



POST-EVENT REPORT

Title: Religions Along the Ancient Silk Routes

Event Date: May 27, 2025

Venue: Virtual Seminar

Time: 14:00-15:40

Moderator: Dr Gulshan Rafiq, Chief Organizer of CAPS, Assistant Professor NUST

Speakers Profile:

Professor Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Director General of the Islamic Research Institute and Professor of Shariah & Islamic Law at International Islamic University, Islamabad

Professor David A. Palmer, Director, Global Society and Sustainability Lab, The University of Hong Kong

Khalid Rahman, Chairman, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad



Session Highlights

- **Dr Saira Aqil**, Vice President of CAPS and Assistant Professor at Quaid-e-Azam University, opened the forum by emphasizing that the BRI is more than an economic venture—it is a vehicle for people-to-people connectivity as well. Such connectivity fosters mutual understanding and can be instrumental in conflict reduction through intercultural dialogue. She highlighted the success of China’s initiative, which, if successful, could bring about a global order with a greater component of cooperation and civilizational dialogue.
- **Prof. Muhammad Zia Ul Haq**, noted that infrastructural development alone is unable to meet the different cultural needs of communities along BRI routes. He emphasised the value of inclusivity and cultural diplomacy, suggesting cultural exchange programs between China and other countries. Dr Haq highlighted that Pakistan and China can fulfil this gap for civilizational exchange by holding workshops and intercultural seminars by emphasizing close civilizational linkages between ancient China, Indus and Gandhara civilizations. In his concluding remarks, Dr Haq proposed that the Silk Road Civilizational Dialogue should be established as a permanent platform for future endeavours.
- **Professor David A. Palmer**, analysed the relation between atheistic China and its neighbouring countries that are predominantly religious and its effect on the religious dimension of BRI. He reflected on the historical backdrop in which Chinese emperors were originally considered sacred figures, representing a combination of political and spiritual authority. Dr Palmer emphasized the interaction of local religious & cultural communities that interacted during the historic silk routes and most of the BRI countries today are Muslim countries, that are going to shape the future civilizations’ interaction. In his concluding remarks, Dr Palmer highlighted how great civilizations recognized each other and appreciated their diversity, arts, ethos etc. Dr. Palmer proposed that now is a good time to renew cultural relations between China and the Muslim world, emphasising the importance of academic, artistic, and religious collaboration.
- **Mr Khalid Rehman**, reaffirmed the topic's broader significance. He noted that the Silk Route was more than just a commercial route; it also served as a conduit for religious ideas, spiritual traditions, and cultural transmission. Mr Rehman emphasized the need for a comprehensive perspective to view the developments under BRI, examining both the economic and strategic matters, and cultural engagement across the different communities. He advocated for increased intellectual and institutional initiatives to investigate how these historical ties may inform present-day collaboration within the BRI framework.

Recommendations

1. CAPS and Islamic Research Institute at the International Islamic University can work together to organize “Silk Routes Civilizational Dialogue” together with partners in Hong

Kong and mainland China. This platform could be utilized to project Indus and Gandhara civilizations in Asia Pacific region with a long-term goal of attracting tourism.

2. This Webinar has also helped to cultivate Prof. David Palmer, who is one of the most influential Anthropologists of the world. CAPS will endeavor to keep him engaged for future activities.
3. CAPS to establish research ventures with Hong Kong University to study intercultural exchanges of BRI's religious factor and their possible policy implementation into BRI's framework.

Conclusion

The seminar concluded with an engaging Q&A session. President CAPS highlighted how ethno-nationalist and religious terrorist organizations use BRI as a propaganda tool to justify anti-China attacks. He argued there is a need to acknowledge this ideological transformation of terrorist organization, which is instrumentalized by hostile actors to damage Pak-China relations.