

Center For Law and Security (CLAS),
Islamabad



Seminar:
**Global and Regional Maritime
Security Challenges: Lessons
from the Gulf Crises**

July 6th, 2026

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About CLAS

The Centre for Law and Security (CLAS) is a non-partisan policy research institution that aims to define the future of national security in Pakistan. We bring fresh ideas and highest quality scholarship to critical international law, foreign policy and national security challenges facing Pakistan. The Centre convene scholars to develop new policy ideas that advance Pakistan's interests in the international community and shape the national debate. The Centre in its work follows a distinct set out values – academic quality, research independence, academic integrity, innovative thinking, and empowerment.

The Centre is an independent interdisciplinary institute dedicated to preserving and promoting country's national security in a challenging 21st century environment. We exist to help policymakers form decisions based on accurate and sound information by providing expert research services and systematic analysis on legal issues that arise in connection with maintenance and development of national security policies and international law questions through a multilateral and multi-dimensional approach.

Mission

To preserve and promote country's national security through education, research and discussion for awareness and better legislation

Aims

To guide policymakers and raise public awareness on vital national security issues

The Centre aims to promote a comprehensive understanding of legal narrative among relevant stakeholders to facilitate the development of a cohesive stance on key issues related to national security. We are dedicated to promoting understanding on legal issues of national interest and creating awareness through our work. We strive for our work to serve as a resource for government officials, defence leaders, judiciary, lawyers, policy makers, media personnel, academics, civil society members, private sector individuals, and interested citizens to better understand the evolving landscape of international law that affects foreign policy and national security choices facing Pakistan, start a conversation and assists in fostering strategic expertise in Pakistan through dialogue, research and contribution to the public debate.



Work

To bridge the gap between theory and practice in a challenging and fast-paced environment on national security issues that carry national as well as international implications

The Center's work focuses on a critical examination of long-standing and emerging issues of national security and international law through a multilateral and multi-dimensional approach to assist policymakers and strategic and defense leadership make informed decisions. Our core activity is the promotion and understanding of law and creating awareness through our publications, workshops, conferences, publications and media productions, and social outreach initiatives. The Centre aims to promote national security as a core area of faculty and graduate research; sponsoring events aimed at encouraging awareness and promotion of legal positions; and engaging productively with local, regional, national, and international organizations through collaborations and publications. We strive to train high qualified students and graduates in legal research and policy development. serves as a point of contact and information for the interested public.

Synopsis

The Centre for Law and Security (CLAS), in collaboration with the National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA), organized a high-level seminar titled "The Strait of Hormuz Crisis: Implications for Maritime Security and Pakistan's Strategic Future." The seminar was chaired by Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan, President CLAS, while Rear Admiral Javaid Iqbal HI(M), President NIMA, delivered the keynote address. Vice Admiral (R) Iftikhar Ahmad Rao, former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Maritime Affairs, attended as the Guest of Honour. The panel featured Dr. Hassan Daud Butt, Prof. Dr. Azhar Ahmed, and Dr. Jahanzeb Butt, with Mr. Rehman Azhar, Executive Director CLAS, moderating the discussion.

The seminar examined the strategic, legal, economic, and security implications of the Strait of Hormuz crisis against the backdrop of escalating tensions in the Gulf. Speakers highlighted how maritime security has evolved beyond traditional naval operations to encompass global trade, energy security, digital infrastructure, environmental protection, cyber resilience, and international connectivity. The discussion underscored that disruptions at critical maritime choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb have worldwide consequences for supply chains, energy markets, and economic stability.

The speakers emphasized Pakistan's growing strategic relevance as a responsible maritime state. Particular attention was given to Pakistan Navy's contributions to Combined Maritime Forces, anti-piracy operations, maritime domain awareness, and the country's expanding role in ensuring the safe passage of commercial shipping during recent regional tensions. The panel also highlighted the strategic importance of Gwadar Port, Pakistan's maritime connectivity with Iran, Central Asia, Türkiye, and Europe, and the untapped potential of the Blue Economy.

