



XI-MODI MEETING: PUTTING DIFFERENCES ASIDE TO ATTAIN COMMON GOALS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Chinese President Xi Jinping received Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an informal summit in Hubei province in the last week of April 2018. According to the Chinese media reports, President Xi hoped that the two leaders can open a new chapter in their bilateral relations, and that Beijing was willing to build a closer partnership and cooperation in all fields that can influence the world. President Xi called for continuous strengthening of friendly relations between the two countries so that their friendship will continue to flow forward like the Yangtze and Ganges rivers.¹

After a tense military confrontation in Doklam in 2017, Modi's visit to China, featuring a number of one-on-one private meetings with President Xi, was a serious attempt to reset ties. The confrontation lasted for more than two months, but both sides pulled back in time to avoid disruption of the 9th BRICS summit that included China and India.

The latest talks were aimed at further clearing the air ahead of an official visit by the Indian leader for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit scheduled to be held in the Chinese province of Shandong in June 2018.

According to Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, the two leaders held a candid exchange of views in a relaxing and friendly atmosphere on topics related to international relations,

¹ "Meeting with Modi to open new chapter in China-India ties: Xi", *Global Times*, April 28, 2018.

China-India relations and cooperation in various areas and reached important consensus.² According to Hua, China is willing to work with India to follow through on the important consensus reached between the two leaders, and takes this meeting as an opportunity to break new ground in the mutually beneficial cooperation between China and India.³

In contrast to the reporting witnessed during the standoff at Doklam, the coverage of this summit by Chinese press was positive and encouraging. Prior to the meetings, the state-owned *China Daily* suggested the two leaders would focus on a number of key issues, specifically global governance and shared international challenges. As *China Daily* noted, “The meeting will be a new landmark in China-India relations, infusing fresh vigour into bilateral ties and ushering in a new phase of cooperation”.⁴ An article in another state run media outlet, *Global Times*, stated that this is the most inspiring diplomatic endeavor made by the two countries to mend ties since last year's Doklam standoff. The meeting will exert enormous influence on Asia and the world.⁵

From the Chinese perspective, this meeting is seen as a step towards normalizing relations with India. Beijing is optimistic about forming closer ties with New Delhi and is willing to accommodate India's concerns. The *Global Times* article also mentioned that the two nations, which jointly advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in the 1950s, should explore ways to live in harmony through the wisdom of Eastern civilizations, instead of dragging themselves into geopolitical competition and confrontation.

President Xi Jinping stated that, “China stands ready to work with India to establish a closer partnership of development, in a bid to promote all-round progress in exchanges and cooperation between the two countries in various areas.”⁶ He added that the two countries' next step should be to make a comprehensive plan for cooperation and to enhance strategic communication to enable timely negotiation on major issues.⁷

According to a press release issued following the informal summit, “both sides take the view that China and India are neighbors, friends and partners. The development of both China and India is a prevailing trend of history and offers important opportunities to each other. Both China and India

² <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/xi-modi-summit-broke-new-ground-for-bilateral-ties-china/articleshow/63999969.cms>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201804/26/WS5ae10b2ba3105cdcf651a83b.html>

⁵ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1100289.shtml>

⁶ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1556015.shtml

⁷ <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2144417/sino-indian-summit-takes-right-road-economic-cooperation>

stand for an independent policy of peaceful development”.⁸ Moreover, it was also reported that both sides agreed to properly manage and control their differences. They have the maturity and wisdom to handle their differences through peaceful discussion and by respecting each other's concerns and aspirations. The two militaries will strengthen confidence-building measures and enhance communication and cooperation to uphold border peace and tranquility.⁹

While there are plenty of unresolved disputes between the two sides, the summit reflects the understanding from Beijing that it needs to avoid future confrontations with India in order to accomplish its economic and strategic objectives. Moreover, the summit has signified that the historical and geographical ties between the two countries must be given their due consideration. China sees strengthening its bond with India as a crucial strategy to attain its foreign policy objective of ensuring regional harmony. It seems that China hopes that greater cooperation with India will prevent external forces from instigating instability in Asia.

Given the nature of the strong bonds of friendship between Pakistan and China, improvement of relations between China and India is largely seen in Pakistan as an opportunity rather than a matter of concern. In the light of reports that China and India also agreed to use their political influence and economic power to reinvigorate regional economic development, this would perhaps be an opportune time for India to wake up to the importance of China's One Belt One Road initiative for greater regional connectivity, and work with both Pakistan and China in strengthening the initiative rather than sabotaging it.

In this regard, the upcoming SCO summit will be an opportunity for Pakistan to share its vision for regional development and put its weight behind win-win strategies in Asia. Pakistan has stated on numerous occasions that it is willing to accommodate its eastern neighbor in CPEC and it would be advisable for the leaders of both countries to hold similar meetings in order to clear away friction for mutually beneficial initiatives for the greater good of the people of this region.

⁸ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1555656.shtml

⁹ Ibid.