

MUHAMMAD UMAR ZAFAR

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EDUCATION

Johns Hopkins University (SAIS)

Washington, DC | Aug 2024 – May 2026

MA International Relations | Technology and Innovation Policy

Award: Public Service Fellow Scholar – fully funded fellowship for public leadership and civic involvement in policy and governance

Courses: Evolution of Cyberpolicy, Political Economy of AI, Energy Policy Analysis, Media Wars, Leadership Ethics & Decision-Making, Field Research Methods, Grand Strategy of the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean in the New Strategic Context, Policy Consulting, AI for Leaders

Research Foci: AI Governance & Regulation, Cybersecurity Policy, U.S.-China AI Competition, South Asian Cyber Doctrine, North Africa Digital Governance, Arctic Security, Compute Policy

Forman Christian College University (A Chartered University)

Lahore, Pakistan | Aug 2019 – May 2023

BS Political Science, Philosophy & Sociology | GPA: 3.71/4.0 | Magna Cum Laude | PEEF Merit-cum-Need Scholar

EXPERIENCE

SNF Agora Institute, Johns Hopkins University | *Independent Researcher*

Baltimore, MD | Jan 2026 – May 2026

- Developed, presented, and published a comparative policy roadmap contrasting U.S. and Nordic e-waste management strategies, advising engineers on community-led e-waste interception and critical rare earth element recovery in Baltimore.

Berkeley AI Safety Initiative (BASIS) | *AI Policy Fellow*

Remote, USA | Feb 2026 – May 2026

- Completing an intensive curriculum spanning the AI Triad (compute, data, algorithms), compute governance, and frontier AI regulation, covering the EU AI Act, U.S. executive orders, and China's AI governance frameworks.
- Analyzing Responsible Scaling Policies (RSPs), global trust and safety frameworks, and national security implications of advanced AI; developing mutual stability frameworks for Mutually Assured AI Malfunction (MAIM) scenarios.

Center for AI and Digital Policy (CAIDP) | *Research Group Member*

Washington, DC | Jan 2026 – Present

- Assessing AI governance frameworks for 80+ nations in the 2025 AI and Democratic Values Index using 12 OECD/Council of Europe-aligned metrics, evaluating algorithmic transparency, independent oversight, and cross-border data governance compliance.
- Producing applied policy memos on AI risk, comparative tech regulation, and institutional capacity for managing advanced AI systems, contributing to CAIDP advisory outputs for governments and multilateral bodies.

Johns Hopkins University, SAIS | *Graduate Consultant*

Washington, DC | Jan 2026 – May 2026

- Leading strategic evaluation of Arctic critical infrastructure and supply chain resilience across Northern Manitoba and Nunavut, applying 12 policy metrics to assess Canada's \$357.7M Regional Defence Investment Initiative and Indigenous-led governance frameworks.
- Analyzing structural resilience of the Hudson Bay Railway and Port of Churchill; developing cybersecurity and supply chain security frameworks to counter the socio-economic impacts of a 1,011.7-km transport disruption and support NORAD modernization.

Mercatus Center, George Mason University | *Frederic Bastiat Fellow*

Arlington, VA | Jul 2025 – Present

- Researching AI governance, energy security, and regulatory design within political economy frameworks, producing policy memos on the compute-energy nexus, sovereign AI deployment, and how institutional resilience shapes long-term technology governance outcomes.

Telophase Corporation | *Geopolitical Risk Analyst*

Washington, DC | May 2025 – Sep 2025

- Identified a \$20M strategic market entry window for U.S. defense contractors in South Asia; produced intelligence-led briefs translating Bangladesh's geopolitical realignment into actionable pathways for dual-use technology, cybersecurity platforms, and 5G infrastructure.
- Evaluated Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030, identifying gaps in AI integration, OT/ICS security, and automated infrastructure; advised on cybersecurity frameworks for government B2B contract strategy.
- Synthesized U.S. and regional data protection and licensing frameworks for medical AI devices, advising leadership on regulatory harmonization and compliance risk for a dual-use digital health product.

Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins SAIS | *Research Assistant*

Washington, DC | Jan 2025 – Jun 2025

- Managed editorial production of a weekly policy newsletter distributed to 8,500+ senior stakeholders, coordinating content pipelines across multiple contributors covering six North African countries and three thematic tracks (digital governance, energy, climate-security).
- Served as primary liaison between FPI staff and external participants for 4 high-level roundtables attended by diplomats, scholars, and regional experts, handling logistics, briefing preparation, and post-event follow-up communications.

Middle East Institute | *Development Intern*

Washington, DC | Jan 2025 – May 2025

- Profiled 400+ prospective donors, improving prospect segmentation and fundraising strategy within a policy think tank environment. Automated and restructured Salesforce donor and engagement records via agentic workflow pipelines (n8n), improving data integrity and event tracking efficiency.

