

Canada-India relations crash, as Ottawa accuses New Delhi of orchestrating campaign of intimidation and murder

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Diplomatic relations between Canada and India have almost entirely broken down after Ottawa presented New Delhi with what it called “clear and compelling” evidence that Indian government officials and intelligence agents have colluded with criminal gangs to carry out a campaign of intimidation and murder on Canadian soil.

India has angrily rebuffed Ottawa’s accusations, which were presented to Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval by his Canadian counterpart at a meeting in Singapore last Saturday.

On Monday, Ottawa expelled India’s ambassador to Canada and five other Indian diplomats whom it claims have been directly involved in illegal activities.

At separate press conferences hours later, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Commissioner Mike Duheme and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau outlined Canadian authorities’ charges against New Delhi. “Agents of the Government of India,” said Trudeau, “have engaged in and continue to engage in activities that pose a significant threat to public safety, including clandestine information gathering techniques, coercive behaviour targeting South Asian Canadians, and involvement in over a dozen threatening and violent acts, including murder.”

Citing ongoing criminal investigations and judicial proceedings, neither Trudeau nor Duheme provided concrete evidence to support their explosive charges. But given the importance that India plays in the imperialist powers’ military-strategic offensive against China and Ottawa’s disinclination, therefore, to jeopardize Indo-Canadian relations and the thuggish character of India’s far-right, Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, they undoubtedly have a massive evidentiary foundation.

New Delhi has responded by expelling Canada’s ambassador to India and five additional Canadian diplomats.

A statement from its Ministry of External Affairs asserted, “The Government of India strongly rejects these preposterous imputations and ascribes them to the political agenda of the Trudeau Government, centered around vote bank politics.”

Thirteen months ago, Trudeau publicly declared that Canada had “credible intelligence” of Indian involvement in the June 2023 assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a Sikh temple in Vancouver. An Indian-born Canadian, Nijjar was a prominent leader of the global Khalistan movement—that is, the reactionary communalist campaign to create a separate Sikh nation-state in parts of northwest India.

Subsequently, the US extradited an Indian national from the Czech Republic, Nikhil Gupta, whom it accuses of conspiring to murder on

American soil an Indian-born US citizen, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, who heads the pro-Khalistan group Sikhs for Justice. The indictment against Gupta charged that the assassination plot against Pannun was directed by an Indian official—identified by the *Washington Post* as Vikram Yadav, and as in the employ of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India’s premier intelligence agency.

In recent months, Canadian authorities have arrested some 20 people for their involvement in violence against pro-Khalistan activists, including three Indian nationals who have been charged with Nijjar’s murder.

According to the RCMP, many if not all those it has taken into custody have ties to an Indian-based criminal organization, which is headed by Lawrence Bishnoi. The Indian state is said to have outsourced its campaign targeting Canadian-based Khalistan supporters to the Bishnoi gang.

Bishnoi is currently jailed in India, but Indian news sources say he has continued to run his criminal operations with little to no impediment.

Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, who joined Trudeau at his Monday press conference, said that since Ottawa first publicly accused India of involvement in Nijjar’s assassination, New Delhi’s clandestine activities in Canada have only increased.

The *Washington Post* has reported that it has learned Ottawa told New Delhi that “conversations and texts among Indian diplomats” in Canada involved in illicit activities and now expelled from the country “include references” to Indian Home Minister Amit Shah and a senior RAW official, and that they authorised “intelligence-gathering missions and attacks on Sikh separatists,” in Canada.

Shah is Modi’s chief henchman. Like his boss, with whom he has a close association dating back decades, he has a notorious record of communalist incitement, and was indicted by India’s Central Bureau of Investigation for orchestrating the summary execution (fake encounter killings) of three criminals. However, the charges were dropped after Modi became prime minister in 2014.

The Indian news website *The Wire* has noted that Shah has used his powers as Home Minister to block the transfer of the gangster Bishnoi from a prison in Gujarat, the state from which Modi and Shah both hail, to face charges in Maharashtra and other states. The imprisoned Bishnoi was even allowed to give a March 2023 television interview in which he boasted of his “patriotism,” declaring, “I am a nationalist. I am against Khalistan. I am against Pakistan.”

Throughout the more than year-long diplomatic spat over India’s international campaign of murder, violence and intimidation against

Khalistan activists, there has been a pronounced difference in New Delhi's response to the charges leveled by Washington compared to those from Ottawa.

