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Editorial

Dear Readers!

The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) continues to offer research, parliamentary development, legislative, capacity building and public outreach initiatives anticipatedly as well as on demand. Being recognized as an international centre of excellence PIPS has been chosen with consensus in the founding Steering Committee of the Global Parliamentary Training Institutions Network at Inaugural Conference of such institutions hosted by Inter Parliamentary Union, (IPU), Parliament of Ghana and Center of Parliamentary Studies and Training, Kenya, on March 23-24, 2026 at Accra, Ghana.

The inaugural meeting attended by 17 Heads and Representatives of parliamentary training schools also decided that PIPS will host the 2nd Conference of Global Parliamentary Training Institutes Network in February, 2027. PIPS has also been contributing its professional input in deliberations at the high level working committee of the National Assembly of Pakistan on Digital Parliament and AI Integration Initiative as envisioned by Honorable Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan.

This March 2026 Issue of the PIPS Parliamentary Research Digest includes absorbing write-ups on US-Israel War in ME, Role of Parliaments in the Age of AI and Effective Committee Inquiries in addition to Communique Adopted by the Inaugural Global Parliamentary Training Institutes Conference at Accra, Ghana on March 24, 2026. The Issue also includes an imperative Senate of Pakistan Resolution condemning ceasefire violation in Gaza, regional destabilization and expansionism attempts by Israel.

We wish our Readers a Blissful Eid Ul Fitr with prayers that May the auspicious occasion bring affections, peace and contentment for every household of Pakistan, ameen. Please feel free to send your feedback and/or contact the Team for any of our services at research@pips.gov.pk

Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka
Director General (Research)



March 24, 2026: PIPS Executive Director Mr. Asim Khan Goraya delivering speech at Inaugural Conference of Global Parliamentary Training Institutions held in Accra Ghana.

PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS

Senate of Pakistan Resolution

Condemning Israeli Atrocities and Violations of Ceasefire Agreement in Gaza

**RESOLUTION NO. 603**

“The Senate of Pakistan,

Condemns in the strongest possible terms the Israeli occupying power’s continued violations of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, along-with Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu’s statement on 22nd February, 2026 regarding Israel’s intention to forge a regional alliance comprising of India and other countries to counter radical Shia axis and emerging radical Sunni axis and as well as its blatant disregard of international law, the UN Charter, relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well as the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ);

Takes strong exception to the vile proclivity of the leadership of the Israeli occupying power towards diminishing the unity and integrity of Muslim Ummah on political and ideological grounds;

Rejects any attempt by the Israeli occupying power to change the legal or historical status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the status of the holy sites; enforce any new legal and administrative reality in the occupied territory, especially the Occupied West Bank; expand its illegal settlement activities in the occupied territory, and encourage settler violence; or forcibly displace Palestinians from their land;

Deplors and condemns the continued provocative steps and statements by the leadership of Israel that threatens the regional and international peace and stability, including the latest statement that expresses its intention to forge so-called “alliances” against Muslim nations and its unholy alliance with India / Fitna tul Khawarij / Fitna tul Hindustan;

Condemns any attempts by Israel to undermine the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of brotherly Islamic countries and rejects, in this regard, the announcement made by Israel recognising the independence of the so-called Somaliland region of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Urges the international community to end Israeli impunity and to hold it accountable for its crimes against humanity, as well as its provocative actions that pose a threat to all regional countries;

Demands full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, increased, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian assistance to the beleaguered Palestinians in Gaza, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), as well as an early start of the recovery and reconstruction process in Gaza;

-2-

Reaffirms historic and unwavering support of the people of Pakistan for the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and for the establishment of an independent, viable, and contiguous State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital."

Moved by Senator Palwasha Mohammad Zai Khan on her own behalf and on behalf of Senators Raja Nasir Abbas (*Leader of the Opposition*), Mohammad Abdul Qadir, Shahadat Awan, Khalida Ateeb, Saleem Mandviwalla, Zamir Hussain Ghumro, Husna Bano, Dr. Afnan Ullah Khan, Rubina Qaim Khani, Kamran Murtaza, Dost Ali Jeesar, Hamid Khan, Abdul Shakoor Khan, Syed Masroor Ahsan, Poonjo Bheel, Abid Sher Ali, Nasir Mehmood, Rahat Jamali, Haji Hidayatullah Khan, Sherry Rehman, Jan Muhammad, Muhammad Talha Mahmood, Mohammad Humayun Mohmand, Syed Waqar Mehdi, Danesh Kumar, Kamil Ali Agha, Niaz Ahmed, Syed Kazim Ali Shah, Azam Nazeer Tarar and Nadeem Ahmed Bhutto Unanimously Passed by the House on Tuesday, the 24th February, 2026.

ANALYSIS

US-Israeli war on Iran 2026

Fakiha Mahmood
Deputy Director (Research), PIPS

1. Introduction

The US military buildup around Iran which began in late December 2025 culminated into a full-scale war on February 28, 2026 with the launch of US-Israel joint military offensive against Iran. On the very first day of war, US Tomahawk missile targeted a girls' school in Minab Iran which killed 168 civilians, majority among them teenage girls. Within a day or two, the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was killed as a result of the Israeli missile attack on Tehran building complex which also killed several other senior Iranian civilian and military leaders.¹ As of March 31, US struck more than 11,000 targets in Iran.² Estimates suggest that the war cost US more than \$11.3 billion only in first six days. Moreover, Pentagon has reportedly requested White House to earmark \$200 billion for supplemental request. The amount would serve to assist munitions refill, replacing lost military equipment, fuel costs, as well military personnel remuneration among others.³

Iran decried the US attack carried out amid bilateral talks and responded with sustained missile and drone attacks on Israel as well as US military facilities across the Gulf region. The Iranian government denounced the attacks as sheer violation of the Charter of the United Nations and invoked its right to self-defense as long as the war continues. Since the launch of US-Israel attacks, Iran has hit Israel and US forces in counter-strikes in neighboring Arab states including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Iraq, and Jordan. Figure-1 below presents the number of drone and missile attacks on four Gulf countries most impacted by the Iranian attacks including Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and UAE. Moreover, table-1 below presents the statistical snapshot of the total casualties and injuries from the war across the region.

Though Iran has suffered the most in this war in terms of live lost and infrastructure damaged, the country has inflicted heavy damage on US facilities across the region as well Israel which has come under direct Iranian attacks. Some of the civilian infrastructure including ports, airports and hotels in the Gulf also came under Iranian attacks. Though the Gulf countries have so far adopted the policy of strategic restraint amid escalation, the situation is extremely delicate which can blow up to become a much wider conflict. While most of Iranian drones and missiles fired towards the Gulf countries have been intercepted, Lebanon has become actual theater of war beyond Iran in the wake of Israeli aggression following Hezbollah attacks of Israel since 02 March 2026. The most significant impact outside the military domain emerged in the form of de facto closure of the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz which is the entry and exit point for all marine traffic in the Gulf region. Almost 20% of the world's oil supply is carried out from this choke point.

Sr. no.	Country/occupying power	Killed	Injured
1.	Iran	1,937	24,800
2.	Israel (occupying power)	20	6,008
3.	US soldiers	13	200
4.	Bahrain	3	Dozens
5.	Iraq	100	Dozens
6.	Jordan	0	29
7.	Kuwait	7	Dozens
8.	Lebanon	1,238	3,543

¹ Clayton Thomas, Christopher M. Blanchard, Jeremy M. Sharp, Jim Zanotti, "US Conflict with Iran," *Congressional Research Service*, 26 March 2026.

² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2026/3/31/iran-war-live-kuwaiti-oil-tanker-hit-in-dubai-port-3-un-troops-killed>.

³ Clayton Thomas, Christopher M. Blanchard, Jeremy M. Sharp, Jim Zanotti, "US Conflict with Iran," op. cit.

9.	Oman	3	15
10.	Qatar	0	16
11.	Saudi Arabia	2	20

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/1/us-israel-attacks-on-iran-death-toll-and-injuries-live-tracker>, accessed 31 March 2026.

