

Pakistan -China -India Relations: Imran Khan's China Visit Meant to Influence President Xi's Upcoming India Meeting

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Global Research, October 07, 2019
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Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan will arrive in Beijing on Tuesday and he will likely try to coordinate with China over the Kashmir issue to gain strong Chinese backing. It is likely that China will also be asked by Khan to assert pressure on India after New Delhi repelled Article 370 of the Indian constitution that ensured the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir has been a cause of division between Pakistan and India as Britain had not determined the final status of the region during decolonization in 1947. The region is now being ruled dividedly by China, India and Pakistan.

Although the date has not been specifically confirmed, according to media reports from India and Pakistan, Imran Khan will arrive in Beijing on October 8, which will be his third visit to China this year alone. The timing of this is critical as Chinese President Xi Jinping will visit India on October 11.

As Pakistan has become a key state of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Khan will hope he has some leverage to gain stronger support from Beijing for the Kashmir region, which Islamabad says it should rightfully administer in its entirety, or at least the Indian portion. Khan will also be hoping that Beijing can help push Pakistan's position in the international arena, and will be emphasizing Pakistan's commitment to the BRI.

Pakistan hopes to increase trade with China by at least \$10 billion a year, which is of critical importance for the economic stabilization of the country as it has been experiencing a financial crisis. Therefore, Khan will be urging China to help develop Pakistan's agricultural and industrial sectors. With China investing \$100 billion to Pakistan through various means such as the Dwadar Port project, Khan will also want China to develop mining and other infrastructure.

Islamabad has failed to gain significant support for its Kashmir cause, which has also meant limited opportunities for international trade as states do not want to risk the significant advantages they can benefit from India's rapid economic growth and development. But the BRI's expansion into Pakistan has provided much needed international relief and support. However, does this mean that Beijing will strongly back Pakistan over the Kashmir sovereignty issue?

It is unlikely that Beijing will want to risk further worsening its difficult relations with New Delhi, and therefore may opt to remain neutral or soft on the Kashmir issue as both China and India have much to gain by improved relations and an increase in trade. It will then be

critical for Khan to emphasize that Pakistan is China's primary ally in the South and Central Asian regions. However, the undeniable fact is that Xi's visit to India is not primarily to assert pressure against India over the status of Kashmir but to find some ways to reach a common resolution and agreement.

Tensions are so bad between China and India that in August, according to Indian media, the National Federation of Traders of India (CAIT) called for boycotts of Chinese goods and demanded a high tariff of 300% to 500% on Chinese goods. CAIT pointed out that "China needs to know the consequences of supporting Pakistan" on the initiative to discuss Kashmir in the United Nations. CAIT believes that "China has listed itself in a list of potential enemies of India's national security."

So, with some Indians already believing China strongly sides with Pakistan over the Kashmir issue, Xi perhaps may not want to further antagonize Indian emotions and may lower the importance of this issue on the agenda if his key focus is economic benefits.

According to Article 370 of the previous Constitution of India, people outside Kashmir could not live, work and own their own property in the region. Although the local population of Kashmir is mainly comprised of pro-Pakistan Muslims, this constitution protected the interests of the local people. This is why India's behaviour is mainly to strengthen the Indian government's control over the region by changing the demographics of the Indian-controlled portion of the Kashmir region. This is to increase the number of Hindus while shrinking the Muslim population.

This is currently the core issue for India, and domestic affairs takes precedence over foreign affairs for New Delhi. That is why Xi will most likely not take a strong position against India's Kashmir policy on behalf of Pakistan. Although Khan will lobby Islamabad's position on Kashmir to Xi on the eve of his India visit and attempt to convince him to take on an active position against New Delhi, the Chinese president is unlikely to adopt this position and focus his agenda on economic development.

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