

PAKISTAN AND THE WORLD DISORDER

Sanober Institute - Friedrich-Ebert-
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INTRODUCTION

The evolving dynamics of the global order have ushered in a period of increasing uncertainty, complexity, and structural transition, significantly shaping the contemporary geopolitical landscape. Marked by intensifying great power competition, weakening multilateral frameworks, and the growing role of emerging technologies, this phase reflects a broader shift from a relatively stable international system to a more fragmented and multipolar world. Within this context, states are compelled to reassess their strategic priorities and adapt to an environment defined by both heightened risks and emerging opportunities.

Amid these developments, Pakistan's position has gained renewed significance as it navigates a rapidly changing regional and global environment. Its strategic location, coupled with its evolving diplomatic posture, places it at the intersection of key geopolitical and geo-economics trends. The need to balance external relations, manage regional challenges, and strengthen internal capacities has become increasingly central to its policy considerations.

To examine these critical issues, the Sanober Institute, in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Pakistan, convened a conference that brought together scholars, policymakers, security experts, diplomats, analysts, and members of civil society. The conference commenced with welcome remarks by Dr. Qamar Cheema, Executive Director of Sanober Institute. He welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of the discussion in the context of the changing world order and evolving global dynamics. The session was followed by a welcome address by Felix Kolbitz, Country

Director FES Pakistan, followed by a keynote address by Mr. Arno Holger Kirchhof, Minister and Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany. The inaugural address was delivered by General (Retd.) Zubair Mahmood Hayat, former Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. The conference concluded with closing remarks by Air Chief Marshal (Retd.) Sohail Aman, former Chief of the Pakistan Air Force.



The conference was structured around three focused roundtables.

- The first roundtable,

Pakistan and Global Geopolitics, was chaired by Ambassador Jalil Abbas Jilani, Pakistan's former Foreign Minister. The session included a policy brief from Dr. Aiza Azam, Director of Strategic Affairs for StrafAsia Pakistan; Dr. Amina Khan, Director of the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA); Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Vice Chancellor of Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad; Dr. Nazish Mahmood, Associate Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, QAU Islamabad; and Mr. Imran Khan, former Country Director of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). The discussion focused on global power shifts, regional conflicts, and Pakistan's role within an evolving geopolitical environment.



- The second roundtable,

Pakistan and Geoeconomics, was chaired by Senator Mushahid Hussain. The session included a policy brief from Dr. Neelum Nigar, Director at the Centre for Strategic Perspectives, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad and speakers included Ambassador Naghmana Hashmi, Former Ambassador to China along with contributions from ; Engr. Khalid Bashir, Chief Executive Officer of Zirva (Pvt.) Ltd.; and Dr. Syed Kaleem Imam, former Inspector General of National Highways and Motorway Police. The discussion emphasized economic connectivity, regional trade, and structural challenges facing Pakistan's economy.



- The third roundtable,

Pakistan and Youth Potential, was chaired by Major General (Retd.) Zahid Mahmood, Principal of the NUST Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. The session included a policy brief by Mr. Sardar Yasir Ilyas, CEO Centaurus and Prime Minister’s Coordinator on Tourism and contributions from Ms. Absa Komal, journalist and anchor; Ms. Sabahat Rafiq, President and CEO of Lampro Mellon and founder of Luna Heritage; and Ms. Syeda Amna Batool, politician and youth development advocate. The discussion highlighted the importance of youth engagement, digital transformation, and human capital development in shaping Pakistan’s future.



In addition to examining external dynamics, the deliberations also highlighted internal challenges that influence Pakistan’s ability to respond effectively, including economic constraints, institutional capacity, and governance issues. The importance of strengthening resilience across these domains was emphasized as a prerequisite for sustaining relevance in a shifting global order.