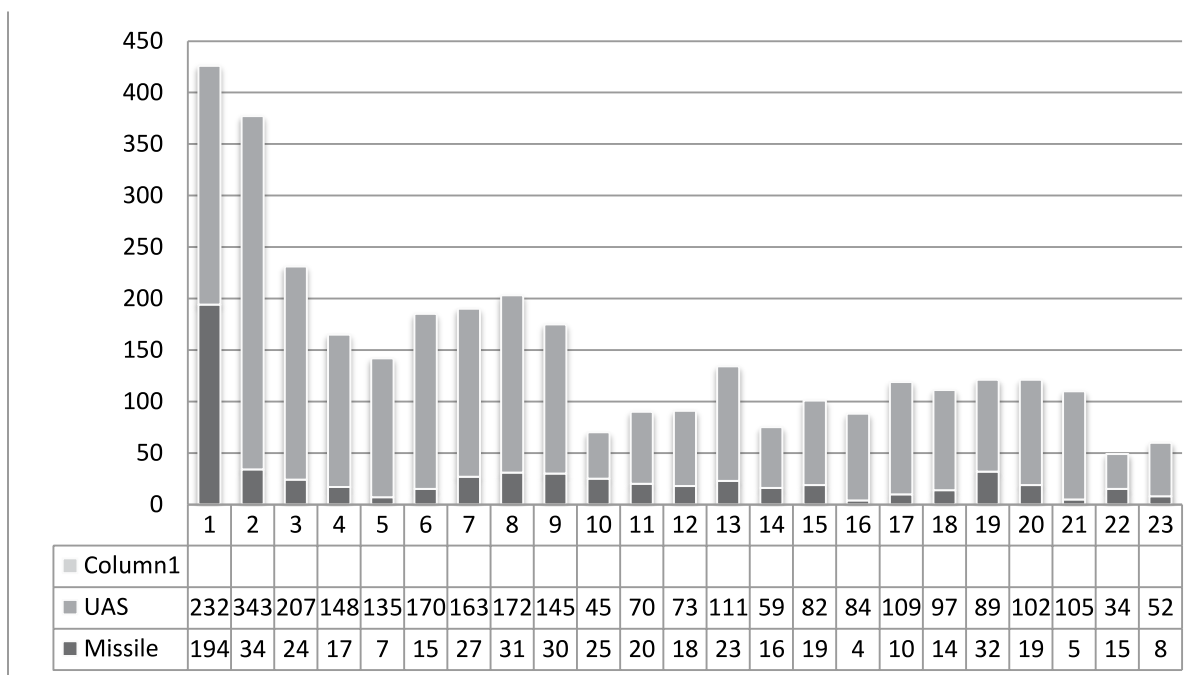


Figure-1: Un-crewed Aircraft System (UAS) and Missile detections or interceptions by Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE⁴

2. Us-Israeli War on Iran and International Law

The US-Israeli aggression against Iran finds no place in the international legal framework. Article 2(4) of the Charter of the UN explicitly prohibits the use or threat to use force against another state without the authorization of the Security Council which comes only in case a state breaches international peace. Though Article 51 allows the use of force for self-defense, this is justified only in case of an armed attack. Iran did not use military force against US or Israel when the war began, nor did the Middle Eastern country threatened to use force against any of them. While one of the stated US objectives of this war is regime change in Iran, the same cannot be legitimized under the international law. Moreover, the pretext of Iran developing nuclear weapons has been shattered from the US Defense Intelligence 2025 assessment as well the IAEA reports. Furthermore, this argument seems hollow in the backdrop of the US attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities in 12 days' Israeli war on Iran in 2025. The US President claimed to have obliterated the Iranian nuclear capabilities through these attacks.⁵

While the US and Israel have announced with utmost pride the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei supposed to usher in regime change in Iran, the international humanitarian law considers such extrajudicial killing of a civilian leader as nothing short of a war crime. It only added to the list of war crimes which began on the very

⁴ The figure includes data from day 1 to 23. Data for days 1 and 2 include Bahrain and UAE, Saudi Arabia incorporated from day 3 and Kuwait from day 7. In this data cruise and ballistic missiles are grouped as single category. Data source: Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Assessing the air campaign after three weeks: Iran war by the numbers," <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessing-air-campaign-after-three-weeks-iran-war-numbers>, accessed 01 April 2026.

⁵ Susan M. Akram, "The legality of attacking Iran," *The US-Israel war on Iran: analysis and perspectives*, 02 March 2026, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-us-israel-war-on-iran-analyses-and-perspectives/>.

first day of the war when US attacked a girls' school in Minab Iran resulting in the killing of 168 civilians mostly teenage girls.

Furthermore, the US has faced backlash from the international community for waging this unnecessary war of choice. For instance, Spain openly denounced the US for the war waged in sheer violation of the international law. Despite being a NATO member, Spain denied the use of its military bases and airspace for operating against Iran.⁶ Similarly, the UK has refused to be dragged into the Iran war.⁷ The US-Israeli war on Iran has culminated into some of the largest protests across the US where millions of people joined the "No Kings" rallies to disapprove the US war on Iran among other agendas. Organizers of the "No Kings" movement reported registering more than 3100 events across 50 states of the US as millions took to the streets to denounce the US war on Iran.⁸ As the push to end the war grows from all sides, diplomatic quarters have begun finding ways to the conflict through peaceful means. Pakistan hosted foreign ministers from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkiye on 29 March 2026, as the South Asian country gained traction for its potentially crucial role in defusing the tensions in the Middle East.⁹

3. The Pursuit of "Greater Israel" Project

While the US has shifted rhetoric on the aims and objectives of its attack on Iran ranging from regime change to weakening Iranian nuclear and missile capabilities as well as barring the country from supporting resistance movements against Israeli occupation forces. The general impression emerging from the sequence of war on Iran is that the war is actually an Israeli pursuit and US has been made to enter the arena through intimidation and blackmailing. And Israeli objective in the whole sequence of developments in the Middle East from Gaza to Lebanon and beyond seems the pursuit of "Greater Israel" project. "Greater Israel" is an extreme Zionist idea which espouses the establishment of Jewish state on territories much beyond the current Israeli location and encompassing Gaza, the West Bank, parts of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan. It envisions a political entity stretching from the Nile River in Egypt to the Euphrates River in Iraq. The concept retains religious connotation for the fact that it hinges on biblical promises of the Land of Israel to the Jewish people. In the modern setting it is a fanatic idea which espouses territorial expansion through the use of brute force with utter disregard to the rule of international law and customs and threatens the very international peace and stability especially in the Middle Eastern region.¹⁰

3.1. Restrictions on freedom of worship in occupied Jerusalem

Alongside the launch of full scale war on Iran, Israel restricted entry to the Muslim sacred site in Jerusalem including the Al-Aqsa Mosque. At the time of the writing of this paper, more than a month passed since Israel blocked access to Al-Aqsa mosque including during the holy Month of Ramazan. Israel did so in continuation of its earlier practice of complete disregard to the international law. The area amounting to 144 dunams including Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al-Sharif is under the exclusive jurisdiction of Jerusalem Endowments and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department, a conglomerate of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.¹¹ Israel has further expanded its restrictions to the religious sites with the imposition of restrictions on the entry to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, and the

⁶ Reuters, "Spain closes airspace to US planes involved in Iran war, defence minister says," 30 March 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/spain-closes-airspace-us-planes-involved-iran-war-el-pais-says-2026-03-30/>.

⁷ Becky Morton, "UK will seek closer ties with EU in light of Iran war, Starmer says," BBC, 01 April 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6216w03lwzo>.

⁸ "Anger over Iran adds fuel to anti-Trump 'No Kings' protest across US," 29 March 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/no-kings-protest-u-s-trump-9.7145895>.

⁹ Osama Bin Javed, "Pakistan hosts four-nation bid to encourage US, Iran towards diplomacy," 29 March 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/29/pakistan-hosts-four-nation-bid-to-encourage-us-iran-towards-diplomacy>.

¹⁰ Hind Azby, "Greater Israel: from extreme ideology to dangerous political mission," *Vienna International Institute for Middle East Studies*, 14 September 2025, https://viimes.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/ResearchFellow_Article5_21September2025.pdf.

¹¹ "Joint Statement on the Continued Restrictions Imposed by Israel on the Freedom of Worship for Christian and Muslims," by Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Indonesia, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, 31 March 2026.

Custos of the Holy Land, Father Francesco Elbo, were denied entry to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the occasion of the Palm Sunday Mass.¹² For the first time in centuries, the Christian community is facing access to its holy sites in Jerusalem. The area which remained under the Muslim political control never witnessed such restrictions over the course of centuries. Even after the episode of Crusades, Muslims provided full access to the religious entities.

3.2. Un-relenting Genocide in Gaza and occupation of West Bank

The Israeli genocide in Gaza continues unabated as the occupying power continues to violate the ceasefire agreed under the US patronage. By the close of March 2026, more than 72,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza while more than 172,000 have been injured. Israel has been consolidating its power in the war devastated Gaza and restricting the entry of commercial trucks as well as humanitarian assistance to make life difficult for Palestinians. The US-led Board of Peace has so far talked little about Gaza reconstruction and focused more on demilitarization of Hamas and destruction of underground tunnels and military infrastructure. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank is also continuing alongside increasing settler attacks which culminate into killings, injuries, and damage to Palestinian property. Figure-2 below depicts the growing trend of Israeli settlers' violence in the West Bank.

