

# CONFERENCE REPORT

## Building Resilience: Canada's Engagement with the Indo-Pacific on Non-Traditional Security Threats



October 10 – 11, 2025



# ROB HANLON

Director Canada and the Asia–Pacific Policy Project (CAPPP)  
Associate Professor of Political Studies  
Thompson Rivers University

# SAIRA BANO

Associate Director CAPPP  
Assistant Professor of Political Studies  
Thompson Rivers University

JANNAT BHULLAR  
NATASHA FERGUSON  
OLIVIA WILCOX

Research Assistants  
Graduate Students, Thompson Rivers University

# PREAMBLE

The Building Resilience: Canada's Engagement with the Indo-Pacific on Non-Traditional Security Threats conference was conceived as a platform to identify and address blind spots in Canada's defence policy, particularly in the areas of development and diplomacy, and to explore how these intersect with non-traditional security (NTS) concerns. The conference sought to move beyond conventional notions of security by integrating perspectives that link defence, diplomacy, and development with human security and regional cooperation.

A key objective was to advance the national conversation on NTS—issues such as climate change, cyber threats, public health, and humanitarian resilience—that increasingly shape the operational and strategic environment of the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The purposeful inclusion of Hon. Harjit Sajjan, who championed the MINDS program as Minister of National Defence, underscored the importance of leveraging interdisciplinary research to address evolving challenges facing Canada's defence and security community. His remarks emphasized the need for a whole-of-society approach to resilience, bringing together policymakers, academics, and practitioners.

The conference also highlighted Western Canada's unique position in advancing Indo-Pacific engagement. From Thompson Rivers University's vantage point in Kamloops, British Columbia, scholars and policy practitioners underscored the region's potential to serve as a bridge between Canada's Pacific geography and its global policy commitments.

This western perspective enriches the national dialogue on Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and situates TRU and the Canada and Asia Pacific Policy Project (CAPPP) as vital contributors to these policy conversations.

Throughout the proceedings, participants underscored that non-traditional security is fundamentally about human security—about safeguarding communities from environmental, economic, digital, and humanitarian vulnerabilities. The discussions sought to bring these issues beyond academic and policy circles into mainstream discourse, emphasizing the role of public communication, civic engagement, and local partnerships in shaping more inclusive and resilient security frameworks.

Ultimately, the conference strengthened TRU and CAPPP's leadership role as a regional and national hub for Indo-Pacific research and teaching. By fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and producing tangible policy outputs, this initiative reaffirmed TRU's commitment to positioning Western Canada as a centre of excellence for research and education on non-traditional and human security within Canada's Indo-Pacific engagement.

# OCTOBER 10<sup>TH</sup>, 2025

## ✦ *Opening Remarks*

Ms. Emma Gottfriedson, an Indigenous knowledge keeper, opened the conference with a Secwépemc story about Porcupine that underscored the importance of inter-community connection, cooperation and living in peace. In the story, humble Porcupine braves deep snow to carry an invitation that brings neighbouring communities together for a feast of reconciliation—showing that small, steady acts can bridge great distances. The teaching reminds us that prosperity follows when we choose cooperation over conflict.

Following her remarks, Dr. Rob Hanlon offered a land acknowledgement and welcomed participants to the conference. He emphasized the value of these gatherings for sharing knowledge and sustaining dialogue on non-traditional security threats in the Indo-Pacific. Dr. Hanlon then introduced the keynote speaker, Dr. Paul Evans, Emeritus Professor at the University of British Columbia.

## ✦ *Professor Paul Evans: Keynote Address*

Professor Paul Evans (University of British Columbia) delivered the lunchtime keynote, noting that we face extraordinary challenges, uncertainty, and turbulence on multiple fronts. He cautioned that many states are reverting to a narrow, state-centric view of security and stressed the need to keep human security at the centre of our conversations. Non-traditional threats, he argued, are deeply intertwined with traditional security apparatuses and demand equal attention and tailored policy solutions.

Evans framed the conference as embodying a cooperative-security mindset—one that fosters idea-sharing and connections across regions to pursue durable solutions. He urged participants to continue these discussions, build networks across communities, and sustain a spirit of hope and optimism. He closed by appreciating Canada's engagement in the Indo-Pacific, given its historical legacy and openness, and underscored the importance of keeping the debate on human security alive—especially when states are reluctant to do so.

