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Report – IN-HOUSE MEETING

4-Member Chinese Delegation from Chinese Council for BRICS Think Tank Cooperation

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PICTURES OF THE EVENT

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted an In-House Meeting with a 4-member Chinese delegation from Chinese Council of BRICS Think Tank Cooperation (CCBTC) on January 3, 2019. The members of the delegation included: Mr. Luan Jianzhang, Secretary General (CCBTC); Mr. Chen Xi, Associate Researcher (CCBTC); Suo Bugu, Staff (CCBTC); Mr. Lijian Zhou, Deputy Chief of Mission Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Islamabad

Welcoming the delegation, Chairman BOG ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood introduced the members of ISSI participating in the meeting.

Ms. Uroosa Khan, Associate Editor at ISSI's China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) gave a short introduction of ISSI to the delegation, and briefed them on the activities and research work carried out at the Institute.

While sharing his perspective on the current global affairs, Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood stated that the world, at large is witnessing a turbulent phase in international relations. The international security, political and economic order, established after World War II is under attack. The country, which has helped in establishing this order is destroying it, which has resulted into so many conflicts in the region from Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine to the tensions in South China Sea. In addition to this conventional crisis, the world is also facing non-conventional threats in the fields of terrorism, cyber war fare, climate change and poverty.

Ambassador Mahmood further said that, at one point, the world is interconnected but at the same time, it is getting fragmented. International organizations like United Nations is trying to address these issues, but has not been succeed so far. The result is that the countries are looking to more regional approaches. However, in this overall atmosphere of gloom. there are some initiatives which reckon to a brighter future. One such initiative is the visionary initiative taken by China in the form of Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), of which China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project. In another part of the world, countries have also established regional organizations, some are successful like ASEAN, and European Union (EU) despite Brexit. While some organisations like SAARC have failed to fulfil their obligations. Moreover, the work of organizations like BRICS, are important in fostering development in the region. The Ambassador

concluded by putting forth some questions related to India's position vis-a vis BRI and BRICS and how does China see the roles of the two together.

Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director, China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) presented an overview of China-Pakistan relations and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He elaborated the political, strategic and economic aspects of this relationship along with the significance of CPEC for both the countries.

Mr. Luan Jianzhang thanked the Chairman, ISSI and said that it is truly an honour to be at the institute. He further appreciated the institute for establishing China-Pakistan Study Centre considering the importance of relations between the two countries.

While responding to the points raised by Chairman, ISSI, he agreed that the world is fragmented and a unified approach is neededto address the issues that the world, at large, face today. Unilateral approaches taken by few countries have given rise to multiple issues. He further said that China believes in fostering peace and development and has thus initiated BRI to connect to the world based on win-win approach. While responding to the question about India's attitude towards BRI and CPEC in particular, he India needs to look at the economic benefits of CPEC as it may help in the resolution of bilateral issues between Pakistan and India. He further asserted that India must have a broader view of CPEC.

To the question about BRICS mandate, Mr. Luan said that it covers economic, politics and security along with people to people contacts between the member countries. Moreover, he mentioned that it has become BRICS-Plus and is inviting other developing countries to be part of it. He further said that BRICS and BRI are economic models based on South-South Cooperation. He went on to say that BRI is an application of China's domestic model at the international level.

Mr. Luan also put forth some questions related to the challenges Pakistan is facing with regards to CPEC; how does Pakistan evaluate India's role in South Asia and what Pakistan suggests to improve US-China relations.

In response to these questions Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood said that under CPEC the Early Harvest Projects have been completed, which have overcome the energy crisis in Pakistan. While in the second stage, the focus is on industrial development and socio economic

development, for which the new government in Pakistan is working in close collaboration with its counterparts from China. Moreover, he emphasised that there is a need to promote people –to people contacts. About the question on India role in South Asia, Ambassador Mahmood said that its alignment with United States has given it a bigger role, with Asia-Pacific being changed into Indo-Pacific. However, in this realignment of countries, the relation between China and Pakistan is growing further and it has got stronger with more economic component added in it in the form of CPEC.

Mr. Lijian Zhou, while responding to a question on relocation of Chinese firms in Pakistan, said that there are nine Special Economic Zone (SEZs) being identified under industrial cooperation. He elaborated the progress of each SEZ in each province and said that there are joint ventures with Chinese firms. However, he said that, the progress on these SEZs is not going very fatly as the federal and provincial governments need to provide facilities so that these SEZs can be developed accordingly. Mr. Lijian said that under the Chinese industrial cooperation, it is expected around 85 million jobs will be created outside China. Pakistan must seize this opportunity by developing these zones and attract investments in order to benefit the locals. He reiterated the importance of third party participation for investment at these zones and said that countries need to expand their bilateral cooperation into multilateral cooperation for the common interest of all.

In response to a question about US drawdown of troops from Afghanistan, Mr. Luan Jianzhang said that this drawdown will have implications for the region and thus China and Pakistan should work together to tackle the complex situation and ensure peace and development in Afghanistan. Lastly, he emphasised on the role of think tank cooperation in advancing BRI and CPEC. Think tanks like ISSI should take a forward looking approach in order to address the issues before they emerge.

Chairman BOG ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood thanked the delegation for visiting the institute and assured a closer cooperation between the two think tanks in future..