

POST EVENT REPORT



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COUNTER RADICALIZATION
6 AUGUST, 2025, PICSS ISLAMABAD

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Mainstreaming of Madrassa Students and its Impact on Counter Radicalisation

6Th August, 2025, Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS)

The Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) organised a high-level roundtable discussion on the theme **“Mainstreaming of Madrassa Students and its Impact on Counter-Radicalisation”** in Islamabad on 6 August 2025. The event brought together senior military officials, Politicians, religious scholars, education experts, civil society members, and policy practitioners to engage in an open discussion one of the most sensitive and consequential aspects of Pakistan’s educational and counter-extremism landscape.

The moderator, **Dr. Shomaila Mumtaz**, commenced the proceedings by extending a warm welcome to the distinguished participants and articulating the session’s objective of fostering an open and substantive discussion on the intersection of policy, societal, and religious dimensions. She emphasized that the roundtable was situated within the broader framework of PICSS’s ongoing initiatives aimed at promoting collaborative, evidence-based thinking on critical national challenges. The formal session began with the recitation of the Holy Qur’an, recited by **Molana Abdul Quddus Mohammadi**.

Welcome Remarks by the Managing Director PICSS, Mr. Abdullah Khan

Managing Director PICSS, Mr. Abdullah Khan, delivered the welcome remarks. He explained that PICSS had always sought to engage people from different walks of life in an effort to generate meaningful, policy-relevant debate. This roundtable, he stressed, was particularly important because the integration of Madrasa students into the mainstream is often discussed in technical or political terms, but rarely in a manner that consider the lived realities of those students and the broader socio-political implications. He candidly shared his own view that Madrasa



education is itself a specialised form of education and should not be diluted or replaced by technical trades unless there is a genuine demand from the students. Drawing an analogy, he said, “We don’t teach a doctor how to do engineering, and we don’t teach an engineer how to do medical work. Why, then, do we advocate that a Hafiz-e-Quran should learn plumbing or mobile repair? Hifz itself is a specialised skill.” He emphasised that in his own experience, he had never encountered an unemployed Madrasa graduate, whereas he had seen numerous engineers, IT graduates, and social sciences graduates without work. He pointed out that with the advent of modern technologies and online education platforms, many Madrasa graduates were now earning in foreign currency by teaching Quran to students across the world, from Europe to North America.

At the same time, Mr. Abdullah Khan acknowledged a complex reality: while Madrassas play an important social and religious role, the historical fact remains that many leaders of religiously motivated militant groups have been Madrasa graduates. He cited figures such as Mufti Noor Wali of the TTP and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, as well as the leadership of the Afghan Taliban, as examples. Although today’s Madrasa leadership in Pakistan had largely distanced itself from militancy, these historical links could not be ignored. The challenge, he suggested, was to reconcile the valuable role Madrassas play with the need to address the ideological vulnerabilities that can lead to radicalisation, without vilifying the entire institution.

Dr. Shomaila then introduced the keynote speaker, Major General Dr. Ghulam Qamar, Hilal-e-Imtiaz (Retd.), currently serving as Director General of the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE). She provided an extensive overview of his distinguished military career, academic achievements, and expertise in counter-radicalisation and religious education, noting that his breadth of experience made him particularly well placed to address this complex topic.

Keynote Address by Major General (Retd.) Dr. Ghulam Qamar

Maj. Gen. (R) Dr. Ghulam Qamar (Hilal-e-Imtiaz Military) a retired senior officer of the Pakistan Army and a seasoned policy practitioner, currently serving as Director General of the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE), Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training. He has been at the forefront of madrasa reforms, working to integrate religious education with contemporary curricula, vocational training, and national policy frameworks. His career reflects a blend of military leadership, academic engagement, and institutional reform expertise.



Major General (R) Dr. Ghulam Qamar started his address by expressing appreciation for the opportunity to speak on what he described as “a very important yet very controversial subject.” He explained that the controversy had emerged immediately when, after being invited to present on government-led Madrasa reforms, “my brother Abdullah Khan started with the counter-thesis.” Nevertheless, he emphasised, “we are from one country with one mission. Our ambitions are same, our objectives are same.” His intention, he explained, was to share his own perspective while welcoming differing viewpoints for future discussion. He outlined the sequence of his presentation: to first provide a theoretical perspective on radicalization, then explain how Madrasa education functions and impacts youth, review the government’s response, describe the structure and activities of the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE), and finally offer recommendations.

Defining radicalization, he stated that “it’s a process, not one day doing but over an extended length of time” under the influence of multiple factors ideological, political, social, cultural, religious, economic, educational, and linguistic. Each type of radicalization, he explained, “has a cost” and even one driver can be enough to influence an individual, depending on the context. In Pakistan, he identified socio-economic alienation as the first major driver, tracing it back to inadequate infrastructure inherited in 1947. Despite national progress, certain regions of Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and southern Punjab remain in “17th century” conditions, leaving residents vulnerable to extremist appeals. Other drivers included the appeal of extremist ideology in a religiously motivated society, the entrenched “culture of militancy” from wars and regional instability, transnational linkages to groups such as Al-Qaeda, Daesh, and the TTP, and perceived global injustice that could radicalise even highly educated youth disturbed by events in Gaza, Kashmir, Syria, and Libya.