The legal dimension of the Strait of Hormuz crisis received considerable attention, particularly the application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), freedom of navigation, transit passage, maritime security charges, and the challenges posed by evolving geopolitical realities. Speakers stressed the need to preserve international maritime law while adapting legal and institutional frameworks to emerging security threats.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan called upon Pakistan to move beyond its traditional role as an observer or facilitator and emerge as a leading maritime power. He emphasized the need for a comprehensive maritime strategy, stronger regional partnerships, enhanced maritime infrastructure, and greater national investment in maritime security and the Blue Economy. He further urged policymakers, academia, and maritime professionals to adopt a maritime mindset, noting that Pakistan's extensive coastline and Exclusive Economic Zone present immense opportunities for economic growth, regional connectivity, and strategic influence.

The seminar concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session, reaffirming the importance of continued policy dialogue and institutional collaboration in addressing evolving maritime challenges and strengthening Pakistan's maritime future.

Chair of the Session



Ambassador Masood Khan – President CLAS

Moderator



Mr. Rehman Azhar – Executive Director CLAS

Chief Guest of



the Session

Rear

Guest of



Admiral Javaid Iqbal HI(M) – President
NIMA

Honor

Guest Speakers

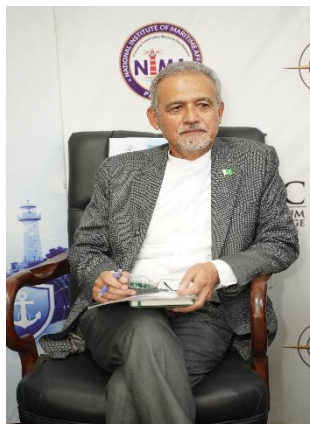


Dr.
CPEC



Hassan Daud Butt - Former Project Director

Dr. Jahanzeb



Butt – Assistant Professor, Bahria University

Prof. Dr. Azhar Ahmed – Maritime Expert

Discussion

The seminar was chaired by Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan, President CLAS, while the discussion was contributed by the keynote speaker Rear Admiral Javaid Iqbal HI(M) (President NIMA), guest speakers Dr. Hassan Daud Butt (Former Project Director CPEC 2), Prof. Dr. Azhar Ahmed (Maritime Expert & Senior Research Associate, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)), Dr. Jahanzeb Butt (Maritime Security Analyst & Senior Assistant Professor, Bahria University) and the Guest of Honour, Vice Admiral Iftikhar Ahmad Rao (Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Maritime Affairs) and moderated by Executive Director CLAS, Mr. Rehman Azhar.

Mr. Rehman Azhar, Executive Director CLAS, who moderated the session, commenced the session by providing an overview of the Strait of Hormuz, explaining its geographical significance and strategic importance. He discussed the ongoing developments concerning the Strait of Hormuz, noting that the issue had only recently begun to unfold. He also highlighted the US–Iran conflict, emphasizing the important lessons that can be drawn from the situation and its implications for regional and global security.

Rear Admiral Javed Iqbal HI(M), President National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA), as **Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker**, highlighted the following in his statement:

The Hormuz crisis is the most important security challenge today. Before the Hormuz crisis, around 140 merchant vessels passed through the Strait every day. Beneath the water was a web of fibre-optic cables carrying digital traffic, and above were satellites monitoring the traffic and facilitating maritime domain awareness. In this narrow system, everything was working in close proximity and everything was functioning smoothly. However, when the crisis began, maritime traffic came to almost zero, which sent a shock to the global economy.

The impact could have been much worse. Fortunately, the submarine cables were not destroyed, internet connectivity was not disrupted, merchant ships did not sink, and the

environmental catastrophe that could have occurred did not materialise.

Nevertheless, the crisis demonstrated that maritime security is no longer a distant concern; it has become the central operating space of globalisation. Although a ceasefire is currently in place, trade flows have not yet returned to normal, and significant uncertainty remains. Around 90 percent of global trade is conducted through the sea, while critical communication cables also lie beneath the oceans. Today,

Maritime security is no longer limited to commercial shipping. It is about interconnected systems, resilient infrastructure, and ultimately global stability. The previous century was about controlling the oceans, whereas the coming century will be about securing maritime networks.

