India needs to pay attention to Russian military build-up in Ukraine

What is the issue?

Russian military build up near Ukraine could affect India's interest.

Why there is a Russian military build up near Ukraine?

- Russia has accused the West of trying to make Ukraine anti-Russia by constantly providing modern weapons and brainwashing the population.
- **Russia's demand from the West -** Assurances that Ukraine will never be admitted as a member of NATO.
- Deny NATO membership to other former Soviet republics.
- No further eastward expansion of NATO
- **Response from US and EU -** Some of these demands have been categorised by the US as "unacceptable".
- For the US and EU, Ukraine is a crucial buffer between Russia and the West.
- They are increasingly determined to keep Ukraine away from Russian control.
- Efforts to induct Ukraine into NATO have been ongoing for many years and seem to have picked up pace recently.
- So, Russia has amassed troops and military hardware at its border with Ukraine.
- Russia could resort to such action if the demands are not met.
- However Russia has reiterated that invasion is not their preferred choice.

What is Ukraine stance?

- Ukraine has tilted toward the West, including the removal of a pro-Russia leader in 2014.
- Russia massing of troops along Ukraine's border is a signal that Putin will consider an invasion unless Ukraine backs away.
- Russia has already annexed the Crimean Peninsula in a 2014 military operation.

What can India do?

- Delhi could try its posture post the Russian annexation of Crimea.
- India can neither openly criticise nor endorse Russian actions.
- However, India's silence will be seen as an endorsement.
- Moscow might seek support from Delhi.
- It will sell India's silence as an endorsement, as it did in the case of Crimea.

How will it benefit China?

- In case of invasion Moscow will need Beijing's diplomatic support even more.
- **In dealing with India -** China could ask Moscow to stall military supplies to India.

- In 1962, when Moscow needed Beijing's backing during the Cuban missile crisis
- It resulted in Soviet support for ally China versus friend India at a crucial moment in the China-India war.
- **In dealing with EU -** In order to focus on the Russia challenge, European capitals could seek to stabilise ties with China, rather than act against its assertive actions.
- This could negatively affect the coordinated approach that Delhi seeks among like-minded partners to balance China.
- China could potentially present itself as a useful interlocutor between the West and Moscow
- China can try to deepen the cleavages between the US and Europe on itself.
- China would benefit from American and European attention focused on Russia-Ukraine rather than on Asia.

How will it affect India's interest?

- In 2014, the Russian annexation of Crimea created problems for India.
- If Moscow again takes military action against Ukraine, it will significantly complicate India's objectives
- **In dealing with China -** It would hinder Delhi's interest from preventing a further deepening of Russia's ties with China.
- Moscow that is more beholden to Beijing would be problematic when India is dependent on Russian military supplies.
- Sino-Indian border tensions could flare up again.
- **In dealing with Russia -** Many in Delhi might argue that power often trumps.
- Nonetheless, Moscow's justifications for its actions against Ukraine are similar to those Beijing makes versus India: Historical claims, ethnic linkages, and Indian steps that it says threaten China.
- Russian military action goes against respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty that Delhi frequently advocates.
- The western response will involve even more sanctions on Russia.
- This will hinder India's ability to do business with Russia and diversify Russia-India ties.
- All this come at a time when Washington is considering a waiver for India from CAATSA sanctions.
- **In dealing with Western countries -** Invasion would end any near-term prospect of a rapprochement between the West and Russia.
- It will complicate India's efforts to maintain a delicate balance between its partnerships with the US, Europe, and Russia.
- India-US and India-Europe contradictions on Russia will come to the fore.
- India's move to deepen security and economic ties with European partners will be affected.
- A crisis nearer home could reduce the latter's increased attention to Asia, especially India.
- **Indo Pacific theatre -** A deteriorating situation in Europe could draw US attention away from the Indo-Pacific theatre, as Afghanistan and Middle East crises did in previous administrations.
- **Economic and defence trade ties with Ukraine -** India has economic and defence trade ties with Ukraine
- 7,500-odd citizens residing there.

What needs to be done?

- India will hope for a diplomatic solution and that Russia does not take military action against Ukraine.
- India can privately express its concerns to Moscow.

- In case of invasion India have to prepare for potential fallout for India’s interests with Russia, the West and China.

Reference

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