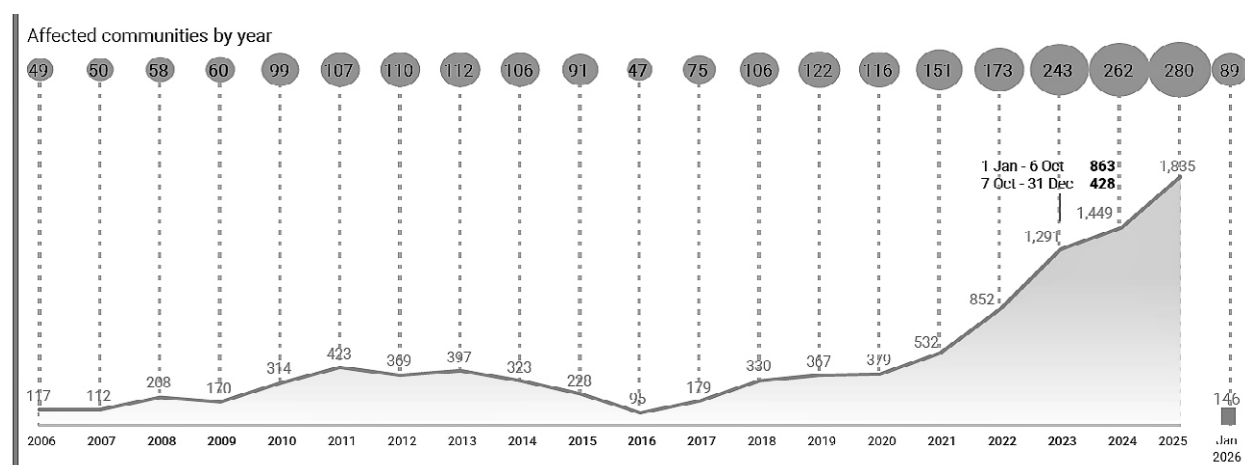


Figure-2: Attacks by Israeli Settlers against Palestinians that resulted in casualties and/or property damage

Source: UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "West Bank monthly snapshot - Casualties, property damage, and displacement, January 2026," 19 March 2026, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-monthly-snapshot-casualties-property-damage-and-displacement-january-2026>.

The Israeli pursuit of occupation is not limited to the military sphere, the occupying power utilizes every available avenue to consolidate its power and find ways to inflict damage and increase killings. While the world is captivated by the situation arising out of the war on Iran, the Israeli so-called parliament passed the law on 30 March 2026 to ensure death penalty for Palestinians sentenced in military courts for deadly attacks. The law is specifically for Palestinians and spares Israelis convicted of similar crimes. The law authorizes execution by hanging within 90 days of conviction. The widely criticized law has been passed in a community which abolished death penalty as far back as 1954.¹³

3.3. Incursions into Lebanon

Following Hezbollah's missile attacks on Israel since 02 March 2026 the theater of war has expanded into the Lebanese territory as Israel launched airstrikes in the country and began ground offensive in the border areas. Following Israeli evacuation orders, more than 112,000 Lebanese citizens have been displaced as a result of the renewed conflict. Israel has also damaged strategically vital infrastructure including bridge on the Litani River.

¹² "The OIC condemns Israel – the occupying power – for preventing the Latin Patriarch from entering the Church of Holy Sepulchre in occupied Al-Quds," <https://new.oic-oci.org/SitePages/NewsDetail.aspx?Item=3404>.

¹³ Mayaan Lubell and Pasha Magid, "Israel passes death penalty law for Palestinians convicted of lethal attacks," Reuters, 30 March 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-death-penalty-bill-palestinian-murder-convicts-faces-vote-2026-03-30/>.

While Israel has repeatedly conducted airstrikes in Lebanon even after the ceasefire agreement concluded soon after the beginning of war in Gaza, it seems that the current Israeli offensive is aimed at occupying the parts of Lebanon under the guise of the ongoing war. Israeli defense minister has pointed towards creating Gaza like situation in Lebanese villages along the border. Israeli officials have been hinting at creating a deep security one in southern Lebanon. Reports point to potential Israeli expansion into the Lebanese territory at least up to the Litani River. To accomplish its task in Lebanon, Israel has called up around 100,000 reservists and concentrated four armored divisions including 60,000 troops along the 79km border with Lebanon. Israeli army has already begun demolishing residential structures in border villages.¹⁴

4. Global Economic Shocks amid Strait of Hormuz Crisis

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most significant choke points of the world. It is a narrow maritime passage which separates the Arabian Peninsula from Iran and joins the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The Strait is only 29 nautical miles wide (54 km) at its narrowest point and comprises of 2-mile-wide navigable channels (3.7 km) for incoming and outgoing maritime traffic and a 2-mile-wide buffer zone. Around 20 million barrels per day of crude oil and oil products were recorded to have passed from this Strait last year. The significance of this choke point rests in the fact that 25% of the global maritime oil trade is conducted from this waterway for which there are limited or no options of bypassing. The Middle Eastern region is home to no less than 30% of world crude oil production, 75% of standby crude oil production capacity, and almost 11% of refining capacity.¹⁵

Though Saudi Arabia and UAE have some alternative to this Strait, other Gulf countries like Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain primarily conduct oil trade from this waterway. Moreover, alongside the oil, natural gas has been gaining traction in the global economy. The closure of Strait of Hormuz means disruption in 20% of global LNG exports from Qatar (93%) and the UAE (96%) which passes from this vital choke point. While the UAE exported 7 bcm LNG in 2025, Qatar stands out as the world’s second largest LNG exporter with total LNG exports recorded at 112 bcm in 2025. Any disruption to the flow of maritime traffic from the Strait of Hormuz directly affects the global energy markets irrespective of the main destination of energy products which pass through this choke point. Following the US-Israel attack on Iran, the country announced the closure of this vital Strait resulting into the abrupt halt to the maritime traffic.¹⁶

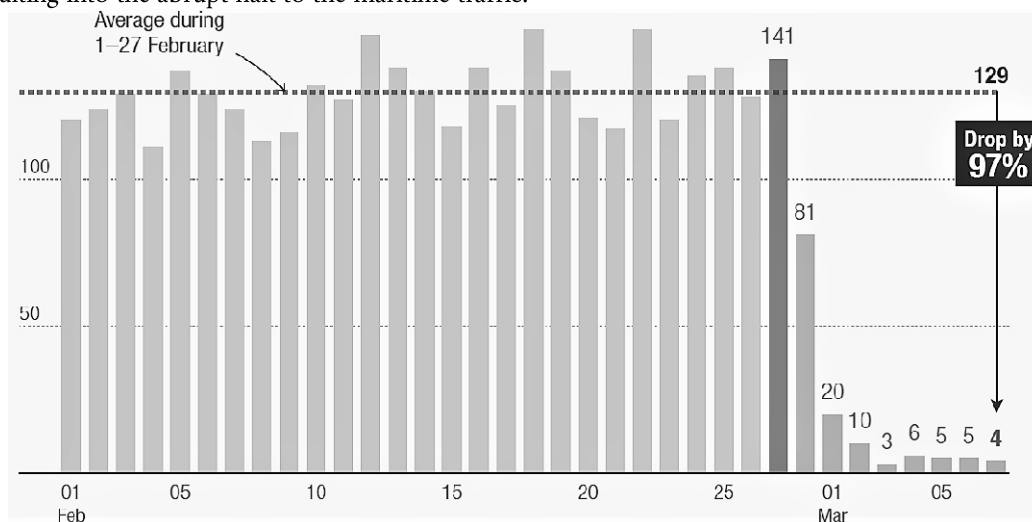


Figure-3: Total number of daily ship transits through Strait of Hormuz

Source: UNCTAD, “Strait of Hormuz Disruptions: implications for global trade and development,” 10 March 2026.

¹⁴ Heiko Wimmen, David Wood, and Max Rodenbeck, “Where is the Israel-Hezbollah war going?” *International Crisis Group*, 20 March 2026, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/qna/middle-east-north-africa/lebanon-Israelpalestine/where-israel-hizbollah-war-going>.

¹⁵ Michael Ratner, Phillip Brown, and Liana W. Rosen, “Iran conflict and the Strait of Hormuz: impacts on oil, gas and other commodities,” *Congressional Research Service*, 11 March 2026.

¹⁶ International Energy Agency, “Strait of Hormuz Factsheet,” February 2026, <https://www.iea.org/about/oil-security-and-emergency-response/strait-of-hormuz>.

As countries scrambled to ensure uninterrupted supply of oil and gas, the obvious result of the disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz was the increase in energy prices. The crude oil price increased from \$65 per barrel to cross the \$100 per barrel mark in the wake of the Middle East situation.¹⁷ Similar fate awaits the natural gas as well as other commodities. As a result of the unprecedented crisis in the global energy markets in the wake of US-Israeli war on Iran, many governments across the world have introduced emergency measures to protect consumers in their country from the global energy price shocks. Moreover, many governments around the world have introduced different emergency energy conservation measures including:

- i. **Work from home:** mandatory remote work or encouragement to do the same (Cambodia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam).
- ii. **Cooling:** temperature limits of air conditioners (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand).
- iii. **Government travel:** limit air and road travel by public officials (Cambodia, Egypt, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam).
- iv. **Schools and universities:** close or limit opening times (Bangladesh, Egypt, Lao PDR, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka).
- v. **Campaign:** ask or mandate consumers to limit energy demand (Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Lao PDR, Maldives, Mauritius, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam).
- vi. **Transport:** limit vehicle use, ration fuel, lower speed limits, promote public transport (Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, Cambodia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam).¹⁸

5. Conclusion

The US-Israeli war, which finds no justification under the international law, has opened up yet another chapter of conflict, destruction, killings, and chaos in an already fragile world. From Gaza to Iran and from Iraq to Saudi Arabia, the entire Middle Eastern region is ragging under the flames of war. Even the affluent countries of the region which offered a glimmer of hope for sustainable socio-economic development have been forced to enter into the orbit of war and catastrophe. The effects of this war are being felt across the world from the top leadership hierarchy to an average household struggling to cope with the rising inflation. While the efforts to de-escalate the situation are ongoing and fortunately Pakistan has been playing an important role in this regard, even if the ceasefire is agreed anytime soon, the situation would not return to normal so easily.

