



Original Article

Geopolitics of Energy Security: How the Russia-Ukraine War Reshaped India's Oil Diplomacy and Maritime Trade Routes

Rakesh Kumar

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Geography, Murarka College, Sultanganj, TMBU, Bhagalpur

Manuscript ID:

IBMIIRJ -2025-020426

Submitted: 10 Mar. 2025

Revised: 22 Mar. 2025

Accepted: 12 Apr. 2025

Published: 30 Apr. 2025

ISSN: 3065-7857

Volume-2

Issue-4

Pp. 134-138

April 2025

Correspondence Address:

Rakesh Kumar
Asst. Professor, Dept. of
Geography, Murarka College,
Sultanganj, TMBU, Bhagalpur
Email: rkrakr05@gmail.com



Quick Response Code:



Web: <https://ibrj.us>



DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18523371

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18523371>



Creative Commons

Abstract

India's oil diplomacy and maritime trade routes were influenced significantly as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine disrupted the international energy market in late February 2022. The war also caused Indian oil importers to have to adjust their supply chain arrangements because India is an oil importer which relies on foreign crude supplies for approximately 85% of its crude demand. The paper examines how the crisis changed India's oil diplomacy and how it affected the maritime trade routes India has utilized in response to the surges and declines in crude oil imports from Russia after sanctions were imposed against Russia by western countries. The paper will analyze the fluctuation in crude oil imports from Russia, the shift in balance in Indian diplomacy as a result of pressure applied by western countries (the United States and European Union), India's use of refining loopholes to enable the exportation of refined petroleum products back to Europe, and India's utilization of new shipping routes such as the Eastern Maritime Corridor (Chennai – Vladivostok) and the Northern Sea Route to reduce reliance on traditional shipping lanes. Based on trade data available until December 2025, this analysis demonstrates that India pursued pragmatic energy security and strategic autonomy while achieving economic advantages through lower priced crude supplies; however, India increased its vulnerability to sanctions risk. Import volumes peaked at 40-42% of India's total in 2023-2024, and declined 17-18% in terms of value in 2025 due to greater compliance with the sanctions. In addition, India demonstrated its ability to be resilient in the face of sanctions, by utilizing non-sanctioned suppliers. The development of maritime connectivity resulted in reduced vulnerabilities in the traditional chokepoints. Overall, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine highlighted the complexity of energy geopolitics in a multipolar world and provided implications for India's strategy of diversifying its energy supplies and enhancing its long-term resilience.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, India Oil Imports, Energy Security, Oil Diplomacy, Strategic Autonomy, Maritime Trade Routes, Chennai-Vladivostok Corridor, Northern Sea Route

Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine War had a profound impact on the world's energy markets when it began in February 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, creating high prices and shortfalls in supplies. The Russia/Ukraine War has caused an enormous disruption to international energy supplies and has led to the re-routing of many supplies and trade routes around the world. The Russia/Ukraine War also presents India with opportunities and challenges as India is the world's third largest oil importer/consumer and relies on imports for over 85 percent of all of its crude oil needs (Kumar, 2025). The Western sanctions against Russia, which were put in place in December 2022, included price caps and embargos implemented by the European Union and the Group of Seven, respectively, and resulted in a surplus of discounted Russian crude, which was selling at discounts of \$20-\$30 per barrel compared to Brent, a grade of crude used as a benchmark for pricing crude oil globally; India took advantage of this opportunity and increased the percentage of Russian crude that it imported significantly, from less than 2 percent prior to the Russia/Ukraine War to between 40-42 percent of all of its crude imports by the middle of 2023, resulting in India reducing the amount of money it spent on importing crude oil by 24 percent, or \$11.57 billion, during 2023, and saving approximately \$10-\$25 billion in total (Bhagwat & Rogachev, 2025). The Russia/Ukraine War represented a major turning point in India's oil diplomacy.

Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

How to cite this article:

Kumar, R. (2025). Geopolitics of Energy Security: How the Russia-Ukraine War Reshaped India's Oil Diplomacy and Maritime Trade Routes. *InSight Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Interlink International Research Journal*, 2(4), 134-138. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18523371>

This paper seeks to answer the central research question: In what ways has the Russia/Ukraine War changed India's oil diplomacy and the way in which India ships its oil? This paper will analyze the significant increase in Indian imports of Russian crude oil, the diplomatic manoeuvres made by India amidst a highly charged and politically volatile geopolitical environment, the re-exportation of Russian crude to countries subject to sanctions by the West and the development of new shipping lanes by India to enhance its energy security and promote its national strategic autonomy. Data related to trade, policies, and geopolitical dynamics through late 2025 are utilized to highlight India's pragmatic response to an increasingly contested global environment.