The Gulf has emerged as a laboratory of modern conflict. Whatever happens here is likely to be replicated elsewhere. Maritime choke points demonstrate how local instability can quickly become a global disruption. The Tanker War, the Red Sea attacks on commercial shipping, and the Hormuz blockade all illustrate that maritime insecurity has become a defining feature of the international system. The Red Sea attacks in 2023 caused major shipping diversions and disrupted global supply chains, but the Hormuz crisis produced an even greater shock to global trade. The second and third-order effects are yet to unfold. The worst-case scenario would be the simultaneous closure of both the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb. The key lesson is clear: it is not necessary to destroy maritime infrastructure; it is enough to make it unpredictable.

He focused on three lessons that could be derived from the Gulf Crisis. The first strategic lesson is that maritime choke points are instruments of strategic leverage. Straits such as Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb serve as pressure points, and disruption in either of them creates cascading effects throughout global supply chains. Their importance is structural rather than merely regional. The second lesson is that the Gulf experience demonstrates how low-cost capabilities can produce high-cost consequences. Naval mines, low-cost drones, cyber capabilities, and electronic warfare systems can all create significant maritime disruption. Historically, naval mines have been inexpensive weapons and are often referred to as the "poor man's weapon." While they are relatively cheap to deploy, they are extremely difficult and costly to clear. The third lesson is that maritime theatres are now interconnected systems. The Gulf, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Hormuz, and the South China Sea have become part of one strategic chain. A disruption in one region inevitably affects the others. The implication is clear: maritime systems are no longer local; they are systemic.

Regarding the legal dimension, there is an ongoing debate over maritime service fees and

security-related charges. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the right of transit passage through international straits must remain free, and states cannot impose charges simply for passage. There is only limited scope for charging vessels for specific services. However, because straits require substantial investment in security and infrastructure, discussions have emerged regarding fees for such services. The strategic concern is not the existence of these costs but their possible conversion into economic leverage over other states. This creates tension between the principle of freedom of navigation and increasing economic pressures.

The Strait of Hormuz is also central to the future of the global energy transition. Rather than reducing the strategic importance of maritime politics, the energy transition is reshaping it. Hydrocarbons remain significant, while the transport of hydrogen and ammonia, offshore wind infrastructure, submarine cables, and critical mineral supply chains are becoming increasingly important. Consequently, maritime strategy is expanding from protecting oil routes to safeguarding complex, multilayered energy networks. A new strategic battlespace is also emerging beneath the sea. More than 500 submarine cables carry global internet traffic, forming the hidden infrastructure of globalisation and creating a new operational domain in maritime competition.

For Pakistan, several strategic implications emerge. First, there is a need to develop a unified maritime security strategy integrating defence, ports, energy, and cyber capabilities. Second, Pakistan should invest in maritime domain awareness through artificial intelligence, satellites, and regional intelligence cooperation. Third, the country should strengthen mine countermeasure capabilities and protect undersea infrastructure. Fourth, Pakistan should enhance the efficiency and resilience of Gwadar Port as a global maritime hub. Fifth, maritime diplomacy should be further expanded.

Ultimately, maritime strategy is no longer simply about sea control or sea denial. It is about something much broader. Oceans have connected civilisations more than they have divided them. They carry trade, energy, data, and ideas. The challenge of our time is to secure maritime networks, shipping routes, and energy infrastructure. In this context, the Gulf crises are not isolated disruptions; they are indicators of a broader transformation in the maritime domain. For Pakistan, we are not merely a coastal state—we are a maritime state. However, it will be the strategy that determines the outcome. In closing, the future will not belong to those who dominate the seas; it will belong to those who choose to keep the seas open, secure, and connected for all.

Dr. Hassan Daud Butt, Former Project Director CPEC, delivered an insightful session

focusing on global geopolitics, energy security, climate change, policymaking, and Pakistan's future role in the international arena. He began by discussing the strategic importance of the **Strait of Hormuz**, explaining that it is one of the world's most significant maritime trade routes. While many associate it only with the transportation of oil, he emphasized that its importance extends beyond fossil fuels, as it is a vital corridor for international trade and global economic stability.

The discussion then moved to the potential consequences of a closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Mr. Daud explained that although there have been repeated concerns and threats regarding its closure, it has never been completely shut down. Nevertheless, any disruption in the Strait would have far-reaching consequences for the global economy, including increased shipping costs, higher insurance premiums, interruptions in trade networks, and instability in energy markets.

