



OBAMA VISIT TO CHINA: INDIA'S CONCERNS

Shiv Poojan Prasad Pathak

Research Associate, Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi

The US President Barak Obama visited China in the month of November, 2009. The visit took place in the midst of global economic crisis, the meeting on climate change in Copenhagen and also in the backdrop of Dalai Lama's religious visit in Twang monastery situated at Arunachal Pradesh. The economic melt-down and crisis smeared the image of the US as a leader of global village and exposed its economic vulnerability. China emerges as a beneficiary state with economic crisis and proves a stable economy in the world. The stability of Chinese economy in time of economic crises levered its political image in the eyes of Washington. The US has acknowledged China's role in managing the global economic crisis and formed G-2 forum for economic dialogue. The economic strength of China reflects in the investment of its foreign exchange reserves in the US securities, which totaled \$699 billion making China the second largest foreign holder of US securities after Japan.¹

During Obama's visit, the US and China issued a joint statement and endorsing the idea of "building and deepening bilateral trust, economic cooperation and global recovery and regional and global challenges". Another area of cooperation has been identified is "climate change, energy and environment".² The joint statement mentions the issues of India and Pakistan relations that reflect the tacit motives of the both states to occupy a larger strategic place in South Asian politics. The joint statement is the cause of anxiety for India, because it consistently denies any third party role in the India-Pakistan relations.

US-China Joint Statement

Obama and his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao, issued the joint statement covering

During Obama's visit, the US and China issued a joint statement and endorsing the idea of "building and deepening bilateral trust, economic cooperation and global recovery and regional and global challenges".

The joint statement appears that the US is looking at China to play a bigger role in the region and monitor talks between India and Pakistan.

a variety of issues related to global and regional affairs. Apart from other factors, the joint statement includes the names of India and Pakistan, which definitely was not appealing to New Delhi. The statement declares that the "two sides welcomed all efforts conducive to peace, stability and development in South Asia.

They support the improvement and growth of relations between India and Pakistan". The point which makes India anxious is that they are "ready to strengthen communication, dialogue and cooperation on issues related to South Asia and work together to promote, peace and stability and development in that regions".³ The statement has stimulated different responses from India, Pakistan and Hurriyat.

India Rejects, Pakistan Welcomes and Hurriyat Offers

India quickly responded to joint statement questioning the motives behind it. On November 19, 2009, Official Spokesperson of Ministry of External Affairs, in reply of joint statement, said, "Government of India is committed to resolving all outstanding issues with Pakistan through a peaceful dialogue in accordance with the Simla Agreement. A third country role cannot be envisaged nor is it necessary". India reaffirmed its stand that for any meaningful dialogue with Pakistan, it requires "an environment free from terror or the threat of terror".⁴ The joint statement appears that the US is looking at China to play a bigger role in the region and monitor talks between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan welcomes the joint effort of both countries. Foreign Office Spokesman Abdul Basit welcomed the joint reiteration to promote peace, stability and security in South Asia. He said, "President Barack

Obama had indicated that the US wants China to help improve relations between India and Pakistan".⁵ A Pakistan daily stated that "for Pakistan, it is a matter of satisfaction that the US and China have developed a unanimity of views on the South Asian situations, complicated as it has become by India's refusal to resume the composite dialogue in the aftermath of the Mumbai terror attack".⁶ The Chairman of All Parties Hurriyat conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq held the argument, that China is the third party in Jammu and Kashmir. He said, "China definitely has a role in the Kashmir dispute and is definitely stakeholder". He demanded that any further negotiations on the subject should involve China.⁷ In fact, China occupies 3800 square km in Aksai Chin and 5180 square km in Kara Koram range, that was gifted by Pakistan for building a highway, under the 1963 Sino-Pak friendship pact.

Is it Unintentional or a Part of Larger Game?

The desire of the US and China to have a bigger role in South Asia is neither the first occasion, nor accidental. It is just a renewal and repetition of old inclinations and efforts of the Cold War politics. For example, the strategy adopted by both countries during Bill Clinton visit to China in June 1998, just after Pokhran II event, did upset India. They issued the joint statement with objectives of taking up a mediatory role in the region and jointly declared, "We are committed to assist where possible India and Pakistan to resolve peacefully the difficult and long standing differences between them, including the issues of Kashmir. We stand ready to assist in the implementation of confidence building measures between them, and encouraging the consideration of additional measures of this type".⁸ They took self-claimed responsibility to "contribute to the achievement of a peaceful, prosperous and secure South Asia". India rebuffed with argument that US-China "joint statement on South Asia, categorically rejected the notion of these two countries arrogating to themselves, joint or individual responsibility for the maintenance of peace and stability and security in the region. India interpreted it as "the reflection of the hegemonistic mentality". It stated, "India's desire to develop friendly and peaceful relations and a stable structure of cooperation with Pakistan does not require reiteration. The way of achieving these objectives is through direct bilateral dialogue".⁹

India's Concerns

India raised its genuine concerns over the mention of "India" in the joint statement, and also questioned the motives of behind it. The concerns of India are based on

its past experiences. No doubt, the relations between India and the US and its relation with China have improved as compared to the Cold War period, but India had bitter experiences of Washington-Beijing-Islamabad alliance that had absorbed its diplomatic energy and caged India to confine in South Asia. Before 1962 war, India had made its appearance globally and registered its presence in various multilateral forums, where international agenda was being shaped. This alliance worked as containing instrument for India's search for great power status throughout the Cold War periods.