He then turned to Pakistan’s polarized education system of three separate streams; private schools with independent curricula, under-resourced public schools often plagued by “ghost”

institutions, and the Madrasa system with its distinct syllabus. Unlike global norms where education integrates curricular, extracurricular, co-curricular, societal, and parental elements, Pakistan's system, he observed, historically lacked a guiding vision. He recounted how, while working on the 2025 education policy, "Till as late as two months back the education policy of Pakistan started with no vision... only objectives." Without a vision for the type of graduate the system should produce, policies lacked direction and continuity.

Describing the Madrasa system, General Qamar detailed the eight-year Dars-e-Nizami programme taught entirely in Arabic. Graduates receive Higher Education Commission (HEC) equivalence to a bachelor's degree, yet, lacking English proficiency, general knowledge, and vocational skills, they don't compete in the job market. He illustrated how Madrasa graduates often fail interviews where basic questions in English or about international affairs are expected, while their peers from elite schools excel. This deficiency, he argued, leaves graduates with limited employment options usually as Arabic teachers or religious instructors and fosters frustration. During his UK-based PhD research on Pakistan's education system and radicalization, he found that such limitations, compounded by sectarian biases, social isolation, and low parental involvement, contribute to vulnerability. He stressed that, despite these issues, Madrasas perform a vital function by educating many of Pakistan's 26 million out-of-school children without government funding.

Against this backdrop, he described the government's strategic framework for reform, rooted in the 2014 **National Action Plan** and reinforced in the 2018 **National Security Policy**. In September 2019, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Ministry of Federal Education and **Ittihad Tanzeemat-ul-Madaris**, represented by senior scholars including Mufti Taqi Usmani and Mufti Munib-ur-Rehman, etc. committing to Madrasa reform under a newly created DGRE. With its headquarters in Islamabad, 16 regional offices, and representation in 132 districts, the DGRE was tasked with registering all Madrasas, introducing contemporary subjects (English, Mathematics, and General Science) up to Grade 12, facilitating foreign student visas, affiliating Madrasas with technical and educational boards, and promoting national harmony.

He reported that 19,035 Madrasas had been registered to date, with approved contemporary textbooks distributed free of cost. Over 2,500 students had received vocational training in fields ranging from plumbing and electrical work to digital marketing and baking, with girls and boys participating equally. He recounted visits to Lahore technical institutes where Madrasa students completed three months' coursework in just one month, impressing instructors with their aptitude. Additional initiatives included training 115 calligraphers through the National Council of Arts, organising 42 "Paigham-e-Pakistan" sessions to foster inter-sectarian and interfaith harmony, and recreational activities such as cricket tournaments with university teams.

General Qamar also highlighted shifts in cultural norms, such as mixed-seating teacher training sessions for Madrasa educators. He cited the success of a young Imam in Gulberg who, after learning calligraphy, now earns PKR 200,000–300,000 a month while continuing his religious duties. He emphasised that such skill integration does not detract from religious learning but enhances graduates' societal value.

Concluding, he asserted that effective reform requires the state to “take its responsibility first of all” by funding and supporting Madrasas, while Madrasas must “create that environment which accepts the change.” Parents, he added, should engage more actively in their children’s Madrasa education through regular interaction and oversight. Society, too, must take ownership visiting Madrasas, understanding their work, and supporting their integration into mainstream education. While acknowledging that some Madrasas already match or surpass universities in quality, he warned that neglecting the majority would leave a significant portion of the nation unprepared for the modern world. If we do this, he concluded, “Madaris reforms automatically will take place... There is a wealth of knowledge there... But as a whole, as a nation, we need to take responsibility for them.”

Discussion Summary by Participants

Admiral (Retd.) Haroon’s Intervention

Vice Admiral (Retd.) Mohammad Haroon is a distinguished Pakistan Navy officer (1967–2007) who retired as Vice Chief of Naval Staff. A career submariner, he uniquely commanded three submarines and a Type-21 frigate, and held senior posts including Commander Submarine Service, Commander Pakistan Fleet, and Naval Attaché to India. An alumnus of the U.S. Naval War College and Pakistan’s NDU, he served in the 1971 and 1999 Indo-Pak wars, the 2001 standoff, tsunami relief, and the War on Terror. His service earned him Hilal-e-Imtiaz (M), Sitara-e-Imtiaz (M), and Tamgha-e-Basalat.



Admiral (Retd.) Haroon began by expressing appreciation for the discussion, noting that he had “discovered a lot” during the session and commending the organizers for doing “a wonderful job.” He said he had come to the roundtable for a specific reason and thanked the hosts for inviting him.

Turning to a matter of personal concern, he described having seen a disturbing video clip of a cleric in a mosque repeatedly beating a child for fifteen minutes. He added that almost daily, newspapers reported incidents of abuse including acts of sodomy by individuals running certain madrassas. “What are you going to do with them?” he asked, directing his question to those responsible for reforms. “At least in madrassas we can do something,” he urged, pointing out that such cases were within Pakistan’s control to address. He pressed for concrete answers: “Have you punished them? Have you put these people on the mat? Up till now, how many? Every day there is

something going on or the other.” Linking this to his broader sense of injustice, he said, “My heart shakes once I see what is happening in Gaza and what is happening in our madrassas.”