## ✦ *People First: Human Security Across Borders*

The panel explored how human security provides a people-centred lens to understand and address emerging global threats that transcend national boundaries. The discussion emphasized that traditional, state-based notions of security are increasingly inadequate for tackling interconnected challenges such as health crises, social instability, and regional insecurity. **Sorpong Peou** (Professor, Toronto Metropolitan University) argued that ASEAN's security framework, while sometimes described as "people-centred," remains primarily rooted in comprehensive security—a paradigm that prioritizes state and regime stability over individual well-being. As a result, he contended, human security as a public good remains underprovided in the region. **Rosalind Warner** (Professor, Okanagan College) **Andy Knight** (Professor, University of Alberta) focused on operationalizing human security in global health governance, demonstrating how human security principles can strengthen responses to systemic risks and improve health outcomes worldwide. The highlighted the need for global cooperation to protect vulnerable populations from pandemics and other transnational threats. **Neilesh Bose** (Professor, University of Victoria) examined ethnic and religious conflicts, discussing how identity-based tensions threaten social cohesion and how inclusive, people-centred governance can foster peace. The panel, moderated by **Paul Clark** (Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University), highlighted the urgency of reimagining security in human terms—anchored in cooperation, dignity, and collective resilience.

## ✦ *Heat, Risk, Resilience: Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific*

The panel, moderated by **Humayun Kabir** (Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University), mapped how climate pressures intersect with energy systems, security politics, and public health across the region. **Sun Ryung Park** (Research Fellow, University of British Columbia/Senior Research Scholar, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada) argued that state-led clean-energy industrial policy in Japan, South Korea, and China is redefining energy security and laid out strategic lessons for Canada—energy-transition diplomacy, co-investment in critical minerals and clean tech, and partnerships on grids and hydrogen.

**M. V. Ramana** (Professor, University of British Columbia) explained China’s continued nuclear expansion as a product of political-economic incentives and techno-nationalist ideology, noting high financial risks, waste challenges, and constrained public participation even as renewables surge. **Philippe Le Billon** (Professor, University of British Columbia) showed how fisheries have become instruments of state power, with gray-zone tactics and ecological stress in the South and East China Seas blurring civilian–military lines and demanding stronger regional governance.

**Athena Madan** (Assistant Professor), University of Victoria reframed extreme heat as a driver and amplifier of conflict, displacement, and health inequality, urging structural remedies that strengthen health systems and accountability—not just technical fixes. **Jack Patrick Hayes** (Kwantlen Polytechnic University) traced two decades of China’s disaster governance—recentralized toolkits, flagship programs, and cross-ministerial “chief” systems—highlighting both effective interventions and looming challenges in fire management and water quality. Together, the panel underscored that building resilience will require cooperative security thinking that links climate policy, energy transitions, maritime governance, and human health.

### *Harjit Sajjan, former Minister of National Defence of Canada: Keynote Address*

The keynote address by Hon. Harjit Sajjan, former Minister of National Defence, set a forward-looking tone for the conference by emphasizing Canada’s growing engagement and responsibility in the Indo Pacific. He noted that before 2015 Canada’s presence in the region was inconsistent, but since the 2017 defence policy and the 2022 Indo Pacific Strategy Canada has become a steady and reliable partner. Sajjan highlighted Canada’s active naval deployments, participation in Operation NEON, and strengthened diplomatic and economic ties with ASEAN, Japan, and Korea as examples of consistent engagement. He described the Indo Pacific as both complex and promising, a region marked by flashpoints such as the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, but also by economic dynamism and cooperation through mechanisms such as the Quad and AUKUS.

Sajjan stressed that Canada's approach must balance traditional security focused on upholding international law and freedom of navigation with human security that includes responses to climate change, disasters, and food insecurity. He emphasized that security today is about resilience as much as defence, addressing rising seas, extreme weather, and displacement across Asia. Economically, he identified key opportunities in clean energy, critical minerals, technology, and education, noting that Canada's transparent and sustainable engagement strengthens prosperity on both sides of the Pacific. Sajjan concluded by reaffirming that the Indo Pacific will define the twenty first century and that Canada must continue to engage consistently through defence, diplomacy, trade, and humanitarian cooperation to help build a peaceful, rules based, and inclusive regional order.

