

Russia's Response to India's ASAT Missile Test Wasn't What New Delhi Expected

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India probably thought that Russia would enthusiastically accept its entry into the “space super league” as Prime Minister Modi described it, but Moscow is actually pretty critical of New Delhi’s anti-satellite missile tests and urged it to join a Russian-Chinese multilateral mechanism for preventing the weaponization of space, something that it curiously announced around the same time as the Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability met in Islamabad and “agreed on the need for preserving multilateralism in the field of international security and disarmament”.

Indian Boasting Meets Russian “Balancing”

India’s [anti-satellite \(ASAT\) missile test](#) was heralded by Prime Minister Modi as an unprecedented achievement that catapulted his nation into the “space super league” of only four countries capable of pulling off this military feat, which he thought would boost his reelection prospects ahead of the [upcoming onset of general elections](#) that will continue into May. The Indian leader also intended to send a strong signal to China and Pakistan, one that he anticipated would be positively received by his American ally and passively accepted by his country’s Old Cold War-era Russian one, but while Washington is behaving as expected, Moscow is not. In fact, it can even be said that the Russian reaction took India off guard because New Delhi has yet to recognize the new reality of its relations with Moscow, which have undergone a drastic change since the [Pulwama incident](#) that accelerated previous trends.

Russia’s [21st-century grand strategy](#) is to “balance” between the various forces of Afro-Eurasia in order to facilitate the [emerging Multipolar World Order](#) and maintain harmony in the Eastern Hemisphere, to which end it commenced a [game-changing rapprochement](#) with former rival Pakistan that’s since seen Moscow prioritize its relations with [the global pivot state](#) in order to “make up for lost time”. Russia announced its “[Return to South Asia](#)” by offering to mediate between Pakistan and India following the recent uptick in bilateral tensions between them, but while this was warmly welcomed by Islamabad, it was shot down by New Delhi whose [Ambassador to Russia was later proven to have lied](#) about the reason for rejecting this unprecedented diplomatic outreach. It’s therefore not for naught that Russia’s response to India’s ASAT test was “diplomatically critical” and nothing like what New Delhi anticipated.

Russia’s Carefully Worded Response

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs put out a [carefully worded statement](#) about this a day after the test on 28 March, with the Google Translated version being shared below because

an official English translation has yet to be published on their website at the time of writing:

“We drew attention to the anti-satellite weapon test conducted by India on March 27, as a result of which an Indian spacecraft in a low near-earth orbit was hit by a interceptor ballistic missile as a target. We note the non-directionality of this test against a specific country declared by the Indian leadership, as well as their confirmation of the immutability of the New Delhi foreign policy to prevent the deployment of weapons in outer space and thereby the development of an arms race in it.

At the same time, we are compelled to state that this step of India in many respects was the result of the substantially degraded situation in the field of arms control. Russia has repeatedly warned that the destructive actions of the United States to undermine the entire architecture of international security and strategic stability, including the one-sided and unlimited expansion of the global US missile defense systems, as well as the reluctance to abandon plans for putting weapons into space, make other states think about improving their own similar potentials in the interests of strengthening their national security. We urge Washington to take a responsible position, think again and abandon the insane, and most importantly – absolutely unrealizable – the idea of universal military domination. It is still possible to stop the arms race unfolding in various regions of the world. It is important to assist the responsible states in maintaining an adequate level of international security and stability.

For our part, we intend to continue taking all the necessary steps to prevent an arms race in outer space. With the support of a solid group of like-minded people, the idea of developing a multilateral legally binding instrument for keeping outer space peaceful based on the Russian-Chinese draft treaty on preventing the placement of weapons in outer space, the use of force or the threat of force against space objects, as well as a multilateral initiative – political obligations not to place weapons first in space. We offer our Indian partners to actively join these joint efforts of the international community.”

As can be seen, Russia hinted that India is a “[rogue state](#)” whose strategically destabilizing test was influenced by the US, which sent the signal that it would be acceptable for its ally to do this at the time that it did after recently [pulling out of the INF Treaty](#) and creating its so-called “[Space Force](#)”.

The Chinese & Pakistani Angles

Another important point to pay attention to is the last one where Russia urged India to join the multilateral mechanism that it proposed together with China to prevent the weaponization of space. It’s extremely unlikely that India will do this, however, seeing as how the whole point of this test was to send an aggressive signal to its Asian Great Power neighbor and “[fellow](#)” BRICS “[frenemy](#)”, though it’s not surprising that Russia would play the part of the Eurasian “balancer” by publicly suggesting that it join that framework. Although Russia’s intentions were positive in doing so and aimed at preserving peace in the supercontinent, India’s ruling Hindutva supremacists must have taken supreme offense at its suggestion because it implies that the two rising powers are equals unlike the BJP’s implied attitude towards its neighbor, especially in the hyper-jingoist run-up to the general elections.

Furthermore, it’s extremely curious that Russia’s statement came a day before the [Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability met in Islamabad](#) and “agreed on the need for preserving multilateralism in the field of international security and disarmament”, with

this outcome once again showing that Islamabad is much more responsible of a regional actor than New Delhi is which has yet to signal any interest whatsoever in Moscow's multilateral security proposal. Both the symbolism and timing of this development shouldn't be dismissed as a mere coincidence since it undoubtedly sent a powerful political signal that the previous state of affairs has changed in South Asia and that Russia seems to have more in common with Pakistan nowadays than it does with India, with the first-mentioned aiming to unite Eurasia through its global pivot state grand strategy while the latter is [trying to divide it through the US' "Indo-Pacific" paradigm](#).

Concluding Thoughts

India's present leadership has proven itself to be remarkably short-sighted in recent weeks when it comes to advancing the country's strategic interests, having been both [humiliated by Pakistan](#) after its reckless response to the Pulwama incident and now "diplomatically criticized" by Russia following its irresponsible election gimmick of an ASAT test. Just like the latest events accelerated previous trends involving Russia's position towards South Asia, so too have they also done the same for India's one towards Eurasia, with it now being evident that New Delhi is siding more closely with Washington than with its notional BRICS "partners" in Moscow and especially Beijing. Given the clear pattern that's visibly being established, it can be expected that India will continue to engage in strategically destabilizing unilateral action at the behest of its new American patron as it moves away from its erstwhile policy of "multi-alignment" and towards a new US-influenced model instead.

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