India's Oil Imports: From Marginal to Dominant Russian Dependence

Before 2022, Russian petroleum shipments represented fewer than two percent of India's annual crude oil imports, as the largest share of supply came from countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. After the invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. and other western nations placed embargos and price ceilings on seaborne Russian petroleum. Because of this, much of that petroleum was diverted to markets in Asia. Therefore, by 2023, it is estimated that nearly forty percent of Russia's petroleum export volume had been diverted to India and China, illustrating the rapid change in the global petroleum trade caused by the imposition of these sanctions (Tavadyan & Tavadyan, 2025). The diversion of Russian petroleum to India was primarily since Russia sold its Urals crude at a discount of approximately thirty-two dollars per barrel compared to Brent, which made it an economically viable alternative for many Indian refiners. Thus, India rapidly became one of the second largest buyers of Russian petroleum, and used these low prices to offset rising inflationary pressures domestically, while increasing India's energy security (Unnikrishnan & Kapoor, 2023; Kumar, 2025). Imports of petroleum from Russia into India skyrocketed. By mid-year 2023, Russian petroleum accounted for as much as forty-two percent of all petroleum imported into India, and volumes peaked at approximately 1.9 to 2 million b/d. Petroleum imports from Russia into India increased dramatically in fiscal year 2022-23, and reached record levels of value at greater than thirty-one billion dollars early in the period, and greater than fifty-two billion dollars by 2024. Initially, the discounts received by India on the purchase of Russian petroleum ranged from twenty to thirty dollars per barrel less than Brent. These discounts decreased over time, but remained relatively large, resulting in cumulative savings estimated at ten to twenty-five billion dollars. These large savings allowed India to reduce its total expenditures for importing petroleum in 2023 by approximately twenty-four percent, to eleven point five-seven billion dollars, while enhancing the viability of the Indian refining industry, and contributing to GDP growth (Tavadyan & Tavadyan, 2025; Bhagwat & Rogachev, 2025).

Period	Russian Share (%)	Key Suppliers Pre-2022	Key Suppliers Post-2022	Approximate Volume (mbd)
Pre-2022 (2021)	<2	Iraq (24%), Saudi (16%), UAE	Russia marginal	~0.07
2022-2023 Peak	40-42	Russia dominant	Russia (40%+), Iraq	1.7-2.0
2024-2025 (Fluctuating)	35-40	Russia top	Russia, Middle East	1.5-1.8

This shift in the sourcing of crude oil for India has improved the affordability of its energy during a period of worldwide price volatility with regard to crude oil prices. It also increased the exposure of India to risk of sanctions from the United States through tariffs on crude oil imports linked to Russia that were introduced by the U.S. government in 2025. Despite these risks, India was able to mitigate them because of the multi-alignment strategy of the government, which is designed to promote economic growth while at the same time maintaining relationships between India and other major players in the international community (Kulik, 2023; Kapoor, 2023). The transformation of the multi-alignment strategy of India resulted in Russia becoming India's primary source of crude oil, as well as making Russia the leading supplier of crude oil to India, surpassing traditional suppliers of crude oil to India such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia (Kulik, 2023; Bhagwat & Rogachev, 2025).

