ISSRA
INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Post Seminar Report

AREA STUDY CENTRES DIALOGUE 2026

Transforming Global Order & Trends - ASC Perspectives

Thursday, 27th August 2026

Institute For Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis

Conversations



@Foothills

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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.


ISSRA COLLABORATION

Introduction

- ISSRA, National Defence University (NDU), organised the Area Study Centres Dialogue 2026 titled "Transforming Global Order & Trends – Perspectives of Area Study Centres on their Respective Regions" on 27 August 2026 at ISSRA, NDU, Islamabad.
- The seminar was graced by Ambassador Sardar Mohammad Masood Khan as the Chief Guest, while the keynote address was delivered by Professor Dr. Niaz Ahmed Akhtar, Chairman, Higher Education Commission (HEC). The opening remarks were delivered by Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, HI(M), Director General ISSRA. Session I was moderated by Ms. Arooba Lak and featured Dr. Ishrat Abbasi, Dr. Salman Bangash and Mr. Ahsan as speakers. Session II was moderated by Dr. Maria Effendi and featured Dr. Jahanzeb Baloch, Dr. Ayesha Siddique, Dr. Sadia Sulaiman and Dr. Naheed Goraya as speakers.
- The seminar brought together the leadership and researchers of Pakistan's Area Study Centres, policymakers, academics, diplomats, practitioners, students and other stakeholders to examine emerging regional and global trends and their implications for Pakistan's foreign policy, national security, economic interests and strategic positioning.
- The event sought to strengthen the research–policy nexus by providing a common platform for regional experts and policymakers and by enabling the Area Study Centres to highlight their institutional needs, research priorities and potential contribution to national policy formulation.
- The dialogue followed earlier engagement between ISSRA and the Area Study Centres, including a roundtable, the signing of an MOU to facilitate academic collaboration, and contributions from the centres to the E9 Quarterly.
- The seminar also included the launch of Brigadier Nadir Suleiman's book, "Balancing on the Brink: National Security in the Shifting Sands of Global (Dis)Order."



Key Takeaways

- The contemporary international order is undergoing significant transformation driven by geopolitical competition, technological disruption, economic realignment, climate insecurity and changing regional alignments. Regional developments are increasingly interconnected and can have consequences beyond their immediate geographical settings.
- Specialised regional knowledge was highlighted as a strategic necessity for Pakistan. Area Study Centres can contribute through policy-relevant research, strategic foresight, regional risk assessments and evidence-based recommendations.
- Pakistan's geographical position provides opportunities for connectivity with China, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, West Asia, South Asia and wider Eurasia. Converting geography into economic and strategic gains requires infrastructure, connectivity, trade, investment and institutional capacity.
- East and Southeast Asia are increasingly important centres of global production, technology, trade and investment, creating opportunities for Pakistan in technology, education, investment, agriculture, healthcare and human-capital development.
- Pakistan-Afghanistan relations remain constrained by security concerns, particularly terrorism and mistrust, while long-term regional connectivity and geoeconomic integration remain important objectives.
- Europe is experiencing strategic uncertainty associated with the Ukraine conflict, changing transatlantic relations, European rearmament, populism and debates over strategic autonomy, with implications for Pakistan's diplomatic, security and economic engagement.
- West Asia remains strategically fluid, while Pakistan's diplomatic engagement and efforts to facilitate dialogue were discussed in the context of its evolving regional role.
- Africa was identified as an underutilised area of potential engagement for Pakistan, with opportunities extending beyond trade to education, culture, creative industries, research and long-term strategic partnerships.
- North America, particularly the US, was discussed in the context of its continuing role in the evolving international order, great-power competition and Pakistan's strategic and diplomatic engagement.