While the concepts like greater Israel do provide theoretical foundation for understanding the behavior of the Israeli occupying power, it seems that the Zionists have an inherent and peculiar thirst for bloodshed, chaos and destruction which they continue to inflict on different people from time to time. And this desire for human catastrophe outside the Jewish sphere is closely entwined with the sense of superiority above any non-Jewish rule, custom or law which is aptly demonstrated in Israel's behavior characterized with complete impunity towards the international law. Last but not the least, International legal order seems toothless in the face of this daunting challenge, only time will tell if this madness could be stopped from any side any time soon.

¹⁷ See for example data on: <https://tradingeconomics.com/commodity/crude-oil>.

¹⁸ IEA, "2026 Energy Crisis Policy Response Tracker," 31 March 2026, <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/data-tools/2026-energy-crisis-policy-response-tracker>.

ANALYSIS

From Misinformation to Harmony: The Role of Parliaments in the Age of AI

Tehseen Khalid
Director (Research), PIPS

1. Introduction:

The elected members of Parliament play a crucial role in protecting democratic processes, promoting accountability, and increasing transparency. Consequently, Parliaments world over are the principled institutions for maintaining harmonious and peaceful societies by upholding the rule of law and fostering public trust.

The spread of misinformation and disinformation¹ is as old as democracy itself. In recent years the emergence of new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) has added a new layer of complexity to the challenge of combatting disinformation. AI-generated deepfakes² and synthetic media³ have rapidly emerged as a powerful tool to develop hyper-realistic yet fabricated images, audios, and videos, making it difficult for the average viewer to distinguish between authentic and fabricated media. This digital forgery employs highly advanced techniques such as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and autoencoders, making it increasingly difficult for the average person to distinguish from authentic media. The synthetic media and AI possess immense creative potential, and their misuse can pose significant societal risks, ranging from identity theft and personal exploitation to the profound undermining of democratic processes. Deepfake content is rising at an increasingly dangerous rate across the globe. It is estimated that by 2026, almost 90 percent of online content may be synthetically generated.⁴

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence in the political sphere threatens democratic foundations. No matter it offers transformative opportunities for administrative efficiency, it is also facilitating the production of deepfakes and synthetic disinformation at an industrial scale. The rise of generative AI has made role of Parliaments in building peaceful societies all the more challenging as it has become race against time. This technological shift demands that the parliaments proactively manage risks of AI-generated deepfakes and misinformation to prevent the destabilization of social cohesion through legislation and introducing multilayered cyber security for the country and society at large.

2. AI Acceleration and vulnerabilities in CPA Asia and South East Asia:

The AI industry in Southeast Asia is growing significantly, owing to increased digital adoption among young people, government efforts, a strong startup ecosystem, and the promotion of digital economies based on cross-border investment and regional collaboration. The figure below compares the top AI markets in 2025 to the United States, China, and the European Union, demonstrating that Southeast Asia stands out for its AI acceleration. Southeast Asia's AI sector, currently valued at roughly \$4 billion, is predicted to grow more than fourfold by 2033 (to US \$17.23 billion).⁵

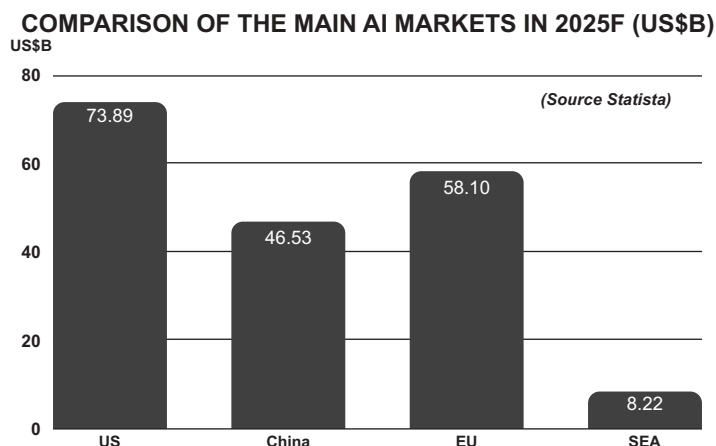
¹ Disinformation means the intentional creation and/or dissemination of false or misleading online content. It can include images, videos, audios, etc.

² Deepfake is an audio or image, etc., in which a person's face, body, or voice is intentionally altered using digital tools, typically for malicious purposes.

³ AI-generated content is commonly known as synthetic media.

⁴ Jana Kazaz. "Regulating Deepfakes: Global Approaches to Combatting AI-Driven Manipulation," Policy Paper, Centre for Democracy & Resilience, 2024, 2.

⁵ *Source of Asia*, "Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Southeast Asia 2025-2026," Source of Asia, September 5, 2025, accessed January 5, 2026, <https://www.sourceofasia.com/ai-in-southeast-asia-2025-2026/>



Source: **Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Southeast Asia 2025-2026 by Source of Asia**

However, this rapid acceleration occurs alongside significant vulnerabilities to digital manipulation. Asia and Southeast Asia are not an exception to such vulnerabilities. In the 2024 elections in **India**, the deepfakes were widely created to clone voices of candidates and create hologram avatars during political campaigns. Concurrently, various social media platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube were used to spread misinformation and falsely announce candidate boycotts.⁶ A deepfake video of the **Malaysian** president was found to be linked with a fraudulent investment scam, which was an attempt to undermine the image of a public figure.⁷ During the 2024 general elections in **Pakistan**, political actors used generative AI to circumvent campaign restrictions, such as creating AI-generated speeches for imprisoned leaders. Conversely, the cycle was marred by malicious deepfakes and audio messages deployed to spread misinformation and falsely announce candidate boycotts. Official police statements from **Sri Lanka** indicate cases of digital harassment and deepfake content targeting women politicians. According to reports online, sexual harassment complaints increased from 182 in 2021 to 625 in 2024 and 365 in the first five months of 2025.⁸ The 2023 parliamentary elections in **Slovakia** were expected to produce predictable results, but public expectations moved radically after a deepfake audio was extensively disseminated by political rivals. In this case a short video of 2.13 minutes undermined the massive election campaign worth millions of dollars and several weeks of preparation. The voters' turn away from Progressive Slovakia was massive, pushing the party to the Opposition benches.⁹

3. Emergent Threats with the rise of deepfakes and misinformation

The AI has revolutionized information sharing and political discourse. However, AI-driven phenomena of misinformation, disinformation, and deepfakes have the potential to undermine democratic values and social harmony.

- a. **The Liar's Dividend:** Synthetic disinformation poses serious threats to democracy, including the liar's dividend. This happens when a skeptical public becomes aware of the existence of deepfakes and begins to doubt genuine evidence. Malicious actors can then dismiss real recordings of wrongdoing as "fake," thereby avoiding consequences and evading accountability.¹⁰
- b. **Hyper-Personalized Micro-targeting:** AI algorithms can scan vast datasets to deliver tailored, often offensive, messaging to specific demographic groups, restricting their viewpoints to a certain

⁶ Kazaz, "Regulating Deepfakes."

⁷ "PDRM Found Deepfake Videos Of Anwar Ibrahim Linked To Scams," https://www.reddit.com/r/malaysia/comments/1j9jntv/pdrm_found_deepfake_videos_of_anwar_ibrahim/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁸ "Deepfakes, disinformation and defiance," CIR, November 15, 2025, https://cir.lk/deepfakes-disinformation-and-defiance/?utm_source

⁹ "The role of AI-generated disinformation in elections," CIR, December 23, 2025, https://cir.lk/the-role-of-ai-generated-disinformation-in-elections/?utm_source

¹⁰ CPA, *Parliamentary Handbook on Disinformation, AI and Synthetic Media* (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Organization of American States, 2023).

