



EXPLORING STRATEGIC
PATHWAYS ON

KASHMIR

POST SEMINAR REPORT
4 FEBRUARY 2025



Post Seminar Report

Supervised by

Jamal Aziz

Director

Centre of Excellence for International Law (CEIL)

Prepared by

Habib Ullah

Assistant Research Associate

Centre of Excellence for International Law (CEIL)

Disclaimer

The discussion and report are obligatory to Chatham House Rules. The statements, facts, and opinions expressed by speakers do not constitute the official policy of National Defense University.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 05 |
| OPENING OF THE SEMINAR & WELCOME..... REMARKS BY DG ISSRA | 06 |
| PRESENTATION ON THE KASHMIR STRATEGY..... PAPER BY MR. JAMAL AZIZ (AUTHOR) | 07 |
| ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF GUEST, SENATOR..... MUSHAHID HUSSAIN SYED | 10 |
| MODERATED PANEL DISCUSSION ON 'THE..... CONTOURS OF THE NEW KASHMIR STRATEGY FOR PAKISTAN.' | 11 |

SEMINAR PROGRAM

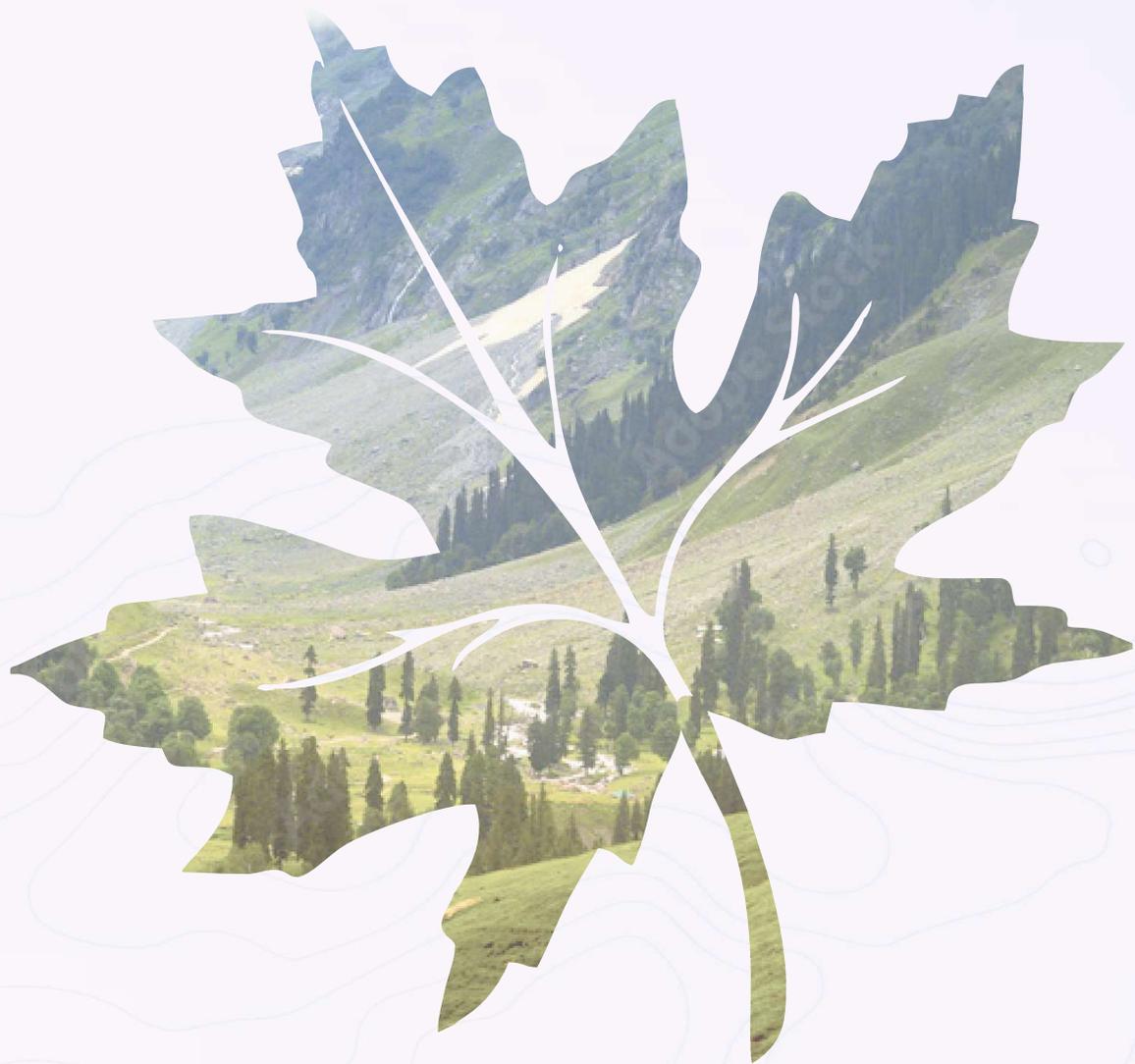
| Session | Time (Hours) | Details/Speakers |
|--|--------------------|--|
| 04.02.2025 JS Hall, ISSRA | | |
| Arrival & Registration of Guests | <i>10:30–11:00</i> | |
| Recitation of the Holy Quran | <i>11:00–11:05</i> | |
| Welcome Remarks | <i>11:05–11:10</i> | Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, DG ISSRA |
| Presentation on Kashmir Strategy Paper | <i>11:10–11:25</i> | Mr. Jamal Aziz, Director CEIL |
| Remarks by the Chief Guest | <i>11:25–11:35</i> | Chief Guest , Senator Mushahid Husain Syed |
| Moderated Panel Discussion on <i>'The Contours of the New Kashmir Strategy for Pakistan.'</i> | <i>11:35–12:35</i> | Moderator: Mr. Jamal Aziz, Director CEIL Panelists: 1. Lt Gen (Retd.) Aamer Riaz 2. Ms. Farzana Yaqoob 3. Mosharraf Zaidi 4. Asad Rahim |
| Interactive Q&A Session | <i>12:35–01:15</i> | |
| Vote of Thanks | <i>01:15–01:25</i> | Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, DG ISSRA |
| Lunch <i>01:30 onwards</i> | | |