US-China: G-2

The relations of US-China are very significant in the twenty first century which would inevitably influence the nature of relations among the nations. The presence of great power in international politics decides the structure of international system. The US as the largest power and the China as the second largest power largely would shape the structure of power in international system in

forthcoming decades. In the post-Cold-War period, the withdrawal of Soviet Union from the great power game, to an extent, helped the emergence of China as a front ranking state in the system. In the present international system, China adheres to the attribute of the great powers in terms of its size, economy,

military and global presence. Being a major centre of power, "the agenda of US-China relations goes global",¹⁰ ranging from the global issues like terrorism, nuclear proliferation, global and regional stability and energy and environment and the institutions in UN, WTO, to recovery of economic crisis.¹¹

The Obama administration employs the strategy of engagement with China. It is no longer perceived a "strategic competitor"¹² as declared in September, 2002 by the Bush administration. The policy reflects that the US is prepared to share the international stage with China by sharing responsibility. In this regard, the US policy to give preeminent role to China in South Asia could be credited to number of factors. Firstly, at the policy level, the Democratic Party advocates the engagement policy with China as contrast to the Republican Party that supports China's containment. Mr. Obama's policy recognises China's status as a major economic and political power among the states¹³. The issues of human rights, Taiwan and Tibet hardly make any impact in strategy of engaging with it. That is why, Obama rejected Dalai Lama's offer to meet him during his Washington visit.

"India's desire to develop friendly and peaceful relations and a stable structure of cooperation with Pakistan does not require reiteration. The way of achieving these objectives is through direct bilateral dialogue".

Obama declared that Tibet is a part of China and the US has one-China policy over Taiwan. Secondly, the economic crisis can also be seen as a reason for the US inclination towards China. China is the second largest creditor in the US security treasury. Third, it might not be incorrect to say that the US was pressurised into giving China a larger role in the region in return for other favours in areas like the North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues and war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Rising China declares its objectives, "the peaceful rise" by the "developing of comprehensive national power". Chinese programme of rapid military modernization, its dispute over Taiwan, Tibet and the anti-satellite testing raises doubts over the peaceful rise of China. China has a history of waging wars with its neighbours.

India and China: Global Competitor

India and China are immediate neighbours, rising powers and are gaining greater economic and military prowess. They have a disputed boundary; both are growing economies competing for energy, market and natural resources and area of influence. However, the relation has markedly improved in some sense, although the dispute over the boundary has been not resolved and still is a bone of contention. The trends of Chinese behaviors reflect bitter relations with India. China walked out in NSG meeting over India-US civil nuclear agreement, claims over Arunachal Pradesh asking to Visa for the Prime Minister's visit there, recently, stopped the construction of road at Leh area in Jammu and Kashmir and issued separate visas to the resident of the valley. China has supported Pakistan's illegitimate claim over Jammu and Kashmir, not only on the diplomatic front but also militarily. It extended military support to Pakistan during the 1965 war and has been a major support in Pakistan military build up. The fear is that the relations are rapidly moving in areas of trade and commerce, so far, no substantial progress has been made that can minimise the apprehension for a future conflict.

China's "Peaceful Rise": What does it Mean for India?

Rising China declares its objectives, "the peaceful rise" by the "developing of comprehensive national power". Chinese programme of rapid military modernization, its dispute over Taiwan, Tibet and the anti-satellite testing raises doubts over the peaceful rise of China. China has a history of waging wars with its neighbours. Today China is a country which has proliferated nuclear weapons despite being an

The US needs to take care of two factors: first, the mentioning the name of India in bilateral relations with China would generate agony and second, whether mentioning of the name would serve any substantial purpose or not, it would be counter productive in democratic regimes like India.

NPT signatory, has the worst human right records, kicked out Tibet's leadership including Dalai Lama and forcibly occupied Tibet and tortured Tibetans for decades. Moreover, Chinese political system is an authoritarian regimes based on the communist ideology. It is a closed system that denies the flow of information. In the absence of authentic information, the motives and preference of the China is

unpredictable because there is always a gap between what has been preached and what is it practicing. The managing and assessing of China's peaceful rise is the challenges task for Indian-policy makers.