- ideology. This creates "echo chambers" that perpetuate ideological gaps and hinder the consensus-building necessary for a stable and peaceful society.¹¹
- c. **Algorithmic Bias:** AI models have the potential to amplify existing societal prejudices, particularly against women and minorities. In South Asia, research suggests that AI tools can perpetuate patriarchy by disproportionately excluding women from political engagement, as happened in the case of Sri Lanka.
 - d. **Scalability:** AI can create rapid, large-scale disinformation, producing text and synthetic media with minimal human intervention. Once the AI model is trained, it can endlessly produce variations of content, including personalized deepfakes. This scalability can increase the volume of disinformation, allowing new actors to spread false content, overwhelming governments, social media platforms, and fact-checkers.¹²
 - e. **Threats to politics and national Security:** AI-generated deepfakes and digital manipulation can have detrimental effects on politics, especially during elections and in public life. Voters' preferences may shift as a result of skewed perceptions about candidates. Fake media can be created to show politicians saying or doing things they never did. It can alter facial expressions, replace faces, manipulate voices, and synthesize speeches, all of which can pose risks for persons and erode public trust. It can also jeopardize national security by distorting public perception, fueling polarization, and undermining trust in state institutions, particularly in societies that have little AI literacy.
 - f. **Open Access creation tools:** Deepfakes and synthetic media can be easily created using freely accessible tools, requiring little or no technical expertise to make and spread the content, making it easier for malicious actors to exploit it to their maximum potential and erode public trust of parliaments, government institutions, and public figures.
 - g. **Two-edged Sword:** An important aspect of AI-generated fake media is that it is hard to defend against. The widespread availability of deepfake creation tools, along with the rapid advancement of technology, makes detection and defense difficult, allowing misinformation to spread quickly through social media, thereby endangering democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.
 - h. **The Delicate Balance freedom of expression and combatting Misinformation:** Maintaining a delicate balance between freedom of expression and combating misinformation is a complex challenge. While individuals have the right to share their ideas freely, manipulated content spreading dependency and hate speech is posing serious consequences to societal harmony. It can erode public trust, cause damage to personal reputations, and pose a threat to democratic institutions. Parliamentarians should focus on maintaining this delicate balance while developing strategy or regulations for combatting synthetic media, including deepfakes. This necessitates a well-balanced, ethical, and careful approach, as this has become a global phenomenon. Strong international cooperation is required with multi-stakeholder engagement, each contributing to the task.

4. Mitigation Strategies for AI-generated deepfakes and misinformation

Around 57 countries across the globe have initiated parliamentary action on AI policy.¹³ The European Union has adopted a comprehensive regulatory framework in the form of **the EU AI Act**. The Act addresses risks associated with AI, including AI, by classifying AI systems into four risk-based categories: unacceptable, high, limited, and minimal. Deepfakes are generally treated as limited-risk systems and are subjected to transparency and disclosure requirements, while deepfakes related to elections and political processes are classified as high-risk AI systems, particularly where they pose a threat to the integrity of democratic processes. The **G7 Hiroshima AI Process**, initiated in May 2023, was a significant move in the global governance of AI, where the G7 leaders adopted 'International Guiding Principles for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems' and a corresponding voluntary 'Code of Conduct for AI Developers.' These frameworks guide multi-stakeholder organizations in responsibly developing AI and using advanced AI through a risk-based approach, keeping in view transparency, governance, ethics, and security across the AI lifecycle, while also remaining adaptable as technology evolves.¹⁴

Across Asia and Southeast Asia, governments and parliaments are adopting regulatory approaches to address the risks posed by AI, especially deepfakes and misinformation. The **ASEAN guidelines on management of government information in combating fake news and disinformation in the media (2023)** provide a

¹¹ *Parliamentary Handbook on Disinformation* (2023).

¹² *Parliamentary Handbook on Disinformation* (2023).

¹³ IPU, "Parliamentary Actions on AI Policy," Last updated on October 25, 2025, https://www.ipu.org/impact/democracy-and-strong-parliaments/artificial-intelligence/parliamentary-actions-ai-policy?utm_source

¹⁴ CPA, *Parliamentary Handbook on Disinformation*.

regional framework to enable governments in Southeast Asia to manage and disseminate official information to counter the harmful effects of fake news and disinformation.

- a. **China** is amongst the top countries that is systematically regulating AI technology from an early stage by a comprehensive framework, “Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis of Internet Information Services,” enforced in 2024. China’s approach mandates the “clear labeling” of all AI-generated content with a watermark or textual indication. Platforms are obligated to verify algorithms and authenticate users.¹⁵
- b. In East Asia, **Taiwan** has taken a targeted criminal law approach by criminalizing the use of deepfakes in fraud cases with penalties of up to seven years imprisonment and fines up to NT\$1 million (approximately US\$32,462).¹⁶
- c. In South Asia, **India** currently relies on the Information Technology Act, 2000, for cyber offenses.¹⁷ However, parliamentary committees and government agencies are actively studying AI risks, particularly for elections, online abuse, and fraud. Several bills and proposals have been introduced to establish an AI regulatory authority. However, there is currently no law that explicitly criminalizes synthetic media.¹⁸
- d. The existing legal framework of **Pakistan** is of the pre-AI era. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 addresses cyber offenses such as fraud, impersonation, and defamation, while the Pakistan Election Act 2017 regulates the electoral process. However, neither statute explicitly addresses artificial intelligence, synthetic media, deepfakes, or data-driven micro-targeting in political campaigns. Pakistan has developed the National Artificial Intelligence Policy (2025), which benchmarks ethical guidelines, cybersecurity protocols, and regulatory sandboxes for an AI ecosystem in the country. But this policy lacks binding legal authority for electoral oversight. **Bangladesh** does not have deepfake-specific legislation as existing digital and cyber laws are being used to address AI-driven misinformation and synthetic media. Similarly, **Maldives** also needs to develop explicit statutory provisions on AI and generative technologies.
- e. In Southeast Asia, **Singapore** lacks a broader legislative framework. However, it has strengthened election integrity by prohibiting digitally manipulated content, including but not limited to deepfakes. In **Malaysia**, the Online Safety Act, regulates harmful online content, i.e., defamation, disinformation, fraud, and threats to public order, thereby providing a legal basis for talking about AI-generated deepfakes. In **Thailand** an ad hoc committee on considering and studying the control and promotion of the use of AI has been established. Similarly, a Senate Committee on Information, Communication, and Telecommunication Technology has been established. These committees are studying the implications of AI and generative technologies to recommend future legislative or policy frameworks.¹⁹
- f. In **Sri Lanka**, legal frameworks include cyberlaws and online safety legislation, but they do not currently include dedicated AI-specific provisions. The Parliament passed the Online Safety Act in 2024 to regulate harmful online content.

5. Way Forward

The rise of deepfakes and misinformation has started to affect the foundations of democracy, thereby requiring proactive oversight and regulation before it’s too late. Since the Asia and Southeast Asia regions have huge variation in policy action on combatting AI-generated misinformation, one size does not fit all. Even within a country, dealing with challenges and benefiting from opportunities in the digital era needs customized solutions. As custodians of people and vanguards of harmony, parliaments must move beyond aspirational policy to enforceable legislation. A set of prioritized recommendations for combatting deepfakes and misinformation are given below.

- i. **Strengthen Legal Framework:** Parliaments must review and strengthen existing legislation on data protection, cybersecurity, privacy, anti-discrimination, and electoral integrity for addressing the

¹⁵ Kazaz, “Regulating Deepfakes.”

¹⁶ “Taiwan amends criminal law to curb fraud using deepfakes,” *Focus Taiwan CAN English News*, May 16, 2023, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202305160024>

¹⁷ Sayobani Basu and Durga Priya Manda, “Generative Artificial Intelligence – India’s Attempt at Controlling ‘Deepfakes,’” *Chambers Expert Focus*, January 15, 2024, <https://www.chambers.com/legal-trends/controlling-deepfakes-in-india>

¹⁸ IPU, Parliamentary Actions on AI Policy,” Last updated on October 25, 2025, https://www.ipu.org/impact/democracy-and-strong-parliaments/artificial-intelligence/parliamentary-actions-ai-policy?utm_source

¹⁹ IPU, Parliamentary Actions on AI Policy,” Last updated on October 25, 2025, https://www.ipu.org/impact/democracy-and-strong-parliaments/artificial-intelligence/parliamentary-actions-ai-policy?utm_source

threats arising from deepfakes and other AI-enabled disinformation. The legal framework must explicitly criminalize deepfakes created with the malicious intent of targeting the democratic institutions. Deepfakes with identity thefts can also be covered in the existing criminal legislative frameworks.

