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India bristles at closer Sino-US ties

11/20/2009

The Indian government and media may have been a little too sensitive toward the newly signed China-US joint statement by saying they do not want a third-country role in the India-Pakistan relationship, Chinese analysts said on Thursday.

The US appears to have accepted the idea that China could play an important role in the task of improving the relationship between India and Pakistan, The Times of India reported Tuesday.

New Delhi said Wednesday that it is "committed to resolving all outstanding issues with Pakistan through a peaceful bilateral dialogue," as US President Barack Obama wrapped up his four-day visit to China with a joint statement declaring a closer Sino-US relationship.

"This is a rare occasion when a US president has acknowledged that Beijing has a role to play in the India-Pakistan relationship. The move, if serious, runs counter to predictions of US foreign policy experts that the US would not acquiesce in a future Chinese hegemony in the region," the paper said.

"A third-country role cannot be envisaged nor is it necessary," India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement on its website Wednesday, in response to the US-China Joint Statement. "We also believe that a meaningful dialogue with Pakistan can take place only in an environment free from terror or the threat of terror."

The China-US statement said the two nations welcomed efforts conducive to peace, stability and development in South Asia, among other major agreements on global issues, such as economic recovery, climate change and nuclear non-proliferation.

"They (China and the US) support the efforts of Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight terrorism ... and support the improvement and growth of relations between India and Pakistan," the statement said.

Washington moved quickly Wednesday to ease Indian worries that US-Indian ties could suffer as the Obama administration pursues closer cooperation with China, and warned against "too much reading into statements."

The US desire for closer contact with China does not come at the expense of strong ties with India, Undersecretary of State William Burns told an audience at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think tank, the AP reported.

Few relationships will matter more in the coming years than the one between the US and India, and India's already large role in Asia will only grow, Burns said.

"That doesn't mean that we will always agree, because we won't. That doesn't mean that we can always avoid mutual suspicions and misunderstandings, because we can't," Burns was quoted as saying. But, he said, the two countries can build an even stronger partnership on the solid foundation they've created in recent years, according to the AP.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is due in Washington next week for a state visit.

India's reaction may demonstrate a sense of wariness and a fear of being ignored at growing ties between China and the US after Obama's visit to Beijing this week, analysts said.

Wang Dehua, of the Institute of South and Central Asian Studies at the Shanghai Center for International Studies, told the Global Times that India unavoidably suffered a sense of loss while observing Sino-US relations entering a new phase.

"China and the US adopted the spirit of seeking common ground while putting differences aside. That should be a reference for the Sino-India relationship. The Indian side, however, seems to prefer to prioritize differences," Wang said.

Ma Jiali, of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, echoed that sentiment, saying the joint statement is not meant to interfere in India's sovereignty.

"It is reasonable for the US and China, especially China, as India's neighbor, to pay attention to security conditions in South Asia," Ma said, adding that protest against such pronouncements was rare, and it may be a display of India's lack of confidence.

It is in China's interests to have an orderly neighborly environment, Wang said. "Good relations between China and Pakistan also benefit India, as China has been trying to persuade Pakistan to continue the peace process with India, instead of jointly confronting it."

India's ambassador in Washington, Meera Shankar, Wednesday downplayed tensions over US ties with China. "Building a cooperative relationship between these two countries would be critical for the emergence of Asia as an area of peace, prosperity and stability in the future," Shankar said of China and India, the AP reported.