Dr. Daud also addressed the issue of climate change, noting that evidence-based discussions are essential when considering future global temperature increases. He referred to scientific arguments suggesting that global warming scenarios may project a rise of around 4°C rather than 8°C, stressing the importance of relying on credible research rather than speculation. Another important point of his discussion was the relationship between localization and globalization. Dr. Daud explained that while globalization has connected economies and societies across the world, countries must also strengthen their local capabilities and resilience. In today's interconnected world, developments in one region can rapidly affect economies, industries, and societies across the globe.

The session also focused on public policy and governance. Dr. Daud observed that while many effective policies are formulated, their implementation often remains weak. He stressed that successful governance depends not only on policy design but also on effective execution and institutional commitment. He suggested that Pakistan must strengthen its key developmental pillars to achieve long-term progress and stability. Speaking about Pakistan's future, Dr. Daud expressed confidence in the country's potential to strengthen its strategic position internationally. He highlighted the need for academic excellence, research, and innovation to support national development. He further remarked that educators should serve as moderators and facilitators, encouraging students to conduct meaningful research rather than simply delivering lectures.

Prof. Dr. Azhar Ahmed, Maritime Expert, began by raising a thought-provoking question: "How do we understand geopolitics and why is there so much confusion about it?" He explained that geopolitical developments are often oversimplified, which leads to

misunderstandings and inaccurate analysis.

He then shared an important lesson from the foreign policy of the United States, explaining that while presidents and governments largely focus on domestic politics, foreign policy is shaped by the state's broader institutional system. He noted that discussions often simplify this reality by attributing the U.S. and Israel's foreign policy decisions to individuals such as President Trump or Prime Minister Netanyahu, rather than to the state itself. In contrast, when discussing

Iran, people generally refer to the country rather than its individual leaders. This creates a paradox: While the apparently democratic states are controlled by individuals while the reference to Iran's political system gives an impression of an institutionalized structure in place, which contradicts the Western narrative.

Reflecting on a meeting held in 2015, he recalled that he had opposed the prevailing view of taking a stronger stance against India at the international level, particularly because the United States was strongly supporting India at the time. He shared that his assessment was that Pakistan's geopolitical environment would change within the next 10 to 15 years and that the country should wait for that strategic shift. He observed that Pakistan has now reached that stage and emphasized that the country should move forward with confidence to make the current geopolitical reputation of the state lasting.

He further remarked that every challenge also brings an opportunity. Referring to the recent Gulf crisis, he described it as a major test of Pakistan's foreign policy, economy, and security. Despite these challenges, he noted that Pakistan remained strong, and its diplomatic standing in the international community improved significantly. Continuing his remarks, he highlighted that ships sailing under the Pakistani flag were not being intercepted in the Strait of Hormuz. He described this as a major achievement and an indication of Pakistan's growing credibility and stronger regional standing. He further stressed that Pakistan must strengthen its policies and institutional framework to ensure that these positive developments are sustained over the long term.

Concluding his remarks, he shared several important lessons from the recent conflict. He pointed out that geography can serve as a decisive strategic advantage, while international treaties may prove fragile when core conflicts, such as water issues, are not resolved. He also observed that the cost of warfare has become an increasingly important factor, mentioning Iran's use of relatively inexpensive missiles compared to the high cost of U.S. Patriot interceptor systems. Finally, he emphasized that Pakistan must invest in emerging

technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and cyber warfare, to prepare for future security challenges.

Dr. Jahanzeb Butt, Maritime Security Analyst & Senior Assistant Professor, Bahria University, focused on the legal perspective of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. He noted that while Hassan Daud Butt described the situation as the "closure" of the Strait and Rear Admiral Javed Iqbal referred to it as its "shutdown," another school of thought characterized it as a naval blockade. These differing interpretations, he argued, reflect the ongoing legal debate in newspapers and academic research. In his view, the crisis ultimately serves as a test of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Drawing on more than a decade

of experience in studying, teaching, and writing about the law of the sea, Dr. Jahanzeb Butt presented a legal assessment of what the crisis revealed about both the resilience and the limitations of the international maritime legal framework.