- The limited discussion of South America during the seminar was also noted, underscoring the need for broader regional coverage in future Area Study Centres Dialogues, particularly given the existence of a dedicated Area Study Centre for the region.
- Technology, artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, digital platforms, critical minerals, supply chains and space systems are increasingly becoming instruments of strategic competition.
- Climate change and water security should increasingly be incorporated into national and regional security thinking, particularly in South Asia.
- A recurring institutional concern was the limited transmission of Area Study Centre research to policymakers. Stronger and more regular links with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, HEC and other government institutions were identified as necessary.
- Participants emphasised that the Area Study Centres Dialogue should become a continuing process involving follow-up activities, collaborative research, policy engagement and sustained institutional coordination.



Summary of Proceedings

- The inaugural session commenced with opening remarks by Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, HI(M), Director General ISSRA, who welcomed the Chief Guest, keynote speaker, heads and representatives of Area Study Centres, diplomats, academics, researchers, students and other participants.
- The proceedings highlighted the original purpose of Pakistan's Area Study Centres, established to develop specialised regional knowledge and bridge the gap between academic research and policymaking. Their role was considered particularly important in the present environment of rapid geopolitical, economic, technological and strategic change.
- The keynote address by Professor Dr. Niaz Ahmed Akhtar, Chairman HEC, highlighted the rapidly changing international environment, including geopolitical competition, technological change, economic challenges, climate insecurity and the changing nature of conflict.
- The need for Area Study Centres to expand their role beyond traditional regional research and contribute more actively to geopolitical analysis, forecasting, early warning and policy research was emphasised. Greater interdisciplinary research, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, economics, climate change and peacebuilding, was also encouraged.
- The use of practical tools such as conflict observatories, simulations and regional risk assessments was suggested, along with wider dissemination of research through policy briefs and other accessible formats to strengthen its contribution to policymaking.



Session I

- The session examined developments in East and Southeast Asia, Afghanistan and Central Asia, and Europe, with emphasis on emerging trends and their implications for Pakistan.
- East and Southeast Asia was discussed as an increasingly important centre of global production, trade, technology and investment, particularly through China, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN.
- The reorganisation of global supply chains and the China Plus One strategy were discussed, including the development of additional production capacity in countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand.
- Strategic competition among major powers, China's efforts to promote multipolarity and strengthen Global South linkages, and the expansion of digital and technological capabilities were highlighted.
- Technology, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, e-commerce and robotics were identified as increasingly important components of economic and strategic competition.
- Climate change and maritime security were discussed as significant concerns in East and Southeast Asia, particularly in relation to sea lanes, territorial disputes, illegal fishing and strategic waterways.
- Pakistan's relationship with China, including CPEC, was highlighted alongside opportunities for stronger engagement with Japan and South Korea in education, healthcare, agriculture, technology and investment.
- The discussion on Afghanistan and Central Asia examined Pakistan's potential role as a bridge connecting South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and wider Eurasia.
- Connectivity, trade, infrastructure, energy, finance and institutions were discussed as interdependent elements of geoeconomic integration. Pakistan's geographical position was considered a potential basis for trade corridors, transit infrastructure, railways, energy networks and access to regional markets.
- Security concerns, terrorism and mistrust were identified as significant constraints in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. At the same time, the discussion emphasised the importance of maintaining dialogue and pursuing longer-term economic and connectivity objectives.
- The importance of understanding Afghanistan's social, cultural and historical dynamics, improving border and transit management, and learning from previous regional experiences was highlighted.

- Developments in Europe were examined in the context of the war in Ukraine, changing US-European relations, European rearmament, populism and debates over strategic autonomy.
- The discussion also considered the changing role of the United States (US) in European security and the implications of evolving European defence arrangements.
- For Pakistan, the importance of constructive relations with European states and cooperation on issues such as human trafficking and countering disinformation was highlighted, alongside the need to prevent European territory from being used for activities directed against Pakistan.
- Questions during the session covered Pakistan-Japan relations, particularly opportunities in technology, education and human development.
- Participants discussed the tension between immediate security concerns in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and the longer-term objective of trade, transit and connectivity, including the role of the TTP and prevailing mistrust.
- Discussion also considered whether security guarantees should precede economic engagement or whether trade and connectivity could contribute to confidence-building. The need to address immediate security concerns while continuing to explore longer-term economic engagement was emphasised.
- The discussion on lessons from China included student exchanges and exposure to Chinese institutions, particularly in relation to discipline, time management and work-oriented practices.
- Earlier efforts to include Afghanistan in regional connectivity initiatives were also discussed, with emphasis on the need for a comprehensive and forward-looking policy mechanism.
- The session concluded with emphasis on sustained dialogue and the recognition that neighbouring states cannot remain adversaries indefinitely.



