

SWP Comment

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Bolstering the India-Germany Strategic Partnership

Deepening commonalities, broadening the agenda, acknowledging differences

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In 2000, the Strategic Partnership between India and Germany symbolised new-found commonalities shared by the countries in the era of globalisation. More than two decades later, the agreement requires an upgrade in order to address the changing international, regional and national dynamics. This upgrade should include, first, further deepening of the strong pillars of the relationship, i.e. in the fields of trade, economics, science and technology. Second, the agenda should be broadened to accord greater priority to areas including defence, security, political relations and people-to-people contact. Finally, both sides should acknowledge their differences with regard to their respective national interests and foreign policy objectives, and should find ways to bridge the gap. The focus on common interests in specific policy areas should be the guiding principle for enhancing India-Germany bilateral and international collaboration.

Russia's war against Ukraine has had severe consequences for the international order. The invasion initiated a dramatic shift in Germany's foreign policy and defence orientation (often referred to as the *Zeitenwende*) when Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a massive increase to the defence budget. India, in contrast, appeared to have initially been one of the countries reluctant to take sides in the conflict. Its abstentions from various votes condemning Russia at the United Nations (UN) raised concerns in Western capitals. Still, divergent positions over Russia cannot undermine the strategic convergence between India and the West vis-à-vis China's rise and its implications for

the Indo-Pacific and the global order. Moreover, the war in Ukraine may even initiate India's own foreign policy *Zeitenwende*. A Russia weakened by Western sanctions that is tilting towards China, and an emergence of a China-Russia-Pakistan axis may compel India to rethink its decades long military defence dependence on Russia. Western powers like the United States, France and the United Kingdom have already signalled their support for India's efforts to reduce arms imports from Russia. In this context, Germany can become an important partner in assisting India's modernisation of its armed forces.