Daadras Foundation | *Founder and CEO*

Lahore, Pakistan | May 2020 – Dec 2025

- Founded and scaled a student-led nonprofit from 0 to 2,000+ beneficiaries, building and managing a 22-volunteer team across facilitation, curriculum design, and field operations; currently directing Project Salam's expansion from 124 active students toward a 2,000-student target by end of 2026.
- Directed 2022 Pakistan flood relief operations end-to-end, coordinating emergency food distribution, shelter logistics, and a livelihoods pipeline supporting 20+ micro-businesses across multiple partner organizations, including orphanages, welfare schools, and community NGOs under crisis conditions.
- Built and managed cross-sector partnerships with local NGOs, community welfare institutions, and international civil society organizations, serving as primary point of contact for operational coordination, funding negotiations, and program delivery across partner sites.
- Organized a public seminar in partnership with Al-Sharq Forum, managing speaker coordination, venue logistics, audience outreach, and communications for a policy event bridging civil society research and policymaker communities on China's Great Firewall and digital surveillance in Pakistan.

RESEARCH

The Epistemic Global City: Washington, Lobbyists, and the Securitization of AI in U.S.-China Competition

MA Thesis, Research Seminar: Asia in Washington DC, SAIS -- Advisor: Prof. Kent Calder

- Used qualitative process tracing and lobbying data to demonstrate how corporate actors (Nvidia, Google) function as co-securitizers, shaping export control regimes and AI governance architecture in the U.S.-China tech rivalry.

Compute as a Public Good: Shared Computing Policy and the AI Divide

Political Economy of AI, SAIS

- Analyzed the concentration of high-performance computing within U.S. and Chinese tech conglomerates as a structural barrier to Global South AI participation; proposed a strategic policy framework modeled on the EU's EuroHPC initiative.

Pakistan's Cyber-Nuclear Doctrine

Evolution of Cyberpolicy, SAIS

- Strategic analysis of Pakistan's cyber doctrine through the lens of full-spectrum nuclear deterrence; evaluated the extension of deterrence logic into the digital domain and how PECA reflects authoritarian consolidation under military-civilian hybrid governance.

The Algorithm is an Abyss: Algorithmic Power and the Codification of Reality

Media Wars, SAIS

- Conducted a two-week empirical diary study across Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, then synthesized findings through Virilio, Tufekci, and Baudrillard to argue that algorithms have displaced continuous human experience with a designed perception of reality.

PROJECTS & GRANTS

Davis Projects for Peace Grant (\$10,000) | *Peacebuilding Through Theatrics and Dialogue*

June-August | 2026

- One of ~100 grants awarded globally by Davis United World College Scholars Program (Middlebury College). Designing a 3-month peacebuilding intervention in Lahore, engaging 16 Pashtun and Punjabi youth (ages 16-22) through theatre-based pedagogy, role-reversal exercises, and facilitated community dialogue; deliverables include public performance, video documentary, and a replication guide for scaling to schools.

AlxBio Hackathon | Pandemic Early Warning Track

Apr 2026

Apart Research x BlueDot Impact x Cambridge Biosecurity Hub -- Track 2: Pandemic Early Warning (sponsored by Measuring AI Progress)

- Built the news intelligence engine of a waterborne pathogen early-warning dashboard: scraped and translated local-language media across 15+ pathogens (cholera, typhoid, norovirus, Legionella), extracted structured outbreak signals, geocoded locations, and served via FastAPI to a Leaflet map for public health officials -- surfacing signals weeks before official WHO/CDC reports.

DC Critical Ops Hackathon | CrossDomain Sentinel

OpenAI x META National Security Hackathon

Apr 2026

- Built CrossDomain Sentinel, a cyber-physical correlation engine that ingests simulated cyber telemetry (login anomalies, malware, IDS alerts) and physical incident data (sensor alarms, emergency reports), correlates signals by time window and location, and surfaces coordinated threat clusters via an operator dashboard -- addressing real operational gaps in defense and critical infrastructure decision-making.

Think-Tanks-DC | Personal [Project](#)

March - Apr 2026

D3.js Network Visualization Project

- Engineered an interactive force-directed graph mapping 28 nodes and 40+ strategic linkages; visualized lobbying flows and institutional influence within the U.S.-China semiconductor and AI policy landscape to analyze competitive power dynamics.

CERTIFICATIONS & TRAINING

AGI Strategy — BlueDot Impact

Mar - Apr 2026

- Analyzed strategic AGI governance, technical progress trends, and threat models; developed defense-in-depth frameworks and risk-mitigation strategies for high-stakes technological transitions.*

Restoring Deterrence: Coercion & Crises in Southern Asia — Stimson Center

Dec 2024

- Strategic coercion, crisis escalation, and implications of AI-enabled military technology in South Asia.*

Naval Competition in the Indian Ocean Region — Stimson Center

Dec 2024

- Maritime security and autonomous systems in the Indian Ocean through an AI-policy lens.*

Hands-on Fact-Checking — Poynter Institute

May 2024

- Digital verification methods, source evaluation, and media literacy tools for evidence-based policy research.*

SKILLS

Policy & Research: AI governance & regulation, cybersecurity policy, export controls, telecommunications (5G), digital rights, OSINT, qualitative & quantitative analysis, risk & compliance, policy memo writing, stakeholder engagement

Technical: Agentic automation (n8n), Salesforce, GIS, Python (basic), LLMs, prompt engineering, curriculum design (EdTech), database management, Microsoft Office, Adobe Suite

Languages: English (proficient), Urdu (native), Punjabi (native), Hindi (intermediate), Arabic (basic)