
**The China-Pakistan
Study Centre (CPSC)**

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R E P O R T
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ROUNDTABLE

The Institute of Borderlands Studies,
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Beijing, China



The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) hosted a Roundtable at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) with the Institute of Borderlands Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Beijing, People's Republic of China, on May 5, 2017. The delegation was led by Mr. Xing Guangcheng, Director-General, Institute of Chinese Borderland Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS). Other members of the delegation included:

Abulimiti Abulaiti, Deputy Director-General, Publicity Department, CPC, China Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Committee; Mr. Liu Sen, Director of Administrative Section of Ninth Bureau, the United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee; Mr. Li Lin, Associate Researcher and Director, the Department of Islamic Studies at the Institute of World Religions, CASS; Mr. Abdureheman Wushouer, Deputy Director of Ethnic Trade Office at the Ethnic Affairs Commission (Administration for Religious Affairs), the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China, and Mr. Qi Mingjie, Cadre of Human Rights Affairs Bureau, State Council Information Office, China.

Welcoming the delegation, Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, spoke about the time-tested ties between Pakistan and China over the years. He said there is great mutual trust between the people of both nations. The ties between the two countries have mostly been restricted to the fields of security and defence. Until recently, economic cooperation and people-to-people contact was always in the background. To cover this deficiency, we need to have more

cooperative arrangements and ties in the fields of information. The more we know of each other, the stronger our relationship will become. The deficient relationship in the economic and commercial fields is now being covered through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). If CPEC is the flagship project in the One Belt One Road initiative, Xinjiang province lies at the heart of the success of CPEC since the corridor primarily runs through Xinjiang and enters Pakistan. He went on to point out that though China has achieved phenomenal progress, the Xinjiang region was still lagging behind. He spoke about how the Chinese Government and the Communist Party is now rightly focusing on the development of this region. In light of this, China's relations with its adjoining countries particularly with Pakistan have become more relevant than ever.

Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, Director, China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC), introduced his team of research and went on to give a presentation on the Xinjiang-Pakistan Relations . He talked about the importance of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to Pakistan. He said that China borders fourteen countries and eight of these borders connect China through Xinjiang. This is a highly strategic region for China and accounts for more than one sixth of China's total territory and a quarter of its boundary length. The region connects with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Russia. He said that the population of Xinjiang is around 23 million, ten times lesser than that of Pakistan. It is multi-ethnic in demography. Presently, Xinjiang is rapidly progressing and the Chinese

Government has been massively investing in that region. The adjoining Pakistani region of Gilgit-Baltistan is greatly peaceful but is largely underdeveloped. Five years after the Chinese Government launched Xinjiang Development Plan, China also decided to build infrastructure in Pakistan under the cover of CPEC to connect Gilgit-Baltistan and Gwadar as well as the rest of Pakistan to Xinjiang. The CPEC is directly benefitting both Xinjiang and Gilgit-Baltistan in terms of economic development.

Mr. Xing Guangcheng, spoke about how both Pakistan and China are combining their efforts and pushing the CPEC forward, the starting point of which is Kashgar in Xinjiang and the ending point is the Gwadar Port in Pakistan. He emphasised that Xinjiang has historical and strategic importance. The Silk Route project has six different routes out of which the CPEC holds most significance and hence attracts the most focus. As with every case, CPEC does have its critics and there are some countries in the West which would not like to see the rise of China. Pressure from these countries poses a great threat to regional stability. He presented a comparison between Pakistan and Xinjiang and went on to say that the CPEC is directly benefitting both the people of Xinjiang and Pakistan. The rapid development taking place in Xinjiang should serve as model for Pakistan.