INTRODUCTION

- The Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA) at the National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, organized a Launch Seminar on 4 February 2025, to present the ISSRA Strategy Paper titled 'Exploring Strategic Pathways on Kashmir.'
- The event, held at ISSRA Hall, brought together esteemed policymakers, academics, and strategists to discuss Pakistan's strategic options concerning the Kashmir dispute.
- The seminar commenced with welcome remarks by Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, Director General (DG) ISSRA, who provided an overview of the strategic importance of the Kashmir dispute and the need for a comprehensive policy framework.
- Mr. Jamal Aziz then presented the findings of the strategy paper, detailing the geopolitical, legal, and diplomatic dimensions of the Kashmir issue. A ceremonial launch of the paper followed his presentation.
- The Chief Guest, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, underscored the significance of the document in addressing Pakistan's strategic positioning on Kashmir. He lauded ISSRA's efforts in fostering meaningful discourse and emphasized the need for sustained engagement on the Kashmir issue at regional and global levels.
- The event culminated in a moderated panel discussion on 'The Contours of the New Kashmir Strategy for Pakistan.' Distinguished panelists engaged in an in-depth analysis of the contemporary challenges and potential strategies for Pakistan's Kashmir policy.

OPENING OF THE SEMINAR & WELCOME REMARKS BY DG ISSRA

- The seminar commenced with a formal introduction to the ISSRA Strategy Paper, underscoring its significance in shaping Pakistan's policy on Kashmir.
- Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, DG ISSRA, highlighted the broader geopolitical implications of the Kashmir dispute, emphasizing it as a critical component of Pakistan's national security framework.
- The welcome remarks also addressed India's 2019 abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A and outlined the challenges it posed for regional stability.
- A multi-faceted approach was advocated, integrating diplomacy, legal strategies, economic policies, and strategic communication to address the Kashmir issue effectively.