From there, Admiral Haroon moved to a historical analogy to challenge the prevailing use of terms like radicalization and extremism. He recounted an episode from around 1090, when a religious relic the Cross of Jesus was damaged while being transported from Jerusalem to Cyprus. When the news reached the Pope in Rome, the Pope delivered a speech “full of radicalization, extremism, and racism,” which stirred the Christian West to launch the First Crusade into Jerusalem and Palestine. The cycle of conflict continued until the Muslim reconquest under Sultan Salahuddin Ayubi, though Western forces returned within a few years.

Using this example, he argued that the labels *radicalization* and *extremism* were historically more fitting for the West than for Pakistan. Pakistanis, he insisted, are “good people,” and the incidents sometimes cited as evidence of extremism here are isolated human failings rather than the norm. He agreed with other speakers that no entire society should be condemned for the actions of a few, but maintained that present-day policies of governments in the USA, UK, Germany, France, and Italy displayed prejudice against Muslims especially in their stance on Gaza. In his view, “the real extremism” was visible in such policies, not in Pakistani society.

Admiral Haroon concluded by voicing support for technical education for madrassa students, which he saw as an important way to create opportunities while safeguarding the moral and cultural character of religious institutions.

Major General (Retd.) Dr. Ghulam Qamar’s Response

Dr. Ghulam Qamar thanked Admiral Haroon for his comments and addressed the concern about corporal punishment in madrassas. He explained that part of the problem stems from the isolation in which many madrassas operate, with minimal parental involvement and limited engagement from the wider community. While acknowledging that cases of abuse do occur, he stressed that such incidents are rare and not unique to madrassas they can also be found in public and private schools.

He emphasized that these were isolated cases which the media often amplified beyond proportion. Citing a recent example in Swat, he said the madrassa in question was registered with the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE). Once the incident came to his attention, he immediately contacted the Deputy Commissioner of Swat, ordered an investigation, and dispatched the regional director from Peshawar to coordinate with local authorities. Detailed reports from both the DGRE regional office and the district administration confirmed the incident. As a result, he cancelled the madrassa’s registration, and an FIR was lodged at the Mangora police station, with the case now under investigation.

Dr. Qamar added that in far-flung areas, some unregistered madrassas may fall outside DGRE's direct oversight, making it primarily a police matter. Nonetheless, he often instructs regional directors to investigate even when it does not formally fall under DGRE jurisdiction. He reiterated that corporal punishment is not a norm in madrassas and that checks exist within their systems to prevent it. The DGRE has also distributed child protection brochures, developed in collaboration with the International Commission for the Rights of the Child, to all madrassa boards (wafaqs) for implementation.

He concluded by agreeing with other participants that isolated cases should not be used to label all madrassas, as the majority operate responsibly and in line with both legal and ethical standards.

Sultan Mahmood appreciated the depth and value of the information shared, observing that such insights were new to many and could greatly benefit the creation of an ideal society in the future. He commended the speaker's knowledge, work, experience, and observations as "truly commendable," adding that the real challenge is to translate these ideas into concrete action within government and institutional frameworks so they can play a meaningful role in societal improvement.



Moulana Abdul Quddus Mohammadi: Civil Society Initiatives and Sectoral Concerns

Molana Abdul Quddus Muhammadi is the Khateeb of Muhammadi Masjid, Shahzad Town, Islamabad, and serves as Chairman of the Imdad Trust. Known for his community engagement and religious scholarship, he plays an active role in guiding congregational affairs and supporting social welfare initiatives.



Moulana Abdul Quddus Mohammadi began by introducing himself and outlining the practical initiatives his institution has been running to address the developmental and professional needs of madrassa students across Pakistan. He described four principal programs that his team has sustained over the years.

First, the **Jamhoor Ulema Leadership Program**, which identifies promising graduates from madaris nationwide. His team visits various institutions multiple times, shortlisting those with the greatest aptitude, confidence, and potential. These selected individuals are brought together for intensive interaction with diverse social groups and are given targeted training in leadership, public engagement, and confidence-building. Such training, he noted, also seeks to address any gaps identified in light of points raised by General Qamar in his keynote. These sessions are conducted in Islamabad and Bhurban, Murree, and are designed to increase the participants' exposure to broader societal perspectives. Over the past decade, the program's alumni have consistently demonstrated stronger performance, broader outlooks, and more effective community engagement compared to their peers.

Second, the **University–Madrassa Interaction Program**, which facilitates mutual visits: madrassa students are invited to universities, and university students are welcomed into madaris and mosques. This, he reported, has been a highly successful initiative in breaking down social barriers, fostering dialogue, and creating an appreciation of each other's environments.

Third, he highlighted the academic achievements of madrassa students in mainstream education, noting that students from Islamic institutions had secured top positions in Federal Board examinations and in other boards across Pakistan. He saw this as proof that madrassa graduates, when given opportunities, can excel within the broader national education framework.

Fourth, his institution has established a **Religious Empowerment Skills Program**. In response to rapid technological changes, they have provided training in modern skillsets including IT, artificial intelligence, freelancing, e-commerce, and other digital competencies to madrassa graduates. While nearly 2,000 young graduates have approached the institution for such training, resource constraints have allowed them to accommodate only around 100 to date. Complementing this is the **Madrassa Media Workshop**, which equips students with the ability to engage constructively with modern media.

