



Title: In-House Discussion on “Navigating Multipolar Currents: Lessons from Asia Pacific Small Powers for Pakistan’s Strategic Autonomy”

Event Date: December 5, 2025

Venue: CAPES Office, Islamabad/ Online

Time: 15:00-16:00

Moderator: M. Asif Khan, Researcher, CAPES

In recent years, the global order has shifted from unipolarity to complex multipolarity. The power is dispersed among several actors rather than concentrated in one or two. This shift has created new challenges and opportunities for small and middle powers in the Asia Pacific region, including Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Pacific Island states. Pakistan can seek various lessons from the engagement of these powers. Thus, CAPES hosted an in-house discussion with Dr. Saira Aquil, Vice President of CAPES and Assistant Professor in the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-e-Azam University.

Dr. Saira was of the opinion that small and middle powers are playing a key role in changing the global order. They are adopting the strategy of hedging. Under this strategy, mutual counter policies are set, creating deliberate ambiguity. This helps them to preserve their strategic autonomy. Small and middle powers cooperate with all the major powers and adopt a proactive approach. For example, Singapore has adopted risk-averse hedging. It has maintained its defence ties with the US while establishing economic ones with China. Its model can be taken as a classic example of art of hedging.

Furthermore, she highlighted that Asia Pacific region is layered with multipolarity. This provides the states with the options of engaging distinctly on selective issues as the new trend in world politics is not bloc systems but minilateralism, i.e., cooperation between two or three states on selective issues, thus maximizing autonomy of the state. To follow this approach, these small and middle powers need to maintain domestic coherence within their country. However, inconsistency will result in failure of heading and will increase the vulnerability of the state.

She recommended that Pakistan should also learn from these small powers and should adopt principled hedging. It should set clear criteria for maintaining relations between the two major powers and follow the consistent execution of the policies, irrespective of the change in government. It should avoid exclusive alignment.

Moreover, Pakistan should also adopt multivector diplomacy under which it should engage with multiple powers on different issues. This will enhance the soft power and increase P2P linkages. This will reduce the dependency on poles. The country shall also work on domestic stability and evolve the IT sector by investing with small powers. It may form functional coalitions on various issues such as climate change, disaster resilience, and others.

