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## *Report- In-House Meeting*

# **“Visit of 3-Member Turkish Delegation to ISSI”**

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## Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a 3-member Turkish Delegation on November 27, 2017. The members of the Turkish delegation included Dr. Mesut Özcan, Acting Chairman, Centre for Strategic Research (CSR), Ankara and Mr. Ufuk Ulutas, Columnist and Researcher. The delegation was accompanied by H.E. Sadik Babur Girgin, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Pakistan.

Before formal discussions, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI and Dr. Mesut Özcan, Acting Chairman, Centre for Strategic Research (CSR), Ankara signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for mutual cooperation between the two institutes.

Following the signature, Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood welcomed the guests and emphasized the close cultural links and Islamic identity that was the basis of deep-rooted ties between Pakistan and Turkey. He also explained how Turkey, after China, is the only country in the world which is adored by the Pakistanis. Ambassador Mahmood said that not just the two countries, but the people of the two countries also shared close and friendly relationship with each other. This relationship has witnessed an upwards trajectory and our bilateral ties have never been affected. He said that we are grateful to Turkey because it has stood by Pakistan in our hour of need. If you ask any average Pakistani, they will only have warm sentiments about Turkey. He stated that the two countries have been collaborating with each other in different international settings like the Baghdad Pact which became CENTO, and the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) which later became the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). However, he said that the trade volume is not matching with this warm relationship. Today, he pointed out, there is a change as there is a greater involvement of Turkey in Pakistani economy. Now CPEC is also providing more opportunities to the Turkish investors who can look into the projects and subsequently join them.

Dr. Mesut Özcan thanked the Chairman ISSI and expressed his gratitude. He also mentioned that it is his fourth visit to Pakistan and it is always a pleasure to be here. Dr. Mesut stated that he is hoping to revitalize the ties between CSR and ISSI after signing of the MoU and would be happy to host ISSI in Ankara on an annual basis. This cooperation can also include joint events and it would allow the two Institutes to address issues of joint concerns. The historical relations between Turkey and Pakistan are very deep, and similarly when you ask a common person in

Turkey about Islamabad, they would speak good things. The reflection of this relationship cannot be seen in the economic terms. This is probably due to the lack of trade routes and some other priorities pushed trade at the back. But now, economic relations are building up and are supported by the governments of the two countries. In addition to the economic relations, there needs to be more academic activities between the two countries. I hope that his MoU signed today will help us in order to have more academic contacts to learn a lot on regional and bilateral issues and also some transnational issues.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood agreed with Dr. Mesut Özcan and suggested that the two Institutes work towards exchange of publications by the two institutes, linkages of their websites, exchange of scholars leading to joint research, joint conferences in Ankara and Islamabad and developing systematized and wide scale linkages with the universities as part of public diplomacy.

Dr. Mesut Özcan reciprocated the suggestions and agreed to the exchange of publications and said that he would be sending latest publications directly to the ISSI library. He said that joint research is also a plausible option and is a doable. He also showed interest in hosting a delegation in Ankara from ISSI in 2018, and that this should be done on an annual basis. He hoped to have these type of events on a regular basis where topics and issues of mutual interest for research can be discussed. Moreover, the two institutes can discuss the regional issues for example the Caucus region, the South Asian region and this way to have first hand information about what is taking place in these regions which would be translated into academic pieces through joint research.

The Ambassador of Turkey to Islamabad H.E Sadik Babur added a suggestion from the embassy perspective to the discussion. He stated that the embassy seeks guidance of ISSI for inviting academicians from Pakistan to international conferences. He was of the opinion that ISSI can play an important role in making such recommendations. He said that the embassy would also like to exchange links of the publications for the Turkish academicians and researchers when they are doing research on Pakistan. These links would ensure authentic data for researchers.

Talking about Turkish foreign policy, Dr. Mesut Özcan stated that it has a historical perspective. Turkey's relationship with Europe has been an important determinant of its foreign policy. Over



the years, the relationship with the United States has also been of great significance. More importantly, a number of developments took place in the Caucasus region during the 90's and Turkish foreign policy had to be molded accordingly. From early 2000's, Turkey started to strengthen economic relations with its neighbors after a turbulent 90's in terms of economic development. In the last couple of years, Turkey's foreign policy has focused on the developments in the Middle East and the uprisings in the region. What happens in Iraq and Syria directly affects the Turkish foreign policy, economy and the society. These developments also affect Turkish security as it opens its borders to refugees coming from the Middle East. Furthermore, the Islamophobia in Europe and involvement of Russia and USA in Syria are also directly impacting Turkey's relations with these countries.