This conference serves not only as an analytical reflection on contemporary global trends but also as a framework for understanding how states like Pakistan can navigate a period of transition. It underscores the importance of strategic clarity, adaptability, and long-term planning

SUMMARY

- The conference “Pakistan and World Disorder” examined the evolving international system, marked by a transition toward a multipolar and increasingly fragmented global order.
- It highlighted the weakening of established norms, declining effectiveness of multilateral institutions, and the growing intensity of geopolitical competition.
- A major focus was Pakistan’s role as a constructive middle power, capable of facilitating dialogue and contributing to regional stability.
- Its recent mediation efforts, particularly between Iran and the United States, reflect a more proactive and balanced foreign policy approach.
- Key drivers of global disorder include the increased use of force by major powers, renewed great power rivalry, and the impact of emerging technologies on modern warfare.
- The rise of cyber, informational, and hybrid warfare has complicated traditional concepts of deterrence and conflict management.
- The ongoing tensions involving the United States, Israel, and Iran illustrate the complex and evolving nature of contemporary conflicts in the Middle East.
- Rather than decisive outcomes, such conflicts are more likely to result in



prolonged stalemates and shifting regional power balances.

- Pakistan's geo-economic potential was identified as a significant advantage due to its strategic location connecting key regions.
- However, structural issues such as limited industrial capacity, economic instability, and policy inconsistency remain major constraints.
- The importance of Pakistan's youth population was emphasised as a critical factor for long-term development.
- Investments in education, skills, and technology are necessary to convert this demographic strength into sustainable progress.
- The need for a coherent national strategy that integrates diplomacy, economic reform, technological advancement, and security planning was stressed.
- In a rapidly changing global environment, resilience will depend on adaptability, institutional strength, and effective governance.
- The current phase of global disorder is not simply a breakdown of order but a period of transition.
- Pakistan has the opportunity to play a meaningful role in this changing environment, but doing so will depend on how effectively it manages its internal challenges while maintaining a balanced and consistent external approach.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Transition to a Multipolar Eliminate World Order

The global system is undergoing a structural transition from a unipolar to a multipolar order. This shift is characterised by competing power centres, declining dominance of any single state, and increasing complexity in international relations.

2. Erosion of Rules-Based International System

Established norms, institutions, and legal frameworks that once governed the global order are weakening. The growing tendency of states to bypass international law and multilateral mechanisms is contributing to instability and mistrust.

3. Rise of Middle Powers

Middle powers such as Pakistan are gaining importance in global affairs. Their ability to engage in multi-alignment and facilitate dialogue positions them as key actors in managing conflicts and bridging geopolitical divides.

4. Changing Nature of Warfare and Deterrence

Advancements in technology, such as cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, and hybrid warfare, are transforming conflict dynamics. Deterrence is evolving from preventing war to managing escalation within increasingly complex operational environments.

5. Increasing Role of Regional Actors

Regional powers are playing a more prominent role in conflict resolution and security arrangements. This reflects a shift away from reliance on global superpowers toward more localised and multipolar approaches to stability.

6. Geo-economics as a Strategic Tool

Economic strength and connectivity are becoming central to national power. Pakistan's geographic position offers significant geo-economic opportunities, but these must be supported by structural reforms and industrial development.

7. Importance of Human Capital and Youth

Pakistan's large youth population represents a critical asset for future growth. Effective investment in education, skills development, and innovation is essential to harness this demographic advantage.

8. Need for Integrated National Strategy

Addressing global disorder requires a coordinated approach that aligns foreign policy, economic planning, security strategy, and technological advancement. Fragmented policymaking limits the ability to respond effectively to complex challenges.