PRESENTATION ON THE KASHMIR STRATEGY PAPER BY MR. JAMAL AZIZ (AUTHOR)

- Mr. Jamal Aziz explained that the Kashmir Strategy Paper, commissioned by ISSRA in January 2024, evolved into an extensive research endeavor involving nationwide consultations, peer reviews, and a deep situational analysis to understand the complexities of the Kashmir dispute.
- The presentation began by outlining the original Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Strategy Paper, which focused on identifying the potential end states of the Kashmir dispute. The primary objective was to determine which end states would be favorable (“green”) or unfavorable (“red”) for Pakistan, and to propose a strategic framework that steers Pakistan toward favorable outcomes while mitigating the risks associated with undesirable scenarios.
- It was emphasized that the current environment in Kashmir is not conducive to achieving a resolution aligned with Pakistan's strategic interests. Engagement with India, without a strong negotiating position, has historically worked against Pakistan. The paper, therefore, focuses on first shaping a favorable environment by leveraging Pakistan's strengths. Using a center of gravity analysis and the DIMPLES framework, it offers strategic recommendations to enhance Pakistan's position across multiple lines of effort.
- India's overarching objective on Kashmir—annexation and consolidation—has remained consistent since 1947, although its tactics have evolved over time. At present, India seeks to leverage its rising global influence to permanently alter the status quo by removing Kashmir's disputed status and pushing Pakistan out of the discourse entirely. It also aims to consolidate control over IIOJK, framing the issue as a purely internal matter. Additionally, India makes aggressive claims over AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) through military rhetoric, altered maps, and efforts to destabilize the region.

- In contrast, Pakistan's immediate priority is to preserve Kashmir's status as a disputed territory under international law and to counter India's efforts to normalize its occupation. Ultimately, Pakistan seeks a resolution that aligns with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people – remaining open to third-party facilitation or bilateral dialogue, provided it results in substantive progress. Engaging global powers such as the United States and China is also essential to prevent diplomatic isolation on the Kashmir issue.
- The paper argues that while UN resolutions remain critical, the messaging should emphasize the illegitimacy of Indian occupation rather than relying solely on diplomatic mechanisms.
- A key strategic adjustment is to counter India's terrorism narrative, which has undermined Pakistan's credibility on the international stage. Evolving global dynamics and Pakistan's own consistent state behavior over the past decade provide a strong basis for reversing this. Simultaneously, Pakistan must project itself as a rational, peace-seeking state committed to regional stability and economic progress, without compromising on its stance.
- Pakistan must avoid an “all or nothing” approach in its engagement with India. The rigid insistence on reversing the events of 5 August 2019, before any dialogue, has boxed Pakistan into a position that limits diplomatic maneuverability.
- The paper argues for a balanced strategy – being firm on Kashmir while taking a long-term, calibrated approach to gradually raise the cost of Indian occupation in IIOJK. This involves shifting global perception to acknowledge it as an occupation through a sustained campaign of lawfare, diplomatic, and political maneuvers, all laid out in detail within the strategy paper.
- GB's provisional constitutional status must be granted to neutralize vulnerabilities that India seeks to exploit. The paper also advocates for strengthening governance in AJK and GB to create a stark contrast with Indian-administered Kashmir, reinforcing Pakistan's legitimacy.

- There is a strong need to dismantle the terrorism label associated with the Kashmir cause by leveraging global narratives emerging from Ukraine and Gaza, which affirm the legitimate right to resist occupation. Post-9/11 counter-terrorism regimes have eroded human rights and humanitarian law, particularly in the Global South, and, therefore, Pakistan should lead the global discourse in restoring this balance.
- India's unilateral actions post-5th August were enabled by a lack of meaningful economic stakes in Pakistan. From a strategic standpoint, fostering business-to-business connections and encouraging academic discourse on India might be useful, which remains largely absent in Pakistan's intellectual landscape.
- Pakistan's strategic culture—across Kashmir, foreign policy, and economic security—has suffered from inconsistency and lack of continuity across successive governments.
- There is urgent need to restore momentum by institutionalizing long-term strategic thinking and reviving hope in the Kashmir cause.



