

In between lakeside lunches, Modi should tell Xi that India wants peace on the border

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India has objected to CPEC passing through PoK. China will have to reciprocate our stand on 'One China' policy and terminate CPEC project.

In his opening address to the recently held 19th Peoples' Congress, the newly anointed supreme leader of People's Republic of China, "Chairman" Xi Jinping presented his vision of China

“moving closer to centre stage”. Needless to say, he was referring to the centre stage of global politics, which also includes global economic supremacy.

It was not a mere platitude when Xi remarked about the beginning of a new era in his opening address. Xi left nothing about his agenda to imagination when he asserted his position and that of his country.

Months later, with US-China trade hostilities (not war yet) intensifying, the two rival Korean states coming together and OBOR projects nose-diving, Beijing has, literally, rolled out the red carpet for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Wuhan, where Modi-Xi Jinping meetings are taking place has a special place in China's chequered history as the first rebellion by the PLA took place here forcing Mao to conduct one of the worst purges in Communist history. Xi Jinping too had some of his tense moments with the PLA, which according to sources, was responsible for the Doklam misadventure forcing Xi to retreat. Supreme leaders in China are bad at forgiving and forgetting.

Xi's idea of a strong China, moving closer to the centre stage of geopolitics is not only replacing US from that position but also has a strong universal economic agenda and internal political dynamics. While he has emerged as the supreme leader of China, even more powerful than Mao and Deng, Xi has to face a hostile US under Trump, constantly changing goal posts and confrontational EU looking to create roadblocks for ever. Trump's U-turn on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is not good news for China especially in the changing landscape in the Indo-Pacific region.

From New Delhi's view point, Trump's policy vacillations are prompting Modi government to undertake constant review of foreign policy assessments.

Washington's 2017 strategy document on South Asia revealed Trump's intent to punish Pakistan for terror activities but again in a sudden development Trump went back on his resolve suggesting that New Delhi will have to pay a heavy price in the bargain such as committing its boots on Afghan soil. Trump's erratic statements on India related visa policies and changes in trade and economic action plans are other major irritants in otherwise smooth Indo-US relations.

New Delhi has been studying the changing dynamics in the Indo–Pacific region where there are clear trends of strategic balance incrementally shifting away from America. The emergence of China as an economic super power and a strategic fulcrum of the world is a reality. As the largest exporter of manufactured goods to the US, China-US trade could cross \$800 billion mark. China is also the largest trading partner of the EU and Japan. It is estimated that China will account for nearly 40 per cent of the global GDP by 2030.

China under Xi has constructed floating armada and ports all along the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, fit for civilian as well as military operations from Africa to Malacca Straits caring two hoots for world opinion and protests by countries in its periphery. It is another matter that many of them are economically unviable but serve the strategic interest of Beijing very well. His ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is focusing on investment, infrastructure, communication systems and cheap loan thereby tying the local political establishment into a debt trap, thus forcing nearly sixty countries in Asia, Africa and Europe to integrate their respective economies with Chinese economy. Xi Jinping's China will not do anything without a long-term strategy. Top on the agenda of Xi Jinping is to close in on the US, dislodge the US from its position and become global numero uno.

Meanwhile, under Modi's supervision, New Delhi has rolled out a robust Asia-Africa-Growth Corridor project, launched special initiatives for regional growth such as Security and Growth

for All in the Region (SAGAR) scheme and revived developmental programmes under BIMSTEC linking it to Act East policy. The recent political victory in the northeast for the BJP will hasten economic activities thereby strengthening the region which is gateway to Southeast Asia. Going by Indian Navy's recent security doctrine, we are poised to become the strongest in the region through greater patrolling power and increased surveillance capability, acknowledged by all regional players, including China as we rescued their ships hit by piracy.

In these circumstances, it becomes extremely imperative for both India and China to reduce flash points, normalise relations and lay a strong roadmap for a long, sustainable and mutually beneficial growth plan through economic engagement.

Yet, notwithstanding all these positives, New Delhi needs to be cautious while hitting the re-set button as far as its Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai-2 is concerned. Beijing is in a hurry to settle border disputes with all its neighbours, including India. India had no border with China until China forcibly occupied Tibet in 1959. We have not yet diluted our stand on Tibet. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his people need to go back to the land of their ancestors, shed the ignominy of living as refugees and live in peace and dignity.

We have refused and rightly so, to be part of OBOR and objected to CPEC which passes through PoK. China will have to reciprocate our stand on 'One China' policy and terminate CPEC project. An independent and free Balochistan should have the right to own and use Gwadar to the best advantage of its people and to countries in the IOR. Besides, Beijing will have to be told in clear and unequivocal terms that it cannot pursue double standards on terrorism.

In between the lunches and dinners by the side of the lake in the picturesque Wuhan, Modi should make it clear to his Chinese host that New Delhi wants peace and tranquillity in the

border, improve relations with Beijing, grow together but will brook no compromise on its stand on Tibet, territorial integrity and strategic and security architecture.

China has a long-term growth and “expand influence” policy and is aiming at being the number one power in a decade. This will happen at the cost of the US but India will also have to pay a heavy price if we fail to play our role. We have to create our own areas of influence, strengthen our economy, emerge stronger in the regional and Indo-Pacific arena and above all learn to keep our cards close to our chest.

The author is a security and strategic affairs commentator and former editor of 'Organiser'.

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