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Issue Brief

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

Modi Visits United States

July 17, 2017

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The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, after completing his four nation tour of Europe embarked on yet another trip - this time to the capital of the most important country of the world, the US. The two days visit that took place on June 25-26, 2017 was at the invitation of newly elected American President, Mr. Donald Trump.

Prior to the visit, there was a lot of scepticism in India on whether Trump would follow the footsteps of President Obama and choose to work closely with India or takes a totally different path. This scepticism existed because though on some issues, there were some very positive signals conveyed by Trump before the elections took place but on other issues, Trump was seen as adopting policies, which could put a reverse gear on Indo-US relations. For example, during his election campaign, Trump had called Modi a “great man”¹ and promised that under his administration, India and the US would be “best friends”.² Prior to this visit by Modi, both leaders had telephonic conversation on at least three different occasions. First call was made by Modi to congratulate Trump on winning the elections. The subsequent calls were made by Trump, one after assuming his new role as the President of the US and second to congratulate Modi on winning State elections in Uttar Pradesh, with a decisive majority that was seen in 30 years.³

But on the other hand, there were issues that were seen as potentially harmful for the future Indo-US relations that have been built over the years. Climate change was one such issue. While announcing his country’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, Trump was critical of India saying that “India makes its participation (in the Paris Agreement) contingent on receiving billions and billions and billions of dollars in foreign aid from developed countries.”⁴ Secondly, Trump’s “America First” agenda and his decision to curb H-1B visa is also expected to damage India’s US\$150 billion technology sector.⁵ In addition to that, Trump also made some statements that were not viewed very favourably in India. During his election

¹ “Donald Trump calls Narendra Modi a great man, promises close relationship with India if elected,” *Indian Express*, October 16, 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/donald-trump-promises-a-close-relationship-with-india-if-elected-3085382/>

² Ibid

³ “Narendra Modi’s B.J.P Party wins big in Uttar Pradesh, India’s largest State,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/11/world/asia/narendra-modis-party-wins-big-in-uttar-pradesh-indias-largest-state.html>

⁴ “Donald Trump dumps Paris climate pact, attacks India; Modi vows to protect environment,” *Hindustan Times*, June 2, 2017 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/donald-trump-dumps-paris-climate-agreement-attacks-india-modi-vows-to-protect-environment/story-nWXYn0si9nnQTizqN0Cg9N.html>

⁵ “Indian tech boss: Trump’s H-1B visa curbs ‘will hurt,’” *CNN*, May 29, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/05/29/technology/trump-h1b-india-tech-mahindra/index.html>

campaign, Trump had offered to be a mediator between India and Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir. Though, recently during his visit to Pakistan, Senator John McCain reiterated that the US policy on Kashmir remains unchanged (the US believes that the issue of Kashmir should be resolved between India and Pakistan bilaterally. India too is apprehensive of third party mediation).

However, setting aside the issues of concern, the US announced sale of 22 Guardian unmanned aerial systems to India just before Modi embarked on the visit. The deal has been termed as game changer and is estimated to be worth \$2-3 billion.⁶ Trump administration did not stop here. In a clear gesture of appeasement, the State Department also issued a notification naming Hizbul Mujahideen leader, Syed Salahuddin, as “Specially Designated Global Terrorist.”⁷ These steps set the positive tone for the visit by Modi.

The joint statement issued towards the end of meeting between Modi and Trump, began by marking 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The two leaders vowed to deepen the strategic partnership between their countries and advance common objectives like the combating terrorist threats and promoting strategic stability across Indo-Pacific region. Trump and Modi agreed that a close partnership between the US and India is central to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. They called upon all nations to resolve territorial and maritime disputes peacefully and in accordance with the international law. On Afghanistan, Trump welcomed the Indian contributions to promote Afghanistan’s democracy, stability, prosperity and security. The two leaders agreed to continue close consultations and cooperation in support of Afghanistan’s future. The leaders strongly condemned continued provocations by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), emphasising that its destabilising pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missile programmes poses a grave threat to regional security and global peace. While touching upon the issue of terrorism, they committed to strengthen cooperation against terrorist threats from groups including Al-Qaida and ISIS. India appreciated the US designation of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen leader as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist as evidence of the commitment of the US to end terror in all its forms. Much to the appeasement of India, the joint statement called on Pakistan to ensure that its territory is not to be used to launch terrorist attacks on other countries. Pakistan was further asked to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai,

⁶ “Top 10 takeaways from Modi’s US visit,” *Hindu*, June 27, 2017, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/top-10-takeaways-from-modis-us-visit/article19154197.ece>

⁷ “US terms Hizb chief Salahuddin as global terrorist,” *Hindu*, June 26, 2017 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-terms-hizb-chief-salahuddin-as-global-terrorist/article19151082.ece>

Pathankot and other cross-border terrorist attacks. Trump and Modi also pledged to deepen defence and security cooperation building on the US's recognition of India as a major defence partner.⁸ On China's mega project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the two leaders in their joint statement supported bolstering regional economic connectivity through the transparent development of infrastructure and the use of responsible debt financing practices, while ensuring respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the rule of law and the environment. This statement also reflected India's position on the project.⁹

The visit is being seen as a huge success in India. Indian Foreign Secretary, Mr. S. Jaishankar, while commenting on the visit said "this was frankly one of the most productive of all prime ministerial visits to the US."¹⁰ Apart from Jaishankar, Modi himself was upbeat about his meeting with Trump and said that there was perfect meeting of minds between the two. In fact, Trump was also heard saying that he had "tremendous success"¹¹ in his meeting with Modi. In addition to having a successful meeting with Trump, Modi also met top CEOs of global giants like Apple, Microsoft and Google. The meeting focused on creating more job opportunities and investments. Further, Ivanka Trump will also lead a US delegation to Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which is being hosted by India later this year. Jaishankar also announced that from next year, liquefied natural gas (LNG) will start flowing to India from the US.

The relationship between India and the US is between two sovereign states. However, being the most powerful country in the world today, it is US's responsibility to adhere to the principles of Justice and fairness. Just to appease India, the US or the world community cannot ignore or deny the sacrifices that are being laid down by the Kashmiri people. To equate the just demand of Kashmiris of their right to self determination with terrorism is most unfortunate, especially at a time when Kashmiris have become the victims of worst forms of brutality at the hands of the Indian security forces. It is also worth mentioning here that while asking Pakistan to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of Mumbai attack, the

⁸ "Modi-Trump White House meeting: Full text of Joint Statement issued by India and US," *Indian Express*, June 27, 2017, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/pm-narendra-modi-donald-trump-white-house-meeting-full-text-of-joint-statement-issued-by-india-and-us-4723844/>

⁹ "Trump-Modi joint statement takes Pakistan to task," *Hindu*, June 27, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/trump-modi-joint-statement-takes-pakistan-to-task/article19153662.ece>

¹⁰ "Analysis of Indo-US joint Statement: tougher on Pakistan, softer on China," *Hindu*, June 27, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/analysis-of-the-indo-us-joint-statement-tougher-on-pakistan-softer-on-china-on-course-for-strategic-partnership/article19153997.ece>

¹¹ Nirupama Rao, "Promises in the Rose Garden: Modi's US visit," *Hindu*, June 29, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/promises-in-the-rose-garden/article19166001.ece>

US completely forgot about the Samjhota Express case in which number of Pakistanis lost their lives. In addition to it, sale of arms to India is also likely to destabilise the strategic balance in the South Asian region, which is in no one's interest. Hence, being the sole super power of the world it is again the US's responsibility to uphold the principle of justice for a peaceful and secure future of the world.