Reshaping Oil Diplomacy: Strategic Autonomy amid Pressures

India's position on Russia has been characterized as "strategic autonomy," and India was able to avoid Western sanctions while supporting the idea of peace. This position enabled continued purchase of Russian petroleum by India, which were described as necessary for the domestic consumer in a volatile marketplace. The strategic protection of profitable trade with Russia, even under extreme pressure from the West, demonstrates India's commitment to protecting its economic interest and ensuring energy security, while at the same time developing important relationships with major Western countries (Bhagwat & Rogachev, 2025). Moreover, this new approach will further highlight India's increasing assertiveness on the international stage, as it challenges long-established unipolar norms by establishing multipolar energy partnerships (Prabhakar, 2024). The geopolitical tension increased in 2025 when the United States began labelling India as "profiteers" and placed tariffs on Indian goods associated with Russian energy as high as 50%. Tariffs on Rosneft and Lukoil caused disruptions to supplies that resulted in some months where Russian oil deliveries fell to four-year lows, however India was able to adapt by purchasing non-tariffed oil barrels, resulting in the increase of import levels back to over 1 million bpd by the end of 2025. The calculated risk taken by India to expand imports of Russian oil is believed to be saving India nearly \$5 billion in 2022 alone, demonstrating the large economic benefit that will continue to drive India's diplomatic posture (Sim, 2024). At the same time, India was processing the Russian crude into products such as diesel and jet fuel and then exporting these products to Europe – representing 27% of India's total export volume of refined products by 2024. The use of the "refining loophole" by India allowed it to indirectly bypass EU bans, with exports of refined products to the EU rising 115% in 2023 and continuing to remain at high levels through 2025 – valued at billions of dollars. Six Indian and Turkish refineries exported over €807 million in refined products made from partially Russian crude to G7+ nations in late 2025 alone. Through this dual role – both buyer of the sanctioned crude and exporter to the sanctioning nations – India demonstrated a pragmatic diplomacy, maintaining good relations with both Russia and the West. By using this

complex geopolitical manoeuvring, India was able to maintain its energy security and economic stability while indirectly testing the ability of the West to enforce sanctions (Surwillo & Slakaityte, 2024). In addition to this, this sophisticated diplomacy represents the larger foreign policy goals of India, including multi-alignment and pursuing national interest in an increasingly multipolar world (Iqbal & Rahman, 2023). Additionally, India's expanded refining capacity and strategically located geography has established India as a central player in global oil markets, allowing it to take advantage of discounted crude and establish itself as a significant supplier of refined fuels to the EU (Kumar, 2025). The flexible nature of India's strategy is consistent with India's approach to foreign policy that places emphasis on issue-based coalitions and pragmatic partnerships to navigate a complex world order while maintaining strategic autonomy (Silove, 2017; Sisodia & Seth, 2025). Ultimately, this diplomatic strategy has allowed India to continue to pursue its path of economic development regardless of geopolitical instability, and has established India as a critical facilitator in the emerging global energy environment (Tavadyan & Tavadyan, 2025).

Maritime Trade Routes: Emerging Alternatives and Connectivity

The conflict created the opportunity for the increased dependence on new sea routes, because of conflict that impacted the use of older sea routes via Suez and Hormuz. It accelerated India's efforts to create alternatives; the Indian government was very active in creating alternative corridors, like the International North-South Transport Corridor, to improve connectivity and lower the time it takes for goods to travel between India and Russia and other countries in Central Asia (Unnikrishnan & Kapoor, 2023). The creation of these alternatives is intended to increase India's geopolitical influence and establish India as an important shipping hub connecting Europe and Asia and thereby provide greater diversity to India's energy and trade partners (Dhaka & Дмитриева, 2020). India's new route, known as the Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor, began operations in 2024-2025 after being conceptualized in 2019. It covers approximately 10,300 kilometres and can significantly reduce the number of days needed to transport goods from 40+ days to approximately 24 days when using this corridor to transport goods such as oil, coal and machinery. Freight volumes were higher than expected, with crude and coal freight volume increasing by 48-87% in FY 2024-25. In addition to providing a cost-effective and efficient alternative to traditional routes, the new corridor will help strengthen India's strategic relationship with Russia by allowing India and Russia to maintain a continuous flow of energy and resources regardless of what happens in the world (Kulik, 2023). There has been a growing interest in the NSR, which Russia ratified logistics agreements in 2025 that allowed India to have access to the Arctic. It plans to integrate the INSTC into the NSR to allow India to send goods to Europe using Russia as a middleman and avoid potential bottlenecks. This demonstrates how both India and Russia are responding to China's growing influence in the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific and supports India's Act East Policy and Russia's Asian pivot during a period of international isolation. This represents India's pro-active approach to protecting and promoting its economic interests and increasing its ability to exert geopolitical influence by developing a strong infrastructure base and engaging in diplomacy.

