

## China Visit of Indian Prime Minister May 2015 Strategically Audited

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Strategically audited, Indian PM Modi's visit to China in May 2015 was minus any strategic gains to India from China nor did the visit create any regional or global ripples in terms of strategic impact.

A China-visit by PM Modi was an imperative to round-off his diplomatic visits to the major global powers. But unlike the effusiveness which host nations extended to the Indian Prime Minister in their countries, the same did not attend PM Modi's visit to China. No major concessions to India were made by the Chinese President particularly on the deeply scrutinised boundary dispute. This was unlike the record of other major global powers visited by PM Modi in the last one year.

Strategic Distrust which is a defining feature of the adversarial relationship between China and India continues to persist. Chinese political leaders during PM Modi's visit to China this month made no visible efforts in terms of initiatives or concessions on the vexatious China-India border and territorial dispute to dilute the all-pervasive Strategic Distrust that plagues India's strategic openings to China. Tokenism was resorted to in terms of opening additional Border Meeting Points for military commanders of both sides and establishing hot lines between Headquarters.

On the second day of the visit PM Modi was constrained to mention that China should take a long view and display strategic vision on issues that divide China and India, implying the border dispute. That reflects that the Chinese President rebuffed any Indian hopes of forward movement on this issue.

In the absence of any mutual strategic openings by China or India no regional or global balance of power equations were upset by visit of

India's new dynamic Prime Minister Modi. If nothing else, the regional and global impact was that India now had a Prime Minister who could stand up to China. Presumably, in the view of these nations, PM Modi too would get disenchanted with China and that India would now ultimately have no options left but to rest its strategic hopes and strategic partnerships on other nations, not China.

Gains arising from PM Modi's visit to China, if any, can be attributed only to the economic and trade relations. Deal worth \$22 billion are said to have been struck by Chinese companies.

The above does not lead to any major strategic breakthrough in China-India relations. The first major reason is that economics by itself cannot build strategic bridges between two major countries with an adversarial and conflictual past. Secondly, in Chinese policies, more specifically, business and economics is not independent of Chinese State's overall relationship with a major contending Asian rival like India. Chinese businessmen's reluctance to make major investments in India also suffers from the same Strategic Distrust that marks the tenor of China-India official relations.

Reverting back to the Strategic Distrust factor in China-India relations, my earlier SAAG Papers prior to PM Modi's departure for China reflected that China was unlikely to make any concessions at all, major or minor, on the boundary dispute or give up playing the "Pakistan Card" against India.

China in a brazen manner of playing the "Pakistan Card" against India played it with a 'double whammy'. China sent two unmistakable signals to India by first timing Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan just prior to Indian PM Modi's visit to China. Secondly, while in Pakistan, the Chinese President announced the \$ 44 billion investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which amounts to a strategic turning of India's western flanks and that to through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir territory belonging to India.

India held its hand initially on the announcement but finally reacted diplomatically by lodging a strong protest '*demarche*' with China. Taking place just prior to the Indian Prime Minister's visit to China, it reflected that China had no intentions to dilute the Strategic Distrust between China and India. If nothing else, both these Chinese hands could have been played after PM Modi's visit to China.

India too under bold and assertive leadership of PM Modi seemed determined not to be outplayed by China in strategic signalling. The Indian Prime Minister just before his departure to China approved an ambitious programme of Indian Navy build-up of a 60,000ton Aircraft Carrier, six Destroyers and six Frigates besides other major armament acquisitions. This Indian naval build-up, which probably is going to be fast-tracked, carries military implications for China's ongoing drive for the Maritime Silk Road project which despite its harmless name is nothing else but a strategic naval girdling of the Indian Ocean.

PM Modi could not have planned his China visit better when he combined it with visits to Mongolia and South Korea. That sent their own signals. The Indian Prime Minister needs to be commended that unlike previous Indian Prime Ministers including BJP Prime Minister

Vajpayee he did not allow the Chinese to creep in the statements the references of Tibet

Before Modi's visit to China, the Chinese media was agog with commentaries that with China and India both headed by strong leaders then both could be expected to make bold decisions to resolve the China-India border dispute. This refrain was picked up in India also. It was forgotten in these summations in China and India that both these strong leaders have inherent contradictions in their respective nationalistic dreams. The Chinese President speaks of an expansive "Chinese Dream" and making China militarily strong. The Chinese President's dream implies that China must emerge as the contending Superpower against the United States. Indian PM Modi's dream synonymous with Indian national aspirations is to make India into a "Global Power"

Reflective of the misty China-India relations was the gigantic wall painting providing the dominating backdrop to the Summit Meet table in Xian. In what appeared to be some forbidding mountain-scape, at the lower level of the painting were clouds and some mist. That characterises the outcome of China-India relations.

China and India are therefore destined to be contending Asian powers and on the global stage too. This throws up its own strategic spill-overs in Asia and the world.

Concluding, once again, as advocated in my earlier SAAG Papers, is that since war is not the option, India's China strategy must adopt the American model of "Congagement" of China that is a judicious strategic mix of 'containment' and 'engagement'. That is the 'Middle Path' to the 'Middle Kingdom'.

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