Session II

- The session examined West Asia, Africa, North and South America, and South Asia, with particular attention to Pakistan's changing diplomatic role and its engagement with major and regional powers.
- Developments in West Asia were discussed in the context of the US-Israel war against Iran and Pakistan's increased diplomatic visibility, including efforts to facilitate dialogue and contribute to de-escalation.
- The historical depth of Pakistan–Middle East relations and the value of understanding historical, cultural and economic links were highlighted.
- Skilled labour, remittances, ports, trade, energy cooperation and connectivity were identified as areas with potential for strengthening Pakistan's economic relationship with Middle Eastern states.
- Pakistan's coastline and ports, including Port Qasim and Gwadar, were discussed as strategic assets whose effective utilisation could support trade and connectivity.
- Greater regulated economic engagement with Iran, including border trade and energy cooperation, was discussed as a potential area for bilateral engagement within the prevailing legal and diplomatic framework.
- Academic, cultural and people-to-people exchanges with Middle Eastern countries were also identified as areas for greater engagement.
- The discussion on Africa highlighted the research and academic activities of the relevant Area Study Centre and its international partnerships, as well as the institutional and financial pressures facing Area Study Centres.
- Africa was identified as increasingly significant in global affairs because of its demographic, political, economic and strategic importance. The discussion stressed that Africa should not be treated as a homogeneous region.
- The need to move from viewing Africa primarily as a market or recipient of assistance towards treating African states as partners with their own agency was emphasised.
- Pakistan-Africa engagement was discussed as requiring a broader approach encompassing education, culture, creative industries, research, academic cooperation and strategic partnerships in addition to trade.