- ii. **Criminalize Non-Consensual Exploitation and Defamation:** Deepfakes violating personal rights of individuals must be regulated. Parliaments must criminalize non-consensual AI-generated content, including photos, images, and videos, in order to safeguard individuals from exploitation. For example, the non-consensual deepfakes are covered in the UK's Online Safety Act, 2023, with the provision of their removal from the platforms.²⁰
- iii. **Enforce Mandatory Regulations to combat digitally manipulated content:** Parliaments must enforce mandatory regulations to combat deepfakes and digitally manipulated content. These can include clear & strict labeling, provenance standards, etc. for AI-generated media, embedding digital watermarks, and implementing a digital content verification system to ensure its authenticity. Regulations should mandate disclosure of AI training data sets and protect individuals, particularly from gender-based violence, harassment, and non-consensual manipulations. Parliaments can foster international cooperation to address cross-border threats, ensuring the perpetrators are held accountable.
- iv. **Enhance Parliamentary Oversight of Misinformation and deepfakes:** Parliaments can empower standing committees/ specialized committees or oversight mechanisms to scrutinize the development, deployment, and societal impact of deepfake technologies, including sector-specific risks. Moreover, the committees can be mandated to investigate and report on the existing cases of potential misuse of synthetic media and conduct public hearings with the intent of bringing legislative reforms. The committees/oversight mechanisms should scrutinize government preparedness and national AI strategies to ensure effective measures are in place to counter deepfakes, particularly in elections, public communication, and democratic processes.
- v. **Establish rules for the use of AI-generated political content:** Parliament must develop rules, codes of conduct, and regulatory frameworks governing the use of AI-generated political content, such as deepfakes and synthetic media, particularly during election campaigns. Such rules, once formulated, must be followed by all political parties.
- vi. **Promote Public awareness and media literacy:** Public awareness plays an important role in minimizing the spread of disinformation and mitigating the negative societal consequences of deepfake technology. Parliaments can help promote inclusive national dialogues and digital literacy campaigns to increase public awareness of deepfakes and AI-generated content and educate citizens on the "markers" of synthetic media, fostering a resilient and informed electorate. Pakistan can leverage the National AI policy to launch immediate initiatives, i.e., the establishment of a National AI fund to support and finance digital literacy and the responsible use of AI programs. Media literacy & public awareness can be strengthened through open parliament initiatives that engage citizens in understanding and identifying AI-generated content.
- vii. **Strengthen International Cooperation:** Parliaments can engage in inter-parliamentary and international cooperation to share best practices and develop common approaches. International organizations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, United Nations and regional bodies can play a key role in coordination efforts, especially for facilitating the exchange of best practices and providing technical expertise to governments for addressing deepfakes and AI-enabled disinformation.
- viii. **Foster Collaboration between stakeholders:** Parliaments can foster collaboration between government, civil society organizations, tech companies, media, academia, and experts to collaborate for combatting fake news and disinformation. Organizations can share data, information, and best practices to mitigate misinformation through effective action.
- ix. **Forge sustainable transnational partnerships for shared responsibility:** Most recently, solutions to AI have been integrated into larger AI governance efforts at the international, national, and stakeholder levels. These frameworks range from legally enforceable rules like the EU AI Act to voluntary initiatives like the G7 Hiroshima Principles and ASEAN guidelines. Such efforts seek to strike a balance between risk reduction and the preservation of democratic norms and human rights. Legislators can scale up their efforts to find ways to encourage collaborations and partnerships with other countries for working toward unifying AI governance standards and establishing frameworks to bridge the global AI investment gap.

²⁰ Kazaz, "Regulating Deepfakes."

- x. **Establish Reporting Mechanism and Partner with Fact-checking organizations:** Parliaments can establish a dedicated reporting mechanism/platform for suspected disinformation, such as a hotline or helpline or government-run online portal. Government can also partner with independent fact-checking organizations that receive and verify content. Collaborations with media companies and experts can help to verify deepfakes or misinformation. Once verified, authorities can take appropriate actions such as removing content from various platforms, issuing warnings, and initiating legal actions against content creators.
- xi. **Regulate Social Media Platforms:** Parliaments should regulate social media platforms to develop and implement measures to combat misinformation and fake news. These measures may include flagging potentially false or misleading content, enhanced moderation and taking actions against accounts repeatedly share disinformation.²¹ Digital platforms should cooperate with governments instead of operating without accountability. The governments must require social media sites or firms to give a one-click "Report AI-generated content" tool. These reports, once shared, can be forwarded to regulators or fact-checking organizations.
- xii. **Build Parliamentary Capacity to detect and respond to fake news and misinformation:** Parliaments should invest in capacity building of parliamentarians and staff to develop the skills and knowledge needed to combat disinformation. Such trainings should cover consequences of using AI tools for misleading the public, misrepresenting individuals or groups, and deliberately disseminating false information. Members of Parliament should be vigilant in verifying information before sharing it and in promoting responsible digital engagement among fellow MPs and constituents. Members of Parliament should also be encouraged to be open and honest in their use of online and social media platforms.
- xiii. **Invest in Research & Development to combat fake news:** Parliaments should encourage interdisciplinary research into advanced technology solutions for detecting and regulating the spread of disinformation. Fostering a research and development ecosystem may help policymakers and practitioners in designing evidence-based solutions that are informed by real-world data and outcomes rather than intuition alone. Thus, by investing in R&D, parliaments may ensure that policy decisions are grounded on scientific evidence, improve cooperation with technology developers and academic institutions, and foster innovation that keeps pace with evolving risks to information integrity.

6. Conclusion

Digital misinformation has no borders. Countries are trying to deal with this issue at their own level, while the issue demands a collective response as disinformation shifts to countries with weaker regulation. Parliamentarians have dual responsibility. They must first invest in themselves to understand the complexities of modern digital technology before leading people to overcome the issue of misinformation. They need to improve information management, improve transparency, and respond quickly when false narratives proliferate. They should focus on improving legislation, enforcing regulations, and developing regional fact-checking mechanisms that work across borders. Digital literacy must be improved so that citizens may make more informed decisions about what they view online. Parliaments can establish unifying regional AI governance standards and frameworks to bridge the global AI investment gap. This would allow countries to share responsibility, coordinate responses, and preserve democratic systems effectively. Parliaments must safeguard the shared factual reality essential for peace, by adopting a proactive, multi-stakeholder approach that balances innovation with transparency.

²¹ ASEAN, *ASEAN Guideline on Management of Government Information in Combating Fake News and Disinformation in the Media* (Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Republic of Indonesia, March 2024).

OPINION

Effective Committee Inquiries

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary democratic system of governance, Parliamentary Committees are crucial institutions as they provide key mechanisms to the legislative bodies for performing the core responsibilities of oversight. For this the committees scrutinize the work of the executive as well as play a significant role in developing informed and effective policies. The parliamentary committees, through their inquiries as most influential function, facilitate the members of the parliament in performing detailed and in-depth examination of a range of multifaceted issues, assessment of complex policies, collection of evidences, questioning of different stakeholders and accountability of various public officials and institutions. While the modern world faces multifaceted challenges including the rapid integration of technology in every field, the governance also faces technical challenges in the realms of expending executive power, heightened public expectations and diminishing public trust in many parts of the world. Hence, the effectiveness of parliamentary committees in the form of improved committee inquiries had become very important.

This briefing paper attempts to delve into the concept of committee system in legislature. It aims to examine the legal structures that formally regulate the working of committees as well as the main phases in which inquiries are conducted and their potential impacts.

2. Rationale, Conceptual and Legal Framework of Parliamentary Committees

Parliamentary committees are among the most significant instruments contributing to the effective working of the legislatures. The committees in a legislature are often referred to as mini legislatures¹; and considered a legislature's brain, hands, ears and eyes² playing a crucial role for building an effective and strong parliament. The will of the people is translated into the act of making laws which is performed in the house, but it is within these committees where these laws and policies of the government are deliberated and scrutinized.

Almost everywhere throughout the democratic world, legislatures rely upon their committees for carrying out the house business. In these committees a specific groups of legislators are given the mandate to examine matters more closely than the full legislature could manage. The rationale behind forming these committees includes:³

- i. Committees enable legislatures in doing multiple important functions simultaneously which may remain incomplete in the absence of committee system. This includes examining proposed legislation in detail, doing oversight of government, examining policy matters and conducting special investigations.
- ii. Committees do their work under more flexible rules as compared to the House, allowing members to deliberate issues informally and cultivate cooperation through building cross-party working relationship; in this manner quicker agreement on technical amendments and negotiation on minor matters are facilitated.
- iii. Membership of committees is widely acknowledged by parliamentary colleagues, media and the public as experts within the respective areas. As a result, committee experience offers greater public visibility and leadership opportunities in Parliament.

¹ George Goodwin, "Subcommittees: The Miniature Legislatures of Congress," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 3 (September 1, 1962): 596–604, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1952492>.

² Sidra Akram and Dr. Muhammad Azhar, "Functioning of Parliamentary Committees in Pakistan: An Analysis," *Journal of Law & Social Studies* 3, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 133–42, <https://doi.org/10.52279/jlss.03.02.133142>.

³ National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, "Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor," accessed February 9, 2026, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/030_ww_committees.pdf.

- iv. The committees through public meetings provide citizen and media representatives' participation opportunities, thus promoting public awareness and understanding of policy issues, suggested measures, future impacts and overall democratic process. In addition, committees help shape public support for upcoming legislative decisions.
- v. Parliamentary committees through public hearings offer platforms from where diverse stakeholders from academia, business community and experts participate in assessing laws, their implementation as well contribute in proposed laws; bringing valuable information for committee deliberations and helping strengthen credibility of committee recommendations.

