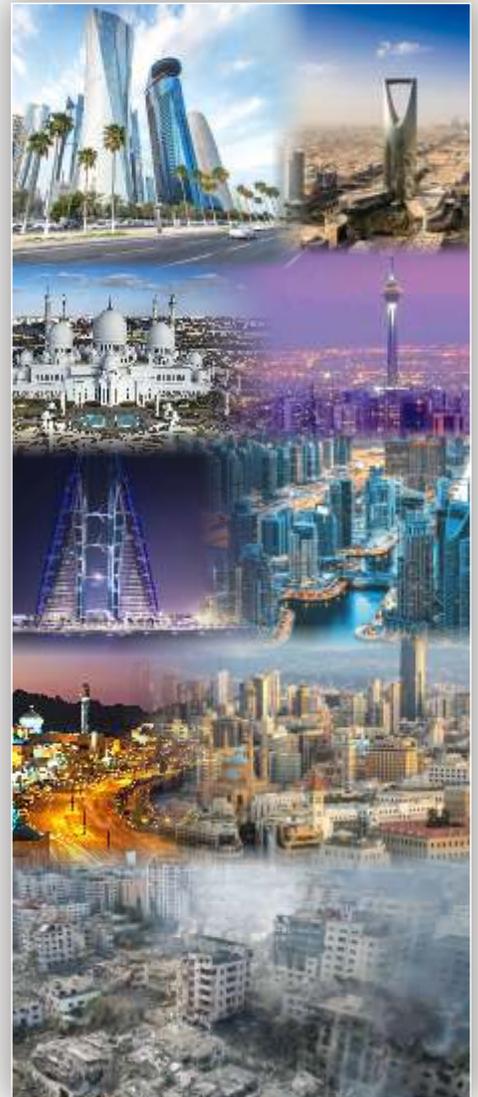


MIDDLE EAST WITHIN THE EVOLVING GLOBAL ORDER AND TRENDS

ISSRA INTERNATIONAL WEBINAR
23 April 2025



Conversations



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Disclaimer: The discussion and report have followed Chatham House rule. The statements, facts and opinions by speakers do not constitute the official policy of ISSRA/NDU.





Introduction

- The Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA) at the National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, hosted a discussion on the “Middle East within the Evolving Global Order and Trends” on 23 April 2025.
- This session was part of ISSRA's international webinar series aimed at strengthening global engagement through formal cooperation mechanisms and academic dialogue with leading think tanks and institutions. It featured experts' presentations followed by interactive discussions that fostered diverse perspectives.
- Participants from Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Türkiye, and Pakistan shared insights on contemporary geopolitical shifts, economic transitions, security challenges, and strategic partnerships shaping the Middle East's evolving role in regional and global affairs.
- They examined the region's centrality in the changing international order, highlighting its strategic significance as well as vulnerabilities stemming from internal divisions and external interference.
- The experts emphasised the urgency of regional integration, inclusive security frameworks, and multilateral dialogue to address persistent conflicts and realise the region's economic and strategic potential.

Key Takeaways

- The Middle East's strategic location, vital energy corridors, and religious and civilisational significance keep it central to the global geopolitical landscape, particularly amid the intensifying rivalry between the United States (US) and China.
- The international order is transforming from unipolarity to a fluid form of bipolarity led by the US and China, with the potential evolution toward multipolarity. However, this shift remains unsettled, marked by volatility and competing alignments.
- Conflict continues to be a defining feature of the Middle East. While some long-standing crises appear to subside, new flashpoints constantly emerge, maintaining a cycle of instability and regional insecurity.
- Despite abundant natural resources, especially hydrocarbons, regional states face challenges of underperforming economies. Structural issues like weak governance,

overreliance on oil revenues, and persistent socio-economic disparities continue to hamper inclusive development.

- In addition to traditional security threats, the region now grapples with emerging challenges such as cyber threats, digital infrastructure vulnerabilities, generational discontent, and social fragmentation, demanding innovative and forward-looking policy responses.
- There are deep-rooted cultural, religious, and historical affinities. Still, the Middle East struggles towards establishing a cohesive and functional regional political architecture. This vacuum gives way to external manipulation and intra-regional divisions, perpetuating strategic fragmentation.
- There is a need for a regional forum in which all Middle Eastern countries including Turkiye and Iran are represented.
- Pakistan considers the stability of the Middle East crucial, particularly to its own strategic, economic, and energy interests. It actively contributes to regional peace and maritime security, especially in areas proximate to key chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, and participates in multilateral maritime security initiatives.

Summary of Proceedings

- On the geostrategic significance of the Middle East, the experts observed that the region has historically been and continues to be a geopolitical epicentre.
- The region's geography, abundant energy reserves, and critical maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Suez Canal make it central to global security and trade.
- Throughout and even beyond the Cold War, the region has remained a central arena for great power competition, serving as both a battleground and a strategic prize.
- No major global power has ever achieved or sustained geopolitical dominance without controlling or being deeply engaged in the Middle East and its broader neighbourhood, including North and East Africa, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and even Pakistan. This extended region shares strategic interlinkages and contextual similarities, underscoring its collective importance in global power dynamics.
- While emphasising persistent instability and conflict dynamics, some participants highlighted the region's history punctuated by recurring conflicts, from the Arab-Israeli and the Gulf wars to the Syrian civil war, the Yemeni crisis, and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian confrontation.
- Hence, instability was observed to be structurally embedded, as one conflict subsides, another tends to emerge, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity.
- While mapping the regional threat landscape, the discussants listed a complex array of multidimensional threats faced by the Middle East. These included:
 - Security threats, such as ongoing wars, external military interventions, terrorism, and conventional and unconventional arms races.
 - Cyber threats, like increasing digital vulnerabilities amid rapid technological adoption without adequate safeguards.
 - Economic threats, including overreliance on hydrocarbons, energy market volatility, poor economic diversification, and high youth unemployment.
 - Socio-cultural threats, such as generational alienation, fragile national identities, unequal access to education, and disenfranchised youth populations.
- It was discussed how the instability has fuelled economic underperformance amid immense resource wealth. The region's combined GDP remains disproportionately low relative to its

population and resource base; in some cases, smaller than that of a single European economy.