Mr. Abulimiti Abulaiti spoke about how Xinjiang is a very important base for Chinese energy and resources particularly natural resources such as petroleum, water and solar power. These resources have guaranteed its rapid economic development. He

pointed out that since the province is a core hub where four great civilisations meet in addition to lying on the ancient Silk Route, it has a rich and colourful history. Moreover, nineteen provinces have shown great support for the development of the Xinjiang which will play an important role in the One Belt One Road initiative. Three transport routes have garnered great attention. These channels are related to transportation, energy as well as information. With regards to energy projects, the focus is on three great bases: the first one is the reproduction of petrol products as well as gas products; the second great base is coal mines as well as chemical products and the third base is solar energy along with electric factories. Another focus is on establishment of various centres such as developing transportation hubs, international trading logistics and trading centres and medical service centres. The Central Government has also paid great importance to the industrial zones and it has set up economic goals to reach their full market potential within 3-5 years and another 5-10 years to breakthrough connections with China's neighbouring countries. The One Belt One Road Initiative has provided great opportunities and platforms for cultural communications as well as establishment of a strong relationship base between Xinjiang and Pakistan. He ended by saying that he hoped greater communications will be established between the two regions.

Answering a question on what challenges does the CPEC face, Mr. Xing Guangcheng stated that the CPEC has vital importance for both countries. He said that the Chinese Government has paid great importance and put Xinjiang at its strategic core. Some areas of China are developing

very quickly and many provinces are competing to become the core area on the Silk Route initiative. However, after much consideration, the Chinese Government has made up its mind to make Xinjiang the core region for cooperation with Europe as well as Asia. China is embarking on this initiative to help create a better bond between China and the rest of the world. He further highlighted the importance of Xinjiang by stating that out of the eight routes, which lie in Xinjiang, four routes including the CPEC lie directly in this region. Moreover, even before the commencement of the CPEC project, Kashgar had already been set up a special economic zone.

A key challenge is that relying on one city alone is not enough to push forward the economic corridor successfully. Urumqi is a bigger city and also the capital city of Xinjiang so it can play a greater role in providing a connection between both sides, which will go beyond the setting up of infrastructures. The second challenge the delegates mentioned was that even though Xinjiang is a core area, it needs support from other areas of China as well. Hence, China has to focus on connecting all the inner provinces. A joint evaluation of the region has not been undertaken so far by both the Chinese and Pakistani Governments. This is the third area, which China is aiming to work on in the near future. The delegates lay emphasis on the fact that in order to be implemented smoothly, the CPEC project needs a proper framework. This can come about if scholars get together and exchange ideas and form proposals. This way, he said that the bilateral cooperation can be further extended. The delegates also stated that in the future the CPEC will not only be

limited to China and Pakistan but will also encompass many countries. Russia has also show keen interest in the project and is already renting the Gwadar Port.

Answering a question related to what measures the Chinese government has taken with regards to security in the region, the delegates stated that the project faces great threats from the extremists. The situation in the region especially in Afghanistan is not very optimistic. If security threats are not addressed, the corridor will go from being a bridge to a barrier. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) can be a useful platform to address these concerns. Similarly, both countries can also look towards the United Nations to support the cause. In the past, Xinjiang faced instability but now the situation has improved a lot. At different levels, regional Government in Xinjiang along with the Central Government have been fighting terrorist elements. The Chinese Government is also now focusing on improving its internal economy to cater to its people's needs so that it can curb extremist elements from rising. Additionally, China has set up new laws against terrorism and extremists.

The delegates went on to say that there has been much investment in education, advertisement against terrorism and use of soft power by the Chinese Government. China also wants to eliminate terrorists through joint efforts. This is a new topic of interest for China now and it is looking towards Pakistan in this regard because of its prowess in fighting militancy. The Pakistani side also gave a brief overview of the current operation against extremists- Operation *Radd-ul-Fasaad*- the aim of

which is to consolidate the gains from all the operations Pakistan has undertaken in the past. Besides these military efforts, Pakistan is also working on a soft power strategy, which is the twenty-point National Action Plan (NAP). At this point, Dr. Malik added that through joint efforts, almost 95 per cent of extremist elements had been eradicated.

The Chairman concluded by saying that Pakistan and China have held joint drills in helping to build capacity and counter the threat of terrorism. Of all the six corridors, CPEC is moving the fastest and will help Pakistan overcome its energy crunch. He appreciated the delegation's idea of enhancing communication between the two sides and assured them of his support in this endeavour.