## OCTOBER 11<sup>TH</sup>, 2025

### *Borderless Threats: Illicit Networks & Security*

The panel moderated by **Zubair Raja** (Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University), explored how transnational organized crime has become a major nontraditional security challenge in Southeast Asia and beyond, intertwining governance failures, illicit economies, and regional instability. **Kai Ostwald** (Associate Professor, University of British Columbia) drew on fieldwork along the Thailand–Myanmar border to show how large-scale scam centres and illicit industries flourish in stateless borderlands controlled by ethnic resistance organizations. He argued that the international community's inability to engage with these subnational actors leaves enforcement gaps and called for risk-based, flexible mechanisms that allow indirect coordination without legitimizing armed groups. **Bridget Welsh** (University of Nottingham, Malaysia) described Southeast Asia as the global epicentre of cyber scams and human trafficking, where weak governance, entrenched syndicates, and the use of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and fintech enable large-scale fraud.

**Alvin Camba** (Lead Scientist, Lyvi & Senior Adjunct Scientist, Associated Universities Incorporated, Washington D.C.) highlighted the spread of scam compounds across multiple continents and criticized fragmented U.S. and Chinese responses. He urged ASEAN and its partners—including Canada, Japan, Australia, and the European Union—to take the lead through coordinated enforcement, financial intelligence sharing, and victim protection. **David Drake** (former Director General, Global Affairs Canada) examined transnational organized crime in the Indo-Pacific and its implications for Canada, emphasizing vulnerabilities in Pacific island states and noting new Canadian policy measures to enhance border and financial security under the 2025 Indo-Pacific Strategy.

**Qamar Cheema** (Sanober Institute, Pakistan) proposed a geoeconomic approach to tackling nontraditional threats in South Asia, arguing that regional economic connectivity can disrupt illicit networks, strengthen resilience, and promote cooperative responses to shared challenges. Together, the panel underscored that transnational crime in the Indo-Pacific is both a security and governance crisis that demands coordinated regional action, innovative policy tools, and stronger economic and institutional linkages to manage borderless threats.

## *From Relief to Resilience: Humanitarian Action in the Indo-Pacific*

The panel, moderated by **Manu Sharma** (Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University), examined how humanitarian practices across the Indo-Pacific are evolving from short-term relief to long-term resilience, emphasizing localization, inclusion, and human security. **David Matijasevich** (Instructor, Capilano University) reflected on Canada's liberal internationalist legacy in humanitarian and development policy, arguing that as the liberal international order declines, Canada must reassess how it engages globally, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, where receptiveness to liberal norms is mixed. **Bala Nikku** (Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University) explored disaster resilience in South Asia, noting that while countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Nepal have institutionalized disaster risk reduction, gaps persist due to top-down governance, weak local participation, and inequitable recovery for marginalized groups.

Drawing on examples from Nepal’s earthquakes and India’s cyclones, he called for community-centered and inclusive approaches to resilience-building. **Hasnat Johnson** (Deputy Director, Transnational Conflict Analysis and Support (ICA), Global Affairs Canada) shared field-based insights on how anticipatory action, social protection systems, and localization can improve humanitarian preparedness across the Indo-Pacific, advocating for approaches that anticipate shocks rather than react to them. **Lauryn Oates** (Executive Director, Right to Learn Afghanistan) addressed education in crisis contexts, focusing on Afghanistan, where women and girls are banned from secondary education. She highlighted the emergence of underground networks and alternative learning models that sustain educational access, demonstrating grassroots resilience and innovation under extreme repression. **Ajith Balasooriya** (Professor, University of Colombo) presented on Sri Lankan women’s “food stories” during the 2022 economic crisis, showing how women’s acts of cooking, sharing, and protest became forms of decolonial resistance and political mobilization. Together, the panel highlighted that humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific is increasingly about agency, equity, and local knowledge—moving beyond immediate relief toward building systems and communities capable of withstanding and transforming crises.

## *Indo-Pacific Non-Traditional Security Research*

The panel, moderated by **Ji Young Lee-An** (Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University), examined emerging security challenges that transcend conventional military frameworks, focusing on information control, climate vulnerability, environmental rollback, and democratic resilience. **Lynette H. Ong** (Professor, University of Toronto) discussed findings from her forthcoming book *Outsourcing Surveillance: Online Opinion Management in China*, revealing how the Chinese state delegates digital surveillance to profit-driven corporations to shape public discourse. She highlighted parallels and lessons for Canada, particularly regarding the risks of privatized online monitoring and the need for transparency and accountability in managing digital information environments.

**James Boutilier** (Former Maritime Forces Pacific, Government of Canada) turned attention to the existential threat faced by Oceania’s microstates, such as Tuvalu, where rising sea levels imperil sovereignty, livelihoods, and legal status under international law. He underscored the urgent need for global cooperation to address the social, economic, and humanitarian dimensions of climate-induced displacement. **Terry Kading** (Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University) explored how nationalist economic policies in the United States, such as the “America First” model, are undermining decades of environmental protection both in North America and the Indo-Pacific. He warned that growing trade wars and deregulation could trigger a “race to the bottom” in environmental standards, reversing progress on pollution control, biodiversity, and sustainability.

**Rick McCutcheon** (Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University) concluded the panel by presenting the concept of civilian-based defence as a human security framework. Drawing lessons from nonviolent resistance movements in the Philippines, East Timor, and Thailand, he argued that societal resilience and democratic strength depend on empowering citizens and civil institutions to resist authoritarianism. He called for reimagining Canadian defence policy to include civic education, media independence, and social organization as essential components of national security. Together, the panel demonstrated that security in the Indo-Pacific—and for Canada’s engagement with it—extends far beyond traditional defence. Addressing digital manipulation, climate fragility, environmental rollback, and democratic erosion requires inclusive, people-centered, and innovative approaches that integrate resilience, accountability, and transnational cooperation.

## ✦ *Indo-Pacific NTS: Emerging Graduate Voices*

The panel, moderated by **Momo Begum** (Lecturer, Thompson Rivers University), showcased innovative research by emerging scholars examining non-traditional security issues across the Indo-Pacific. The session highlighted how young researchers are broadening the analytical scope of regional security to include information integrity, human rights, economic vulnerability, and demographic transformation.

**Gershon Adela** (PhD Candidate, University of Calgary) explored how middle powers such as Australia, Canada, Türkiye, the Philippines, and Indonesia are reconfiguring their alignments amid great-power rivalry, increasingly relying on strategic hedging and multi-alignment shaped by non-traditional security concerns rather than purely military factors. **Gurinder S. Purewal** (Graduated Thompson Rivers University) analyzed the reemergence of the Khalistan movement in Canada-India relations, using discourse analysis of Canadian and Indian media to reveal how competing political narratives shape diaspora identity and bilateral tensions.

**Jannat Bhullar** (Graduate Student, Thompson Rivers University) examined China's information warfare in Taiwan, showing how disinformation campaigns erode media integrity and public trust, while proposing strategies to safeguard democratic discourse through cognitive and network-propaganda frameworks. **Himadrija Chakraborty** (PhD Candidate, Visva-Bharati University, India) discussed the resilience of India's informal sector, arguing that inter-firm collaboration serves as a form of economic security for millions of workers facing precarity, especially during crises such as COVID-19. **Radhika Tabrez** (Graduate Student, Thompson Rivers University) analyzed shifting demographic trends in the Indo-Pacific, contrasting the youth bulges in South and Southeast Asia with aging populations in East Asia, and argued that the region's long-term stability will depend on how societies turn these demographic pressures into shared resilience.

Together, the panel underscored the importance of supporting new academic voices whose research illuminates the complex human, social, and economic dimensions of security in the Indo-Pacific. It emphasized that the future of the region will be shaped not only by states and militaries but also by people, ideas, and inclusive approaches to resilience and cooperation.

## ✦ *Closing Remarks*

In the closing remarks, **Rob Hanlon** and **Saira Bano** thanked all participants for their insightful contributions and thoughtful engagement throughout the conference. They emphasized the importance of sustaining dialogue on nontraditional security threats and advancing the human security agenda in the Indo-Pacific.

