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View Point

Obama Visit to India: Impressions from China

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The three-day state visit of the US President Barack Obama to India from 6 to 9 November 2010 was covered adequately by the Chinese media and several details of the visit were reported except the President's address to Indian Parliament. Significantly, some of the important issues such as US support to India's candidature for a permanent seat in a reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC) received mixed reaction in Chinese media while other issues were reported without adding any value judgment. The analysis in Chinese media and blogs indicated that the visit of Obama was primarily aimed to help counterbalance the rise of China.

A study of a few important issues relating to President Obama's visit to India could be a more logical way to understand response from China. The announcement of President Obama supporting India's candidature for a permanent seat in a reformed UNSC was initially reported by Xinhua without comments. However, strong adverse reactions by Pakistani media on the issue were amply emphasized in the Chinese media. Later, Hong Lei, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, clarified China's position and stated 'China understands and supports India's aspiration to play a bigger role at the UN and will stay in contact with other UN member states including India on the UN and Security Council reform.' He also maintained that 'priority should be given to increasing developing countries' representation at the Security Council.' This statement can be viewed as a way forward as far as China's position on India's

inclusion in the UNSC is concerned. Also, emphatic US support to India on this issue appears to have influenced China's foreign policy towards India to some extent.

Prior to the visit, a section of the Chinese media had predicted that 'US President is unlikely to give a clear statement backing India's bid [UNSC].' Ma Jiali, an expert on India from China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, Beijing had made a similar statement prior to the Obama visit to India. After the declaration, a report in China Daily opined that 'the U.N. seat [for India] could be a pipe dream and face resistance from some of the U.N. Security Council's five permanent members'. China is now the only country of UNSC which has not supported India's candidature for a permanent seat in a reformed UNSC.

In the past, China has supported 'India's aspiration to play a greater role in the UN', while duly adding that any reform of the UNSC should be 'comprehensive and should ensure a balanced representation of developing and developed countries'. It is also noteworthy that some scholars in China maintain that China should play its 'Card' with India for a 'package' deal (economic and trade deal) in return for China's support to India's aspirations for a permanent seat in a reformed UNSC.

As far as India's joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson commented that 'under the precondition of abiding by international non-proliferation obligations, all countries have the right to peaceful utilization of nuclear energy and international cooperation in this regard'. Further, it was noted that 'cooperation between relevant countries can be conducive to regional peace, stability and development'. The Chinese media also gave significant details on the India-US partnership for setting up a Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership in India.

Interestingly, Obama's speech to the Indian Parliament including the statements that 'India has emerged' and 'terrorist safe heavens in Pakistan are unacceptable' was not reported adequately. However, comments of separatist leaders of Jammu and Kashmir on President Obama's statements were emphasized by a section of the Chinese media.

Likewise, the review of export control regime by the US and commercial deals worth US\$ 10 billion between India and US were given enough attention. It was argued by some scholars that the main idea of Obama's visit was to boost the domestic economy and increase exports. However, by and large, the analysis in mainstream Chinese media suggested that the US 'from the Clinton Administration to Obama's continues to play the balance of power game in Asia to contain China's development.' Also, US has 'pinned hope on Delhi to act as the counterweight to Beijing'.

It is appreciable that the media has not whipped up any kind of frenzy witnessed until a year ago. The meeting between PM Manmohan Singh and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao on 29 October 2010 at the sidelines of ASEAN summit in Hanoi gave a fresh impetus to India-China relations. Both Chinese and Indian media must respect each other's concerns and prepare conditions conducive to make the forthcoming visit of Premier Wen Jiabao to India in December 2010 a landmark visit in bilateral relations.

Chinese media needs to be more perceptive of the evolving role of India in the emerging international order, especially India's aspirations to play a greater role at the United Nations as a permanent member of the Security Council and its commitment to promote peace and security in Asia and the world. It is pertinent to note that India is an acknowledged rising power which enjoys strategic autonomy and its engagement with US is not targeted against any country.

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