Route	Distance (nm)	Transit Time (days)	Key Commodities	Strategic Significance
Traditional (Suez/Europe)	~8,675	40+	General	Vulnerable to disruptions
Chennai-Vladivostok	~5,600	~24	Oil, coal, machinery	Direct Russia Far East access
Northern Sea Route (Potential)	Variable	Shorter in summer	LNG, minerals	Arctic shortcut, energy diversification

Implications for Energy Security and Geopolitics

India's short-term energy needs have been met with reasonably priced energy during the crisis, however, this also has brought to light many of India's ongoing dependencies. Sanctions placed upon Russia starting in 2025 are only adding to those concerns by making diversifying into the Middle East, United States and renewable energy domestically a necessity.

Additionally, India's involvement in the International North-South Transport Corridor as well as their joint effort with Iran to build out the Chabahar Port represents an important aspect of their strategy to both diversify their trade routes and improve their energy security. With these efforts India can gain access to Central Asia and Eurasia markets, thus limiting their dependency on traditional choke points as they develop regional connections (Mahmud & Hossain, 2025; Avcu, 2023). Furthermore, as part of this process India is positioning itself to be able to mitigate potential disruptions to their supply chains and increase their geopolitical stature, all by providing alternative options to traditional trade channels (Zakharov, 2023; Kulik, 2023). Finally, India's continued participation in the BRICS energy dialogue as well as their increasing number of bilateral energy agreements with countries in Africa will demonstrate how committed India is to utilizing a diversified strategy to ensure their long-term energy resilience while also minimizing their exposure to geopolitical risk.

Ultimately, India's comprehensive energy and trade policy will not only meet the short-term demand for energy but will also provide the framework for India to be proactive in navigating future global energy transitions and changes in the geopolitical landscape with increased independence and influence (ARAS & Bulut, 2023). As India continues to pursue its energy and trade policies, the strategic implications of these policies go beyond merely improving India's economy, as India seeks to become a key player in creating a new international system and to challenge the existing power structures (Singh et al., 2024). This dynamic interaction between India and the rest of the world is most clearly demonstrated in India's emergence as a key player in emerging economic corridors, specifically in the example of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor as evidence of its desire to continue growing its economy and to dominate the region in terms of economic development amidst the emergence of new global energy infrastructure (Singh et al., 2024). From a geopolitical perspective, India's efforts to support Russia economically, while also benefiting from refining margins, highlight India's multipolar nature while also illustrate the tension in alliances between the U.S. and indirect European suppliers. As such, India's ability to achieve a balance in these multiple alliances is an example of

India's multi-alignment strategy, which allows India to pursue relationships with various global powers, while avoiding becoming aligned with a single block, and illustrates the importance of maintaining this type of strategy in order for India to maintain its strategic autonomy (Kapoor, 2023). Long-term, routes such as Chennai-Vladivostok and NSR will contribute to India's ability to secure its economic and strategic interests through robust maritime infrastructure and diplomacy, and will ultimately allow India to counter regional hegemony and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific (Juned, 2019).

Conclusion

India's shift to an "opportunistic" oil diplomacy towards strategic autonomy has created an entirely new relationship between India & Russia. The war changed Russia into India's top source of oil (amidst a surge of coal & fertilizer) at a time when the US has been pressing India on its oil imports. New maritime corridors have opened up (e.g., the operationalization of the Chennai-Vladivostok route; India's emergence as a user of the Northern Sea Route; use of the International North-South Transport Corridor & Chabahar Port), which have both diversified India's supply chain and reduced dependence on narrow chokepoints; they also have strengthened connections across Eurasia. Discounted oil prices (and related higher margins) have generated substantial economic returns for India; but India has had to navigate an extremely complex web of geopolitical relationships to achieve these gains - especially during the period of US pressure & sanctions against Russia. There are arguments against this approach: the International North-South Transport Corridor is still unpredictable, expensive & low-priority for India; the ability to maintain multi-alignment is being challenged by increasing pressure from the West, threatening to create a rift in India-Russia relations & limit diversification. With accelerating global energy transition(s), India's experience illustrates the fundamental interdependence of security, diplomacy & trade - positioning India as a key player that can promote multipolarism & resilience in a rapidly fragmenting world.

