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### NEW RE-ALIGNMENT IN ASIA: UNEASE IN THE US ADMINISTRATION?

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The recent visit of US Secretary of State, John Kerry to Beijing coincided with the Indian Prime Minister's state visit to China. It could be a coincidence that both the leaders were in Beijing around the same time or it could also be some kind of uneasiness emerging within the US administration seeing the evolving Sino-India relationship. Traditionally, India has been pitted against the rise of China as a counter-balance by the US administration. The Indian Prime Minister's recent visit to China had attracted worldwide attention, and seen as a new beginning between the two major Asian powers that could well challenge America's primacy in the global order. As one article in the People's Daily states that; "...those who base their thinking on old logic to judge China-India ties, and those who like to present India as a power to counter China's geopolitical influence, will not enjoy the sight of the dragon dancing with the elephant...". The article also states that, there exist competition and also differences between India and China, but there is more cooperation and expanding this cooperation is the right choice<sup>1</sup>.

In seeking this new relationship with Beijing, Prime Minister Modi seeks a more pragmatic approach, which is to avoid any kind of conflict with China in order to ensure stability. According to an Indian Express piece by Minxin Pei; such pragmatism will disappoint many of his (Modi's) supporters, who want to see him take a hard line and bring back more concessions. But in doing so it would create a more hostile China; however, by avoiding a premature conflict with China and initiating engagement it could achieve



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substantial outcomes in the long run. The author concludes by stating that in order to ensure realistic outcomes for both the nations there is the need for continuity in engagement by keeping the lines of communication open through dialogues and high-level visits<sup>2</sup>.

US Secretary of State, John Kerry's visit to Beijing from 16 to 17 May, 2015, according to the Department of State, was aimed to establish the ground work for both, the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue to be held in mid-June and the State visit by President Xi Jinping in the fall. Also, during the visit the Secretary addressed and seeks ways to expand areas of practical cooperation with the Chinese on a number of regional issues in the Asian Pacific concerning maritime security, and global issues such as cyber and human rights<sup>3</sup>. During the joint press conference with the Chinese Foreign Minister Wan Yi, Secretary Kerry, stated that, *"...the relationship between the US and China as certainly one of the most consequential, if not the most consequential relationship in the world..."*. Secretary Kerry also adds that there exists an opportunity for both the US and China to build the history of this century. He talked about the need to continue to engage in order to accomplish bilateral, regional concerns and also the most complex global challenges. Stating that; as the world's two major power and largest economies, *"...we have a profound opportunity to set a constructive course on a wide range of issues that will affect everybody all across this planet. So the United States looks forward to continuing to build this relationship, to work with China, to build on our partnership of today, in order to create the most constructive future that we can, and not just for the people around this planet who depend on great and powerful nations to help set high standards of behaviour and of aspiration."*<sup>4</sup>

The remarks by Secretary Kerry showed strong intentions on the part of the US administration to continue engagement with China and also to enhance this engagement to new levels at a time when Sino-India relationship seems to be heading in a good trajectory.



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Both India and China have come to a realisation that they need to work together and despite issues such as border disputes and strategic competition, India and China should continue to build mutual trust through deeper economic cooperation and strategic coordination<sup>5</sup>. The timing of his visit as stated above could have been a sheer coincidence, however, with the new realignment happening between the two most powerful nations in Asia; it could well have caused disquiet amongst the US administration. Therefore, the Secretary's timely visit could be US seeking a new kind of strategy in Asia in its efforts to retain its global primacy.

The centrepiece of Modi's China strategy is conflict avoidance and stability. China's strategy towards the US also seeks economic competition and conflict avoidance. This new re-alignment in Asia between China and India should, however, cause no concern for the US administration. Both the US and India are two matured democracies with strategic autonomy, therefore, they have to ensure that their internal as well as external security interests are not compromised. The new strategy adopted by India towards China is to ensure India's security challenges are met. This changing dynamics in the Sino-Indian relations can't be defined as a tectonic shift in the geopolitics for the region, since it is as a result of impending concerns, tackling of which could benefit both the nations. Therefore, despite the current re-alignment being witnessed in Asia, India would seek from the US partnerships, like the Indo-US Defence Trade and Technology Initiative, which becomes a means for both the US and India to tackle their respective security challenges.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*



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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> *People's Daily Online*, "Those with Rivalry Mentality will not Enjoy Dragon-Elephant Dance", May 21, 2015, <http://en.people.cn/n/2015/0521/c98649-8895608.html>, accessed on 21.5.2015.

<sup>2</sup> Minxin, Pei. "The Show Chugs Along", *The Indian Express*, May 21, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> *US Department of State*, "Background Briefing on Secretary Kerry's Trip to Beijing, Seoul and Seattle", May 13, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/05/242514.htm>, accessed on 21.5.2015.

<sup>4</sup> John, Kerry. "Joint Press Availability with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi", *US Department of State*, May 16, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/Secretary/remarks/2015/05/242497.htm>, accessed on 21.5.2015.

<sup>5</sup> Dingding, Chen. "When Giants Meet", *The Indian Express*, May 20, 2015.

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