On a question about Germany and how is the failure of Angela Merkel to reach an agreement with the coalition partners affecting Turkey, Dr. Mesut Özcan stated that this is very important for Turkey because there are 3 million people of Turkish origin living in Germany. Also, after Brexit, Germany and France have become main players of EU politics. He said that in his personal opinion, a grand coalition would be in favor of Germany because the economic challenges after the economic meltdown of 2008 affected EU, and in future there might be some instability in European politics and people like Macron along with Merkel can find some equilibrium in EU. On the other hand, the rising xenophobia in Germany is affecting the relationship with Turkey. The Turkish officials are keeping their channels open and look forward to cooperation with EU, and Germany in particular.

To a question about the interest of Turkey to join EU as a member after Brexit, Dr. Mesut Özcan stated that the Turkish prime minister was in London having talks with Theresa May as we speak. Europe has always been an important aspect of Turkish foreign policy. The Ottoman empire was mainly a European empire. During the Cold War years as a member of NATO, Europe was always on the agenda of Turkey. Almost 50% of Turkey's trade is with the EU. After Brexit, if you follow the developments in Europe, people are talking of a different structure. If there is a new structure, Turkey should be a part of it. Yet, Turkey aims to diversify its options and make inroads in new areas and markets.

Ms. Amina Khan, Senior Research Fellow at ISSI gave a presentation on the current situation in Afghanistan. She stated that the Afghan state of affairs has constantly deteriorated over the past 16 years. In fact a number of reports have been produced by the Americans where it is questioned whether the American presence has brought stability to the region or not. According to reports by the US Congress, the level of violence in Afghanistan is more than it was in 2001 before the invasion. There were hopes that under the Ghani government, things would improve, but this has not been the case. Even the peace process, in which both Turkey and Pakistan have played an important role to help bring some sort of progress, is stunted. The Taliban insurgency is on the rise and they do not feel the need to speak to the Afghan government. While Kabul keeps on blaming Islamabad for not bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table and for supporting them, the main reason is the divide among the ranks of Kabul. There are elements in the Ghani government that do not want to share power with the Taliban. The peace process will only be a success if the Afghan government takes the process seriously. Also, another thing of importance is that the Afghan government has failed to deliver on governance. Regarding the Pak-Afghan relations, unfortunately since 2015, the relations are on a downhill trajectory. Afghanistan is constantly blaming Pakistan for all the ills which is unrealistic. She said that Turkey can play an important role in bringing Kabul and Islamabad back to the negotiating table. Unless and until Pakistan and Afghanistan sit and negotiate, there cannot be any progress on the peace process. Pakistan has been very clear and has stated that it would support an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. Pakistan has made sincere efforts in the past, but one has to see the timing of the killing of Mullah Mansoor. There seems to be a deliberate effort to sabotage the peace process.

Answering a question by the Turkish delegate on the prospects of recognizing the Afghan Taliban and Russian position on the Taliban, Amina Khan stated that there is a lot of talk by the Afghan government, but in reality there are no sincere efforts that take place to actually bring the Taliban on the table. Afghanistan still does not have a national reintegration program and there is no clear line of action in sight if the Taliban do come to the negotiating table. The Afghan Taliban also make certain demands like taking their name off the exit control list and taking them off the UN list of terrorist organizations before coming to the table. It is up to the Kabul government to meet these demands so that the peace process can kick start. So at the moment, things do not look good. Russia, Pakistan and China have a collective policy towards

Afghanistan and are pushing for peace. Russia is very vocal about recognizing the Taliban as a stakeholder and building a ground to fight Daesh. Unfortunately, the West is looking at this with suspension. It's time for the region to play a proactive role and not depend on the West, because if the Americans leave, it will be the regional actors who will have to step up to the plate.

The Turkish delegation stated that they would welcome anybody's role in the region whether its Russia, Iran, China or Pakistan, as long as its helps solving the Afghan quagmire. The Afghan problem has prolonged for too long and now it is time that it must end for the stability of the region. It's the regional powers that should find the solution because the extra regional powers have only created issues not solved them.

