



Post Workshop Report

**International Programme
for Development & Stability**

IPDS

2025

15-17 September, 2025



WORKSHOP SPONSOR

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International Programme for Development & Stability (IPDS) - 2025

Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad organized International Programme for Development and Stability (IPDS) - 2025 from 15 - 17 September 2025. The programme was attended by Foreign Security Advisers (FSA's), Diplomatic staff of Embassies, representatives from international agencies and members from civil society.

The Programme was aimed to provide a platform for shared understanding and perspective on 'development and stability in the region & Pakistan':-

- Study transforming global, regional environment & enabling conditions for attracting investment/sustainable development in the region.*
- Discuss trade, development and stability in Pakistan while analyzing policy options for investment in the country.*
- Explore the possibilities of startup businesses, entrepreneurship and venture capital in Pakistan.*

**International Programme
for Development & Stability**

IPDS

2025



NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE, ISLAMABAD
GENERAL PERVAZ MUSHTAQ KHAN, THE
PRESIDENT OF ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN
CHIEF OF THE ARMY STAFF

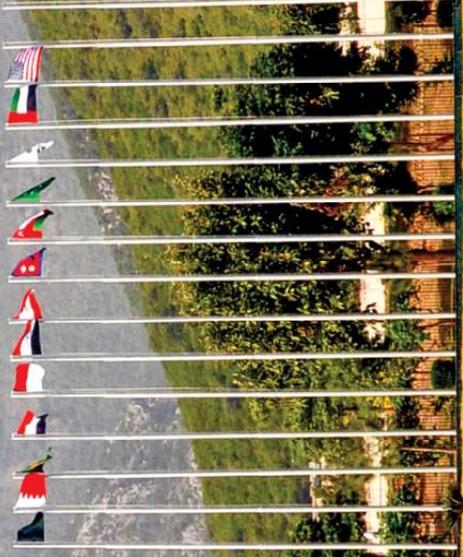




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**Welcome Address by
MAJ GEN MUHAMMAD RAZA AIZAD, HI (M)
DG ISSRA**





DAY 1

15 September, 2025
Session I

Global Strategic Shifts: Evolving Trends in an Uncertain Era



SPEAKERS



Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Amb Jalil Abbas Jilani (Retd)



SPEAKER - I
Mr Ejaz Haider



SPEAKER - II
Dr Da Wei



SPEAKER - III
Dr Andreea Stoian karadeli



SPEAKER - IV
Amb Zamir Akram (Retd)



MODERATOR
Ms Aiza Azam

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We are living through an era of profound uncertainty, marked by a turbulent transition in the global order, with the US-China rivalry emerging as the central axis of future geopolitics.
- The decline of unipolarity has created space for regional powers, such as Japan, Brazil, Türkiye, Pakistan, India, and others, to influence the global order.
- Understanding global dynamics requires moving beyond the Western lens; as international structures have long been defined on Western terms.
- South Asia risks emerging as the next Cold War arena, with intensifying arms races, institutional fractures, and increasing tensions.
- New domains of conflict are emerging, with AI, drones, disinformation, and cyber warfare increasingly replacing conventional battlefields.
- The future lies in seizing opportunities in AI, climate cooperation, and multipolar collaboration, but survival will hinge on substantial defence investments and adaptive strategies in an increasingly fragmented system.
- Pakistan must navigate a delicate balance between China and the US, in a context far more complex than the alignments of the 1970s–80s.
- The US and China remain the biggest beneficiaries of globalization and have reaped the rewards but are locked in a high-stakes struggle over technology and critical resources like semi-conductors, rare earth minerals.
- Pakistan's relationship with China is truly strategic in nature, unlike its engagement with the US; from a strategic standpoint, Beijing remains the more vital partner.
- Regional institutions are losing their strength, while India's aggressive actions, such as violations of water treaties risk serious repercussions. Meanwhile, new and complex domains of conflict are emerging, where artificial intelligence, drones, disinformation, and cyber warfare are rapidly replacing traditional battlefields.
- In this environment, Pakistan must position itself as a bridge and facilitator, deepening long-term cooperation with China while practising statesmanship and ensuring unity across the whole of government.
- To safeguard its interests, Pakistan needs strategic clarity, stronger domestic foundations, and prudent, well-calibrated diplomacy that allows it to navigate major power rivalries without being forced into rigid alignments.