Transitioning from programmatic details to policy critique, Moulana Abdul Quddus expressed appreciation for the scope of reforms described by General Qamar but raised serious reservations about the political structuring of the state-led process. He argued that the expansion from five traditional madrassa boards (wafaqs) to fifteen new ones had not unified the sector, but rather fragmented it. In his assessment, approximately 95% of Pakistan's madrassas along with their students and affiliated boards remained excluded from the main benefits and activities described by DGRE. Drawing an analogy, he compared this exclusion to creating a "separate Bangladesh" within Pakistan: while the smaller segment inside the state's reform framework might be performing well, the larger majority outside it remained untouched.

He stressed that many of the reform activities highlighted by DGRE were already being implemented, often on their own initiative, by certain leading madaris meaning the real need was to extend these benefits to less advanced institutions, particularly in underserved regions.

In closing, Moulana Abdul Quddus underscored that misconceptions, data gaps, and lack of factual awareness were major barriers to effective policymaking. Without accurate figures and transparent communication, conclusions would remain flawed and reforms would lack legitimacy. He called for an honest acknowledgment of institutional weaknesses both within the madrasa sector and in state policy and a collective willingness to address them. While apologizing for any remarks that might have been taken personally, he affirmed his commitment, both personally and institutionally, to constructive engagement and practical reform.

General Qamar's Statistical Clarification

General Qamar responded to Moulana Abdul Quddus Mohammadi's concerns by first clarifying what he viewed as a key misunderstanding regarding madrasa representation and registration. While acknowledging that certain prominent madrasa boards (*wafaqs*) hold significant political influence and public recognition, he rejected the claim that 95% of the madrasa sector remained outside the formal system. He reported that 19,003 madaris had been registered with the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE), operating under established standards such as having boarding facilities, libraries, computer classes, qualified faculty, and a student body of at least 100 to 200.

In his assessment, more than 80% of madrasa students in Pakistan were now enrolled in registered institutions affiliated with the Federal Ministry of Education, and 90% of all madrasahs had complied with state requirements. He noted that two of the five major wafaqs had already formally joined the reform process, while other institutions were cooperating quietly. The perception of a large-scale exclusion, he argued, stemmed more from political positioning particularly linked to certain political figures than from actual religious or administrative realities.

General Qamar stressed the need to distinguish between political disputes and genuine religious or educational concerns, cautioning that conflating the two would only create unnecessary tension. While he recognized and praised madrasahs that had taken the initiative to modernize on their own citing examples such as **Urwatul Wusqa**, which engaged faculty from Punjab University, LUMS, LSE, and even non-Muslim instructors, he maintained that such cases were still a minority, with large segments of the sector remaining educationally isolated. His own visits to remote madaris in areas like North and South Waziristan, Chitral, and Bolan Pass had reinforced his conviction that significant reform work remained to be done.

He underscored that alignment with state policy was inevitable, given the state's constitutional authority. Religious leaders such as Mufti Taqi Usmani and Mufti Munib-ur-Rehman, he noted, were respected figures serving the same religion, but differences of opinion over technical and vocational education persisted. He recounted an exchange with Mufti Taqi Usmani in which the latter questioned why madrasa students should be required to acquire technical training, comparing it to asking medical students to spend a year in a madrasa. General Qamar's stance was

that religious training and technical skills were not mutually exclusive but complementary preparing graduates to navigate both religious responsibilities and contemporary economic realities.

Islam, he reminded the gathering, was inseparable from Pakistan's identity, but national progress required competence in both spiritual and worldly domains. He pointed out that in daily prayers, Muslims ask first for the good of this world before the hereafter, which for him was a theological rationale for embracing worldly knowledge alongside religious education.

On the matter of registration, he confirmed that the government had agreed to madrasa leaders' preference to register under the Societies Registration Act of 1860, removing a key point of contention. In return, he urged full acceptance of the state's request to integrate modern and technical education into the madrasa system. He concluded by reiterating his respect for madrasahs' religious contributions while emphasizing the urgent need to equip students for the demands of the present and future.

Allama Hussain Wahidi: Trust-Building, Reform Challenges, and the Issue of Extremism

The former member of **council of Islamic Ideology, Allama Arif Hussain Wahidi** is a prominent Islamic scholar and speaker based in Pakistan, known for his insightful lectures on Islamic teachings, particularly the legacy of Imam Hussain (A.S.) and the message of Karbala. He serves as the Central Vice President of the **Shia Ulema Council Pakistan** and is a key member of the **National Rahmatul-lil-Aalameen WA Khatamun Nabiyyin Authority (NRKNA)**. Through platforms like Welayat TV USA, he promotes ethical values, unity, and spiritual growth, emphasizing truth, justice, and resistance against oppression



Allama Wahidi, opened his remarks by noting his extensive engagement with the country's madrasa system, including his role as an examiner in Shia madaris across different regions. He commended the keynote address, observing that it raised important issues warranting deeper discussion, though time constraints and the presence of foreign participants limited the extent of his intervention.

Drawing on his experience, Allama Wahidi recalled that under former Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, sustained engagement had taken place with religious seminaries, sometimes in meetings lasting six hours, during which challenges were candidly addressed. While acknowledging that such dialogues were constructive, he argued that successive governments had

failed to secure the full trust of madrasa leadership. As an example, he pointed to the recent outreach to Maulana Fazlur Rehman whom he personally respects as an indication that the government's rapport with the religious sector remained incomplete. Without a stronger climate of trust, he contended, madrasa reforms would not achieve their intended outcomes.

