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## *Report- In-House Meeting*

# **7-Member Young Chinese Diplomats'**

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### Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), held an In-House meeting with a 7-member Chinese young diplomats delegation on March 15, 2017. The delegation included: Mr. Zhang Changwei; Counselor, Mr. Zhang Ling, 2<sup>nd</sup> Secretary, Mr. Zang Liang, 3<sup>rd</sup> Secretary; Mr. Wang Chenbiao, Attache; Ms. Lin Long; Mr. Wu Wenchang and Ms. Saima Jamil.

The Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood welcomed the diplomats and lauded the contributions made by the diplomats in the making of exemplary relationship between China and Pakistan. He pointed out that a five-member delegation was invited by China from Pakistan to participate in the celebrations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pakistan-China friendship, out of which four were diplomats. This highlights the significance of the role of the diplomats.

Ambassador Mahmood appreciated the unflinching support given by China to Pakistan throughout the history of relationship between the two countries. China, he said, always stood by Pakistan during its wars with India both in 1965 and 1971. China even extended its diplomatic support to Pakistan in the UN General Assembly during the 1971 crisis. All metaphors like deeper than sea, higher than mountains and sweeter than honey are meaningful in their history of relationship between Pakistan and China. The gaps in the relationship have been bridged by the recently initiated flagship project of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the people-to-people contacts have enhanced manifold, and closer interaction is being experienced between the two nations ever since. Pointing to the establishment of China Study Centre at the ISS, he said that it establishes the importance the Institute attaches to the relationship.

Ambassador Mahmood pointed out that while the world is in a great flux and new configuration of power centers is being witnessed by the world today, including the peaceful rise of China, however, the situation has become tense ever since the advent of Donald Trump as the President of the US. He pointed out that the American policy towards the South Asian region is still evolving. Similar concerns have also been expressed by Japan and other Pacific countries who are allies with Australia. Ambassador Mahmood, however, treasured the steps being taken by China to enhance the economic connectivity through its One Belt One Road (OBOR) project. Despite the overt and covert measures being taken by the opponents to sabotage China's initiative, the project of CPEC offers benefits for the countries in South Asia and beyond.

Mr. Zhang Changwei, while expressing gratitude on the hospitality extended by the various organizations in general, and by the Institute in particular, regarded Pakistan and China as partners, friends, neighbours, brothers and sisters. He held the younger diplomats to be responsible to further the cordiality in the relationship of the two. They should explore the similarities and common grounds to enhance the relationship both within themselves and on the international issues. The political, economic and people-to-people contacts must further be explored.

Ms. Mahwish Hafeez, Research Fellow at ISSI, in her brief on Pakistan-India relations, lamented that despite Pakistan's efforts to mend its relationship with India, there had been no concrete outcome achieved due to the deep-rooted mistrust between the two states. It is entrenched in the history of their inception as independent states since partition in 1947. A very brief period of reconciliation was experienced when Composite Bilateral Dialogue was initiated in 2004. It,



however, got scuttled due to the Mumbai attack in 2008. Ever since Modi's ascent to power, the relations have taken a downward swing due to his aggressive stance towards Pakistan. The core issue remains Kashmir, which is bleeding due to atrocities carried out unabatedly by India while violating the human rights. She asserted that till the Kashmir issue is not resolved, peace in the region would remain elusive. Further, Modi's threats of withdrawing from the Indus Water Treaty and blockade of Pakistan's waters flowing from India are of great concern for Pakistan. Hence the resumption of dialogue process is imperative.

