

Blinken Hopes to Derail India's Relationship with Russia Following Scholz's Failure

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With Russia's military operation in Ukraine evidently destroying NATO's ambitions, Washington is becoming increasingly frustrated that Moscow has not been isolated. Russia did not economically collapse, as was predicted in the West, partly because of the robust and longstanding relationship it has with India. It is unsurprising that in only a matter of days, Germany and the US have pressured India to capitulate their sovereignty and serve Western interests instead of their own.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz sought assurances from India on February 25 that it would not only refuse to block, but also support efforts to isolate Russia. Following his talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the chancellor refused to reveal what exactly they discussed in relation to Ukraine.

Although the contents of the discussion were cited as being confidential in nature, it is likely that Scholz did not want to humiliatingly admit that India refused to step back from its tried and tested relationship with Russia. Scholz did reveal though that he and Modi had discussed the war in Ukraine "very extensively and very intensely."

It is noted that this trip was Scholz's first official visit to India but his fourth meeting with Modi since taking office in 2021. Although they also discussed ways to boost economic cooperation, including through a free trade agreement between the European Union and India, it cannot be overlooked that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in New Delhi only days after Scholz.

Days before arriving in the Indian capital, Blinken said that countries like India, which have not joined the West in denouncing Russia's military operation, were on a supposed trajectory away from alignment with Moscow. He stressed that the process would not occur "in one fell swoop."

“There are countries that have long-standing, decades-long relationships with Russia, with the Soviet Union before, that are challenging to break off in one fell swoop. It’s not flipping a light switch, it’s moving an aircraft carrier,” Blinken said in an interview with The Atlantic on February 24.

However, for all of Blinken’s claims that India is moving away from Moscow, there is no actual suggestion that this is occurring. The US and India cooperate through the QUAD format, a naval bloc aimed against China, but this has not meant India’s submission to Washington, as the Americans evidently anticipated.

Although India has faced sustained and continued pressure from the West to distance itself from Moscow, New Delhi has thus far resisted, citing its longstanding ties with Russia and its economic and oil interests. It cannot be overlooked that Russia has been India’s largest weapons supplier since the Cold War-era, particularly since the US traditionally favoured Pakistan.

However, Washington in recent years has looked to turn New Delhi away from its main military supplier (but without wanting to adjust its policy to Pakistan).

“India for decades had Russia at the core of providing military equipment to it and its defences, but what we’ve seen over the last few years is a trajectory away from relying on Russia and moving into partnership with us and other countries,” Blinken said, without mentioning the fact that India is moving towards home-grown production, something that Russia is playing a key role in.

None-the-less, it is expected that Blinken, in the same way as Scholz, will try and convince India to change course regarding its ties with Russia.

As Bloomberg reported, citing Kpler’s lead crude analyst, Viktor Katona, “India purchased almost no Russian oil a year ago, but has become a crucial market after the US and European Union imposed sanctions on Moscow. The Asian country imported around 1.85 million barrels a day from Russia in February, close to its potential maximum of about 2 million barrels a day.”

The cold hard facts are that Moscow and New Delhi have a longstanding relationship that India will not break just for the sake of serving Western interests. Beyond the time-tested security ties, Russia offers energy hungry India the best deal for oil, something that will not be sacrificed because of a far-off war in Eastern Europe.

According to QUARTZ, India has in less than a year saved an estimated \$3.6 billion by increasing Russian oil imports. This is a significant amount for a country that depends on imports to meet 85% of its petroleum needs.

It is recalled that in November 2022, Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said “Russia has been a steady and time-tested partner. Any objective evaluation of our relationship over many decades would confirm that it has actually served both our countries very, very well.”

With this statement, he effectively confirmed a continuance of the current policy despite sustained pressure – a pressure that Scholz and Blinken are the latest to apply. They are however also the latest that were unable to convince New Delhi to change its policy regarding Russia.

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