While the Modi government has demonstratively dismissed the Canadian allegations, it has made a show of taking those levelled by US authorities very seriously. The Biden administration, for its part, made it clear from the beginning that it would not allow the murderous actions of the Indian state to impede Washington's full-court press to integrate India ever more deeply into American imperialist global strategy, above all its war drive against China, including through massive arms sales and the transfer of advanced weapons technology.

However, everything suggests that Canada's latest diplomatic foray against India was closely coordinated with Washington.

According to a report published in the *Indian Express*: "Over the last week or so, Washington and Ottawa are learnt to have had several rounds of discussions with their Indian counterparts which have detailed what they described as 'credible information' on an Indian government official's involvement in the transnational killings and plots to kill pro-Khalistan separatist figures in the US and Canada ...

"It was an ambush by both Americans and Canadians', a top official source told *The Indian Express* describing the nature of the meetings."

Last week, the US State Department effectively summoned representatives of the Indian government "enquiry committee" that Modi and Shah created in response to US demands for an "accounting" following the release of the indictment in the Pannun murder conspiracy case to come to Washington to provide an update on their findings.

According to a US State Department announcement, which was subsequently removed from its website, the enquiry committee members were to arrive in Washington on Tuesday. That is, they were to confront US officials in the immediate aftermath of the secret extraordinary meeting of India and Canada's National Security Advisers in Singapore, Trudeau's public claim of "compelling" evidence of an Indian state-orchestrated assassination campaign in North America, and the expulsion of the six Indian diplomats.

Washington, with Canada's support, violates international law at will, including in carrying out assassinations on foreign soil, as with US President Obama's "terror Tuesdays" and the Trump-ordered 2020 killing of the Iranian Islamic Guard Corps head Qasem Soleimani. The two North American imperialist powers have supported Israel to the hilt over the past year as it has conducted its genocidal assault on Gaza and rampaged across the Middle East, wantonly heaping one war crime and violation of international law upon another.

For reasons of state sovereignty, national prestige and internal political cohesion, Washington and Ottawa are not prepared to simply allow New Delhi to violate their laws and kill their citizens. If India does that in Pakistan, where it has reportedly masterminded 20 assassinations in recent years, that's one thing, on the streets of Vancouver or New York another.

That said, there clearly are other reasons Washington has chosen to rattle this issue now and chosen to use its longtime close ally Canada as something of a stalking horse.

The strategists of US imperialism are frustrated and angry that New Delhi has balked at supporting the NATO powers in the war they instigated with Russia over Ukraine, and those frustrations have only increased as Ukraine's military position has gone from bad to worse.

India continues to integrate itself ever more fully into a web of anti-China bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral military-strategic alliances and "dialogues" with Washington and its principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia. However, it continues to resist US pressure to substantially downgrade, if not break, its decades-long strategic partnership with Russia, on whom it remains dependent for much of its weaponry and nuclear program. Moreover, the opportunity to import Russian oil at discounted prices, due to the US-led Western embargo, has proven a godsend for the Indian economy. Russia is now India's biggest crude oil supplier, up from a market share of just 2 percent in 2021, and much of that is subsequently exported as refined products.

India's clandestine illegal activities provide Washington with a means to pressure New Delhi to come more into line with its drive against Russia. At the same time, having Canada take the lead allows the Biden administration to send its message without in anyway jeopardizing the Indo-US military-strategic alliance or potentially discrediting it in the eyes of the US public.

How this will play out in the coming weeks and months remains to be seen. In Canada, the latest revelations of Indian-state violence are being cited by the corporate media and political establishment as yet further arguments for Canada to adopt a more aggressive policy in "a hostile world," strengthening its partnerships with the US, NATO and the Five Eyes, through massive hikes in military spending, and increased state surveillance at home.

Last June, in the name of combating "foreign," principally Chinese, "interference," parliament unanimously adopted legislation creating a whole new category of political crimes and vastly increasing the powers of the intelligence agencies.

In the Indian press, articles are already appearing that decry the "stupidity" of the Modi government's vendetta against North American-based Khalistan activists, arguing that it has given Washington leverage to bully New Delhi; and, as various investigations and legal proceeding unfold, to raise or cool tensions over them in accordance with US interests.

More generally, the entire affair speaks to the collapse of any semblance of international law and the explosive character of international relations as world capitalism, with the US and its imperialist allies in the lead, lurches towards global war.



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