Presentation of the Kashmir Strategy Paper by Mr. Jamal Aziz & DG ISSRA to the Chief Guest

ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF GUEST, SENATOR MUSHAHID HUSSAIN SYED

- Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed praised the paper for its comprehensive and pragmatic approach. He opened his remarks by highlighting the shifting strategic landscape, particularly the emerging dynamics under a potential second Trump presidency. Trump's outsider status and distinct policy approach—especially on issues like illegal immigration and trade tariffs—have complicated India-U.S. ties.
- The regional balance in South Asia is tilting away from Indian influence. India now faces strategic pushback in all of its neighboring states—Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, and Myanmar—where either leftist, nationalist, or anti-India governments have emerged.
- Drawing parallels to global movements, he pointed to tailwinds from Ukraine and Gaza, noting how resistance movements are gaining legitimacy and forcing their adversaries into negotiations—an encouraging precedent for Kashmir.
- India is currently facing three key “strategic nightmares”: first, the growing China-Pakistan strategic partnership, especially over GB and the borderlands, which became a redline for China after India's 2019 annexation of Kashmir; second, the emerging Kashmir-Khalistan linkage, with diaspora activism in the U.S. and other Western countries intensifying scrutiny on Indian human rights abuses; and third, the evolving Pakistan-Bangladesh understanding, particularly after political shifts in Dhaka, which could impact India's control over its northeastern states.
- India's traditional hegemony in South Asia—rooted in military dominance, coercion of smaller states, and exclusion of China from the region—has been significantly undermined. He cited India's setbacks in Balakot and Galwan, and its inability to dominate smaller neighbors diplomatically or economically.



- He emphasized the rise of China's influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), noting that except for Bhutan and India, every South Asian country is now a BRI partner, drastically altering the strategic balance.
- Therefore, India, despite its ambitions, is not immune to historical and geopolitical constraints. Internal divisions fuelled by Hindutva politics are undermining India's cohesion and global image.
- Finally, he cautioned against political interventions in AJK and GB, stressing that these regions must be treated as the political and strategic “base camps” for Pakistan's Kashmir policy. He called for empowering local leadership and reaffirming trust in the Kashmiri people's commitment to Pakistan.



MODERATED PANEL DISCUSSION ON 'THE CONTOURS OF THE NEW KASHMIR STRATEGY FOR PAKISTAN.'

- The panel opened by acknowledging that the Kashmir Strategy Paper underwent extensive peer review, incorporating insights from experts in foreign policy, strategic communication, and legal affairs. The panelists, key contributors to the paper, were invited to share their perspectives on the strategic environment surrounding Kashmir.
- While the strategic importance of Kashmir remains intact in principle, panelists noted a visible dilution in Pakistan's broader strategic culture—reflected in weakened national discourse, inconsistent strategic communication, and fading societal commitment. Kashmir, originally a foundational promise by Pakistan's founders, has increasingly lost salience in public and institutional consciousness over the past decade—a trend that must be urgently reversed.
- Several panelists noted that Pakistan's Kashmir strategy has been undermined by a growing “defeatist” mindset rooted in its diluted strategic culture. This erosion stems partly from the over-aggrandizement of India in national discourse, which has fostered a diminished sense of national agency and self-belief.
- Others emphasized that this strategic pessimism is further driven by a lack of competitiveness, poor preparation, and absence of a coherent national purpose—despite there being no rational basis for such self-doubt in relation to India. One panelist drew attention to the stark contrast between today's indecisiveness and the strong national response to events like Burhan Wani's martyrdom or India's 2019 annexation of Kashmir. To counter this defeatist drift, internal stability is essential to restore national confidence and strategic focus.
- Pakistan has consistently misread India's strategic posture—mistaking early Indian secularism for goodwill—despite decades of consistent policy across parties like Jan Sangh and BJP framing Kashmir as an unfinished agenda. In contrast, Pakistan's fluctuating positions—e.g., the aggressive diplomatic stance post-2019 followed by an abrupt shift in 2021—signal strategic inconsistency and undermine its credibility in the domestic and international arena.



