

Has India Taken An Appropriate Stand During Ukraine Crisis?

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

We all are aware that by working together, individuals in a group can achieve far more than persons working alone. Group Discussions are conducted as groups are better problem solvers than those working in singular capacity, because they have access to more information than individuals do. One must also be able to communicate effectively while participating in a group discussion in organisational or social life. While functioning as a manager, one has to work in a group and also communicate effectively with other team members. Group discussions are a combined useful tool to resolve various issues in an organisation on a regular basis. At the same time, group discussions are also utilised to select or screen candidates for various jobs or admissions in a number of reputed institutes. This is so because while participating in a group discussion, participants reveal a number of personality traits that are very useful for the assessors.

During the process of selection of candidates for MBA course in one of India's top management institutes, 10 candidates were called to take part in a group discussion. Being aware that participating in a group discussion was a formal interaction, all candidates arrived wearing formal dresses. They were made to sit in a semi-circle so that the three assessors could closely observe and listen to them. Thereafter, they were allotted Identification Numbers, which were prominently displayed on their shirts. Candidates were told to address each other by Identification Numbers and NOT names. Subsequently, a detailed briefing was conducted by one of the assessors to clearly tell the candidates all the dos and don'ts during the conduct of the group discussion. In particular, candidates were informed that they were at liberty to speak as much as they wished, but at the same time, they must also permit others to speak. They must speak in an orderly manner, meaning that only one person should speak at a time. Candidates were asked to conclude the GD in 20-25 minutes



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and not more. They were given three topics and were asked to select one of them after mutual consensus. The above topic was selected by this group of candidates for the group discussion. The candidates were then given 5 minutes' time before starting the group discussion to recapitulate and jot down any points about the topic, which they wanted to speak on during the discussion. Thereafter, the group discussion proceeded in the following manner:

Candidate No. 6 : Good morning friends. After selecting this topic for our discussion, I am sure you all are quite keen to express your opinions on this important issue. Let me just remind you that though tension had been building up between Russia and Ukraine for some time, Russia eventually invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, causing Ukraine to break all formal diplomatic ties with Russia. Talking very briefly, while most European nations and the United States bitterly criticised Russia for this action against a much smaller country, only a few countries, including China, did support Russia. During all the turmoil and hot discussions, India did not take a stand against Russia and

instead decided to abstain when voting took place in the United Nations on this controversial issue on several occasions. Owing to this very reason, India's stand on this issue has sparked many a debate and discussion, both in national and international forums. Friends, we are now expected to evaluate this stand of neutrality taken by India and see whether it was the right approach during this group discussion.

Candidate No. 8 : I think, No. 6 has introduced the topic quite well. Let us now listen to views of other friends as well.

Candidate No. 1 : Friends I feel, to understand and evaluate the stand taken by India on this issue, we need to put things in perspective by knowing the background of this drastic action taken by Russia. I think you all will agree with me on this. Can some friend talk on this aspect now?

Candidate No. 2 : Let me briefly apprise you of the background of this issue. Consequent to the collapse and break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, bilateral relations of the consequent new states have undergone many ups and downs. Ukraine's policy was dominated by its desire to ensure its independence and sovereignty. It also adopted a foreign policy to balance relations with European Union (EU), Russia and other powerful nations. Relations between Russia and Ukraine became hostile after 2014 Ukraine Revolution of Dignity, which was followed by Russian annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. At the same time, pro-Russian separatists engaged the Ukrainian military in an armed conflict for control over eastern Ukraine. Ever since 2021, constant Russian military build-up on the border of Ukraine increased tensions between the two countries. The present war is the culmination of all these developments.

Candidate No. 9 : But, I feel that the tensions between Russia and Ukraine began in 1999, when North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) had decided to admit new erstwhile Soviet Union members from Europe.

Russia had loudly opposed this move. This was so, since in 1999, NATO had signed an agreement with Russia agreeing not to deploy troops or nuclear weapons on the territories of new NATO members. Subsequently, NATO did expand eastwards to enlist more members. Russia feels that there is a need to renegotiate present security arrangements in Europe, as expansion of NATO threatens Russia's security. But the West finds the Russian demand unacceptable. This is the main issue, friends. I hope, I was able to make it clear as to what is this war all about.

Candidate No. 5 : Well, Nos. 2 and 9 have clearly brought out various circumstances which led to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Now, we are in a position to debate the stand taken by India during this war.

Candidate No. 6 : Friends, since India did not openly take a stand against Russia and also abstained during debates and votings in United Nations on this issue, the United States and some other European countries alleged that India had also joined the Russian camp. According to them, since India is a large democratic country, which always supported peace, it was not understood as to why India was not condemning this brutal attack by a powerful country like Russia on a small nation like Ukraine? They repeatedly insisted that India should clarify her position in this regard. I feel, all this has certainly embarrassed India a great deal. Am I right?