Allama Wahidi further stressed that many madaris were themselves making significant efforts to integrate modern education, often in difficult circumstances. However, when reform initiatives were presented by the government in a top-down manner, they frequently generated suspicion creating the impression that the objective was not partnership but control. He noted that persistent administrative hurdles, such as challenges in registering institutions or opening bank accounts, reinforced this mistrust. In some cases, external agencies had approached madaris demanding donor lists, which, once submitted, were reportedly used to question or discourage supporters' further eroding confidence.

On the structural side, he addressed the tensions between the newly created madrasa board (wifaq) and the traditional five wifaqs. Citing his own participation in a conference where the older boards walked out upon the arrival of the new representatives, he suggested that such initiatives should have been preceded by sustained consultation with leading scholars, including Mufti Taqi Usmani, Ayatullah Hafiz, and Mufti Munib-ur-Rehman. Without their confidence, he believed, any new system risked failing to gain sector-wide acceptance.

Turning to the sensitive issue of extremism, Allama Wahidi stated candidly that certain madaris did promote sectarianism and discriminatory attitudes, and that a comprehensive survey was essential to identify and address these cases. However, he cautioned against attributing extremism solely to the madrasa system, pointing instead to past state policies such as the mobilization of fighters during the Afghan conflict and the dispatch of individuals to Syria as significant contributing factors. He maintained that extremism and sectarianism must be rooted out, and that religious unity must remain a central objective, with ongoing engagement between scholars of all schools of thought.

He then addressed the question of fatwa issuance, emphasizing that in the Shia tradition, the authority to issue a fatwa rests solely with the marja'iyya (recognized religious authorities). Even with his own advanced credentials including a PhD in Quranic sciences, completion of the ijtehad course, and formal recognition as a mujtahid, he explained that he would not issue a fatwa, as it is a responsibility of the highest gravity. The absence of clear standards for who may issue fatwas, he argued, has allowed underqualified individuals often with limited religious education to make pronouncements that foster prejudice and extremism. Establishing agreed-upon criteria, jointly developed by scholars and the state, would help prevent misuse of religious authority.

Finally, Allama Wahidi spoke on the **Paigham-e-Pakistan** declaration, describing it as an important and beautiful document to which he had personally contributed, and which had garnered the signatures of 12,000–14,000 scholars. However, he lamented that it had not been sufficiently disseminated to the grassroots level. Many district officials, he observed, were unaware of its

existence. Translating the declaration into local languages and ensuring its wide distribution, he concluded, would be essential to countering extremism effectively.

General Qamar's Response to Allama Hussain Wahidi

General Qamar thanked Allama Wahidi for his observations and clarified that one of the key points of contention madrasa registration was in the process of being resolved. He explained that under Section 21 of the Societies Registration Act of 1860, madaris already registered, or wishing to register, could do so without government objection. This arrangement, he said, had been reached after extensive consultations with senior scholars such as Mufti Taqi Usmani and Mufti Munib-ur-Rehman. The amended bill reflecting this understanding was in draft form and expected to be presented to the Assembly imminently, which, in his view, would bring an end to the longstanding dispute over registration.

He credited the Ministry of Education with showing considerable patience throughout the negotiations, emphasizing that he personally had no interest in making DGRE the sole registering authority. The priority, he stressed, was simply to ensure that all madaris were under some form of regulation and that their data was available for oversight. He also acknowledged the progress many madaris had already made in offering contemporary education, including English, and expressed the hope that state support would further strengthen such efforts once the legislative framework was in place.

On the issue of madrasa bank accounts, General Qamar reported that he had held a direct Zoom meeting with the Governor of the State Bank and senior officials to address institutional concerns. Following this, registration forms had been amended to meet regulatory requirements, and the Chief of Army Staff had twice sent the DGMI to the State Bank to expedite resolution. He assured participants that the matter was actively being pursued and was confident it would soon be resolved for all institutions.

At this point, Moulana Abdul Quddus Mohammadi intervened to seek clarity on the banking issue, asking; the issue of bank accounts, will it be solved for everyone?

General Qamar confirmed that the solution under discussion would indeed apply to all madrassas. He went on to elaborate that the Societies Registration Act of 1860 amended in 1952 to include Section 21 provided for madrasa registration at the district level through the district registrar, typically a grade-16 officer located in the DCO's office. While this allowed for local registration, the absence of a centralized data repository meant that the Ministry of Education and provincial authorities lacked a complete picture of the sector.

Compounding the problem, the Act fell under the Ministry of Commerce and Industries, which had no mandate over education. This, he argued, created a contradiction: the state presented madrassas to the world as part of its education system, yet administratively placed them under a

ministry unrelated to education. His position was that registration under the 1860 Act should continue where desired, but the government must also develop a centralized database to integrate madrassa education into the national education framework.

Concluding his remarks, General Qamar urged participants to keep future interventions concise and, where possible, in English, to facilitate broader engagement and ensure that all voices could be heard within the time available.

Dr. Tahir's Question on Youth Development and Educational Cohesion

Dr. Tahir Mahmood bin Muhammad Yaqoob is Associate Professor of Tafsir at the Faculty of Usuluddin, International Islamic University Islamabad. A PhD graduate in Qur'anic Studies from the Islamic University of Madinah, he has served as Director and Professor of Hadith at Salafia University, Director General of Dawah Academy, and Khateeb at King Faisal Mosque. He also teaches Qur'anic Sciences, Hadith, Comparative Religions, and Arabic Literature at various institutions, including Al-Huda International Foundation.



During the discussion, Dr. Tahir shared his longstanding engagement with academic and policy forums, and acknowledged that Pakistan's religious institutions (*madaris*) were largely fulfilling their primary mission producing imams, khateeb, teachers, and moral reformers who contributed significantly to social welfare. This achievement, he mentioned, was recognized by both the government and society. However, he raised a pointed question about the country's broader approach to preparing its future leaders:

"Our young generation, who will be responsible for leading Pakistan in the next 8–10 years—are we paying adequate attention to their moral, spiritual, and civic development? Our education system is split into five or six different streams. Is there a unified platform to reform it? While surveys show that more than 80% of madrassa graduates eventually earn BA, MBA, or PhD degrees, what comparable reforms are we implementing in the mainstream schools and universities that produce our engineers, doctors, and IT experts? Why is it that a 20–25-year-old graduate can excel professionally yet be unable to read the Quran, understand the Prophet's biography, or grasp the ethical principles of our faith? What proportion of their education is devoted to Islamic studies and moral training? Are we doing enough to ensure they are not influenced by anti-Pakistan sentiment, drugs, or the erosion of our family system? Who will take responsibility for reforming this critical space?"

General Qamar's Response to Dr. Tahir Question

General Qamar welcomed the question and explained that the government had recently taken concrete steps to address precisely these concerns. He described the establishment of the **National Rahmat-ul-Alamin and Khatam-ul-Nabiyyin Authority**, mandated to introduce Seerat-un-Nabiyyin (the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) across all educational institutions in the country. A carefully developed syllabus, he said, was being issued this year as a compulsory subject from class 1 to class 12, with further integration at the university level through hadith and Quranic studies.

He also cited the example of the **Character Foundation** in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, which had produced a character education booklet based on the Seerat-un-Nabiyyin. This booklet had already been incorporated into Islamabad Capital Territory schools, both public and private, and was now being extended to classes 1 to 5 nationwide.

General Qamar added that provincial governments were being urged to adopt these reforms, which would also be embedded in the **National Education Policy 2025**, making it obligatory for provinces to include Seerat-un-Nabiyyin and character-building content in their curricula. He concluded that these initiatives were designed to ensure that Pakistan's future generations were not only technically competent but also morally and ethically grounded.

Mahjabeen Abbasi: Emphasis on Physical Development in Madrassa Education

Mahjabeen Abbasi is a Pakistani politician who has been serving as a member of the National Assembly since 2024, elected on a women's reserved seat representing the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N). She entered the Assembly following the 2024 general elections and is engaged in parliamentary work, policy discussions, and legislative matters. Her role involves contributing to debates on national issues, representing women's perspectives in legislation, and supporting her party's policy agenda within the federal legislature.



Mahjabeen Abbasi, participated in discussion by expressing her appreciation for the work being carried out in madrassa reform and community engagement, noting that she had previously met with Mr. Qamar and had been impressed by his dedication and initiatives. She remarked that, having now seen the current progress and activities first-hand, she was even more convinced of their value.

Drawing from her own experience in Bahawalpur, particularly in areas near the border, she confirmed that such programs were indeed being implemented in her constituency, which she had personally observed and endorsed. However, Abbasi proposed an important addition to future legislation: the integration of physical activities into madrasa education. She stressed that physical development was essential for students from grade 1 through grade 10, suggesting that a 16-year-old madrasa student should receive physical conditioning comparable to that of a cadet in military training. She specifically mentioned activities such as swimming, alongside other forms of physical exercise, as crucial for building resilience, discipline, and overall health.

Concluding her remarks, Abbasi praised the ongoing work, describing it as “Mashallah, very good work,” and urged that this physical development component be formally incorporated into policy.

Dr. Irfan Shehzad: Concerns on Madrasa Reform, Registration, and Education Structure.

Dr. Irfan Shahzad serves as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Islamic Studies at the Virtual University of Pakistan. He holds a PhD in Islamic Studies and possesses a diverse academic background, having earned master’s degrees in both Islamic Studies and English Literature from the University of Punjab. His teaching and research interests span Quranic studies, Islamic thought, comparative religion, and the interplay between classical scholarship and contemporary issues. Dr. Shahzad is also associated with Al-Mawrid, a foundation for Islamic research and education, contributing to scholarly discourse through publications, lectures, and curriculum development.



Speaking from both scholarship and experience, Dr. Shehzad argued that many religious scholars resist registering their madrassas not out of principle, but because of vested economic interests and institutional dominance. In his view, this resistance would dissolve if the state clearly established its authority; past examples have shown that madrassas quickly adapted when state policy shifted, such as during changes in the national stance on jihad. He criticised the government’s approach of creating multiple boards for madrassas, describing it as a “divide and rule” tactic that has deepened mistrust between religious institutions and the state.

He went on to suggest that, if madrassas are to be registered, they should not operate on a sectarian admissions policy. Like universities, they should be open to students from all sects and employ teachers from diverse theological backgrounds. This openness, he argued, would help foster unity and reduce sectarian divisions.

Dr. Shehzad also addressed what he saw as underplayed problems of abuse and corporal punishment in madrassas. He contended that such issues are more widespread than acknowledged, especially in boarding institutions that admit very young boys sometimes as young as ten without age restrictions. The residential nature of these madrassas, he warned, creates an environment where both physical and sexual abuse can occur. He cited a recent case in which a registered madrassa was implicated in the death of a student due to abuse, noting that while action was taken, it only happened after the tragedy, despite signs of ongoing mistreatment beforehand.