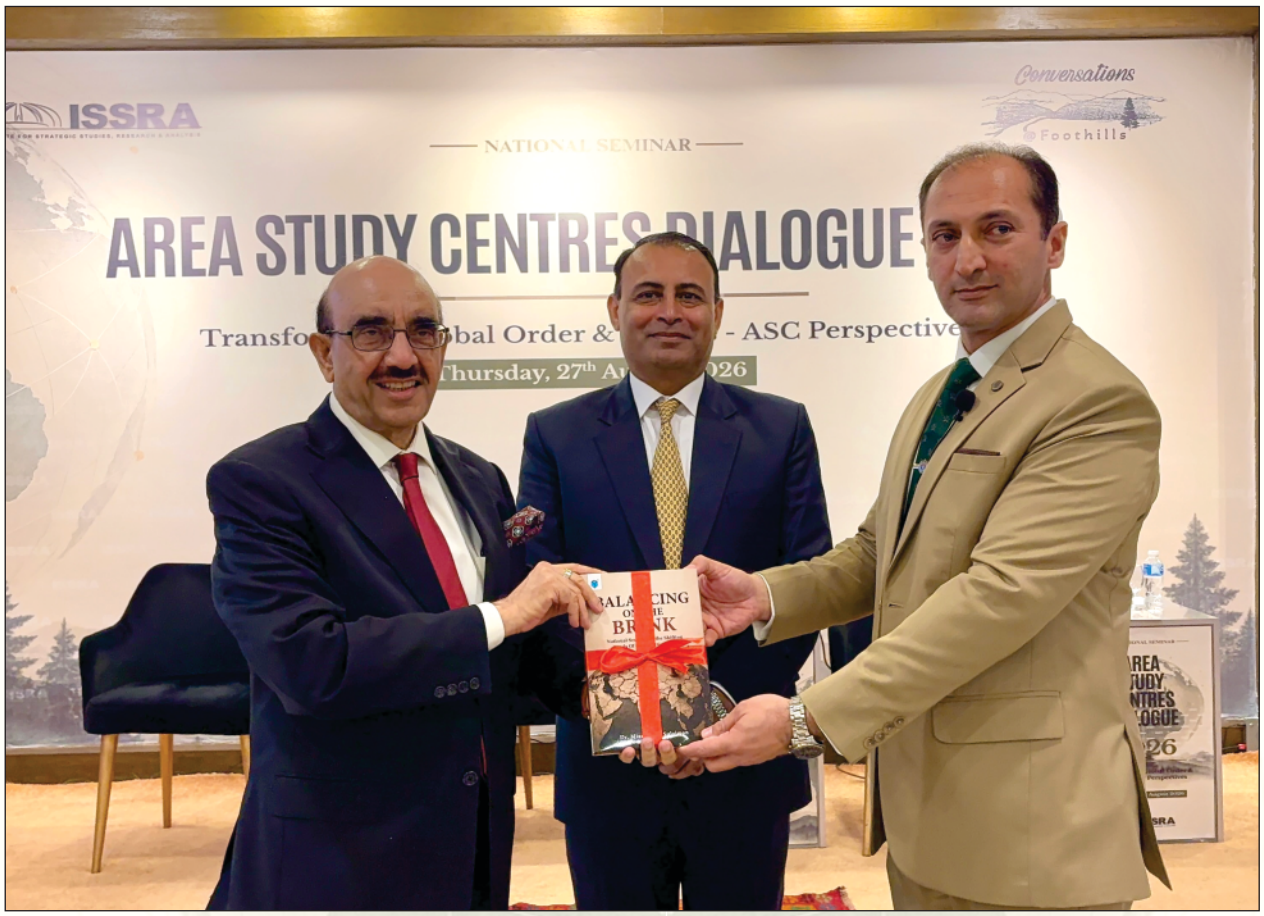
- The broader discussion on the changing international order considered the decline of unipolarity, transactional diplomacy, continuing great-power rivalry, the increasing role of technology and the stresses affecting the liberal international order.
- Pakistan's geographical position, diplomatic engagement and emerging middle-power role were discussed alongside the challenge of maintaining balanced relations with the US and China and managing difficult relations with Afghanistan and India.
- The discussion on South Asia emphasised that transformation is occurring not only within the international system but also in the conditions under which states exercise power, pursue security and generate prosperity.
- Five broad transformations were highlighted: movement from unipolarity towards a more contested and increasingly multipolar environment; the growing importance of economic power and supply chains; technology becoming an instrument of strategic power; the expansion of security concerns beyond conventional military threats; and the increasing strategic significance of climate change.
- South Asia was discussed as possessing substantial demographic, economic and geostrategic potential while simultaneously facing political rivalry, weak regional cooperation, terrorism, youth unemployment, water stress and climate pressures.
- Pakistan's geography was discussed as an asset that needs to be converted into connectivity, trade, investment, infrastructure and strategic influence rather than treated simply as a location.
- Technological capacity, digital governance, human capital, export competitiveness, financial governance, innovation and data-informed diplomacy were highlighted as components of national transformation.
- Climate change and water security were identified as security multipliers requiring integration into national and regional policy.
- Questions addressed Pakistan's role in facilitating US-Iran dialogue and the practical limits of a bridging role in a rapidly changing regional environment. The gradual nature of peace processes and the need for continuity and willingness among principal parties were discussed.
- Participants examined whether the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA) could generate competing regional expectations and how Pakistan could manage relationships with different regional actors while maintaining strategic flexibility.

- A significant discussion concerned the extent to which Area Study Centre research is received and utilised by policymakers. It was acknowledged that substantial research is produced, but institutional links with government decision-makers remain insufficient.
- The need to strengthen links between Area Study Centres and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government institutions was emphasised, including mechanisms for translating academic research into policy-relevant inputs.
- Alumni engagement was discussed as a possible mechanism for strengthening research-policy linkages by tracking graduates working in government, diplomacy and other relevant institutions.
- Pakistan-Africa economic engagement was discussed, including potential for greater trade, investment, industrial cooperation and integration with African supply chains.
- The session also considered whether the international system is moving towards multipolarity or whether US power remains sufficiently extensive to make such a conclusion premature, with emphasis on the uncertainty and fluidity of the current international environment.



