the February 2022 escalation of the war," says Dr. Leon Hartwell.

India also remains officially neutral on the Russia-Ukraine war, which the researchers believe is in part because Russia continues to be its most important military supplier. They note that having strong military supplies is crucial for New Delhi, given India's ongoing border dispute with China.

In the event of Russia being perceived as China's client state, the researchers believe India might pursue a more active role in multilateral organisations, such as the Quad and BRICS, that are more favourable to Ukraine's interests rather than Russia's. For this reason, they suggest the Kremlin will need to be cautious about being seen as too cosy with Beijing.

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