He began by congratulating Pakistan for its role in mediating one of the most challenging global crises. He then addressed the question of whether the Strait of Hormuz, or any other international strait, could legally be closed or subjected to a naval blockade in the future. According to him, under UNCLOS, the Strait of Hormuz could never be legally closed. However, he pointed out that both the United States and Iran have not ratified UNCLOS, creating a complex legal situation. While Iran signed the Convention without ratifying it, the United States neither ratified nor became a party to it. He explained that, under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, a state that signs but does not ratify a treaty is generally not legally bound by it, although certain obligations may still arise. Thus the principal legal challenge arises from the fact that neither Iran nor the United States is formally bound by the treaty's obligations

Addressing the issue of tolls, he explained that the matter falls within the broader framework of customary international law and the evolving principles of international maritime law. He noted that Iran maintains that, because it provides security and maritime services to vessels transiting the Strait, it possesses the authority to levy charges for those services. Additional challenges include hydrocarbon activities, increasing maritime traffic, and environmental concerns in the Strait of Hormuz. In this context, he emphasized the importance of Part III of UNCLOS, particularly Articles 37–44, which govern transit passage through international straits and establish obligations concerning the freedom of navigation.

Dr. Jahanzeb Butt also highlighted the humanitarian and operational implications for seafaring. With more than a thousand vessels reportedly stranded in the Strait for several months, he

argued that serious questions had emerged regarding the effectiveness of the global maritime order and the role of international organizations. Consequently, both the enforcement capability of international institutions and the capacity of individual states had come under increasing scrutiny. He observed that these legal debates are not unprecedented. Similar questions had arisen following United States strikes against Iran, particularly regarding whether such actions constituted an unlawful use of force and whether measures affecting the Strait of Hormuz violated international law.

In conclusion, he argued that the Gulf crisis demonstrated that, despite the apparent clarity of international legal rules, the effectiveness of the international legal order often depends more on power than on enforcement mechanisms. He warned that legal restraint can rapidly erode

during periods of crisis and emphasized that future legal engagement should be forward-looking and carefully calibrated. He concluded by asserting that the international community must ensure that any future settlement does not reinterpret or weaken the UNCLOS regime governing transit passage through international straits.

Vice Admiral Iftikhar Ahmad Rao, Former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Maritime Affairs, addressed the audience. He emphasized that maritime security is not limited to naval operations or armed intervention; rather, it encompasses a wide range of issues. These include illegal fishing, the misuse of fishing vessels for terrorism, the smuggling of weapons, illegal immigration, environmental protection, and maritime terrorism. He highlighted that even a relatively small maritime incident can have significant environmental consequences. Referring to the recent crisis, he noted that oil spills had already entered the sea, affecting marine ecosystems and coastal communities. He stressed that maritime security should be understood as a broad concept covering environmental protection, fisheries, maritime terrorism, and several other interconnected issues. He also mentioned that his third book, *Maritime Security in the Changing Global Environment*, published by IPS approximately three years ago, examines these issues in greater detail and could serve as a useful resource for further research.

Turning to the legal dimension, Vice Admiral Rao explained that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) took several decades to negotiate and was eventually adopted in the 1980s. Referring to the Strait of Hormuz, he noted that although the United States has not ratified UNCLOS and Iran has signed but not ratified it, both Iran and Oman maintain territorial waters of 12 nautical miles, consistent with UNCLOS. Prior to UNCLOS, territorial waters generally extended only 3 nautical miles. He argued that any attempt to reinterpret these legal principles could have implications not only for the Strait of Hormuz but also for other strategic straits around the world. He further discussed the debate

regarding maritime security charges, observing that Iran has attempted to use the provision of security as strategic leverage. However, he cautioned that if such practices became widely accepted, they could undermine the broader legal framework established under UNCLOS and encourage similar claims elsewhere.

Vice Admiral Rao also highlighted the complexity of maritime law by illustrating how multiple jurisdictions can apply to a single vessel. He explained that a ship may be manufactured in China, owned by a Greek company, operated by Pakistani, Filipino, Indian, and other multinational crews, while transporting cargo for European clients. In such situations, determining the applicable legal jurisdiction following an incident at sea becomes highly complex and requires the application of multiple international legal frameworks. He stated that both the actions taken by Iran and the responses of other parties during the Strait of Hormuz

crisis were inconsistent with international law and international policy. He emphasized that maritime disputes should always be addressed within established legal frameworks rather than through unilateral actions.