Book Launch

- The seminar concluded with the launch of Brigadier Nadir Suleiman's book, “Balancing on the Brink: National Security in the Shifting Sands of Global (Dis)Order.”
- The book examines how changes in the international order affect Pakistan's national security and how Pakistan should position itself within a transforming international environment.
- The discussion placed the current international environment within the broader historical evolution of the Westphalian order, European order, post-1945 bipolarity and the post-Cold War unipolar moment.
- The book's discussion concluded that Pakistan's geography, resources, strategic location and people are inherited assets, while the manner in which these assets are converted into national capability and strategic influence will shape Pakistan's position in the emerging order.



Closing Session

- Chief Guest Ambassador Sardar Mohammad Masood Khan congratulated ISSRA for convening the Area Study Centres and bringing their regional expertise together on one platform.
- He recommended that the research and presentations generated through the dialogue be shared with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, economic ministries and other relevant government institutions.
- The importance of demand-driven research was emphasised, with Area Study Centres encouraged to respond directly to policymakers' requirements and move beyond description towards practical guidance on policy implementation.
- The changing international order was discussed in terms of the return of great-power competition, the role of the Global South, the influence of technology and financial actors, the continuing importance of the United Nations, and possible future configurations of the international system.
- The importance of considering international-order concepts beyond predominantly Western historical and intellectual frameworks was highlighted, including the experiences of Islamic, Chinese, Hindu and other civilisations.
- Pakistan's diplomatic engagement in West Asia, its role in facilitating US-Iran dialogue and its wider regional relationships were discussed in the context of its evolving international role.
- Stronger engagement between Pakistan's Africa Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant Area Study Centres was encouraged, including the possibility of dedicated institutional interaction.
- The need for Area Study Centres to focus increasingly on implementation-oriented research was stressed, examining not only what should be done but also how policy recommendations can be operationalised.

Programme

Ser	Time (Hrs)	Details / Speakers	Session
1.	1000-1030	Arrival & Registration Participants	
Opening Plenary			
2.	1030-1035	Opening – Welcome Remarks by DG ISSRA	
3.	1035-1050	Prof Dr. Niaz Ahmad Akhtar (S.I), Chairman HEC	Key Note Address
4.	1050-1100	Gp Photo (in front of Colb Wall)	
Plenary – I			
1.	1100-1115	Dr. Ishrat Afshan, Director ASC Far East & South Asia, University of Sindh	Perspective on Far East & South Asia
2.	1115-1130	Prof Dr. Salman Bangash, Director ASC Russia, China & Central Asia, University of Peshawar	Perspective on Russia, China & Central Asia
3.	1130-1145	Mr. Ahsan, ASC Europe, University of Karachi	Perspective on Europe
4.	1145-1205	Q & A Session	
5.	**1205-1220**	**Light Refreshment**	**ISSRA Lounge**
Plenary – II			
1.	1220-1235	Dr. Jahanzeb Baloch, Director ASC Middle East & Arab Countries, University of Baluchistan	Perspective on Middle East
2.	1235-1250	Dr. Ayesha Siddiqa, & Dr Sadia Sulaiman, ASC North & South America, Quaid-e-Azam University	Perspective on Africa and North / South America
3.	1250-1305	Dr. Naheed S. Goraya, Director ASC South Asian Studies, University of Punjab	Perspective on South Asia
4.	1305-1325	Q & A Session	-
Book Launch Balancing on the Brink – National Security in the Shifting Sands of Global (Dis)Order			
1.	1330-1345	Remarks by Author	-
2.	1345-1350	Presentation of Book	
3.	1350-1410	Concluding Remarks by Chief Guest	
4.	1410 onwards	Group Photo (Speakers) & fol by Hi Tea	In front of Mess Lounge

Picture Gallery






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