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, quite a few countries were also curious about India's stand, due to the fact, that in the recent past, India had joined QUAD, which is a group of four countries, namely India, Japan, the United States and Australia. All other members of this group had condemned Russia's invasion on Ukraine strongly, while India did not do so. They also pointed out that India had repeatedly emphasised the need to respect the UN Charter and principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, and in the present case, Russia was a clear aggressor. In this context, the US and Japan were more vocal in their reaction on India's stand, while Australia was a bit more understanding.

Candidate No. 1 : I would like to add, not only QUAD group of countries, but most European countries also joined the US in openly condemning Russia and all these developments did embarrass India.

Candidate No. 9 : Not only this, as war in Ukraine got uglier and more and more civilian targets were hit, a quick victory was denied to Russian forces.

When situation continued to become graver and human cost mounted, a number of countries, which were not in favour of drastic actions against Russia, were changing their position. Some countries which earlier had non-aligned traditions, started supplying weapons to Ukraine. Due to these reasons, international criticism against Russia increased considerably putting more pressure on India to take stance against Russia. The question which was debated remained: should India continue to persist with its stand, despite Russia's current drastic actions and increased isolation and how would India defend her stand diplomatically?

Candidate No. 6 : Not only that, I think situation became even uglier after reports came in about Bucha massacre of civilians by Russian forces. According to these reports, 300 inhabitants of this city were found dead and evidence of their torture and young girls being raped was made available. Many bodies were found mutilated and burnt also. Subsequently, Ukraine has asked the International Criminal Court to investigate what happened in Bucha as part of investigation of the invasion in order to assess whether a series of Russian war crimes against humanity were committed? All these developments did put pressure on India to take a stand against Russia. Isn't it?

Candidate No. 2 : I want to clarify that South Africa, a major democracy, also abstained from UN votings to condemn Russia. UAE, a close American ally, also abstained from a vote in the UN Security Council and even Israel refused to join the sanction regime and said no to sending its defence systems to Ukraine. So, there were other nations as well which took similar stand as India, but they were not subjected to much criticism as India was.

Candidate No. 8 : You have not mentioned that Russian authorities have denied that their country was responsible for all such incidents and have described footage and photographs of dead bodies as fake news from the West and a provocation or a staged performance by Ukrainian authorities. As per a number of media organisations, these denials are not correct. Additionally, eye-witness accounts from residents also hold Russian Armed Forces responsible for these killings. What about that?

Candidate No. 5 : Quite right. I think India should have taken a clear stand after all such happenings were reported. These are very serious human tragedies amounting to war-

crimes and India should have spoken against Russia.

Candidate No. 4 : You do have a point, but what did India say about the stance it had taken?

Candidate No. 9 : Friends, let me put on record that at any time, India did not support any coercive military takeover of a country's territory by another. It has also always advocated resolution of international disputes through peaceful means, mutual dialogue and consultation. Moreover, India did use very strong language to condemn the killings in Bucha. Meanwhile, India has also given various reasons due to which it has taken this stand during the Ukraine crisis.

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, after due deliberation, India has taken a balanced and middle-of-the-road approach in all discussions that have been held at the United Nations on this issue. India's decision has been mainly guided by the need of safeguarding her security and developmental requirements. India has also spoken about her resolve to preserve the fundamental principles of the UN Charter to maintain the territorial integrity of all members of the United Nations. India has also urged Russia for immediate cessation of hostilities and to come to negotiating table for talks. Not only that, while supporting these principles, India also ensured that her close relations with the United States as well as Russia were not adversely affected. Over some time now, India has maintained very cordial relations with both these countries for mutual benefit and regional security.

Candidate No. 6 : Quite right, with the US, India has a global, strategic and comprehensive partnership covering large areas of mutual interest. The US is also India's biggest trade partner and important supplier of technology and defence equipment. In addition, now the US is also India's close associate in the QUAD to effectively counter the dominating posture of China. Both India and the US are two world's largest democracies and they fully acknowledge the significance of India-US defence partnership for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region. Even though, India did not oblige the US to take a firm stand against Russia during the Ukraine crisis, the relationship between the countries is considered significant to deal with global issues of mutual interest and regional peace. The US appreciates that presently China poses a bigger threat to the international order and it certainly needs India to deal with this emerging situation.

Candidate No. 1 : I feel by not obliging the US, India has shown that she is entitled to her strategic autonomy and take decisions strictly on the basis of her national interest and priorities. I think India has taken the correct stand.

Candidate No. 3 : Yes, I quite agree with you.

Candidate No. 9 : In case of Russia, India has a long-lasting and time-tested strategic partnership, and Russia has been a key pillar of India's foreign policy. Though, during the last few years, India has diversified her defence imports, yet Russia continues to supply approximately 60% of India's armaments. In the recent past, Russia has supplied S-400 missile systems valued at \$5.4 billion to India. This is besides some other Make-in-India initiatives and domestic manufacture of AK-203 rifles and Kamov helicopters with Russian help. Russia is also helping India in the areas of nuclear energy, hydrocarbons and space, etc. During the last India-Russia summit in December 2021, the two countries have further agreed to increase collaboration in Central Asia and Russia's far-east. Therefore, India wants to and should maintain good relations with Russia to safeguard her security and also effectively meet the current threat posed by China on India's borders.