- The global strategic winds are shifting rapidly and this assumption that India's alignment with the U.S. has made it invincible no longer holds weight. While the U.S. may have invested in India as a strategic partner, India lacks both the capacity and willingness to fully meet American strategic objectives, particularly in the Asia-Pacific.
- It was argued that India seeks hegemonic dominance in South Asia, unlike other regional states such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Maldives that favor pluralistic coexistence; however, internal fault lines within India—including communal tensions, regional disparities, and the North-South divide—are contributing to growing domestic discontent, especially among Sikhs, Kashmiris, Muslims, and the more educated and economically productive South India.
- A key issue identified was Pakistan's lack of preparation on the Kashmir front, with the only “all or nothing” moment—during the Kargil episode (1998–1999)—becoming a fiasco due to a severe civil-military disconnect; otherwise, Pakistan's approach has been inconsistent and lacking commitment, rooted in this enduring preparation gap.
- A growing lack of national purpose has undermined Pakistan's Kashmir stance, with many youth questioning its relevance amidst domestic crises. Without a coherent narrative of national identity and vision, efforts like supporting Kashmir appear directionless and disconnected, leading to strategic drift and public disengagement.
- While a general consensus among the panelists favored economic engagement with India to create mutual stakes, some opposed it—arguing that initiating trade with an adversary that denies Pakistan's very right to exist is a flawed and defeatist approach; such engagement, if done under pressure or to appease elite interests, compromises Pakistan's strategic purpose and legitimacy, even though diplomatic dialogue should remain open in principle.
- The panel underscored the strategic and symbolic significance of GB, highlighting that its people have historically expressed a clear desire to join Pakistan and not be treated as part of the broader Kashmir dispute. While several panelists supported granting GB provisional status, they emphasized that any constitutional step must genuinely reflect the will of its people and must not compromise Pakistan's long-standing principled stance on the right to self-determination for the entire Kashmir region.

- However, caution was voiced regarding the timing and readiness of such a move. One panelist warned that premature action—without adequate institutional, administrative, and intergovernmental preparation—could be riskier than inaction. Given Pakistan's governance weaknesses and lack of cohesive coordination between federal and subnational entities, hastily altering GB's status could lead to unintended consequences and undermine Pakistan's credibility.
- In this context, another panelist highlighted the role of the Sartaj Aziz-led Committee in formulating comprehensive reforms for GB while safeguarding Pakistan's historic legal and diplomatic position before the UN. The proposed approach was nuanced: instead of amending Article 1, limited constitutional changes could grant GB representation in the National Assembly while preserving its provisional status. This would fulfill GB's democratic aspirations without creating irreversible facts on the ground that could be construed as legitimizing India's 5 August 2019 annexation of IIOJK.
- Karachi Agreement outlines the relationship between Pakistan and the leadership of AJK, including AJK's consent for Pakistan to administer GB. It was also highlighted that the AJK Assembly serves as the representative body for all of Kashmir, reaffirming that as early as July 1947—prior to Pakistan's formation—the representative leadership of Kashmir had collectively resolved to accede to Pakistan.
- Pakistan's strategic communication infrastructure is weak and fragmented. The state's role should be to foster a coherent strategic culture while enabling civil society, media, and academia to carry forward narrative-building innovatively and effectively. A new dimension of “information as a right” was proposed, alongside life, honor, and property—highlighting that the state must equip citizens with truthful, timely information to sustain national cohesion and strategic clarity.



PICTURES GALLERY





Conversations



@Foothills

For Feedback, please contact us at ceil@ndu.edu.pk



**INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS (ISSRA)
NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD**