

IMPACT REPORT 2025

NAVIGATING THE
NEW GEOPOLITICS

A large, abstract background graphic composed of numerous overlapping, semi-transparent red and dark red geometric shapes, resembling shards or facets of a sphere. The shapes create a sense of depth and movement.

COUNCIL FOR STRATEGIC AND DEFENSE RESEARCH (CSDR)
NEW DELHI, INDIA

FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

The year 2025 was extraordinary in world politics, marked by the dissolution of post-Cold War certainties and the emergence of a more transactional, mercantile, and deeply uncertain global scene. As the traditional anchors of the international order shift, India must protect its core national interests while simultaneously seizing the strategic opportunities they create.

At CSDR, we recognized early on that this era of deep flux required proactive, mutually beneficial engagements between the country's intellectual ecosystems and its policy-making community. Our work in 2025 was a response to that necessity. Through our flagship Power and Purpose report, Track 1.5 and 2 dialogues, and various other contributions, CSDR acted as an important strategic enabler, bridging the gaps between policymakers and epistemic communities, and between Indian thinkers and their counterparts in like-minded nations.

We are a global Indian think tank that seeks to bridge the knowledge-practice gap across domestic and international spectrums. By institutionalizing bridges with partners in the Indo-Pacific and the West—notably through the Republic of Korea Chair and the India-Canada Research Initiative—we have ensured that Indian strategic thought is not merely heard, but integrated into policy and the global discourse.

As we approach 2026, our founding mission remains our guiding principle: to offer the rigorous, independent, and forward-looking counsel that a rising power requires, along with support for our clients in like-minded and friendly countries. We believe that in an age of systemic disruption, intellectual clarity is the greatest ally for our policymakers.



HAPPYMON JACOB (PhD)
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR

CO-FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

National security is no longer defined solely by strong borders and a deft foreign policy; it is increasingly shaped by technological sovereignty and resilience of the defense industrial base. The conflicts of 2025 have underscored a brutal reality: conventional deterrence is only credible when backed by indigenous capability.

This year, CSDR placed a relentless focus on the 'hard power' foundations of India's rise. Our volume on Operation Sindoor distilled key strategic lessons from the May India-Pakistan conflict. Our deep-dive assessment, Forging a New Frontier, mapped India's transition from a defense importer to an emerging exporter of arms. Simultaneously, our work on nuclear confidence-building measures and maritime stability advanced new frameworks to prevent unintended escalation in South Asia.

A world-class think tank bridges the gap between practitioners and policymakers. Having commanded forces on the border, I understand that policy documents must hold up under real-world friction. That is why our research this year was anchored in operational pragmatism. We are strengthening India's intellectual infrastructure to match its evolving security needs.



LT GEN D S HOODA (Retd)
CO-FOUNDER

10 + Institutional Partnerships

20 + Projects Delivered

30 + Long-Form Strategic Reports

40 + High-level Dialogues & Convenings

50 + Short form Analyses

55 + Diplomatic Telegrams

200 + Commentaries in Global Media

1,800 + Stakeholders Engaged

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Bridging Theory, Policy, and Reality

Beyond public discourse, CSDR serves as a trusted sounding board for India's highest decision-making circles. Throughout 2025, our leadership and senior faculty consistently conducted high-level briefings with policymakers across New Delhi, providing rapid-response assessments during critical geopolitical junctures.

Our distinct value lies in dismantling the silos that traditionally separate academic rigor, statecraft, and "boots on the ground" realities. By integrating deep research with practitioners' insights, we ensure our inputs are not only theoretically sound but also geopolitically and operationally viable. Whether deconstructing military signalling during border crises or advising on India's neighbourhood policy, CSDR bridged the gap between the seminar room and the situation room, ensuring national strategy and foreign policy are informed by the granular truths of a rapidly changing world order.



PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

The Indo-Pacific Fulcrum

The Republic of Korea Chair

- Supported by a grant from the Korea Foundation, this Chair, held by Prof. C Raja Mohan, addresses the critical blind spots in India-Korea relations.
- Delivered actionable knowledge on semiconductor supply chains and the KSOE-CSL shipbuilding alliance.



Australia-India Underwater Domain

Awareness (UDA) Cooperation

- Together with the University of Western Australia Defence and Security Institute (UWA DSI), the project worked to strengthen India-Australia cooperation in Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Two workshops, in Perth and Visakhapatnam, brought together more than 50 experts, government and industry stakeholders.



PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

The West & The World

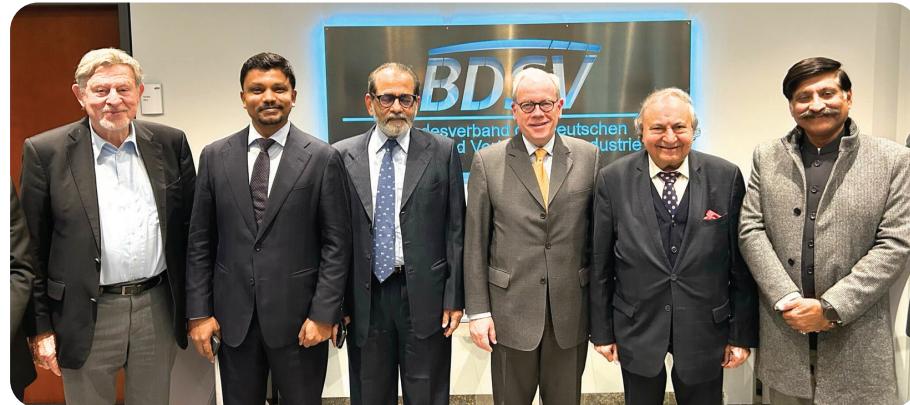
India-Canada Research Initiative (ICRI)

- Amidst diplomatic volatility, ICRI served as a stabilizing platform for substantive policy exchange.
- Supported by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, ICRI hosted several events, produced five policy reports, and curated a Track 1.5 dialogue on India-Canada defense and security cooperation.



India-Europe Policy Alignment

- CSDR worked with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, and the European Commission to convene discussions and publish reports on India-EU and India-Germany relations.
- Reports covered themes such as Space Governance, Green Technologies, Rule-based order, the Indo-Pacific, and the India-EU Trade and Technology Council.
- CSDR also undertook a field visit to Berlin and met with stakeholders in Defense and Space ecosystems.



PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

The West & The World

- In a year of major upheaval in Indo-US ties, CSDR hosted several high-powered US delegations for discussion and exchange with Indian experts.
- CSDR released several long and short-form reports to explain US domestic politics, and its likely impact on India-US relations.
- CSDR joined the reputed NESA-led Quad 1.5 Track dialogue on Emerging technologies as an Indian partner in San Francisco.
- We also focused on the complex geopolitics of West Asia, with a particular emphasis on connectivity and strategic realignment. We critically assessed the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) through expert roundtables and tracked the deepening India-Gulf nexus with our report "From Trees to Forests."



PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

The Third Nuclear Age & Energy Sovereignty

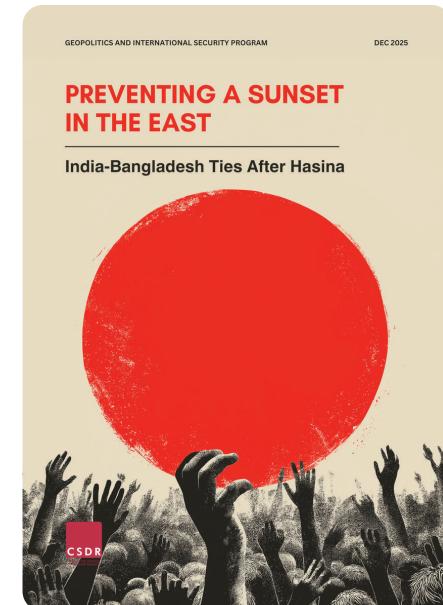
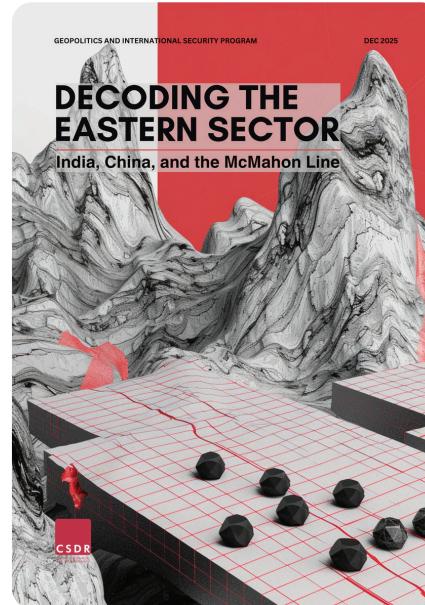
- CSDR addressed the dual nature of the nuclear domain: as the ultimate strategic deterrent and as a critical component of energy security.
- We confronted the realities of a fraying global order through our high-level dialogue, "Navigating the Challenges of the Third Nuclear Age." This platform analyzed the risks of multi-front nuclear signaling, specifically in the context of the India-China-Pakistan triad.
- Moving beyond weapons, we championed the commercialization of nuclear energy. Our report, "Powering India's Nuclear Sector," provided a blueprint for integrating Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) into the national grid and advocated private-sector participation to boost energy resilience.
- We linked defense to clean energy through our analysis on "India-South Korea Partnership on SMRs," identifying specific pathways for joint IP development in reactor technology.



PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

Neighborhood Crisis Management & Border Security

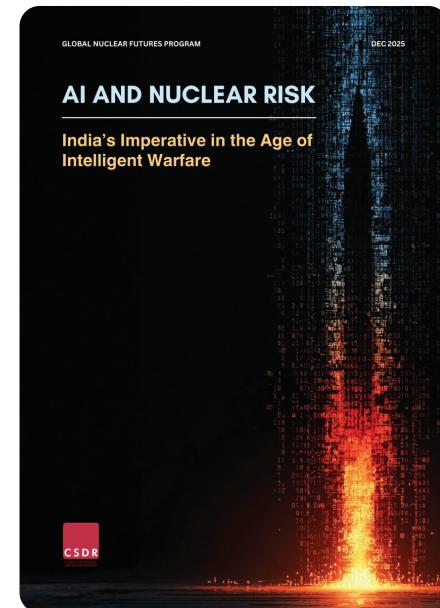
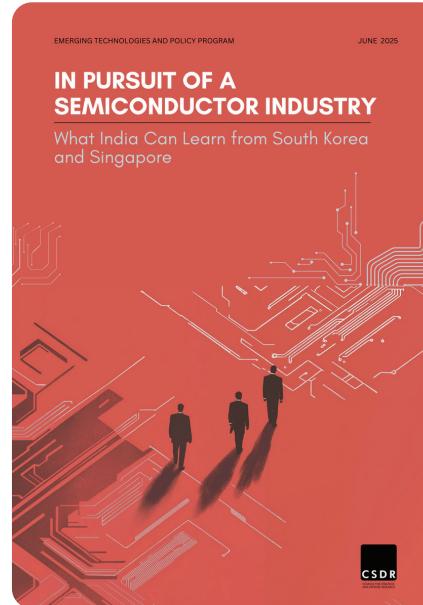
- 2025 was a year of profound regional disruption. CSDR served as a "strategic watchtower," providing real-time assessments on the crises reshaping India's neighbourhood.
- Following the Pahalgam terror attack, we released the definitive operational analysis: "Operation Sindoor & India's New Doctrine of Deterrence." We deconstructed the military response for policymakers, detailing the shift to "deterrence by exhaustion" and the Indian Navy's role in signaling intent.
- As the political landscape in Dhaka shifted, we hosted the roundtable "Dealing with a New Bangladesh," to map the future of cross-border security cooperation and transit rights in a post-Hasina era.
- We maintained a sharp focus on the northern border through our closed-door briefing, "Mitigating Risks: Understanding the India-China Military Equation." This session provided a granular assessment of PLA infrastructure build-up and the "tactical rapprochement" impacting patrol points.



PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

Emerging Technologies & Critical Supply Chains

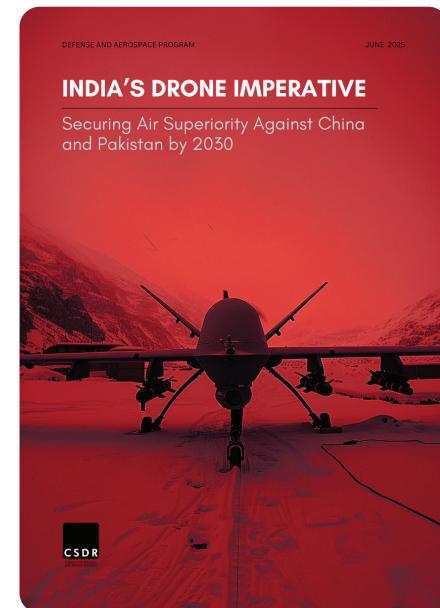
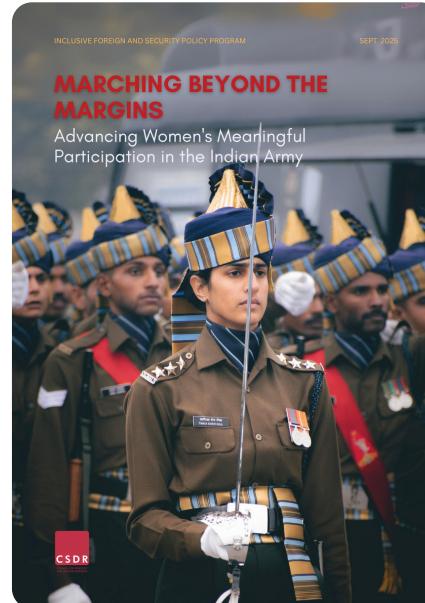
- 2025 marked the moment national security became inextricably linked to code, chips, and critical minerals.
- We moved beyond the hype to offer a playbook for Semiconductor Sovereignty, releasing the decisive report "In Pursuit of a Semiconductor Industry." This analysis provided policymakers with granular lessons from South Korean and Singaporean models, detailing the hard policy choices required to avoid fabrication pitfalls.
- To govern the future battlefield, we convened the "Disruptive Technology and Strategic Stability" workshop series. By bringing together technologists and nuclear strategists, we established a critical dialogue on how AI and cyber-weapons are reshaping crisis escalation and decision-making timelines in South Asia.
- In 2026, our focus shifts from assessment to architecture. We will expand our research to define the global governance frameworks needed for AI and autonomous weapons.



PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

Human Capital & Inclusive Future Force Structure

- Recognizing that modern defense requires modern personnel policies, we drove the conversation on inclusivity and force modernization.
- We released the groundbreaking report "Marching Beyond the Margins: Advancing Women's Meaningful Participation in the Indian Army." Moving beyond symbolism, this study offered data-driven policy recommendations to integrate women into command roles and the combat arms, ensuring the armed forces tap into the full national talent pool.
- Our work on "India's Drone Imperative" extended to human capital, advocating specialized training modules to equip the forces of 2030 with the skills to operate and counter tactical UAVs on the front lines.

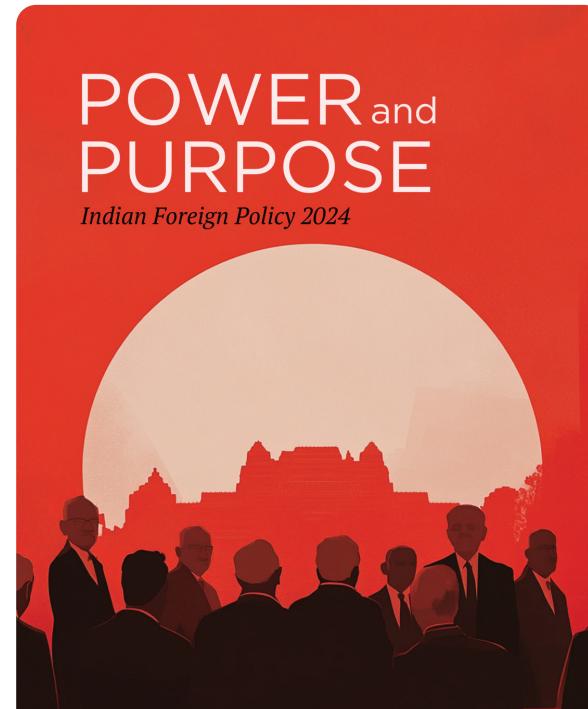


RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Highlight | Power and Purpose: Indian Foreign Policy 2024

We released our annual assessment of Indian Foreign Policy for 2024 in early January. The report examined India's foreign policy shifts in 2024, highlighting major diplomatic recalibrations amid global power competition. Key developments include an unexpected thaw in India-China relations, a decline in ties with Russia, and challenges in its traditional sphere of influence, particularly in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

The report also covered India's careful balancing act during the Middle East conflict, progress in Indo-Pacific partnerships, and strategic focus on critical minerals and semiconductor development. The report concluded that throughout 2024, India maintained a pragmatic approach while preserving its strategic autonomy.



RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Highlight | Operation Sindoor & India's New Doctrine of Deterrence

Shortly after the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict, CSDR released an edited volume that examines the 88-hour confrontation following the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, analyzing India's precision strikes across Pakistan and the emergence of a new deterrence doctrine.

Edited by Lt Gen D S Hooda (Retd) and Dr Happymon Jacob, the collection brought together leading military practitioners, diplomats, and strategic analysts to dissect the operation's multifaceted implications.

The volume explores critical themes, including escalation management under nuclear shadow, China-Pakistan military cooperation, water diplomacy through the suspended Indus Waters Treaty, and the international community's response.

Operation Sindoor & India's New Doctrine of Deterrence

Strategic Lessons from the 2025 India-Pakistan Crisis

Editors

Lt Gen D S Hooda (Retd)
Dr Happymon Jacob



RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Highlight | National Security & Defense



RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Highlight | Foreign Policy



RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Highlight | India-Australia Defense Cooperation



RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Highlight | Policy Brief Series on India-Europe Relations

This series by CSDR, in collaboration with the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (hbs) New Delhi Office, brought together Indian and European experts to provide policy-relevant analysis of the evolving India-Europe partnership. Each brief explored key areas—climate, trade, digital governance, and geopolitics—offering evidence-based insights and actionable recommendations.

Published ahead of the India-EU Summit, the series aimed to inform both policymakers and the broader public. Each brief is accompanied by a public webinar to encourage dialogue and deeper engagement.



DEFENSE AND AEROSPACE INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

Highlight | Bridging the gap between national security policy and industry

In 2025, CSDR bridged the gap between national security policy and the defense industrial base. Facing a year of rapid technological disruption and shifting alliances, we provided the strategic foresight required to navigate the global defense landscape. From semiconductor supply chains to underwater domain awareness, we convened experts, policymakers, and industry leaders who are shaping the future of security.

Simultaneously, we translated bilateral partnerships into tangible technology tracks—launching the Australia-India underwater domain dialogue, establishing a framework for India-Korea space-defense cooperation, and aligning India-Japan maritime architectures to counter grey-zone threats. Underpinned by our cutting-edge research on AI stability and drone proliferation, our engagement ensured that both industry stakeholders and policy planners were equipped to navigate the sharp edge of modern warfare.



WORKSHOPS

The Indo-Pacific at a Crossroads: Taking Stock and Charting Future Trajectories

Together with the Department of International Studies at De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines, and with support from the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, CSDR hosted a workshop on the theme “The Indo-Pacific at a Crossroads: Taking Stock and Charting Future Trajectories”.

The workshop convened ambassadors, scholars, and experts from across the Indo-Pacific to examine critical regional shifts since 2020, including China’s evolving influence, the strengthening of the QUAD, the operationalization of RCEP, U.S. policy transitions, supply chain reconfigurations, and rising regional tensions. It addressed pressing cross-cutting challenges, including climate vulnerability, technological disruption, and maritime security.



WORKSHOPS

Inception Dialogue: Enhancing Australia-India Underwater Domain Awareness Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Together with the UWA Defence and Security Institute (DSI), Perth, Australia, CSDR hosted the Inception Dialogue on Australia-India Underwater Domain Awareness cooperation.

This dialogue brought together experts from academia, industry, and the government to explore five key UDA focus areas: bilateral intentions and capabilities, anti-submarine warfare (ASW), uncrewed underwater vehicles (UUVs), undersea search and rescue, and deep-sea awareness. These areas serve as critical pillars for Australia and India to enhance collaboration and further strengthen their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).



WORKSHOPS

Policy Lab on Asia's Evolving Geopolitics

CSDR, in collaboration with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Asia, organized a productive policy dialogue focused on "The New Geopolitics of Asia and the Global Order of Tomorrow."

The India Policy Lab brought together Indian policy experts for strategic scenario-building exercises to explore future geopolitical dynamics in Asia and their implications for the emerging global order. The collaboration involved key FES representatives, including Marc Sacher, Christoph Mohr, and other regional stakeholders, facilitating substantive discussions on Asia's strategic future.



WORKSHOPS

Netherlands Defence College Delegation Workshop on Indian Security and Foreign Policy

A productive full-day workshop was conducted with a 49-member delegation from the Netherlands Defence College, focusing on Indian foreign policy priorities and national security challenges.

The program featured expert lectures delivered by prominent Indian strategic affairs specialists and former military leaders, including Rakesh Sood, Lt. Gen. D.S. Hooda, Ajay Bisaria, Ashok Kantha, and Dinakar Peri.

The workshop was organized in collaboration with the Embassy of the Netherlands in India, providing an in-depth platform for strategic dialogue between Dutch defence officials and Indian security experts on regional and bilateral security concerns.