Both expressed their commitment to carrying this work forward by publishing **two special journal issues** featuring selected conference papers and organizing **a follow-up conference in Ottawa** in collaboration with partners at the **Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), Carleton University**. These initiatives aim to deepen research collaboration, expand policy dialogue, and continue building a network of scholars and practitioners dedicated to addressing emerging security challenges in the region.

### *HOW PROJECT FURTHERED THE PUBLIC POLICY DEBATE ON MINDS DEFENCE POLICY CHALLENGES AND/OR THE DEVELOPED FOCUS QUESTIONS?*

The conference advanced the **public policy debate on MINDS Defence Policy Challenges** by directly engaging scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in examining how **non-traditional security threats** are reshaping Canada’s strategic engagement across the Indo-Pacific. Through thematic panels and keynote discussions, the project addressed three core MINDS Defence Policy Challenges:

First, on **Climate Change: a driver of destabilization**, multiple sessions—particularly “Heat, Risk, Resilience: Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific”—explored how environmental stress, extreme weather, and rising seas are creating humanitarian crises, governance challenges, and regional instability. The discussions highlighted Canada’s opportunity to lead through climate diplomacy, energy-transition partnerships, and humanitarian assistance frameworks that align with defence priorities.

Second, on **Canada in times of global uncertainty and interconnectedness**, panels on human security and transnational crime illuminated how instability in the Indo-Pacific—ranging from displacement and public health crises to illicit networks and information manipulation—affects global governance and directly impacts Canadian interests. The conference emphasized the importance of maintaining Canada’s role as a **reliable, cooperative, and principled middle power**, capable of bridging traditional defence policy with people-centred security approaches.

Third, on **Cyber and space: Critical enablers for strategic effect**, sessions such as “Safeguarding Democratic Discourse in Taiwan” and “Outsourcing Surveillance: Online Opinion Management in China” examined the growing significance of the digital domain as a battleground for influence, disinformation, and public trust. These discussions connected cyber resilience and information integrity to broader questions of national and human security, offering insights into how Canada can strengthen its policy responses to hybrid and technological threats.

To broaden policy reach and public engagement, the conference was live streamed, widely advertised, and summarized on the CAPPP website as well as the Thompson Rivers University website. Key highlights and recordings were amplified through TRU and CAPPP social media channels, extending access to students, policy practitioners, media, and community partners beyond the in-person audience. These dissemination steps ensured that the evidence, debates, and recommendations generated at the conference will continue informing Canadian defence and foreign policy conversations aligned with the MINDS priorities.

### *THE NUMBER OF OFFICIALS FROM DND AND CANADIAN ARMED FORCES (CAF) ENGAGED BY THE PROJECT?*

None at this event. Invitations and multiple follow up emails were sent to CFB Comox and CFB Esquimalt, but they declined due to their busy schedules. To ensure DND and CAF participation, we are planning a follow up conference in Ottawa in collaboration with partners at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, and will extend targeted invitations to DND officials there.

### *THE NUMBER AND NAMES OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROJECT?*

The conference brought together **33 domestic and international experts from Canada, South Asia and East Asia** representing universities, research institutes, and policy organizations committed to advancing the study of nontraditional and human security across the Indo-Pacific.

## **DOMESTIC EXPERTS (CANADA):**

- Paul Evans (University of British Columbia)
- M. V. Ramana (University of British Columbia)
- Philippe Le Billon (University of British Columbia)
- Kai Ostwald (University of British Columbia)
- Sun Ryung Park (University of British Columbia / Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada; originally from South Korea)
- Athena Madan (University of Victoria)
- Neilesh Bose (University of Victoria)
- Andy Knight (University of Alberta)
- Rosalind Warner (Okanagan College)
- Sorpong Peou (Toronto Metropolitan University; Cambodian scholar)
- David Matijasevich (Capilano University)
- Bala Nikku (Thompson Rivers University; originally from India)
- Humayun Kabir (Thompson Rivers University)
- Terry Kading (Thompson Rivers University)
- Rick McCutcheon (Thompson Rivers University)
- Ji Young Lee-An (Thompson Rivers University)
- Manu Sharma (Thompson Rivers University)
- Paul Clark (Thompson Rivers University)
- Rob Hanlon (Thompson Rivers University)
- Saira Bano (Thompson Rivers University)
- Momo Begum (Thompson Rivers University)
- James Boutilier (Maritime Forces Pacific, Department of National Defence)
- David Drake (former Director General, Global Affairs Canada)
- Hasnat Johnson (Global Affairs Canada)
- Lauren Oats (Right to Learn – Afghanistan)