Concluding his remarks, Dr. Shehzad questioned the prevailing approach to education policy, particularly the notion of early specialisation in religious studies. He argued that every child should first receive ten to twelve years of broad-based education before committing to any specialised path, whether that be in religious scholarship, medicine, engineering, or another field. In his view, no child should be dedicated to purely religious training from an early age, as this restricts future opportunities and development.

General Qamar's Response to Dr. Irfan Shehzad

General Qamar thanked Dr. Shehzad for his observations, acknowledging their significance, and offered clarifications on the state's role and the realities of madrassa reform. He explained that his directorate is not a controlling authority over madrassas but a reform-oriented body tasked with maintaining accurate registration records. Regulation and internal governance, he stressed, remain the responsibility of the wafaqs, or madrassa boards, which function as the primary governing entities.

Addressing the allegations of abuse, General Qamar accepted that incidents of corporal punishment and sexual misconduct have occurred, but rejected the characterisation of these problems as systemic. Such cases, he said, are isolated and not unique to madrassas; similar incidents occur in elite private schools, government institutions, and other parts of society. However, when such an incident involves a madrassa, it is often magnified by political and foreign actors seeking to tarnish the reputation of religious education.

He assured participants that the government takes swift action on all reported cases, registering them for investigation without exception, but stressed that such cases must first be reported. In his view, a significant part of the problem lies in parental neglect; families often send children to madrassas and then disengage entirely, leaving them without a crucial layer of oversight. Greater interaction between parents, teachers, and students, he suggested, could serve as an effective safeguard against misconduct.

General Qamar concluded by reaffirming that the government has put in place stringent rules and regulations, and that these are enforced whenever violations are brought to its attention. However, he called for a cultural shift towards shared responsibility among parents, educators, and

the wider community to ensure that madrassas remain safe and nurturing environments for all students.

Naeem Murtaza: Reframing the Concept of Jihad and Harnessing Madrassa Students' Cognitive Potential

Muhammad Naeem Murtaza currently serves as the **Chief Technical Advisor** to the **International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC)**. With nearly four decades of experience in business development, strategic marketing, and institutional leadership across telecommunications, automotive, and security sectors, he played a key role in advancing IPC's global outreach and policy engagement



Naeem Murtaza began by expressing his appreciation for the insights shared during the session, noting that he found the discussion both informative and thought-provoking. Addressing his remarks particularly for the benefit of the foreign guests present, he drew attention to a recurring issue in cross-cultural understanding: the interpretation of the term jihad. He observed that many of his international acquaintances instinctively associate jihad with violence or killing in a negative context. In contrast, he has made it a personal mission to promote the broader, positive dimensions of the term explaining to others that jihad also encompasses the pursuit of education, acts of kindness, guidance, and other constructive contributions to society. He suggested that whenever presentations are delivered in international or mixed-audience forums, it would be beneficial to include a clear and contextual explanation of jihad to dispel misconceptions.

Turning to the potential of madrassa graduates, Murtaza shared a personal example from his family. His brother, formerly the CEO of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and a leading figure in Pakistan's IT sector, had conducted a five-year pilot project involving huffaz (individuals who have memorised the entire Quran). This experiment tested their abilities in IT-related problem-solving, including mathematics and technical challenges. The results, Murtaza explained, were remarkable the huffaz demonstrated exceptional analytical and cognitive skills, performing tasks with notable precision and speed. Based on these findings, he recommended that religious leaders and policymakers consider expanding opportunities for madrassa graduates in fields such as information technology and artificial intelligence, emphasising that these students represent an underutilised intellectual resource.

General Qamar's Acknowledgement and Examples from Technical Education Initiatives

In response, General Qamar expressed agreement with Murtaza observations and supported his suggestion with concrete examples from his own recent visits to technical institutions. Earlier in the week, he had toured two facilities where madrassa students were enrolled in vocational and technical courses. At the University of Engineering and Technology (UET), Lahore, he visited an e-commerce class comprising twenty-nine female and four male students. Both the instructor and the principal informed him that these students had completed three months' worth of coursework in just two weeks, a pace they attributed to the exceptional cognitive abilities of huffaz.

General Qamar underscored the belief that memorising the Quran endows individuals with extraordinary mental discipline and retention capacity, qualities that can be highly advantageous in mastering technical subjects. He recounted a similar experience at a technical college in Gulberg, Lahore, where forty madrassa students both male and female were learning computer skills, including artificial intelligence. According to the principal, what was intended as a month-long introductory module had been mastered by the students in just two to three days?

He concluded by emphasising that these abilities must be channelled into productive avenues. While preserving their religious education, madrassa graduates should also be equipped with market-relevant skills to ensure they can secure meaningful employment. Failing to provide such opportunities, he warned, would represent a wasted societal asset and a disservice to the nation.