In summary, parliamentary committees form one of the main pillars of accountability and good governance in parliamentary democracies. Since the government dominates in the house and because there is inadequate time to debate particular matters, committees offer a more focused, cross-party and comparatively less-partisan setting, in which complex deliberation, technical scrutiny and evidence-based decision-making can occur. They improve transparency through hearings, calling of officials and reviewing of budgets, public spending and administrative performance, thus enhancing control over the executive. One more way in which committees have the potential to enhance the quality of legislation is through clause-by-clause review of a bill, which allows recommendation of proposed changes to be made and the inclusion of views of stakeholders, potentially not otherwise represented. Moreover, the platforms of committees encourage institutional memory and capacity building among members, who acquire subject-matter expertise in the long term. These forums also help extend the participation of wider population through providing access to the committee sittings to civil society and inviting contribution of experts.

In the Parliamentary setup of Pakistan the constitutional mandate of Parliamentary Committees is rooted in the Article 66(5) specifying Parliament as either Senate or National Assembly, a joint sitting or a committee thereof.⁴ Both the Senate and National Assembly derive their rules of procedure from Article 67 of the Constitution; whereas, Article 66 (3) makes it binding for any person to give evidence or produce documents before the committees with noncompliance leading to punishable act.⁵

3. Importance of Committee Inquiries

Committees use inquiries to examine important issues in more detail than parliamentary debates allow.⁶ Committee inquiries are an important tool of parliamentary control and informed legislation allowing legislatures to research in a structured way the challenging policy matters, administrative effectiveness and matters of concern that cannot be so thoroughly and rigorously examined in plenary proceedings. Inquiries allow the committee to gather both written and verbal evidence of the government, experts, representatives of the civil society and other interested parties, thus basing the decisions on factual information and a variety of opinions, but not on partisan discussion. This is an exercise that increases transparency and accountability as the executive is compelled to clarify its actions, policies, and correct weaknesses as well as discovering gaps in implementation, resource misuse, or systemic flaws that might need to be corrected. The committee inquiries also lead to improved governance by bringing up practical recommendations, legislative amendments and policy reforms that are a product of close scrutiny and consensus-building. They enhance democratic legitimacy and trust of citizens in parliamentary institutions by encouraging citizens to participate and engage the media. The committee inquiries turn parliament into an active, investigative and responsive as well as problem-solving institution that makes sure that the laws and policies are sensitive, informed and in the best interest of the population.

⁴ National Assembly of Pakistan, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Islamabad: National Assembly of Pakistan, 2024).

⁵ National Assembly of Pakistan, The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

⁶ Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, "The Committee Inquiry Process," parliament.act.gov.au, 2026, <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/get-involved/guides/inquiry>.

4. The Process and Main Stages of Conducting Effective Inquiries

In general the committees can initiate multiple inquiries simultaneously. The duration and length of time required for inquiry processes can vary, depending upon the nature of the issue and urgency of the matter requiring resolution. The following points enlist some of the key features organized committee inquiries usually employ:⁷

i. 1st Stage: Making the Decision to Conduct inquiry

Several practical considerations are involved in the decision to have a committee inquiry and to choose the matter to be investigated. The committees will evaluate the existence either of identifiable problems or gaps in the current laws or policies within the area of their work, whether the Chair or its members have taken a particular area of interest, or whether any urgent or significant problem has been raised in Parliament or given attention in the press or media. They also deliberate on whether the time is appropriate and the inquiry is bound to have an impact on policy or administrative action. In order to facilitate this process, the staff of the committee typically compiles a list of potential topics that could be discussed by the Chair. These options are then discussed by the committee, under the chairmanship and ways of proceeding with the inquiry or inquiries are agreed upon.

ii. 2nd Stage: Developing and Assenting to the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for guiding the inquiry process are developed under the leadership of the Committee Chair and the staff. The inquiry Terms of Reference are drafted concisely, describing the matter under discussion and the expected outcomes.

iii. 3rd Stage: Developing a Timetable to Undertaker the Inquiry Process

During the planning process, the Chair and the staff in the committee should come up with a clear outline schedule of how the inquiry will be conducted, giving the stages enough time to execute the work properly and efficiently. Adequate scheduling assists the committee to organize evidence collection, deliberations and drafting. Moreover, there should be a preliminary date by which the final report will be published so as to ensure that the process remains focused and on schedule.

iv. 4th Stage: Evidence and Factual Material Gathering

This part of the investigation is crucial in order to make sure that the work of the committee is not based on assumptions or political views but on acceptable facts and strong evidence. Evidence-based approach not only enhances credibility of the inquiry but also assists the members with different perspectives to agree on the final report. The Terms of Reference (ToR) of committee must be circulated to the media and made available on the committee website with a call being made to the media to submit written evidence. The relevant ministries are normally requested to present information about their policies, plans, and supporting data and submissions may also be requested of the civil society organizations, experts in the subject, academics, research institutes, the bodies in the private sector, employee groups and individuals or representatives of the community who would have a practical understanding of the implications of the policy. A helpful way to rationalize this outreach is to have up-to-date contact lists. Moreover, the staffs of the committee can write background papers based on the available research and publications and where the need arises, short term specialist advisers can be hired to offer technical advice and assist the inquiry procedure.

v. 5th Stage: Holding Hearings

The committee will normally conduct oral hearings to seek the opinion of organizations or individuals who may have an idea about the topic. Holding hearings with a Minister, a government official or an expert witness is an important aspect of a committee enquiry as it allows the questioning of key people and experts and the discovery of facts. The hearing will also serve to raise the profile of the committee. The key steps that the hearing must pass through are:

Preparation: The Chair will invite people to a hearing after consultation with the committee members. Hearings need to aim at finding a diverse array of various opinions and knowledge, such as minority groups

⁷ Alex Brazier, "Holding Government to Account: Parliamentary Committees and Oversight Inquiries" (Global Partners Governance, 2017), <https://gpgovernance.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Guide-to-Parliaments.-Paper-10-Holding-Government-to-Account-2.pdf>.

and opinion, in order to prevent accusations that it has favoritism of some groups or that it has been imbalanced in its approach.

Development of a Strategy to the Hearing: For the purpose of making the best of the hearing, the committee should devise a strategy taking into account the intended purpose to be served, the desired results to be achieved, the method of obtaining information for use and the nature of questions to be asked from witnesses for the committee to get the best information for inclusion in report.

Hearing Organisation and Administration: Committees are expected to determine an appropriate date, time and place of the hearing, subject to such security arrangements as may be required. Best practices in this regards include: Giving reasonable advance notice to the individual providing evidence and furnish all the relevant information concerning what is required. The majority of hearings will be open and accessible to both the media and the public. It is a good practice to ensure that hearings are as open and transparent as possible. In some cases, the hearing can be in private where confidentiality or security may be a matter of concern; In the event that the hearing is held in the open, the media must be informed of the people involved in the hearing, the topic and purpose of the hearing and the date, time and place; and allocation of staff roles and duties, including drafting briefings and questions, organisation and administration of the hearing, inviting and liaising with witnesses and taking a written record of the Hearing.

Briefing Paper for the Hearing: A briefing paper is to be prepared and distributed to the committee that includes background information on the hearing. The Briefing Paper is to be distributed before the hearing, so that committee members could read and digest it. It is also necessary to include some proposed questions for the members to ask during the Hearing in the Briefing Paper and some supplementary questions should also be incorporated to facilitate elaboration on the question when needed. Where feasible, questions must utilize factual and statistical content and data derived through written evidence. Such information will help in making the questions more rigorous and make it less possible that the individual before the committee may evade giving a direct answer.

Chair Role during the Conduct of the Hearing: The Chair, with the assistance of the committee staff, will develop an agenda of the hearing. This agenda will set a framework of discussion and make the hearing run in an orderly manner. The Chair can start the meeting by greeting everyone present and explaining the areas of interest to the committee. The Chair will typically start the questioning, after which he will invite other committee members to ask questions. In other cases, the people providing information to the committee may open with an opening statement, while in other instances, there might be no statements and the questions can begin at once. The Chair should ensure that the queries of the member are concise and wherever applicable questions can be assigned to members with an interest or expertise in the topic. The hearing should be carried on in a respectful and positive tone and must not entail personal attacks or allegations except in exceptional cases where evidence of misconduct requires committees notice.

