

## COMMENT 235 - The European Union and India's security challenges

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Jawaharlal Nehru, side by side with Josip Broz Tito, Sukarno, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Kwame Nkrumah, founded the [Non-aligned movement](#) in 1961. Non-alignment became a defining feature of Indian foreign policy – and to a certain extent identity – ever since.

The reality and perception of 'non-alignment' changed fundamentally within the last six decades, most in particularly since the fall of the Soviet Union. This also happened in India.

The original declaration was geared at promoting peace (in particular denuclearisation) as well as denouncing Western colonialism – while implicitly suggesting a third way between the two main political, economic, and social models. India's democratic system, from the very start, followed the Western [institutional democratic model](#). Most likely, the country always thought necessary to dispose of the same sort of weapons used by others, and it decided to become a nuclear power in [1989](#). In the [nineties](#), India embraced a set of economic reforms that made it closer to the Western economic logic, and from the beginning of the [twenty first century](#) it developed closer defence and security ties with the US. At the same time, Russia developed closer relations with China and engaged with Pakistan ([Wolf, 2022](#)), while its position on the Kashmir dispute, traditionally supportive of India's, evolved slightly in 2019 towards that defended by China ([Mitra, 2019](#))

Among the key messages animating the [Belgrade declaration](#), the opposition to military blocks is perhaps the most important surviving to our time. It seemed to lose importance with the supposed conclusion of the cold war; many thought that (as exemplified by the failed Venezuelan meeting) [non-alignment was dying](#) (Pant, 2016). On the other hand, the invasion of Ukraine is showing us it was actually not over and it is re-emerging in a rather less cool manner.

India's first step into multilateral defence constructions materialised in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) among Japan, the United States, India, and Australia. The

initiative was fostered by Japan and may be seen either as a building-up of the [Trilateral Strategic Dialogue](#) arranged by Australia, Japan and the US in 2002 – or as an extension of the Core group comprising the four Quad founders which emerged from the [December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami](#) 2004.

China reacted strongly against an arrangement it saw as a mechanism of containment ([Nicholson, 2007](#)). Calling it the '[Asian NATO](#)', Beijing accused the US to be responsible for its making. Chinese pressure was mostly effective and led to a freezing of the initiative, which revived only recently, a situation the Indian press has been describing as an unwarranted 'Chinese veto power' over Indian options (e.g. [Krishnakutty, 2022](#), interpreting the words by the head of the Indian diplomacy in this way).

In October 2021, at the occasion of the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Israel, a new security dialogue group was created, the '[I2U2](#)' – comprising India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America. The I2U2 will have a virtual summit from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of July. With the I2U2, India sets itself at the centre of the Greater Middle East's new geopolitical reality – that created by the Abraham Accords. The EU, by contrast, did not contribute to the reproachment of the Arab world with Israel and still seems not to have understood its importance.

Germany, the Netherlands and in particular France showed some interest in joining the Quad's security actions ([Casaca, 2021](#)), an interest that seems to be vanishing after Russia's aggression on European soil ([Kliem, 2022](#)). This contradicts the need to solidify a global alliance with the democratic world.

Quite on the contrary, the European Union has downplayed its active contribution to global food and energy security. For instance, while combatting Russian attempts to sow panic, it blamed India and other countries for taking very reasonable preventive measures so as to avoid market disruptions ([Casaca, 2022](#)).

According to the data supplied by the [Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air](#), the European Union was responsible for importing 61% of the Russian energy exports in the first hundred days of the invasion, while India was only responsible for 3.7 % of said Russian exports. Still, European authorities felt it appropriate to publicly lecture India for importing Russian energy, forcing Indian authorities to [answer](#) – and damaging the support Europe needs to face its own challenges.

While Europe was in dire need of allied support from the rest of the world, it openly dismissed the crucial defence challenges faced by its prospective allies. Europe did not alter its intention of concluding a nuclear agreement with Iran – despite the repeated attacks on Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates by Iranian proxies, and as if Middle East

security was of no concern to Europe. Likewise, European institutions did not condemn Chinese aggression of India along the Himalayas (contrarily to what was done by the [United States](#)).

As the head of the [Indian diplomacy](#) later developed in a conference held in Slovakia: ‘Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems but the world's problems are not Europe's problems.’

The European Union absolutely needs a less parochial diplomacy – one more solidly supported in general principles that are of global pertinence. As pertinently observed by Minister S. Jaishankar, food, energy, and the territorial security of European allies – both in the Greater Middle East and the Indo-Pacific – must be duly considered by Europe if it wants its allies to be duly concerned with its own security problems.

The European engagement with its allies in security initiatives such as the Quad and the I2U2 should therefore not be seen as alternatives to European concerns with Russia’s aggression. Quite the opposite, they are necessary complements to a European strategic defence concept.

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