Vice Admiral Rao also expressed concern over Pakistan's maritime policymaking. He noted that Pakistan's National Maritime Policy was originally issued in 2002 and has not been comprehensively updated despite numerous attempts. During the caretaker government, a dedicated team revised the policy and sought to issue an updated version, but the effort remained unsuccessful. He added that the Maritime Task Force continues to push for reforms involving the many stakeholders within Pakistan's maritime sector.

He further explained that, under the Rules of Business, responsibility for the National Maritime Policy currently rests with the Ministry of Defence rather than the Ministry of Maritime Affairs. During the PTI government, reforms proposed by Dr. Nisha Durrani recommended transferring this responsibility to the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, and although the proposal was approved by the Cabinet, it has never been formally notified. He noted that while serving during the caretaker government, efforts were made to retrieve and circulate the revised draft among all stakeholders after locating it within the Ministry of Planning. Despite these efforts, the revised National Maritime Policy has still not been officially issued or implemented.

In concluding his remarks, Vice Admiral Rao observed that although revisions to the policy were prepared in 2020, primarily because the concessions granted under the 2001 policy had reached the end of their twenty-year period, the updated policy remains pending. He stressed that Pakistan urgently requires an effective and updated maritime policy to address emerging



maritime security challenges and to support the country's long-term maritime interests.

Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan, President Centre for Law and Security (CLAS), in his concluding remarks, thanked Rear Admiral Javed Iqbal, NIMA President, Vice Admiral (R) Iftikhar Ahmad Rao, the distinguished panelists, including Dr. Hassan Daud Butt, Dr. Azhar Ahmed, and Dr. Jahzeb Butt, as well as the participants for attending the seminar despite the challenging weather conditions. He appreciated NIMA's continued collaboration with the Centre for Law and Security (CLAS) and reaffirmed the commitment to further strengthening this institutional partnership.

Paying tribute to Vice Admiral (R) Iftikhar Ahmad Rao, Ambassador Masood Khan commended his outstanding contributions to Pakistan's maritime sector, particularly his work on the Blue Economy and the development of Pakistan's maritime ecosystem through his scholarly publications.

Turning to the seminar's theme, Ambassador Masood Khan emphasized that Pakistan should move beyond the traditional role of an observer, facilitator, or mediator in regional affairs and instead emerge as a leading maritime power. He observed that recent geopolitical developments in the Gulf had significantly enhanced Pakistan's strategic importance. During the recent regional conflict, Pakistan ensured the safe passage of commercial vessels, including oil tankers, through regional waters and extended maritime assistance to ships of friendly countries.

He highlighted that evolving regional security dynamics had created new opportunities for Pakistan. With changing security arrangements in the Gulf, countries including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait increasingly viewed Pakistan as a reliable strategic and security partner. He noted that Pakistan's defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia and its growing maritime role had strengthened Islamabad's strategic relevance in the region.

Ambassador Masood Khan observed that the regional security architecture had undergone a fundamental transformation. Gulf states, he said, were diversifying their security partnerships beyond traditional alliances and increasingly engaging countries such as Pakistan, China, and Russia. This evolving environment, he added, presented Pakistan with unprecedented diplomatic and maritime opportunities.

Highlighting Pakistan Navy's professional credentials, he noted that Pakistan had repeatedly commanded the Combined Maritime Forces (CTF-150 and CTF-151) and had earned international recognition for its contributions to maritime security, anti-piracy operations, counter-narcotics efforts, interoperability with international naval forces, and mine countermeasure capabilities.

The Ambassador also underscored the growing importance of Pakistan's maritime connectivity. Referring to the recent conflict, he explained that cargo arriving through Karachi, Port Qasim, and Gwadar had successfully been transported onward through Taftan and Chaman into Iran, demonstrating Pakistan's potential to become a regional logistics and transit hub connecting West Asia, Central Asia, Türkiye, and Europe. He emphasized that these emerging trade corridors could transform Pakistan into a bridge between South Asia and the wider Eurasian region.

He further stressed that Pakistan must adopt a maritime mindset rather than continue thinking as a land-centric state. With a coastline of over 1,000 kilometres and a vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Pakistan possesses enormous untapped economic opportunities in maritime trade, fisheries, offshore resources, and the Blue Economy.

