



Trump's hamstrung diplomacy

What is the issue?

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- The suspicion of Russian interference in the U.S. elections to favour Trump has rendered any diplomacy between the two countries impossible.

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- This is clearly weakening the diplomatic potential of the Trump administration and is making international arena challenging for all.

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What are the recent developments?

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- U.S. secretary of state Mr. Rex Tillerson recently got fired by President Trump, which is suspected to be because of his strong anti-Russia position.

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- This is in the backdrop of Mr. Tillerson censoring the Russian government for fostering an alleged attack on a former Russia defector, who is living in U.K.

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- Interestingly, the mainstream media till recently had been accusing Mr. Tillerson of being soft on Russia and even suspected that he owed his very appointment to Russia.

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- But the moment he got shunted out of office for seemingly taking a strong stand against Russia, he got hailed as hero who paid the price for boldness.

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- This episode has clearly exemplified that media frenzy has largely hijacked substantive aspects of the suspected electoral meddling.

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How are investigations into Russian electoral meddling progressing?

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- Presently, there seems to be a bipartisan consensus on stern action against Russia and the Trump administration seems willing to oblige.

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- Special Counsel Robert Mueller is already investigating allegations against Russia and he has till now filed documents indicting 13 people in court.

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- Charged against them are “information warfare” against the U.S. and “spreading distrust towards the candidates and the political system.

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- **Allegations** - It is alleged that Russia has spent thousands of dollars every month, since 2014 in order to distort the 2016 elections.

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- Russian-linked entities placed ads and ran propaganda campaigns on social media and it is estimated that as much as 11.1 trillion posts were made.

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- Facebook vouched that 126 million people may have seen a post generated by Russian operatives or bots on its site, and 56% of them were after the election.

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- It is alleged that some Russians misrepresented their purpose and travelled to the U.S. to collect intelligence on the country’s political process.

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- Russian campaign seems have supported Bernie Sanders during the Democratic primary and Mr. Trump during the presidential election.

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Is Trump administration going soft on Russia?

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- Recently, U.S. released the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), both which declared Russia as a main adversary.

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- The documents placed Russia slightly above China in the order of U.S. enemies, and left little room open for reconciliation.

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- With U.S. also stressing on modernising its nuclear arsenal and upgrading its weapons delivery systems, a new cold war already seems to be brewing.

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- This is expected to cost significantly on the tax payers and stocks of American defence companies have also been doing exceptionally good currently.
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- Even after sacking Mr. Tillerson, the White House announced a new round of sanctions against Russia.
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- Hence, Trump administration is already following a strong and muscular policy towards Russia and the calls for more anti-Russia rhetoric is illogical.
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What are the problems with sensationalising the meddling issue?

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- There is no practical way for journalists or citizens to independently verify whether the Trump campaign allegedly colluded with Russia.
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- Even if all the allegations are true, the current obsession of the American elite with Russia is still counterproductive and potentially dangerous.
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- **Decrying Democracy** - The episode seems to disputes voter intellect, and delegitimizes an established democratic process without concrete proof.
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- It also denies an obvious public outrage against the country's socio - economic prospectus that saw the rise of Mr. Trump and Mr. Sanders.
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- Notably, U.S.A is the only advanced country where life expectancy is falling, gun violence is rampant and drug abuse is strikingly very rampant.
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- **Diplomatic cramp** - The commentaries have also created the perception that any contact between a Trump official and a Russian is treason.
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- This has severely undermined a democratically elected President's authority to pursue diplomacy, which has weakened the county's international standing.
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- Hence, Russia-gate scandal has not merely bent perspective, but blinded vision in America, which might have even been deliberately done.
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Source: The Hindu

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