- Another serious matter noticed was that despite being richly endowed with natural resources, many Middle Eastern countries suffer from systemic underdevelopment, governance deficits, and entrenched inequality.
- The participants also pointed towards the absence of effective regional integration. The lack of an inclusive, unified, and effective regional political platform was noted to be a major structural weakness.
- It was observed that the existing regional groupings, such as the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), are either limited in scope or constrained by political disunity.
- Also, deep-rooted ethnic, religious, and ideological divisions have long been exploited by external powers to gain strategic leverage. Although there are more similarities within nations than differences, regional states often prioritise discord over their shared cultural and religious heritage, missing opportunities for cohesion and unity.
- The absence of a collective voice, particularly on defining issues like the Palestinian cause, reflects internal disunity and susceptibility to external influence.
- Amid these challenges, the discussion also highlighted ongoing global power shifts and the influence of external actors on the region.
- These highlights included the global order potentially transitioning from unipolarity to a fluid bipolar structure led by the US and China, with an eventual drift toward multipolarity involving regional and emerging powers.
- Moreover, the economic dominance of traditional G7 powers was noted to be eroding, while emerging economies, particularly the BRICS nations, are asserting greater influence on global affairs.
- Some experts observed their reservations about the growing erosion of respect for international norms and multilateral diplomacy, evidenced by unauthorised military interventions and impunity for violations of international humanitarian law, notably in the Palestinian (Gaza) conflict.
- Global powers maintain a strong footprint through strategic alliances, military basing rights, defence pacts, and economic dependencies, often reinforcing regional cleavages.
- Foreign actors have historically capitalised on sectarian and ethnic divisions in the Middle East to entrench their strategic foothold in the region.

- While deliberating on strategic recommendations to enhance regional resilience, the experts emphasised that to break this cycle, regional states must urgently invest in economic diversification, with stronger focus on renewable energy, education, technological innovation, and cyber resilience.
- Forging robust regional partnerships anchored in shared strategic interests is essential for achieving lasting peace, collective security, and economic sustainability.
- There is a pressing need for visionary regional leadership and multilateral cooperation to foster integration and shift the narrative from division to unity.
- A proposal was tabled to establish a pan-Middle Eastern regional platform that transcends sectarian and national rivalries to collectively address shared challenges and opportunities. It was recommended Türkiye, Iran, and other directly affected countries be included in such a dialogue, allowing all stakeholders to sit together and engage in meaningful discussions on issues.
- Pakistan's role and strategic interests were also highlighted. As an immediate neighbour of the Middle East, Pakistan wants peace and stability and regards regional peace as integral to its own security.
- Regional experts underscored Pakistan's deep-rooted religious, cultural, and strategic ties with the Middle East, emphasising the need to strengthen cooperative initiatives aimed at delivering mutual gains and sustainable partnerships.
- Pakistan's active participation in regional and international maritime security efforts through combined naval task forces was highlighted.
- Moreover, Gwadar's strategic location near the Middle Eastern Strait of Hormuz underscores Pakistan's stake in regional energy stability, trade security, and freedom of navigation.
- Pakistan advocates a principled stance supporting peace, non-intervention, and cooperative frameworks for resolving disputes in the Middle East.

Picture Gallery



Programme

1230 -1300 hrs	International speakers / participants to join online
1300 -1305 hrs	Welcome Remarks by Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, HI(M), DG ISSRA
1305 -1405 hrs	Experts' talk on Middle East within the Evolving Global Order and Trends Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ambassador Dr. Elsadiq Elfaqih Secretary General Arab Thought Forum (ATF), Jordan▪ Major General (R) Guray Alpar Chairman Geopolitical Foresight Institute, Ankara, Türkiye▪ Col. Khalid Khasib Almakhmari Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), Oman▪ Ambassador (R) Javed Hafeez Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman
1405 -1505 hrs	Interactive Session
1505 -1510 hrs	Concluding Remarks by DG ISSRA

List of Participants

Chair	
Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, HI(M)	DG ISSRA
Moderator	
Dr. Atia Ali Kazmi	Director G&RS ISSRA
Speakers	
Ambassador Dr. Elsadiq Elfaqih	Secretary General Arab Thought Forum (ATF), Jordan
Major General (Retd) Guray Alpar	Chairman Geopolitical Foresight Institute, Ankara, Türkiye
Col. Khalid Khasib Almakhmari	Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), Oman
Ambassador (Retd) Javed Hafeez	Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman
Participants	
LTC Ahmed ALSULAITI	Strategic Studies Centre (SSC), Qatar
Dr. Muhammad Umar Abbasi	Assistant Prof, Dept of IR, Faculty of Contemporary Studies (FCS), NDU
ISSRA	
Research Team	G&RS ISSRA



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