Before concluding, President CLAS posed several critical strategic questions for consideration.

First, he asked what Pakistan's specific role should be in the Persian Gulf regarding the facilitation of safe passage for international shipping.

Second, he raised the question of whether the Strait of Hormuz could face closure in the future, expressing the view that such a possibility should be regarded as real.

Third, he suggested that if Iran and Oman were to impose taxes or transit tolls on vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz, Pakistan and the broader international community would need to reassess strategic maritime routes, including those through the Strait of Malacca, Singapore, and the Turkish Straits. He argued that such developments would fundamentally reshape maritime security and global trade dynamics. While acknowledging that differing views had been expressed by Admiral Sahib on this issue, he maintained that the question warranted serious consideration.

Fourth, he asked how the Gulf countries and the littoral states of the Arabian Sea, particularly Pakistan, could strengthen communication and coordination, especially in the context of US-Iran relations during a potential Gulf crisis.

Addressing prevailing narratives surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, President Khan argued that Iran is often portrayed as the principal actor responsible for tensions in the region. However, he asserted that, from his perspective, the United States had imposed war upon Iran, and that Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz constituted a retaliatory measure intended to offset the extensive infrastructural damage inflicted upon the country.

Concluding his remarks, Ambassador Masood Khan urged policymakers, maritime professionals, and the younger generation to develop greater confidence in Pakistan's maritime potential. He stressed that maritime security should not be viewed solely through a defence lens but also as a gateway to economic prosperity, regional connectivity, and national development. He expressed confidence that with strategic vision and national resolve, Pakistan could emerge as a leading maritime nation in the region.

Ambassador Masood Khan concluded his remarks by thanking the audience for their attention.

Ms. Maureen Zaidi, HOD Laws (TMUC) & Director Management CLAS, thanked the panel and described the discussion as very informative. She stated that, in her view, law exists for everything, and there is no issue for which legal frameworks do not exist. Especially after the Second World War, the world witnessed the development of numerous treaties, demonstrating that law does exist. The real challenge, however, lies in institutionalizing enforcement and crisis management.

She remarked that she had never imagined there would be such a closure that would affect digital traffic and oil supplies, and that no one had anticipated a disruption of this scale. Referring to the interpretation of treaties after the crisis, she noted that expecting treaty interpretations to change would be overly optimistic. Instead, if states wish these agreements to remain effective, they will have to renegotiate them.

She emphasized that it is important for the current Memorandum of Understanding to be converted into a treaty so that the trust deficit between the parties can be reduced. She further highlighted the growing challenge of climate change, noting the significant rise in global temperatures. Looking at the issue from a maritime perspective, she stated that war, escalation, and pollution could have serious consequences for climate change and may amount to a fuel catastrophe. She concluded by observing that this is a very important aspect of maritime law of which the public remains largely unaware.

The session concluded with Mr. Rehman Azhar moderating the Q&A segment. One of the students in the audience asked a question. Referring to the discussion that civilizations have historically been connected through the oceans, he noted that Pakistan and India not only share a land border but also maritime boundaries and transboundary water resources. In light of the lessons from the Gulf crisis, he asked about the possibility and likelihood of future cooperation between Pakistan and India in the areas of water management and maritime affairs.

Vice Admiral Iftikhar Rao shared his perspective. He asked what had led to the creation of Pakistan as an independent state and why separation had been considered necessary. He stated that the foundation of Pakistan's creation was the Two-Nation Theory and remarked that, unless the underlying mindset changes, he does not see a lasting solution to the broader issues between the two countries. Rear Admiral Javed Iqbal then responded, clarifying that he would limit his remarks to the maritime aspect of the question. He reiterated that maritime security extends far beyond naval warfare and includes merchant shipping, commercial trade, and addressing transnational threats. He explained that cooperation is inherently embedded within maritime security, as issues such as maritime safety, environmental protection, and the security of commercial vessels require collaboration among states. He pointed out that Pakistan and India already cooperate through regional maritime forums such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), where representatives of both countries engage on matters of common maritime interest. However, he distinguished this cooperation from traditional security issues. He observed that while functional cooperation exists in the maritime domain, meaningful cooperation on broader traditional security matters remains unlikely until the core political disputes between Pakistan and India are resolved.

A Glance at the Seminar







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