



INFORMATION SPACE: AN EMERGING INDIA-RUSSIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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The second round of *India-Russia Consultations on Security regarding use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)* was held in New Delhi on February 15-16, 2018. These consultations were held pursuant to the *India-Russia Bilateral Agreement on Cooperation in ensuring security in the use of Information and Communication Technologies* signed on the sidelines of the 8th BRICS Summit in October 2016.

The Russian delegation was led by Mr. Oleg Khramov, Deputy Secretary, Security Council of the Russian Federation. Mr. Rajinder Khanna, Deputy National Security Adviser along with Dr. Gulshan Rai, National Cyber Security Coordinator led the Indian delegation. The Head of the Russian delegation also met with Mr. Ajit Doval, Indian National Security Advisor.¹ Both sides discussed and reaffirmed to:

1. Identify the common threats and formulate a common approach to ensure ICT security.
2. Highlight the need to increase bilateral collaboration in the use of ICT through specialized agencies.

¹ "Press release on Second Round of the India-Russia Consultations on Security in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 16, 2018, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3078159.

3. Exchange confidential and technical information to prevent conflict and the misuse of ICT for criminal and terrorism purposes.
4. Resume the negotiations at the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (UNGGE) on Information Security in order to develop the international norms, principles and rules on security and the use of ICTs where UN will act as a key facilitator.
5. Initiate additional mechanisms between relevant authorities of both countries to enhance the consistent bilateral dialogue.²

The time of this India-Russia strategic partnership in the use of ICT is very significant. Following the *India-Russia Bilateral Agreement on Cooperation* signed in October 2016, Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin approved Russia's new *Information Security Doctrine* in December 2016. The new doctrine states that the key “strategic objective of information security in the field of strategic stability and equal strategic partnership is to create a sustainable system of conflict-free inter-State relations in the information space” and “promoting the interests of the Russian Federation's allies in information sphere.”³ Thus, the doctrine achieved one of its key objectives even before its final approval in the form of this bilateral agreement.

International strategic environment is witnessing a resurgence of Russia which is stretching its muscles in the domains of land, air, water, outer space, and specially the information space. Russia is strengthening its cyber-defenses on one hand, and speeding up the offensive operations on other hand. It was officially accused of highly sophisticated digital espionage activities like stealing the US Democratic National Committee's emails, meddling in the US Presidential elections, hacking the German government computer network⁴ and “NotPetya” ransomware which hugely effected the businesses across Europe.⁵

The increased bilateral collaboration in the use of ICT through specialized agencies and additional mechanisms with Russia will further boost India's ranking on Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI). In terms of cyber preparedness, the Index divides states into three categories: leading states; maturing states and initiating states. Like Pakistan, India is also among the group of “maturing states” that are

² Ibid.

³ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation. *Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation* (No. 646 of December 5, 2016), http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2563163?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_CptICkB6BZ29&_101_INSTANCE_CptICkB6BZ29_languageId=en_GB

⁴ “Report: Russian Group Hacked Germany's Government Network,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2018/02/28/world/europe/ap-eu-germany-government-hacked.html>

⁵ “US joins UK in blaming Russia for NotPetya cyber-attack,” *The Guardian*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/feb/15/uk-blames-russia-notpetya-cyber-attack-ukraine>

developing multifaceted commitments, engaged in limited cybersecurity programs and committed to take new initiatives. India is ranked 23rd among 193 states, while Pakistan was at 67th position in 2017.⁶

This is also a diplomatic accomplishment for India. Through its pro-active diplomacy, India attained a stable posture between United States (US) and Russia in information space. Presently, India is a state with formal cyber agreements with both US and Russia through which it minimized the chances of its exclusion from non-proliferation regime. India is emerging as a significant member of UNGGE formed to identifying cyber norms which is actually a Russian initiative to control the weaponization of cyberspace. Currently, there is a deadlock between US, Russia and China on the issues of defining the threshold for the right to self defense and applicability of international humanitarian law in cyberspace.⁷ Furthermore, information warfare is an essential component of India's military doctrine. The cooperation with Russia for information security can translate into substantial defense cooperation in information sphere and both sides agreed to exchange confidential and technical information to prevent conflict and the misuse of ICT for criminal, as well as terrorism purposes. India is currently taking full advantage of this initiative to sustain and broaden the scope of its strategic partnership with Russia.

⁶ "Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2017," *International Telecommunication Union*, last modified October 05, 2017, https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2017-PDF-E.pdf

⁷ Arun Mohan Sukumar, "India and Russia sign cyber agreement, pushing the frontier for strategic cooperation," *Observer Research Foundation*, last modified October 15, 2016, <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speaks/india-and-russia-cyber-agreement/>