DAY 1

15 September, 2025
Session II

Regional Pathways for Future South Asia's: Dialogue, Integration, and Maritime Challenges



SPEAKERS



Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Amb Shahid Malik (Retd)



SPEAKER - I
Mr Jamal Aziz



SPEAKER - II
Amb Asif Ali Khan Durrani (Retd)



SPEAKER - III
Dr Maria Sultan



SPEAKER - IV
Maj Gen Inam-ul-Haque (Retd)



MODERATOR
Ms Naila Shuja

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- South Asia, through SAARC, accounts for 25% of the global population; adding China's 17.4%, Central Asia/Iran/Afghanistan's 2%, and nearly 500 million from the Middle East makes the region strategically significant.
- Key regional challenges include India–Pakistan nuclear rivalry, instability in Afghanistan, Maoist insurgencies in India, Iran's issue, the Israel factor and flashpoints such as Kashmir.
- Emerging trends of instability are shaped by identity politics (religion, ethnicity, group identity) and the disruptive role of Generation Z protests (e.g. Bangladesh, Nepal), alongside transnational jihadist groups.
- Regional security is further complicated by Indian desire of political hegemony adding to instability and mistrust.
- Pakistan's geostrategic vulnerability stems from its western borders (Iran and Afghanistan) combined with its eastern front against India, leaving the country in a constant state of security pressure.
- India's stance on Kashmir has shifted from initially seeking UN involvement and granting special constitutional status to treating it as a bilateral issue and, since 2019, declaring it an internal matter after revoking its autonomy.
- International inaction and shifting geopolitical priorities have sidelined Kashmir, leaving the dispute in a prolonged state of neglect despite continuing human rights concerns.
- The Soviet Union was not militarily defeated in Afghanistan by the Mujahideen alone, but crumbled due to its own systemic vulnerabilities and overreach.
- Pakistan is uniquely positioned at the northwestern gateway of the Indian Ocean, one of the world's most critical maritime highways, making its maritime security strategically vital.
- Maritime security underpins three pillars for Pakistan: economic security (control of trade), strategic autonomy (avoiding dependence on others), and national defence (integrating space-based capabilities).
- Gwadar's operationalisation makes it strategically crucial not only for Pakistan but also for regional and extra-regional players seeking secure access to global trade routes.

DAY 2

16 September, 2025
Session I

Pakistan's Economic Trajectory Integrating Trade & Investment



SPEAKERS



Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Mr Haroon Sharif



SPEAKER - I
Ms Erfa Iqbal



SPEAKER - II
Hassan Shehyar Yasin



SPEAKER - III
Mr Bilal Saqib



SPEAKER - IV
Dr. Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan



MODERATOR
Musarat Jabeen

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides the overarching framework for CPEC, which continues to be central to Pakistan's development strategy.
- For the first time, progress went beyond Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), with Pakistani businesses signing Joint Venture Agreements with Chinese companies at one of Beijing's largest B2B conventions.
- Pakistan still lacks robust institutional support systems for emerging entrepreneurs; despite limited support from institutions, the country has no shortage of raw talent and innovative ideas waiting to be nurtured.
- Pakistan currently ranks 78th globally in entrepreneurial ideas; a reflection of significant untapped potential that could be unlocked through proper guidance, mentoring, and supportive policies.
- Crypto tends to benefit nations that embrace change and adapt, while economies that cling to the status quo risk falling behind.
- What was once dismissed as a temporary façade has now proven its resilience and enduring value as Pakistan stands 3rd in the world for crypto adoption, with over 40 million active users engaged in digital assets.
- While investment outcomes require time, SIFC is actively working toward macroeconomic stability.
- Agriculture, contributing 23% to Pakistan's GDP, remains a cornerstone of the economy. Opportunities in this sector lie in improving the ease of doing business, enhancing public investment, providing fiscal and farming support, and modernising agricultural practices.
- In the post-COVID era, global trade is showing signs of recovery but remains constrained by rising tariffs, which are driving up trade costs.
- Not all investments are beneficial for fragile economies; careful selection of projects is critical to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Economic corridors can only succeed if they attract adequate private capital, yet 60% of special economic zones fail due to insufficient investment.
- To remain competitive, Pakistan must transition from efficiency-driven to knowledge-based skills, following models like Singapore.
- Regulating cryptocurrency in isolation will not ensure transparency; Pakistan must adopt gradual, sequenced, and well-structured regulations, viewing crypto's rise as a long-term transition rather than an abrupt shift.

