

India Mimics America and Hints at a Russian Twitter Troll Conspiracy

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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The US-Indian Strategic Partnership has rapidly evolved to such a point that the Indian government is now obliquely hinting that Russian twitter trolls are backing the country's opposition leader, showing that New Delhi is willing to say and do anything in order to further ingratiate itself with Washington even if this means demolishing its decades-long relationship with Moscow.



Rahul Gandhi (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Indian Information and Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani sent shockwaves through the diplomatic community over the weekend when she indirectly accused Russian “Twitter trolls” of supporting opposition leader Rahul Gandhi. The government official [tweeted](#) an article from [ANI Digital](#) which purports that Gandhi’s Twitter popularity is partly due to automated bots located in Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Russia, snidely remarking in her post that “Perhaps @OfficeOfRG planning to sweep polls in Russia, Indonesia & Kazakhstan ??” The report in question is nothing more than unfounded speculation, but the strong symbolism behind it in trying to capitalize on the US’ anti-Russian hysteria shouldn’t be overlooked. Furthermore, the very fact that a high-ranking member of the Indian government, a woman who plays an indispensable role in the projection of the country’s soft power within its borders and beyond, would publicly retweet such a ridiculous claim and even add her own snarky commentary to it is very scandalous, to say the least.

What it isn’t, however, is surprising, since India already launched a failed infowar against Russia a little over a year ago when it spread the fake news that the first-ever joint military

drills between Russia and Pakistan were cancelled by Moscow due to Indian pressure. The author wrote about this in depth at the time in an article titled "[India's First-Ever Infowar Against Russia Was A Failure](#)", which concluded that New Delhi decided to crudely backstab its partners in Moscow due to American pressure and the vindictive sentiment prevalent in the Indian capital nowadays to "pay Russia back" for its game-changing rapprochement with Pakistan. What the ruling BJP party apparently fails to understand is that India's much-trumpeted policy of "multi-alignment" isn't exclusive to their country, and that other states could also seek to rebalance and diversify their foreign partnerships as the [Multipolar World Order](#) progressively becomes a reality. Leading the way on the Russian front are the foreign policy "[progressives](#)," like Moscow's top Afghan envoy Zamir Kabulov, who strongly believe that Russia must pioneer non-traditional geopolitical partnerships in order to fulfill its 21st-century grand strategic vision in functioning as the supreme balancing force in Eurasia.

On the Indian side, though, there doesn't seem to be much enthusiasm for practicing "multi-alignment" in the manner that it was publicly presented as, since New Delhi has lately been pivoting away from multipolar Eurasia and towards the unipolar Atlantic in decisively furthering the an unprecedented military-strategic partnership with the US. The author chronicled all of India's moves in this direction in a series of articles listed under his [2017 Forecast for South Asia](#), and the reader is encouraged to skim through them if they're unfamiliar with the pace and magnitude of what happened in this regards all across last year. The highlight event of this year was the artificially manufactured [Donglang Drama](#) that India and the US both exploited in order to "justify" New Delhi's de-facto membership in the Washington-led "China Containment Coalition". The US hasn't made a secret out of this either, despite some Indian voices trying to downplay it in an unsuccessful attempt to "save face" before the eyes of the anti-imperialist "Global South", as the American Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [proudly boasted](#) right before departing for his first South Asia trip that India is his country's preferred partner for the 21st century.

This pivotal announcement only formalized what was already known for some time, but it seems to have encouraged the Indian government to do away with its erstwhile halfhearted attempt to hide its newfound pro-American policies behind the slogan of "multi-alignment".

After all, it was right after Tillerson's declaration of the 21st-century US-Indian military-strategic partnership that Indian Information and Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani felt confident enough to publicly imply that Russian trolls are supporting an opposition candidate in order to swing the 2019 elections. This, of course, is a categorically false suggestion which was only made in order to smear Russia and demonstrate India's fealty to its new American overlord. It also deliberately fails to acknowledge the billions of dollars in military and nuclear energy deals that the Modi government has signed with Moscow, and it also doesn't recognize the reasons why Russia has more [warmly embraced India](#) in recent years in spite of its fast-moving and comprehensive strategic partnership with China. Such deceptive information warfare is typically the domain of the "ModiMob", or [government-backed ultra-jingoist trolls](#), and usually directed against non-state targets, but this is the first time that an Indian state actor employed such tactics against a seemingly friendly state.

Bearing in mind the pro-American backdrop in which this anti-Russian Twitter troll accusation was made, it shouldn't be seen as a coincidence that [reports](#) also started streaming in over the weekend around the same time stating that India was thinking about abandoning its planned \$10 billion fifth-generation fighter jet deal with Russia. There's been talk about this for a while, but the revival of these reports in the current context of

Tillerson's proclamation of a century-long military-strategic partnership, the Indian Information and Broadcasting Minister's false suggestions that Moscow is coordinating a social media bot operation to unseat the BJP in 2019, and now the talk that India might pull out of what was supposed to have been the cornerstone deal of its partnership with Russia altogether indicate that New Delhi [no longer views](#) Moscow as the "brother" ("[bhai](#)") that it claimed it was during the Old Cold War. Instead, India sees Russia as being no different than any other partner aside from the US, which has now replaced Moscow as New Delhi's preferred patron given the paradigm-changing geopolitics of the New Cold War.

The New Delhi-initiated "normalization" of what was hitherto regarded as the "special relationship" between India and Russia is further proof that India has agreed to become the US' main proxy force for "[containing China](#)", breaking BRICS, and dismantling multipolarity. Furthermore, this negative trend in bilateral relations and the unfriendly moves against Russia over the weekend also point to India's desire to "play hardball" against its former ally, in that it no longer has any reservations about resorting to crude measures in order to squeeze as beneficial of a deal as possible from Moscow.

India is infuriated that Russia won't transfer high-end and ultra-classified military-technical information to it as part of any forthcoming weapons deals, something which is mandated by its "Make In India" policy, so it's apparently decided to employ dirty tricks against its negotiating partner in the hopes that it can intimidate Moscow into complying. To the contrary, however, no matter if the jet deal ultimately goes through or not, Russia isn't likely to forget what has happened, and this unpleasant experience will surely be used as an instructive example which will powerfully influence the course of the country's future South Asian policy, most likely to [Pakistan's comparative benefit](#).

The recent appointment of master strategist [Nikolai Kudashev](#) as the new Russian Ambassador to India will be very useful in helping Moscow navigate this uncertain period of relations with New Delhi, and the envoy's prior history of working with China should help Russia become the consummate geopolitical balancer that it desires to be in Eurasia. It will probably be impossible to repair the damage that India's ultra-jingoist BJP government has wreaked to the bilateral relationship over the past year, but that doesn't mean the two Great Powers can't pragmatically find some common ground between them even in the context of the US' domineering influence over Indian policy nowadays.

At the end of the day, the maintenance of cordial ties with Russia is important to India because it needs access to Russian resources and overland trade routes to Europe (the North-South Transport Corridor), and New Delhi also wants to establish a "soft" presence in the Russian Far East in order to give off the perception that it's "strategically flanking" China. That said, the fact that an Indian minister would publicly mimic the US' slanderous accusations against Russia by implying that Moscow is using Twitter bots to support the opposition is worrisome and suggests that pro-American sentiment in New Delhi is even stronger than the most vocal critics imagine it to be.

Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare.

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About the author:

Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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