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Report – Book Launch

“Gwadar: Balance in Transition”

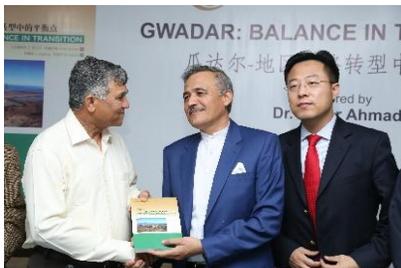
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Pictures of the Event



The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) launched a book titled “*Gwadar: Balance in Transition*” authored by Dr. Azhar Ahmad, Head of Department, Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University, on March 13, 2018. Former Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Asif Sandila, was the Chief Guest at the occasion.

The book is an in-depth study of the multi-dimensional aspects of Gwadar and contextualizes the evolving dynamics of the maritime affairs in the region. The distinguished commentators at the book launch included: Rear Admiral Farrokh Ahmed HI (M), Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Projects), Naval Headquarters, Islamabad; Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defense University (NDU), Islamabad; Mr. Zhao Lijian, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Islamabad;

Welcoming the guests, the Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood lauded the scholarly efforts made by Dr. Azhar Ahmad in contributing to the existing literature on Pakistan’s maritime sector, especially the neglected importance of Gwadar.

Dwelling on the history of the port, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that Pakistan purchased Gwadar from the Sultanate of Oman in 1958 and first phase of the port was completed by China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) by the end of 2005. The port operations contract was then awarded, after international bidding, to PSA (Port of Singapore Authority) Gwadar Pte. Ltd. However, the company failed to deliver according to its contractual obligations, and therefore, the ‘Concessional Rights’ were finally transferred to China Overseas Port Holding Company in 2013. He further said that Gwadar’s importance increased manifold following China’s announcement of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by President Xi Jinping in 2015. Today, Gwadar holds the key for future development of Pakistan. The port is situated 605 km east of the world’s biggest energy choke point — Straits of Hormuz. Nearly 20 per cent of the world’s traded oil and 77 per cent headed towards Asia-Pacific pass through the Straits every day. For China, this port holds huge significance as it shortens China’s route to the global oil market

The Ambassador, while highlighting the strategic importance of Gwadar port, said that the port is primarily important for trade and commerce, but also has strategic significance. It is farthest from India, and, therefore, provides strategic depth against any attack. Because of this distance, it

also provides more warning time against air and naval threat. He further said that the developments taking place along the coast of Baluchistan will support the expansion of Pakistan's Navy. On the back of its naval strength, Pakistan will be in a better position to implement its maritime strategy. It will also pave the way for greater cooperation between Pakistan Navy and People's Liberation Army Navy. The projected economic prosperity from the development of this port will also curb extremism in the region and lead to peace and prosperity.

The Chief Guest, Admiral Asif Sandila, while speaking at the occasion said that the foundations of CPEC was laid first in 1958, when Gwadar was taken over from Sultanate of Oman and Pakistan's navy was tasked to provide coastal security. Since then, the Pakistan Navy is playing a major role in developing and securing the coast against external threats.

Admiral Asif opined that Chabahar and Gwadar will complement each other in times to come, and if Pakistan plays its cards in its own interest, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will prove to be a game changer, in real terms. He further said that Gwadar is purely a commercial port which will ensure China both safe passage, and a continuous flow of oil from the Persian Gulf under all weather conditions. And for the landlocked countries, it will provide an opportunity to transport their goods and market more competitively to regional and global markets. Admiral Asif emphasized on enhancing the port's capacity in order to make it an international trade hub. He also congratulated the present and the previous government in developing the port.

Rear Admiral Farrokh Ahmad thanked Dr. Azhar Ahmad and Ambassador Khalid Mahmood for giving him the opportunity to express his views. He started off by revealing his close association with the author which began at the time when both of them joined Pakistan Navy. He said that during his career, he has read a lot about sea power and maritime strategy, but he had never come across a book written by a Pakistani on this topic. Expressing his views on the book, Rear Admiral Farrokh stated that this book has cleared most of his doubts regarding the region. He commended the effort made by Dr. Azhar Ahmad and recommended the book to be studied in higher education institutes across the country, especially the Naval War College. He expressed his disappointment over the fact that Pakistan has not capitalized on its maritime potential, whereby neighboring countries have made significant progress in the maritime sector. He also

pointed out that Pakistan has been unable to finalize maritime and shipping policy. On Gwadar, the speaker said it has the capability to address Pakistan's economic woes and labelled it a 'crown jewel'. He concluded that this book will create much needed awareness about this topic and collaboration between Pakistan and China will strengthen the maritime sector of Pakistan.

Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema expressed his gratitude to Ambassador Khalid Mahmood. As Dr. Azhar Ahmad's PhD supervisor, Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema said he was well aware of the author's credentials and the content of the book. He remarked that the author actually highlighted the importance of maritime affairs, while discussing the elements of powers. Dr. Azhar, he observed, underscored the ignored elements of power and this is where the book becomes highly useful. He opined that Pakistan Navy should have been developed much stronger since the time of independence as the sea link was the most viable link between the two wings of the country. Referring to the operational affairs of the Gwadar port, he said that Chinese have been our tested friends and they never let us down, whereas other friends abandoned us many a time.

Mr. Zhao Lijian congratulated the author on his seminal publication. He called it a thorough study and lauded the efforts by the author to present a comprehensive background of Gwadar's history and a meticulous analysis of its present. He said that the book is significant for both the governments in terms of policy making. Mr. Lijian gave a detailed account of current state of development of the Chinese projects in Gwadar. He said that all these projects are for the welfare of the people of Baluchistan, which include: New Gwadar International Port; Upgradation of schools and hospitals in Gwadar; Gwadar Smart Port City; Eastbay Expressway; and power plants. Many of these projects are being implemented under Chinese foreign aid and grant system, which will ultimately benefit the people of Baluchistan.

Dr. Azhar Ahmad called the event a humbling experience and stated that he couldn't have asked for a better setting for the launch of his book. He thanked Admiral Asif Sandila for gracing the occasion and recalled that his research work began at the time when Admiral Asif Sandila held the position of the Chief of Naval Staff. Dr. Azhar informed the audience that he benefited from Admiral Asif Sandila's insights at the onset of this study. He stated that it was an honour to be supported and appreciated by his esteemed supervisor and thanked all the reviewers for their compliments. For making this occasion possible, Dr. Azhar expressed gratitude towards

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Research ISSI, and Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, Director CPSC. Dr. Azhar told the audience that the lack of understanding of maritime sector is detrimental for the country and he chose this topic in order to bring much needed attention. He observed that the gathering at this event speaks for the importance of this topic.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood commended the author for raising awareness about Gwadar and maritime sector of Pakistan in a scholarly manner. Acknowledging the presence of the honorable ambassador of Tajikistan in the audience, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood remarked that this reflects the significance of this topic in regional development. He went on to say that it was an honour for the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad to provide a platform for the launch of this book.