WORKSHOPS

Enhancing Australia-India Underwater Domain Awareness Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Building on the Perth Inception Dialogue, the Second Workshop on Enhancing Australia-India Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) Cooperation was held in Visakhapatnam to advance bilateral maritime security collaboration. The workshop translated earlier recommendations into actionable frameworks focused on four key areas: anti-submarine warfare (ASW), uncrewed underwater vehicles (UUVs), undersea search and rescue, and bilateral capacity building.

Field visits to Hindustan Shipyard Limited, the Eastern Naval Command, and L&T Port Kattupalli offered participants insights into India's undersea capabilities and practical collaboration opportunities. The workshop was hosted in collaboration with the University of Western Australia's Defence and Security Institute, supported by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).



CONFERENCES

Looking and Acting West: The Past, Present & Future of India-Middle East Ties

In collaboration with India's World Magazine, a conference was held on the theme 'Looking and Acting West: The Past, Present & Future of India-Middle East Ties'. The event convened informed discussions on critical dimensions of India-Middle East relations and featured the release of a CSDR policy report titled "From Trees to Forests: How India-Middle East Ties Evolved Post-2014", alongside a special Middle East edition of India's World Magazine.

The conference included a keynote address by Ambassador Sanjay Bhattacharyya, former Secretary at the Ministry of External Affairs (2020–22), followed by two panel discussions examining how India-Middle East ties evolved post-2014 and exploring future trajectories of the relationship.



CONFERENCES

Taiwan Beyond Semiconductors: Three Decades of India–Taiwan Relations and Emerging Collaborations

CSDR organized a conference to mark the release of its report, "Taiwan Beyond Semiconductors: Three Decades of India–Taiwan Relations and Emerging Collaborations". The report explored how the partnership evolved from modest commercial ties to wider cooperation, examining trade, semiconductors, and education, while uncovering new avenues in urban planning, disaster management, healthcare, and cutting-edge technologies such as AI, IoT, and quantum computing. The discussion brought together experts to reflect on these insights and chart pathways for advancing India–Taiwan collaboration in the Indo-Pacific.



CONFERENCES

Canada-India Conclave: Navigating a New Chapter in Bilateral Relations

In collaboration with the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, CSDR hosted the "Canada-India Conclave: Navigating a New Chapter in Bilateral Relations". As India and Canada navigated a complex global environment, the conclave provided a timely opportunity to assess the expanding bilateral partnership—marked by \$30.9 billion in two-way trade and renewed momentum following the October 2025 joint statement. The event brought together senior officials and experts to discuss opportunities in trade diversification, investment, technology collaboration, and emerging sectors such as AI, clean tech, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, and sustainable infrastructure.

The conclave featured keynote addresses by Shri Periasamy Kumaran (Secretary East, MEA, India) and Mr. Christopher Cooter (High Commissioner of Canada to India), followed by a panel discussion on "Building Economic Resilience Through Technology and Innovation: India-Canada Pathways Forward".



MEDIA FOOTPRINT

Shaping Public Opinion

CSDR experts published more than 200 articles in 2025, influencing the public debate on critical national security issues.

Featured In



Top Voices



C Raja
Mohan

65 + Articles



Happymon
Jacob

50 + Articles



Bashir
Ali Abbas

30 + Articles

WEB FOOTPRINT



Our Twitter content reached 562,000 impressions and generated 56,600 engagements, including 3,200 likes, 1,200 reposts, and 1,100 bookmarks — indicating that stakeholders not only viewed but actively saved and shared CSDR insights for future reference.

10% Engagement Rate

In 2025, CSDR achieved a 10% engagement rate on X — far surpassing global benchmarks for think tanks and nonprofits. This reflects the deep resonance of our analyses with policymakers, journalists, and strategic communities.

www.csdronline.com

100k+ Visits

1.6m+ Impressions

26k+ Report downloads

The CSDR website served as a primary hub for in-depth research, hosting flagship reports, policy briefs, and event summaries, driving over 100,000 visits in 2025. With 26,000+ report downloads, our publications were actively accessed by global stakeholders—a clear indicator of demand for CSDR's rigorous, forward-looking analysis of strategic and defense issues.

INTERNATIONAL FOOTPRINT



In 2025, CSDR solidified its footprint as a global think tank. We operationalized a diverse network of institutional alliances, hosting high-level government delegations and expert consultations from major capitals. Through dedicated Track 1.5 dialogues, roundtables, conferences, and specialized workshops, we facilitated transnational cooperation on geopolitics, maritime security, critical technologies, and economic resilience, among other themes.

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