Acknowledgment

I, Rakesh Kumar, Asst. Prof and Head, Dept. of Geography, Murarka College Sultanganj, TMBU, Bhagalpur, Bihar do hereby acknowledge that no financial or any other support was provided to me. Also that I face no conflict of Interest regarding publication of these papers.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

1. ARAS, F. Ç., & Bulut, Y. (2023). India's arctic policy: deterrent against china's belt and road initiative? *JANUS NET E-Journal of International Relation*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.14.2.9>
2. Avcu, S. A. (2023). Role Of India In Regional Integrations In Eurasia. *DergiPark (Istanbul University)*. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/ulisa/issue/82084/1402722>
3. Bhagwat, J., & Rogachev, I. (2025). Influence of the USA on Indian-Russian Relations. *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Serija 4 Istorija Regionovedenie Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenija*, 30(3), 189. <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2025.3.17>
4. Dhaka, A., & Дмитриева, М. О. (2020). Factoring Central Asia in the Russia-India Energy Trade. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 13(6), 208. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2020-6-75-208-227>
5. Iqbal, B. A., & Rahman, M. N. (2023). BRICS and India in the Light of Russia-Ukraine Crisis: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of East Asia and International Law*, 16(1), 159. <https://doi.org/10.14330/jeail.2023.16.1.09>
6. Juned, M. (2019). India's Foreign Policy in Indo-Pacific Region and Its Impact for Southeast Asia's Regional Interest. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2019-0029>
7. Kapoor, N. (2023). Multi-alignment under "Uneven Multipolarity": India's Relations with Russia in an Evolving World Order. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 16(2), 15. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-2-89-15-32>
8. Kilian, L., Rapson, D., & Schipper, B. (2025). The Impact of the 2022 Oil Embargo and Price Cap on Russian Oil Prices. *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Working Papers*, 2024(2401). <https://doi.org/10.24149/wp2401r1>
9. Kulik, L. (2023). Russia-India Economic Cooperation: Current Trends and Promising Directions. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 16(2), 159. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-2-89-159-175>
10. Kumar, R. (2025). European Union Sanctions on Russian Crude After Russia-Ukraine War: Opportunity for India's Energy Security and Oil Refinery Industry. *Humanities and Social Sciences*, 13(2), 126. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.hss.20251302.14>
11. Mahmud, K. U., & Hossain, Md. S. (2025). Tracing the geopolitical influence and regional power dynamics in Central Asia: a thematic analysis with Neorealist perspectives. *Discover Global Society*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44282-025-00269-3>
12. Prabhakar, A. C. (2024). India's Industrial Revolution: Navigating Job-Oriented Growth Amidst Global Geopolitical Realities. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(6), 33. <https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2024-0052>
13. Silove, N. (2017). Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of "Grand Strategy." *Security Studies*, 27(1), 27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073>
14. Sim, L.-C. (2024). The Arab Gulf states in the Asian energy market: is the Russia-Ukraine war a game changer? In *Routledge eBooks* (p. 382). Informa. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003539230-24>
15. Singh, S., Raja, W., kumar, S., Uppal, A., & Rani, N. (2024). India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: A Strategic Energy Alternative. *Energy RESEARCH LETTERS*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.46557/001c.123649>

16. Sisodia, H., & Seth, S. (2025). India's Diplomacy in a Multipolar World: Analysing "Issue-based Coalitions." *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i02.43436>
17. Surwillo, I., & Slakaityte, V. (2024). Out with the old, in with the new? : The EU's path out of the energy crisis. In *Research Portal Denmark* (Issue 5, p. 86). Technical University of Denmark. <https://local.forskningsportal.dk/local/dki-cgi/ws/cris-link?src=diis&id=diis-1845ed57-e061-4c17-ad43-68da72420aa4&ti=Out%20with%20the%20old%2C%20in%20with%20the%20new%3F%20%3A%20The%20EU%2019s%20pa th%20out%20of%20the%20energy%20crisis>
18. Tavadyan, A., & Tavadyan, A. (2025). Redirection of Russian Oil Exports: Analyzing the Impact of Western Sanctions. In *Lecture notes in networks and systems* (p. 31). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-80710-7_3
19. Unnikrishnan, N., & Kapoor, N. (2023). Russia and India in the Evolving World Order. Introduction to the special issue. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 16(2), 7. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-2-89-7-14>
20. Zakharov, A. (2023). The International North-South Transport Corridor: The Prospects and Challenges for Connectivity between Russia and India. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 16(2), 216. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-2-89-216-234>