Speaking on the Pakistan-US relations, Ms. Mahrukh Khan Research Fellow at ISSI stated that Pakistan has maintained a complicated partnership with USA. The relations have further declined ever since President Trump came into power. It has been almost a year since Trump became president, but still no clear policy for Pakistan has been defined. From the past interactions we can determine three major things:

1. The Afghan policy
2. The growing strategic partnership of USA with India
3. The China influence in the region.

The growing partnership with India is a concern for Pakistan because it undermines the importance of Pakistan. USA has also started to openly criticize CPEC. As the rise of China is a concern for USA, it has started to expand upon its relations with India to balance out China. President Trump has already announced an increase of troops in Afghanistan. Will this help the USA to curtail Taliban? This needs to be seen. Pakistan recently saw US officials coming to Pakistan. With the first installment of \$350 million rolling into Pakistan for border management and civilian assistance, it can be argued that the relationship between US and Pakistan might get better. The second installment is conditional subject to the report by the state secretary to the President.

Answering a question by the Turkish delegation on when did the relationship between USA and Pakistan started to go sour, Ms. Mahrukh Khan stated that the relationship started to move in the

negative trajectory after the Salala incident, the raid in Abbottabad to get Osama bin Laden, and the Raymond Davis incident.

Adding to the discussion, Director Research at ISSI Mr. Najam Rafique commented that Pakistan and USA share a transactional relationship. It has seen three phases i.e Cold War, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and American war on Terror. America has always used Pakistan whenever its interests have been threatened in the region. Donald Trump has now devised a strategy towards Pakistan which is to put more pressure on Pakistan, particularly vis a viz Afghanistan. They have identified approximately 20 terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan and are now looking for excuses to prolong their stay in the region. There is a possibility that USA might increase drone strikes in Pakistan and may even carry out hot pursuits inside Pakistan to take out intended terrorist targets. Also, there is also a possibility that US may strike off Pakistan from its list of non-NATO allies. So in the near future, Pakistan can expect to see more pressure from the US, whereas India will be given a bigger role to play in Afghanistan.

To a question on the relationship of Pakistan with Saudi Arabia and Iran, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood stated that he has served as ambassador in both the countries. Iran has some complaints towards Pakistan that it is tilting towards Saudi Arabia. But in reality, Pakistan has maintained good ties with both the countries. Whenever the tensions are high among the two countries, Pakistan plays a neutral role. It is a very difficult relationship, but Pakistan has been managing its relations with both, and has very close ties with these two countries.

Ms. Mahwish Hafeez, Research Fellow at ISSI spoke on the condition of Muslims in India and in Indian held Kashmir. She stated that the situation has gone from bad to worse under the Modi administration. There have been a number of reported incidents where Muslims were targeted on the allegation of slaughtering cows. The religiously driven hate sentiment against the Muslims has been a major change under the Modi administration. India is also involved in gross violation of the human rights in Indian held Kashmir. Last year only through the use of pellet guns, Indian forces blinded 200 people including children of 4 to 5 years and around 7,000 people were injured. Around 100,000 people have also been killed. Also, some 20,000 women have been widowed and approximately 10,000 women have been raped. These numbers are from 2016 year



onwards only. Based on the numbers, one can imagine the magnitude of violence Indian forces have resorted to in Kashmir.

She further spoke about the peace process and stated that the peace process between India and Pakistan was started in 2004 and there have been four rounds of talk. But ever since the Mumbai incident took place, the peace process has been stalled. It has been almost a decade now and India is refusing to come back on the negotiating table with Pakistan.

Chairman ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood added to the discussion by stating that despite the serious efforts by Pakistan, India has not shown any interest in coming to the negotiating table and now that Modi is in power, it seems that the fifth round of talk is not going to materialize.

Dr. Ahmad Rashid Malik Director, China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at ISSI asked Dr. Mesut Özcan about the East Turkmenistan movement and how it is affecting the Turkish-Chinese relations.

Responding to the question, Dr. Mesut Özcan stated that the relations in terms of the political sphere have been dramatic in the past couple of years. There have been high level visits from both sides. China is also an important trading partner of Turkey. The East Turkmenistan Movement is affecting the Turkey-China relationship. Turkey is obeying the United Nations in this regard. What Turkey believes is that these people should be given equal status in China without any discrimination. At the same time, Turkey is against any type of terrorist activity that is threatening the national integrity of China.

Concluding the meeting, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood and Dr. Mesut Özcan exchanged warm regards and words of gratitude for each other and the two countries.