9. Persistence of Global Uncertainty

The current phase of disorder is likely to persist in the near to medium term. States must therefore prioritise adaptability, resilience, and strategic foresight in navigating an unpredictable international environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pakistan should continue pursuing a balanced foreign policy based on multi-alignment, maintaining relations with major powers while avoiding overdependence on any single bloc. This approach will allow flexibility and enhance its role as a mediator in regional and global conflicts.
- Greater engagement with multilateral institutions is necessary to reinforce a rules-based international system. Active participation in forums like the United Nations can strengthen Pakistan's diplomatic standing and contribute to collective problem-solving.
- Economic stability must be treated as a core national priority. Structural reforms, including tax improvement, fiscal discipline, and export diversification, are essential to reduce reliance on external borrowing and ensure sustainable growth.
- There is a need to strengthen industrial capacity by promoting manufacturing, value addition, and technological upgrading. Without a strong industrial base, geo-economic ambitions cannot be fully realised.
- Pakistan should make better use of its geographic position by expanding regional connectivity. Improving trade routes, logistics systems, and cross-border cooperation can help transform the country into a hub linking South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.
- Investment in energy security is critical. Exploring regional energy projects, reducing dependence on imports, and ensuring a stable and affordable energy supply will directly support industrial and economic growth.
- Human capital development should be prioritised through reforms in education, vocational training, and research. A skilled and productive workforce is essential for long-term competitiveness.
- The country needs to invest more in science, technology, and innovation. Developing capabilities in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure will be important for both economic and strategic purposes.
- Institutional reforms are necessary to improve governance and policy implementation. Reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies and ensuring consistency in policies will help build investor confidence.
- Pakistan should strengthen its internal security and counterterrorism framework, particularly in relation to cross-border threats. A combination of security measures and dialogue will be required for long-term stability.
- There is a need to improve regional relations, especially with neighbouring countries. Confidence-building measures and sustained diplomatic engagement can reduce tensions and create opportunities for cooperation.

- Public diplomacy and communication strategies should be improved to better project Pakistan's narrative internationally. Managing information effectively has become an important aspect of modern statecraft.
- Efforts should be made to formalise informal trade and expand legal economic channels, particularly with neighbouring countries. This can increase revenue and improve economic transparency.
- Long-term policy planning should be strengthened by aligning economic, foreign policy, and security objectives. A coordinated approach will help the country respond more effectively to global uncertainties.
- Greater focus should be placed on political stability and continuity in policymaking. Consistent and predictable policies are essential for both domestic development and international credibility.



CONCLUSION

The contemporary international system is undergoing a profound and multidimensional transformation, marked by increasing fragmentation, shifting power configurations, and the gradual erosion of long-standing norms and institutional frameworks. What is often described as “global disorder” reflects not merely a breakdown of order, but a transitional phase toward a more complex and fluid multipolar system. In this environment, uncertainty, strategic competition, and the redefinition of power are likely to remain enduring features of international relations.

The decline of a singular dominant power and the simultaneous rise of multiple centres of influence have introduced new layers of complexity into global governance. Traditional mechanisms of cooperation, particularly multilateral institutions, are facing growing limitations in their ability to effectively manage conflicts and coordinate collective responses. At the same time, the increasing use of coercive tools, coupled with rapid advancements in technology, has transformed the nature of conflict, making it less predictable and more dispersed across physical, cyber, and informational domains.

In such a context, the concept of power itself is evolving. Economic resilience, technological innovation, control over narratives, and institutional capacity are now as critical as military strength in shaping a state’s position within the global hierarchy.

This shift underscores the importance of adopting a comprehensive and integrated approach to national strategy, where external engagement is closely aligned with internal stability and development.

For emerging and middle powers, this changing landscape presents both opportunities and constraints. On one hand, the diffusion of power creates space for greater diplomatic agency, regional influence, and strategic manoeuvrability. On the other hand, it also demands a higher degree of adaptability, coherence, and long-term planning to effectively navigate competing pressures and uncertainties. The ability to balance external relationships while addressing domestic structural challenges will be a defining factor in determining long-term relevance and stability.

Furthermore, navigating this era of global disorder requires more than reactive policymaking. It calls for sustained commitment to institutional strengthening, economic reform, and human capital development, alongside a pragmatic and forward-looking foreign policy. States that are able to maintain policy consistency, build resilience across sectors, and adapt to rapidly changing global dynamics will be better positioned to manage risks and capitalise on emerging opportunities. In an increasingly unpredictable world, strategic clarity and internal consolidation will remain the key foundations for stability and progress.