Follow-up: In the course of the hearing, when the individual giving evidence is unaware of all the information, the committee might advise that a copy of further details be sent to the committee in a written document later. The hearing should be prepared in a written transcript or record. All those who appeared before the Committee should be sent a copy of the transcript.

vi. 6th Stage: Gathering and Analysing Evidences

The transcript and notes of the hearing, the written evidence and information submitted to the committee should also be reviewed by the committee staff and any special advisers. The staff can develop and provide necessary documents summarising the significant points, themes and conclusions that may be drawn and suggestions to be considered by the Chair. Such documents can be utilized in the deliberation process and while preparing the report on the issue. The committee work should, as much as possible, be founded on evidence and research material. All the facts and oral testimonies collected in the course of the hearing will be original ones and will contribute to the work of the committee on the topic. Interesting quotes during the hearing process should be spotted and added to the report.

vii. 7th Stage: Preparing the Report

The committee staff prepares a draft report on the direction of the Chair and it describes the purpose of the inquiry, the most important evidence presented, the relevant facts and statistics; the findings and conclusions of the committee and possible recommendations. The Chair reviews the draft and provides feedback and guidance and then circulates it to the rest of the members to be considered. Once circulated, committee

members then deliberate on the draft and can either accept the draft report or propose amendments of the text or recommendations. The report is revised by staff under the supervision of the Chair to accommodate these concerns. The goal is to achieve a general consensus and come up with a report that reflects the opinion of the committee. In the event of a need, additional revisions or votes can be made to settle any differences. Finally, the report is prepared and endorsed and unanimous agreement makes it more credible and impactful.

viii. 8th Stage: Final Report Publication and Dissemination

Committee staff should notify the media when the final report is published and the members of the committee and the Chair can also comment to the media regarding the report or appear in interviews. Copies of the report should be shared with interested organisations and individuals, those who furnished written material or information, individuals who appeared at a hearing, custodian of the House and other parties or committees of the House. In some cases, the report can be discussed on the floor of the House. The Ministry in charge of the subject area should always be sent a copy of the report requesting them to respond within a given period of time to the recommendations. Following the Ministry's response, the committee can convene to deliberate on whether the response is satisfactory and can make follow-up statements to the media.

ix. 9th Stage: Conducting Follow-Up

In the long run, committees are expected to conduct a follow up review of their past inquiries to assess the outcomes and results of their suggestions. This involves the investigation of whether the concerned ministry has acted on the actions as requested by the committee, whether the government has fulfilled the commitments made to the Parliament or the committee, and, in the event that this is not the case, the reasons of delays and the estimated time that this should be done. The committees must also look at the issue of whether the circumstances necessitate a new or modified approach to the issue.

In this process, the committee might also request further information from the ministry by way of written communication or convening further hearings in order to raise the matter with the Ministry or public officials.

5. Committee Inquiries and the Impact on National Policy and Legislation

Parliamentary committees possess both the potential of providing forums through which the people can participate in the law making process and the capacity to build political motivation to bring about legislative or policy change.⁸ The ultimate test of a good committee inquiry is not necessarily the quality of its debates or the thoroughness of its report, but its real impact on the national policy and legislation. The aim of committee inquiries is to influence the public debate, to impact the legislative amendments, and to make the executive more accountable. The effect of this however differs depending on political context, institutional design and responsiveness of the executive branch.

- i. There are various ways in which committee inquiries affect policy and legislation. The most immediate pathway is by way of formal recommendations in the form of committee reports to which governments are usually obligated to respond within a certain period. Such recommendations may result in the formulation of a new law, the revision of an already existing law, or the reorganization of executive policy. As a case in point, in Pakistan the legislature conducts executive accountability for use of public funds from the platform of one of the standing committees i.e. the Public Accounts Committee.⁹ The Committee has continuously led efforts on accountability of public expenditure by uncovering inefficiencies in their operations and proposing statutory reforms, with its reports

⁸ Sarah Moulds, "Committees of Influence: The Impact of Parliamentary Committees on Law Making and Rights Protection in Australia," 2019, <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AIAdminLawF/2019/21.pdf>.

⁹ Faisal Saeed Cheema, "Public Sector Financial Accountability: The Role of Public Accounts Committee in Pakistan," 2020, https://agp.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/8_ecosai-circular-spring-issue-2020-article-Faisal%20Saeed%20Cheema.pdf.

resulting in quantifiable reforms in the fiscal policy.¹⁰ Similarly, other committees also contribute to a great many important laws.

- ii. Issues that are emerging, are of great public concern or have been overlooked are usually brought to the political scene by committee inquiries. Through hearings, media coverage and publication of reports, committees have the power to increase awareness in people and force the executive action. Regardless of whether a change is introduced straight away in the form of new legislations, inquiries can influence how the long-term policy discourse will develop and what the boundaries of change will be.

Media reporting facilitates society's awareness of the results of the inquiry so that the findings of the inquiry are discussed in the civil society, thereby, making the executive accountable as well as ensuring that the society engages in constructive debate on wider reforms.¹¹

- iii. Reviewing and recommending amendments to draft legislations¹² or the creation of new bills are one of the most explicit types of influence when findings made by the committee are incorporated into the draft legislation. Committees that consider the proposed laws might make suggestions on revisions to be done depending on the evidence collected in the course of investigations. In other systems, the reports of committees contribute a lot to the ultimate content of a piece of legislation prior to its passage. For instance, in Indian Lok Sabha, the Standing Committee on Health's several recommendations related to the National Medical Commission Bill in 2017 were integrated into the final law passed in 2019, such as removing the provision for allowing a bridge course for AYUSH practitioners.¹³
- iv. Recommendations of the Committee based on its inquiries also push towards better regulatory regulation, reformed administrative practices, or better service delivery processes, or restructuring of institutions. Such suggestions may be adopted by executive agencies without any formal change in legislation.
- v. The investigation can also affect the budgetary allotments or modify the oversight priorities in the future. Results associated with inefficiencies, mismanagement or policy gap may influence appropriations choices and affect any further monitoring actions. For example, the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate of Pakistan, under rule 166(4) the Senate Committees now keep oversight over the budgetary allocation and its utilization by the concerned Ministries and submit report of findings and recommendations bi-annually to the House.¹⁴

The influence is thus multidimensional and not just limited to the formal lawmaking but the process of reforming governance and accountability. In a parliamentary setup where the committee system and their inquiries are strengthened the house gets the impetus and direction, which serves as a catalyst for effectiveness and public trust. The committees, through their inquiries thus deal with the complex, varied and demanding nature of parliamentary business, including but not limited to initiating or amending legislation, administering financial control, ensuring oversight and scrutiny of executive functions, paving way for institutional or policy reforms and establishing a forum for public inclusion as well as representation.

¹⁰ PublicFinance.pk, "Role of the Public Accounts Committee in Strengthening Financial Oversight – Public Finance," Publicfinance.pk, 2026, <https://publicfinance.pk/role-of-the-public-accounts-committee-in-strengthening-financial-oversight/>.

¹¹ Matthias Keppel, "Political Control and Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry: Strengthening the Quality of Democracy," *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, February 10, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-021-00883-x>.

¹² Sidra Akram and Dr. Muhammad Azhar, "Functioning of Parliamentary Committees in Pakistan: An Analysis,"

¹³ Sanat Kanwar, "The Importance of Parliamentary Committees," PRS Legislative Research, 2019, <https://prsindia.org/theprsblog/importance-parliamentary-committees?page=42&per-page=1>.

¹⁴ Senate of Pakistan, Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate, 2012 (Senate of Pakistan, 2012).



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Inaugural Conference of Parliamentary Training Institutes (PTIs)

PTIs: Peer learning and networking

23-24 March 2026, Accra, Ghana

COMMUNIQUE

Adopted by consensus by the delegates and representatives assembled for the Inaugural Conference of Parliamentary Training Institutes

The Conference of Parliamentary Training Institutes,

Recognizing the growing role of Parliamentary Training Institutes (PTIs) as parliament-mandated institutions responsible for the continuous professional development of members of parliament, parliamentary staff and other stakeholders,

Noting the steady expansion of PTIs globally, particularly in the past decade,

Acknowledging the increasing demands placed on parliaments to respond effectively to heightened public expectations for transparent, inclusive and accountable governance,

Mindful of the evolving challenges confronting most parliamentary democracies, including imbalances between executive and legislative authority, high turnover rates of MPs at elections, rapid technological change, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation,

Affirming the critical role of PTIs in strengthening legislative capacity, supporting effective parliamentary oversight, enhancing institutional autonomy, and promoting resilient democratic institutions,

Recalling the initiatives undertaken in 2025 to foster collaboration among PTIs, including the identification and mapping of existing institutions, the development of a preliminary global directory, and the circulation of a survey examining their mandates and activities,

Further recalling the virtual consultation held on 6 October 2025 which enabled PTIs to exchange experiences, discuss challenges related to parliamentary training, and consider avenues for enhanced international cooperation,

Welcoming the shared commitment among PTIs to deepen collaboration and establish a more structured platform for global engagement and peer learning,

Hereby adopts the following:

Resolves to establish a semi-informal network of PTIs,

Resolves to establish an interim steering committee to coordinate the activities of the network with a duration of one year, after which a permanent steering committee will be elected,

Members of the interim Steering Committee include Angola, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Thailand, and the IPU as an observer,

Resolves to create working groups in the following thematic areas:

- Governance, visibility and sustainability of the PTI network
- Standards for curricula, training of trainers and accreditation
- Research and monitoring and evaluation

Each working group will be tasked with developing a concept note that determines its working methodology, duration and outcomes.

FUTURE CONFERENCES

Decides that the Global Conference of Parliamentary Training Institutes shall be convened annually to review progress, exchange experiences, and advance cooperation among PTIs;

Further decides that the next **Global Conference of Parliamentary Training Institutes** shall be hosted by the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services in Islamabad, tentatively from 3 to 5 February 2027. The PTIs of Thailand and Nigeria have expressed interest in hosting future Conferences respectively in 2028 and 2029.

ADOPTION

Adopted by consensus by the delegates and representatives of Parliamentary Training Institutes assembled in Accra, Ghana, on 24 March 2026.

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