DAY 2

16 September, 2025
Session II

Economy of Pakistan: Opportunities & Challenges



SPEAKER



Speaker
Mr. Bilal Azhar Kayani

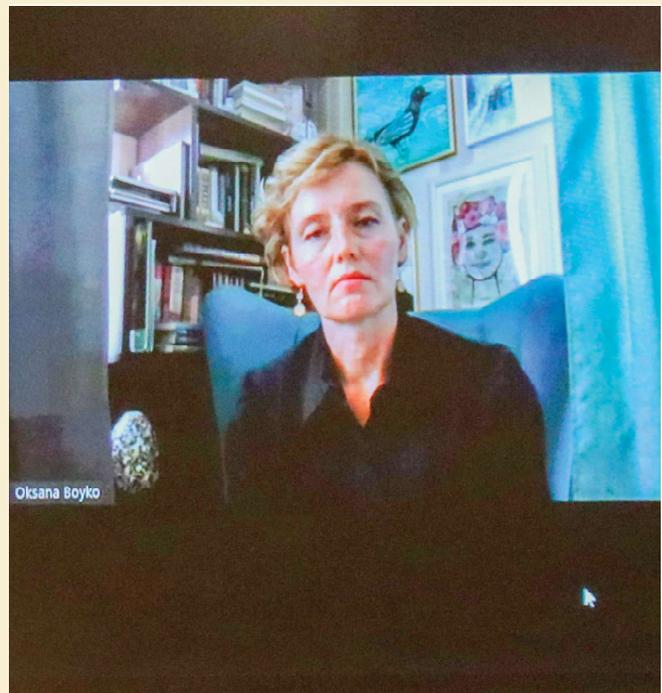
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- For the first time in 14 years, Pakistan recorded a current account surplus of \$2.1 billion, the highest in 22 years, compared to a \$2.1 billion deficit in the previous year. This turnaround reflects progress on external accounts.
- Inflation dropped from 23.4% last year to 4.5%, marking a 9-year low, while per capita income registered a slight increase. More importantly, the tax-to-GDP ratio rose sharply from 8.8% to 10.2%, an unprecedented gain.
- Pakistan secured a \$7 billion IMF Extended Fund Facility, passing the first review with the second due soon; these steps have been critical for macroeconomic stabilisation.
- Exports stood at \$32 billion (a marginal rise), while remittances remained strong at \$38 billion, which together form the backbone of foreign exchange inflows. To further strengthen remittances, the government launched the Pakistan Remittance Initiative, incentivising transfers through formal banking channels instead of informal systems.
- Foreign exchange reserves have reached nearly \$20 billion, with over \$14 billion held by the State Bank of Pakistan, providing some cushion for external obligations.
- Debt-to-GDP ratio stands at 70%; the government is focusing on improving debt sustainability by lengthening loan maturities and lowering borrowing costs, moving toward a more balanced debt profile.
- Pakistan's economy faces a recurring structural problem: after a period of IMF-backed stabilisation, growth rebounds, but once GDP growth crosses 4%, imports rise disproportionately. Since exports and remittances cannot keep pace, foreign reserves decline, creating another crisis cycle; breaking this pattern requires long-term reforms.
- The government has initiated sweeping tariff reforms. Pakistan currently has three types of import duties (customs, additional customs, and regulatory duties). The plan is to eliminate additional duties within four years, regulatory duties within five years, and cap customs duties at a maximum of 15%.
- Alongside tariff cuts, reforms are also underway in industrial policy, privatisation, and pensions. The pension bill, which is rising every year, will shift to a contributory scheme so that it becomes self-sustaining and does not burden the national exchequer.
- Privatisation efforts are moving ahead with a list of 10 companies, including all power distribution companies, which are currently incurring huge annual losses. Reforming the power sector is vital not only for financial efficiency but also for reducing costs to citizens and businesses.
- The government is also focusing on the digitisation of the tax system. While the existing filing platform has shortcomings, two teams have been tasked: one to immediately upgrade the current system, and another to design a new, locally-suited digital filing system from scratch.