Ms. Amina Khan, Research Fellow at ISSI in her presentation on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations emphasized on the mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the continuing blame game which is keeping the relationship sour. While giving the statistics of the cross border attacks, Amina suggested that the border regulations must be as strictly monitored by Afghanistan as are being done by Pakistan. This would help counter the militancy honed on the Afghan soil by Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)/Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA). The recent dialogue between the Afghan government and Pakistan hosted by Britain is a welcome development. While speaking about Pakistan's role in the peace process, she said whenever a breakthrough in talks was eminent, it was always jeopardized by the Afghans such as, the disclosure of Mullah Umer's death right before the second round of Murree talks and killing of Mullah Mansoor on Pakistan's soil despite the fact that he had agreed to holding talks. Amina also highlighted the emergence of controversies on the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. It was a difficult decision for Pakistan also since they had hosted them for more than 40 years. Drug trafficking is a vital component of Afghan economy and is a major concern for Pakistan since it is being illegally used for its route to the rest of the world. Perhaps the most significant ingredient of the deteriorating relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is the growing regional rivalry due to India's increasing role in Afghanistan. Amina suggested that no solution of Afghanistan would be sustainable without Pakistan's participation, since Pakistan has a long history of investment in its relationship with Afghanistan and holds influence on its population.

Fatima Raza, Research Assistant at ISSI, gave a presentation on Pakistan-Iran relations. In her overview of the history of relationship between Pakistan and Iran, she underlined the bonds of common faith, culture, ethnic and language keeping the relationship friendly. Iran was the first country to have recognized Pakistan after its independence. Pakistan and Iran also have close economic ties. The trade volume between the two has increased by 30% since 2016 and they have pledged to increase the bilateral trade to \$5 billion annually by 2021. Iran has also shown its eagerness to join China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to promote the 'Triangle of Cooperation' between Pakistan, Iran and China. This has been welcomed by China and Pakistan. Both Iran's rich energy resources and its geo-strategic location as a gateway to oil rich Middle Eastern countries could be an alluring factor. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline having a total distance of 1,931 kilometers has a capacity to generate 4, 000 MW electricity. It is also a prospective project for job opportunities in less-developed areas of Pakistan and Iran. However, there are areas of friction between the two states which include the instability in the border region of Sistan-Baluchistan, the Saudi factor, the American relations with Iran, the Indian investment in Chahbahar port and the sectarian issue. Nonetheless, it is imperative to note that the strain in their relations is more due to external and third party factor.

In a question answer session followed presentations made by the research scholars of the Institute, the delegation was interested in knowing what would be Trump's policy regarding the withdrawal of ISAF announced by Barak Obama and the security vacuum thus created.

In reply, it was observed that Trump has taken a back seat and instead the British have taken over the process of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. Trump's Afghan policy is still evolving and therefore not clear. However, the 8000-10,000 US troops are not participating in the counter-insurgency operations. It was suggested by Amina Khan that Pakistan and Afghanistan should enter into negotiations with utmost willingness. The presence of IS in the region could be threatening for all the countries of the region. Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood emphasized that Afghanistan should not allow its land to be used against Pakistan.

In an answer to a question on Iran-Pakistan relations, Fatima suggested that since CPEC is a flagship project of regional connectivity, its role could be valuable even in countering the areas of conflict between the two.

On Gwadar-Chahbahar rivalry, the Chairman explained that since Gwadar is a natural deep sea port and is the shortest route for the Central Asian states, Chahbahar does not pose any competition to Gwadar. Besides, it eventually depends upon the competitive economic services provided in which Gwadar now has an edge. In reply to a question on Indo-Pakistan relations, the Chairman regretted that India has rebuffed all overtures by Pakistan so far. The only way forward is in meaningful negotiations. Pakistan urges China to use its influence on India and bring it back to the negotiation table.

Concluding the meeting, the Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood very briefly stated that the relations between Pakistan and India have become worse than before, there is tension in its relations with Afghanistan, but with Iran, Pakistan has friendly relations though there are hiccups. He said that the silver lining in the region is in the strong relationship between Pakistan and China.

Mr. Changwei expressed gratitude on both the hospitality and the information shared with the delegation. He said that the faith in the bilateral relations would grow even further by such exchange of delegations.