

Report: Roundtable on “Pak-China Relations” with a delegation of the Chinese People’s Association for Peace and Disarmament (CPAPD) on February 10, 2014.

## **China’s Silk Road would herald Peace and Prosperity in the Region**

**Aarish U. Khan**

ISLAMABAD: “China’s New Silk Road Project would not only lead to economic cooperation among the countries of the region, but would also build trust among them leading to peace and stability,” said Ms. Chen Huaifan, the Deputy Secretary General of the Chinese People’s Association for Peace and Disarmament (CPAPD), here on Monday. She was speaking at a roundtable discussion organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS).

Ms. Chen shared that the contours of the New Silk Road project were still being studied in China and that the Chinese government was open to suggestions from the think-tanks and academia of the neighboring countries on the project. She stated that the New Silk Road project, as enunciated by President Xi Jinping, is a comprehensive project that could link 30 countries of the region. She added that once complete, the economic corridor between Pakistan and China—that links Pakistan’s Gwadar seaport with the newly established Special Economic Zone in Kashgar in western part of China—will form an important and integral part of the New Silk Road.

Ms. Chen expressed her concerns about the security situation in Afghanistan, especially after the draw-down of NATO forces from the country that has already started and would complete by the end of this year. Ms. Chen argued that even though some scholars in China were advocating against the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, the Chinese government still supported it because of its acceptance and popularity among countries friendly toward China. She shared that China had hosted several trilateral sessions involving Afghanistan and its various neighbors to facilitate peace and prosperity in the region. Ms. Chen reiterated that the Chinese government would want Afghan peace process to be Afghan-led, but maintained that Afghanistan’s neighbors needed to coordinate their policies with respect to Afghanistan. Brig. Bashir Ahmad, Acting President of IRS, called for a greater role for Pakistan, China, and Russia for the future security and stability of Afghanistan. He called for a cautious approach on the part of China though, concentrating more on economic development and cooperation. He also suggested greater cultural cooperation between Afghanistan and China, calling for greater numbers of cultural exchanges and student scholarships for Afghanistan. Mr. Du Genqi of the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad argued that China could not afford to ignore Afghanistan and that it would remain actively engaged in the reconstruction of Afghanistan .

Other participants of the roundtable discussion included: Mr. Wang Yuxiang, Council Member of CPAPD; Mr. Zhu Fagen, Deputy Director at CPAPD; Ms. Zengjianing, Project Officer at CPAPD; and IRS scholars Ms. Farhat Parveen, Mr. Khalid Malik, Mr. Aarish Khan, Ms. Heba al Adawy, Mr. Basharat Hussain, Mr. Imran Sardar, Ms. Sidra Tariq, and Ms. Humera Iqbal.