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Issue Brief

Modi's Perversion of the CPEC

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Introduction

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is steadfast in his perversion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and he has not moved back. Falsification and misrepresentation are the hallmark of his notion of the CPEC. In his remarks, he is trying to misguide others on the CPEC by distorting the project in his speeches and statements.

His recent remarks came during the flagship Raisina conference held in New Delhi on January 17, 2017 where he stated that: "Only by respecting the sovereignty of countries involved, can regional connectivity corridors fulfill their promise and avoid differences and discord."¹

Modi constantly propagates his anti-CPEC propaganda, perturbing both China and Pakistan and a dozen of other countries that have become part of the CPEC or considering to join it. Over 66 countries might become the part of the One Belt One Road (OBOR). Modi further lamented on the OBOR and CPEC in the following language: "India has termed the OBOR as a 'unilateral' or a 'national' initiative of China, with a limited role of other participating countries in shaping the priorities of the connectivity projects."²New Delhi has also objected to the route of the CPEC – a sub-set of OBOR – going through Gilgit-Baltistan, contested by India.

It is the responsibility of the leaders in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir to strongly respond to India's allegations on the CPEC. Unfortunately, they have not readily responded to such accusations leveled by Modi. No prompt reaction has come from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry as well.

Chinese Reaction

While Pakistan's Foreign Ministry has yet to carve out its response, China has swiftly countered Modi's remarks. China emphatically and unambiguously dispelled India apprehensions and allegations on the CPEC. China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, stated that the CPEC is a purely a long-term development and cooperative commercial project and it targets "no third country", indicating at India. The project has regional trade connectivity to bring peace and development, she added.³

Beijing continuously considers Kashmir as a disputed territory between Pakistan and India, and CPEC would not affect China's stand on Kashmir. China does not assume that Kashmir is a part of Pakistan,

Hua Chunying, mentioned.⁴ For China, it is a disputed territory. The CPEC goes through the territory, which falls under the Pakistani and Chinese suzerainty.

The Greater CPEC

Modi's venom against CPEC seems to be directed towards those countries that have shown interest in joining the project. This includes Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asian Republics, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Romania. Many analysts are convinced that the Russian association with the CPEC is an end game of India's ties with Russia. The CPEC is becoming even stronger than the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa Summit (BRICS). The CPEC is emerging on the EU model - an Asian Union. Moreover, after Brexit from the EU, United Kingdom wants to invest more in non-EU and CPEC projects.

Modi warns these countries to show how the CPEC is disputed between Pakistan and India and also between India and China. India's bilateral relations might be affected with these countries because of their alignment on the CPEC and OBOR. Modi is launching a diplomatic-cum anti-CPEC and anti-OBOR campaign. It would difficult for Modi to distract these countries from their growing interest that they have shown in joining the CPEC projects. His vitriol against CPEC seems to have had little effect in many capitals around the world, which in turn has added to his frustration and anti-CPEC rhetoric.

CPEC is getting stronger and larger with each passing day. The project has given a new vigor to Asian connectivity and like European iron and steel cooperation, the project has been building connectivity as the main pillar of cooperation among a number of Asian and European countries. Pakistan has been successful in its CPEC diplomacy over the past 21 months since the project was formally launched in April 2015.

India's competition with China and containing its presence would continue along with its enmity with Pakistan. Recently, both Pakistan and China have offered the olive branch of the CPEC to India asking it to join the project. CPEC has emerged as one of the greatest Confidence Building Measures (CMBs) that could bring lasting peace in the region. President Donald Trump's slashing of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) provides an opportunity for India to join the CPEC and support the OBOR. Under this changed trading scenario in the Asia-Pacific, it would remain even harder for Modi to erect barriers against the CPEC and OBOR.

Notes and References

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- ¹ Shubhajit Roy, "On corridor via PoK, China showed no sensitivity: Gov", *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), January 29, 2017.
 - ² Devirupa Mitra, "Connectivity Can't Undermine Sovereignty", *The Wire* (New Delhi), January 17, 2017.
 - ³ Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hua Chunying's, Regular Press Conference on January 18, 2017. Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1431615.shtml
 - ⁴ Ibid.