India-US: Building or Betraying

In backdrop of these developments, India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh paid an official visit to the US for strengthening the India-US relations n the last week of November 2009. They declared that India-US partnership is for the better world and indispensable for global peace and security¹⁴. The visit did help to pacify the India's discomforts over the joint statement of the US and China. One should commit to memory that the US has always been, explicitly and implicitly, in the South Asian region, since the beginning of the Cold War and played major role in shaping India-Pakistan relations. Currently, the US has registered its military and diplomatic stay in the region in the name of war on terror in Af-Pak region. There is tacit acceptance of the US in the region but invitation of China as a monitoring role would not be acceptable to India. The US needs to take care of two factors: first, the mentioning the name of India in bilateral relations with China would generate agony and second, whether mentioning of the name would serve any substantial purpose or not, it would be counter productive in democratic regimes like India. It would only destabilise Indian's relation with the US. India is never been comfortable with a policing role of any third country in India and Pakistan relations.

Options for India

It looks that the new American presidency has given excessive significance to China, and obviously deepening dependence on Pakistan to achieve US goal in Afghanistan, which raises genuine questions about India's position in overall American foreign policy. Obama, as a Senator, gave unenthusiastic

support to India-US civil agreement. He appointed Richard Holbrook, a special envoy to South Asia, initially mandating him to cover the issues of Kashmir. The name of Kashmir was deleted only when India objected. He has given priorities to China in his strategy of managing the Asia-Pacific stability. The Indian Prime Minister visit to the US, remain a customary visit, and no new pact was signed.

The self-reliance and self-autonomy is not an appropriate strategy in the complex interdependence world. But for long term planning, India has to develop its own resources and capability and engage itself in promotion of the international regimes over the common issues that support rule-based mechanism.

The dilemma persist that what options does India has in the evolving US-China relationships. In an overall appraisal, India cannot stand with China and inclination towards the US is the rational choice for Indian foreign policy makers. The PM Manmohan Singh reiterates its concerns about China and put his arguments that India wants to prepare for the peaceful rise of China as a major power but he reminded India's long standing border problems with China and its recent assertiveness on the border. According to him, both countries have agreed that "pending resolution of the problem, peace and tranquility will be maintained on the border, there is still a certain amount of assertions on the part of China. I do not fully understand the reasons for it but that has to be taken note of".¹⁵

In middle term, India has to move with balance on the tightrope of US and China that is a matter of great skill and diplomacy. That is why Indian Prime Minister adopted balanced approach over the US-China joint statement. But it has different meanings. Countering or containing China is neither possible nor desirable on the part of India. It is not possible because the China is moving faster than India in all dimensions of power, it is nor desirable because India, also a rising country needs the peaceful atmosphere.

In the Westphalia system, every state is free to develop the relations and to build the alliance with each other depends upon the necessity of national interest. What

India can do is to engage with these countries with its own terms and conditions. The self-reliance and self-autonomy is not an appropriate strategy in the complex interdependence world. But for long term planning, India has to develop its own resources and capability and engage itself in promotion of the international regimes over the common issues that support rule-

based mechanism. So for intervention or mediatory role in region is concerned, the both the power realize the cost of intervention. India is able to protect its territory and citizens from any encroachment by adversary.

Notes

- ¹ *China's Holding of US Securities: Implications for the US Economy*, CRS Report of Congress, 9 January 2008
- ² U.S-China Joint Statement, 17 November, 2009, at <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/111709.html>
- ³ *ibid*
- ⁴ Ministry of external Affairs, Government of India at <http://meaindia.nic.in/pressbriefing/2009/11/18pb01.htm>, 18, November, 2009
- ⁵ PTI, 18 November, 2009, at www.dawn.com/wps/wcm.dawn-content
- ⁶ "China-US Presidents' talks attracts International media attention", 19, November 2009, at <http://www.dawn.com/>
- ⁷ *Hindustan Times*, 20 November, 2009
- ⁸ Joint Statement on South Asia, 1998 available at <http://www.nti.org/db/chinalengdocs/sasiasum.htm>
- ⁹ www.Indianembassy.org.pic.1998/june98/prjune2798.htm
- ¹⁰ Kenneth Lieberthal (2009) "The China-US Relationships Goes Global", *Current History*, Vol.108, no. 719, pp. 243-249
- ¹¹ U.S-China Joint Statement, 17 November, 2009, at <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/111709.html>
- ¹² The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002.
- ¹³ "Welcome Moves", *Dwan*, 19 November 2009, at www.dawn.com,
- ¹⁴ "India and the United States: Partnership for a Better World" at http://www.Indianembassy.org/newsite/press_release/2009/Nov/22.asp, 24 November, 2009
- ¹⁵ *Indian Express*, 25 November, 2009, New Delhi



The Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) is an independent, non-profit think tank that undertakes and promotes policy related research, study and discussion on defence and military issues, trends, and development in air power and space for civil and military purposes, as also related issues of national security. The Centre is headed by Air Cmde Jasjit Singh, AVSM, VrC, VM (Retd) Centre for Air Power Studies.

P-284, Arjan Path, Subroto Park, New Delhi 110010
Tel: +91 11 25699130/32, Fax: +91 11 25682533

Editor: Ms Shalini Chawla e-mail: shaluchawla@yahoo.com

The views expressed in this brief are those of the author and not necessarily of the Centre or any other organisation.