Candidate No. 8 : I think No. 9 has nicely listed out the main reasons due to which India must maintain good relations with Russia, and this also partly explains why India did not take a firm stand against Russia during the current Ukraine crisis.

Candidate No. 2 : In this context, I would like to add that in the past, Russia had been more open to transfer of technology to India while supplying military equipment, and this has been one of the main reasons due to which Russia continued to supply bulk of military hardware to India for quite some time. On the other hand, America has been somewhat hesitant to transfer technology to India.

Candidate No. 10 : I feel, despite adequate pressure from the US, UK and other western countries, India has done well to avoid criticising Russia in a jiffy mainly to safeguard its national interest.

Candidate No. 6 : In addition, after the Russian invasion, India also had the responsibility of repatriating Indian nationals, including about 20,000 students, who were stranded in different cities of Ukraine. If India had taken a stand in favour or against Russia, or US/Ukraine, repatriation of Indians could have met with several difficulties. Therefore, the stand taken by India was

also in the interest of helping our stranded countrymen come back to India safely, which I think, was the right thing to do under those difficult circumstances.

Candidate No. 2 : We should also recall that India made repeated appeals at the highest level to both Russia and Ukraine for cessation of hostilities and return to dialogue and also stressed the significance of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries. It is important to note that while India took this stand of neutrality, India was quite aware that she cannot encourage or endorse military takeover of a nation's territory by another. This is so because India is currently dealing with a dominating China, who is also making unlawful demands to occupy India's territory by display of military force.

Candidate No. 9 : I think these are quite valid reasons to support India's position in the present circumstances and we all need to appreciate this stand taken by our government. India taking such an independent stand also reflects her growing status as a world power. While Russia has tried to justify attack on Ukraine on grounds of her own security considerations, India did call Russia's action as unfortunate, while keeping her links with Russia intact. While Russian invasion continued, the US did accept Indian stance to pursue positive ties with Russia while building a mutually beneficial partnership with the US. India has also displayed that she has the capability to maintain good relations with great powers, who may be having problems with each other on numerous world issues. In fact, India has not sacrificed her historic Russian connection at the cost of growing economic ties with the US and the West.

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, I think India has been able to keep herself equidistant from power games played by powerful nations, and yet has taken benefit from both sides for her own needs. Though India had declared that it is no more a non-aligned nation, yet core principles of Nehru's Non-Aligned Movement were seen to be once again relevant for India during the Ukraine crisis.

Candidate No. 7 : Friends, time allotted to us is getting over, so we need to conclude this group discussion now. May we request No. 6 to conclude this GD.

Candidate No. 6 : I think, we all had a very informative and fruitful discussion on this significant topic. If I may be permitted to say, I would conclude by saying that Russia has invaded Ukraine citing its own security

threats due to expansion of NATO and India took a balanced approach and did not take a stand against Russia, and absented during votings on this issue in the United Nations. India's action was criticised by the US and other European nations, who openly denounced Russia and announced sanctions against it. However, India did speak against killings of civilians and repeatedly stressed the need to resolve international disputes through negotiations and consultations. By taking such a stand, India has shown her choice of developing positive ties with major competing powers and pursue her own foreign policy, which does not get influenced by ideologies of major power centres. And finally, in a multipolar world, India has displayed her capability to safeguard her interests.

Thank you friends and have a good day.

Critical Analysis of Candidates' Performance :

Good: Candidate Nos. 2, 6 and 9

Candidate Nos. 2, 6 and 9 were the main speakers, who did a fine analysis of the topic. No. 6 took the initiative to start as well as conclude the group discussion also. These candidates brought out the finer aspects of the topic and logically countered others. Their knowledge was up-to-date and they made reference to the latest happenings connected with the topic to make the discussion interesting. It became apparent that they had done adequate preparation to participate in the GD, therefore, they could speak with fair amount of self-confidence also. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Good'.

Average : Candidate Nos. 1, 5 and 8

These candidates managed to put across their views along the side lines. They did enhance the momentum of the group discussion, but their contribution was somewhat restricted due to lack of knowledge and initiative. They did not make sufficient contribution and did not bring in new points or facts to take the group discussion forward. During the course of GD, their lack of effort to prepare became fairly obvious. Due to these reasons, their performance has been graded as 'Average'.

Below Average : Candidate Nos. 3, 4, 7 and 10

These four candidates barely took any active part in the group discussion. They have been merely appreciating or asking other candidates to speak. In fact, their own contribution to the discussion was almost negligible. It became quite apparent that these four candidates did not put in efforts to study the topic or collect relevant data to support their arguments. They just spoke once or twice to register their presence. Owing to all these reasons, their performance can be merely assessed as 'Below Average'.

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