## **INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS:**

- Ajith Balasooriya (University of Colombo, Sri Lanka)
  - Bridget Welsh (University of Nottingham Malaysia)
  - Alvin Camba (Lyvi & Associated Universities Incorporated, United States / Philippines)
  - Qamar Cheema (Sanober Institute, Pakistan)
  - Himadrija Chakraborty (Visva-Bharati University, India)
  - Lynette H. Ong (University of Toronto; specialist in Chinese politics)
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## EMERGING GRADUATE RESEARCHERS:

- Gershon Adela (University of Calgary; originally from Ghana)
- Gurinder S. Purewal (Thompson Rivers University)
- Jannat Bhullar (Thompson Rivers University)
- Radhika Tabrez (Thompson Rivers University)

Collectively, these experts and emerging scholars enriched the dialogue on defence, diplomacy, and human security, bridging regional perspectives and advancing Canada's engagement with Indo-Pacific policy debates on nontraditional security.

## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

| <u>COST AREAS</u>  | <u>COST</u>  | <u>SOURCE OF FUNDING</u> |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| CATERING, VENUE AND SOUND SYSTEM                                 | \$14,269.38  | MINDS                    |
| FLIGHT AND HOTEL FOR 17 PARTICIPANTS                             | \$18,783.31  | MINDS                    |
| HOTEL FOR 4 PARTICIPANTS ON CAMPUS (CASH CONTRIBUTION)           | \$1,020  | CAPPP                    |
| GIFT BAGS FOR PARTICIPANTS (CASH CONTRIBUTIONS)                  | \$490 (\$14 X 35 PARTICIPANTS)                         | CAPPP                    |
| 3 RESEARCH ASSISTANT (CASH CONTRIBUTION)                         | \$900 (\$300 EACH)                                     | CAPPP                    |
| PROMOTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES (IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION) | \$1,250 (50 HOURS DEDICATED ADMINISTRATOR X \$25/HOUR) | CAPPP                    |

## ✦ *MEDIA INTERACTION*

The conference was widely promoted and disseminated through multiple institutional and public channels to reach academic, policy, and community audiences. It was **advertised on the CAPPP (Canada and the Asia Pacific Policy Project) website CAPPP Conference Announcement** and featured on the **Thompson Rivers University news portal TRU Conference Feature**.

In addition to these formal announcements, the event was **livestreamed** to allow broader participation from scholars, students, policymakers, and the public. It was also **shared and promoted across TRU and CAPPP's social media outlets**, including Twitter/X, LinkedIn, and Facebook, which extended outreach beyond the in-person audience and fostered engagement from partners across Canada, South Asia, and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

These dissemination efforts not only amplified the visibility of the project but also furthered the **public policy dialogue on Canada's Indo-Pacific engagement**, ensuring that the conference findings and discussions contributed to ongoing debates surrounding nontraditional security and defence policy priorities.

## ✦ *PUBLICATIONS*

Two special issue journals will be published as key outcomes of this project to extend the reach and policy relevance of the conference findings. The first special issue will appear in the **Centre for Military and Strategic Studies Journal (CMSS Journal)** and will focus on Canada's engagement with nontraditional security threats and defence policy challenges in the Indo-Pacific. The second special issue will be published in **The Asian Journal of Peacebuilding**, featuring regional perspectives on human security, resilience, and cooperative security.

Both publications will include peer-reviewed articles developed from conference papers and are scheduled for release by end of next year. Upon publication, **both special issues will be shared with the Department of National Defence (DND)** to ensure that the research insights contribute directly to ongoing policy discussions and to the advancement of Canada's defence and security engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.