DAY 2

16 September, 2025
Session III

Framing Reality: The Role of Narratives in the Contemporary Era



SPEAKERS



Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Mushahid Hussain Syed



SPEAKER - I
Ms Oksana Boyko



SPEAKER - II
Dr Zeeshan Zaighum



SPEAKER - III
Mr Muhammad Maalick



SPEAKER - IV
Ms Mahreen Aziz Khan



MODERATOR
Ms Aniq Nisar

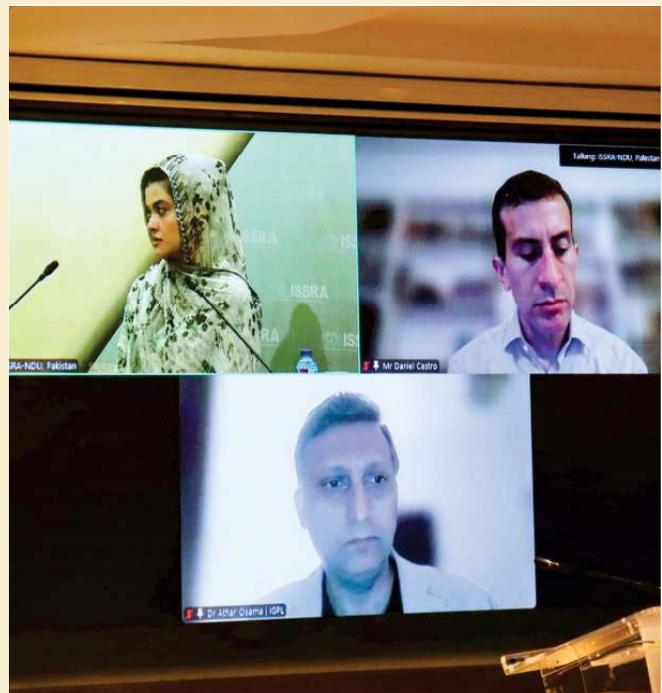
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Two parallel realities coexist: a predictable physical world shaped by routines and a volatile digital world defined by unpredictability, speed, and instability.
- Media literacy remains weak: over 60% of people share disinformation while only 10–11% share verified content. Platforms like Facebook have (3.04 to 3.05) billion monthly users while daily active users are about 2 billion. In Pakistan, TikTok has 66.9 million active users while Facebook has 49.4 million users.
- Narratives not only shape beliefs but also influence behaviours. In today's digital environment, dominated by social media, this power can even affect the fragility of territorial integrity.
- Algorithms fuel engagement by amplifying sensational, emotional, and violent content, while also trapping users in echo chambers that reinforce beliefs and accelerate polarisation.
- Unlike in the past, when states could easily block hostile influence, the modern information space enables adversaries to bypass barriers, target populations directly, and conduct “fifth-generation warfare” through soft subversion and asymmetric communication.
- The media is the most powerful entity, capable of shaping perceptions and portraying the innocent as guilty or vice versa. Recent fake headlines in UK newspapers on Gaza showed how mainstream media manipulates opinion, while social media exposed Israel's ongoing violations.
- Youth bulge defines digital dynamics. Most users are 18–36, making discourse fast, emotional, and mobilised, unlike older generations who approach issues with compromise and caution.
- Against adversaries that apply double standards, one effective strategy is to support the idea of a multipolar world; a practical way to broaden narratives and reduce reliance on Western-dominated perspectives.
- Bollywood has served as India's “unofficial ministry of propaganda,” consistently portraying Pakistan negatively while concealing India's own deep-rooted social issues.
- Double standards in global narratives were highlighted when China's military parade was labelled aggressive, while a similar U.S. parade under Trump was celebrated as patriotic.
- The Iraq War showed how coordinated disinformation campaigns shape global conflicts; false claims of weapons of mass destruction to justify the invasion.
- Russia is often framed negatively in global media, but a country's image is also shaped by culture, values, and the everyday impressions of its people.
- South Asian case studies show digital disruption: Bangladesh saw a viral video spark political change; Sri Lanka's hashtags toppled leaders; Nepal used Discord to mobilise 145,000 users even under shutdowns.
- Pakistan mirrors these vulnerabilities with its youth bulge, unemployment, inequality, and elite capture; constructive engagement and counter-narratives are the only viable path.