Dr. Ikram ul Haq Yaseen: Promoting Interfaith Engagement, Practical Training, and Resource Utilisation

Dr. Hafiz Ikram-ul-Haq currently serves as the Secretary of the **Council of Islamic Ideology (CII)**, a position he has held since June 25, 2013. He brings extensive expertise in Islamic scholarship, having earned a Ph.D. in Arabic Literature (2003), as well as M.Phil. and M.A. degrees in Islamic Studies and Arabic from leading Pakistani institutions. His academic and professional background includes teaching positions at the International Islamic University's Shariah Academy, coordination of training programmes for judges and lawyers, and roles in research and publication. Dr. Ikram-ul-Haq is also active in scholarly translation and has published research in reputable journals, serving as the Council's spokesman and representing the institution in national and international forums



As initially, Dr. Ikram ul Haq expressed his appreciation for the presentation of Maj Gen. Dr. Ghulam Qamar, mentioning that while he was already familiar with much of the work undertaken by the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE), the session had been both informative and engaging. Drawing on his own teaching experience, including in calligraphy, he observed that children possess remarkable learning capacity, quickly grasping skills when given the opportunity. He also reflected positively on Mufti Abdul Quddus's earlier remarks, noting that such experiences provide valuable practical insights.

Dr. Yaseen highlighted the example of Dr. Tahir, who had transformed his mosque, Rahmatul Alameen, into a welfare centre, describing it as an inspiring model of community service. He also recalled his tenure at the International Islamic University, Islamabad, where the Dawah Academy hosted religious scholars from diverse backgrounds Shia, Sunni, Barelvi, and Deobandi offering a three-month course in Islamic outreach. Initially, participants were reluctant to engage with one another, but by the conclusion of the programme, they had developed camaraderie and mutual respect. This, he argued, demonstrated the transformative power of interaction, which should be expanded wherever possible.

He proposed that madrasa graduates, beyond current students, could be a valuable resource for national capacity building. Short, targeted courses could be designed for them in various areas of governance and development. For instance, some madrasa graduates could be introduced to the legislative process through internships in parliament, or familiarised with the judicial system through one-month training modules.

Dr. Yaseen further suggested linking madrasa education to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He noted that many of these objectives such as environmental stewardship already have strong foundations in Islamic jurisprudence and scripture. Citing the 1947 First Educational Conference in Karachi, he observed that Pakistan's founders envisioned an education system infused with ideological inspiration, where scientific subjects were taught alongside relevant Quranic references. He recommended one- to two-week courses on each of the 17 SDGs, pairing religious scholars with subject matter experts from relevant government ministries, such as climate change.

In addressing resource challenges, Dr. Yaseen stressed that Pakistan already possesses significant institutional and physical assets. He cited large tracts of agricultural land currently leased at minimal rates, extensive urban properties managed by the Auqaf department, and major mosques and adjacent markets in prime commercial areas. Historically, these resources were intended to support madrasa education, welfare services, child development, and healthcare. He pointed to international examples, particularly in Qatar and Kuwait, where Auqaf assets are managed to maximise public benefit, and suggested that similar strategies could be implemented in Pakistan to ensure financial sustainability for religious and educational initiatives.

He concluded by emphasising that with effective management of existing resources, Pakistan would not need to look externally for funding. His remarks closed with a call for

coordinated action to unite educational, religious, and community institutions under a shared vision of societal betterment.

Abdullah Khan: Concluding Remarks

Abdullah Khan brought the roundtable discussion to a close by reflecting on the highly interactive and intellectually engaging nature of the session. He remarked that the topic under discussion was both unique and enlightening, offering fresh insights into the role and functioning of madrasas. He noted that the exchange had been equally valuable for the international guests in attendance, with participants representing Romania, China, and Indonesia gaining a deeper understanding of the madrasa system in Pakistan.

In a lighter tone, Khan acknowledged the scholarly credentials of the session's key contributor, referring to General Ghulam Qamar not only by his military title but also as a doctorate holder. He extended the same recognition to **Dr. Samraiz**, noting that while both men were generals, their academic achievements reflected their broader intellectual engagement.

Building on the discussions, Abdullah Khan stated that the session had prompted him to refine his own thinking on the integration of skills training within madrasa education. While remaining committed to his view that such skills must complement, rather than dilute, religious education, he offered practical examples. He cited e-commerce as an important avenue for madrasa graduates seeking employment both within Pakistan and abroad, enabling them to generate income through teaching and other services while managing remittances and tuition fees effectively.

Abdullah Khan also highlighted the potential of leveraging digital tools that preserve and expand access to Islamic scholarship. He recalled how Arab engineers had developed Maktaba Shamila originally distributed on two CDs containing the Sihah Sitta, jurisprudential works, and other Islamic texts, and now available as a mobile application. Similarly, the Islam 360 application, developed by Pakistani innovators, offers a vast repository of Qur'anic exegesis, hadith collections, and biographical works (Ilm al-Rijal) in a user-friendly format. He suggested that directing madrasa students toward such platforms would allow them to integrate their deep religious expertise with modern technology, thereby enhancing their role in contemporary society.

For Abdullah Khan, madrasa education in Pakistan already constitutes a specialised skill in its own right. The challenge, therefore, lies in embedding this skill within the broader socio-economic framework so that graduates remain anchored in their religious identity while also equipped to contribute productively to national development.

Abdullah Khan closed his remarks by thanking Dr. General Ghulam Qamar for his insights, and expressed appreciation to all participants for their contributions. Extending an invitation to Dr.

Mohammad Molana Abdul Quddus to serve as a future guest speaker, he noted his eagerness to engage further and to address certain questions in a more private setting. Concluding on a cordial note, Khan invited everyone to continue their conversations informally over tea.

Some Glimpses of the Round Table Discussion

