

The Nation

Islamabad
17 October 2017

America Opposes CPEC

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The rift between the United States and China would invariably increase during the Trump Administration. So are ties between Pakistan and the US. On the other hand, these cracks are instead further warming up ties between Islamabad and Beijing. The latter would not join any Islamabad's bashing on accusing it on terrorism. Beijing's well understands Islamabad's gigantic contribution on anti-terrorism. The Beijing-Washington ties are running up in the opposite directions. Much would be clear or even un-clear after the visit of President Donald Trump's visit to Beijing next month.

After accusing Pakistan of Afghanistan's instability and assigning a greater role to India together with alleging Islamabad for harboring terrorism, Washington also unexpectedly opposes the Chinese initiative of the development of the Belt and Road and its flagship project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The Trump Administration been following an Indian policy on terrorism and on now the CPEC development. Earlier, the US expressed a favorable or a muted response on the CPEC initiative. The U.S. Defense Secretary, Jim Mattis, together with Chairman Joint

Chiefs of Staff General, Joseph Dunford, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that CPEC passes through a disputed territory between India and Pakistan.

Mattis said the U.S. opposed the One Belt One Road policy in principle because there were many belts and many roads, but no nation should put itself into a position of dictating belt and road and it opposed the on-going road through Pakistan also because it passes through a disputed territory. He also told Congress that Barack Obama had opposed the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

This means the US has taken Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) as disputed territories between Pakistan and India but offered no resolution to the seven-decade long dispute.

Pakistan and China strongly reacted to the remarks passed by Mattis. America cannot see crimes against humanity inside the Indian-Held Kashmir and opposes the course of economic development in Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK under the framework of BRI. His logic could be that in any disputed territory between nations, no development could be carried out until the dispute was resolved.

Mattis, on the one hand, finds Kashmir a disputed territory between Pakistan and India. If true, then why Mattis could not send a similar message to India – to stop any development work in the Indian-Held Kashmir? The Modi government has been planning a big outreach development package of as much as Rs. 70,000 crore over the next five years on several projects. This is just one example among numerous others.

If the UN resolutions were implemented on Kashmir, the fate had been much different. For Kashmiri people, the American statement on CPEC is a blow to the independence of the Kashmiri people as it has justified the inhuman Indian cruelties and barbarism of Indian occupied forces inside the IHK. Instead of resolving the Kashmir dispute, Mattis has endorsed Indian position in the IHK.

For China, Belt and Road is a cooperative infrastructure project among 68 countries and all regions based upon good-will and inclusiveness. It does not interfere in nations' sovereignty. People of Kashmir are keen to join the CPEC. Majority of mainstream political parties and pro-freedom groups in the IHK have expressed desire for an economic corridor. The prominent pro-freedom leader of Hurriyat Conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, believes that Kashmir can become a gateway to Central Asia and he suggested that Kashmir should become part of the CPEC.

The Modi-Mattis bashing of CPEC is also anti-Kashmir. People in a disputed territory cannot live under poverty and under-development. An international concern should be raised to address poverty in disputed regions.

Re-calling history, it should be mentioned here that Gilgit-Baltistan is not a disputed territory as such for the information of Modi and Mattis. After the imposition of British Raj in 1877, Muslim Governors were appointed in Gilgit until 1947. A revolt took place in Gilgit once it was decided to make it part of the Jammu and Kashmir at the time of the partition. The famous Gilgit Scouts' revolt spread in other areas and the British authorities included Gilgit-Baltistan into the independent dominion of Pakistan in November 1947.

The Gilgit Scouts later occupied Skardu in May 1948 and also Baltistan. Major W.A. Willie Brown played the guiding role for the inclusion of Gilgit-Baltistan into Pakistan. Later, through a number of accession processes, several Princely States including Hunza, Nagar, Chilas, Koh Ghizr, Ishkoman, Yasin, and Punial acceded to Pakistan by choice and not by force as did India in the IHK, Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Manavadar. The Indian objections in Gilgit-Baltistan are thus baseless.

The CPEC at present does not go into any disputed territory between Pakistan and India. Gilgit and Baltistan are under the actual control of Pakistan, and China and Pakistan redefined a border in 1963 comprising that area, while the British authorities in India had remained unable to demarcate the border. Pakistan's position over Gilgit-Baltistan is unchallengeable by historical records.

Pakistan fully possesses sovereignty over the Gilgit-Baltistan region. It was sliced from Jammu and Kashmir through a popular revolt in 1947 as happened to many other areas, regions, and Princely States at the time of the partition. Azad Kashmir is not on the main pillar of the CPEC route. Just a branch would link it up with the CPEC route.

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