DAY 3

17 September, 2025
Session I

Disrupted Realities: Emerging Trends Shaping the Future of Human Society



SPEAKERS



Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Sajjad Mustafa Syed



SPEAKER - I
Dr Ather Osama Siddique



SPEAKER - II
Mr Daniel Castro



SPEAKER - III
Air Marshal Aamir Masood (Retd)



SPEAKER - IV
Ms Kanwal Cheema



MODERATOR
Ms Sidra Jalil

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In the long arc of history, every society is dependent on innovation for progress, but it is the enabling environment of skillset, regulations, digital infrastructure and the desire to pursue a progressive good that determines the future.
- Digital invasions are transforming daily lives; technology has the potential to improve the availability of opportunities out there.
- Political developments around the world are accentuating the disruptive capacity of AI. This, along with the US's stringent services import measures, is resulting in the disruption of IT outsourcing industries across the world.
- AI has profoundly changed the rules of the game, with more disruptive technological and political competition emerging from the US and the rest of the world.
- AI has enormous capacity to disrupt but also has a symbiotic ability, where humans can benefit from the layered learning of AI and improve our tasking, but this symbiosis will only be successful when there is an aptly regulated environment with a relevant skill set.
- AI is going to hit hard on the developing countries in the area of knowledge work, and Pakistan's IT exports are mainly in the low-level knowledge work, which is at threat from AI.
- Although there is scepticism around the debate of the use of AI and potential threats, there is always room for positive and regulated use of the technology. One of the best example of it is regulated biotechnology and gene editing, where industry self-regulates the constructive use of technology for human good.
- One of the biggest challenge to the regulated use of AI is that it is not run by academics but by the big tech, whose motive is primarily of profit rather than a regulated wellbeing.
- The world has a great opportunity in face of block chain technologies, to establish a trusted integrated system, focused on enhancing the service delivery and larger public good.
- Modern warfare is being reshaped by AI, cyber, quantum, and space technologies, with air power highlighted as the decisive element to strike deep and establish control of the skies.
- In the May 2025 conflict, the Pakistan Air Force's system-centric approach, integrating cyber, space, and electromagnetic domains, ensured swift tactical responses and operational superiority.
- Future preparedness requires a unified national command system, resilient and secure communications, adoption of AI/ML, and stronger collaboration among scientists, engineers, and operational forces.
- There is a need for a global governance system for AI, and that would require a multilateral cooperative mechanism, probably under the UN system, to enhance the best use of AI for public good rather than disruption.
- There is great scepticism around the discussion on AI, but there is a positive side, where it can be used to address the shortage of workforce in the countries where required.

DAY 3

17 September, 2025
Session II

Pakistan's Soft Power Frontier: Culture Connectivity and strategic Narrative



SPEAKERS



Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Mr Javed Jabbar



SPEAKER - I
Mr Arieab Azhar



SPEAKER - II
Ms Momina Duraid



SPEAKER - III
Mr Kamran Lashari



SPEAKER - IV
Dr Najeeba Arif



MODERATOR
Bushra Zafar Khan

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Culture, though influenced by religion, is distinct from it; shared faith does not erase cultural differences, as seen in the diverse traditions of Muslim countries like Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.
- Art and culture are not decorative extras; they form the core of identity, serving as living expressions of heritage that anchor us, shape our aspirations, and inspire hearts and minds.
- Heritage provides continuity and stability, but it is not static; it evolves with new inventions, ideologies, and lifestyles, retaining its original essence while adapting to change.
- Literature and art elevate individuals by teaching the value of both words and silence, nurturing self-awareness, and instilling the courage to improve.
- Pakistan is home to some of the world's oldest civilisations, including the Indus Valley, with urban centres like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro showcasing advanced planning 5,000 years ago.
- Pakistan's Sufi heritage, embodied in qawwali, folk dances, and music, remains a powerful cultural force, uniting people beyond prejudice. Shared laughter, dance, and music dissolve divisions more strongly than politics ever could.
- Despite this heritage, extremism and orthodoxy have stifled cultural growth, discouraging music and artistic expression. Coupled with security concerns since the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Afghan war, borders remain closed, isolating the culture.
- Despite incoherence and pessimism, countries can still highlight their potential and unique realities through the media. Iran is an example where restrictive politics coexist with creative brilliance, as seen in its globally acclaimed cinema.
- Globally, music is a significant industry: India and South Korea earn \$3 billion, the UK \$7 billion, China \$14 billion, and the US \$35 billion annually, showing music feeds both soul and economy.
- Pakistan inherits an unbroken ancient tradition of music, rooted in the Indus Valley Civilisation, where instruments were played, though the script remains undeciphered.
- Promoting music through research and education is essential; classical music should be taught in schools, academies, and universities.
- Turkey and South Korea export dramas successfully; Pakistan can do the same with government support and stability to attract OTT investment.
- Dramas and films act as cultural ambassadors, with every production representing Pakistan abroad.
- Media can inform but cannot fully represent reality; an accurate understanding requires direct engagement with people and the world.

LIGHTER MOMENTS







