



**Delhi Policy Group**

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



# DPG POLICY BRIEF

## Pakistan's National Security Policy: An Assessment

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## Cover Photographs:

*Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan at the launch of National Security Policy of Pakistan in Islamabad, January 14, 2022. Source: Radio Pakistan*

*Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa addressing the Islamabad Security Dialogue in Islamabad, March 17, 2021. Source: AFP*

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# Pakistan's National Security Policy: An Assessment

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## Introduction

On January 14, 2022 Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan unveiled the public version of the country's first-ever National Security Policy (NSP).<sup>1</sup> In his message at the beginning of the document, Mr. Khan writes, "This National Security Policy contains our boldly defined and clearly articulated goals as a self-respecting, sovereign, and inclusive state. I am confident that effective implementation of this Policy will contribute immensely to our country's economic security, human welfare on the lines of Riasat-e-Medina, and a stronger defence capability."

The NSP seeks to "keep economic security at the core, and judiciously transfer the dividends of a strong economy to further strengthen defence and human security." The focus on economics is not new. In March 2021, at the Islamabad Security Dialogue, the Pakistan Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, had spoken about the geo-economic potential of Pakistan and a "desire to change the narrative of geo-political contestation into geo-economic integration."<sup>2</sup>

## Analysing the NSP: Aspirations vs. Realities

The document contains eight sections. Section I outlines the policy formulation process that began in 2014 and involved intensive consultations with official stakeholders, experts, and civil society members. Section II explains the conceptual elements of the national security framework and defines the ultimate purpose of national security as ensuring citizens' safety, security, dignity, and prosperity. Thereafter, there are six thematic sections that provide "an assessment of the context and Pakistan's desired goals and objectives in the particular area of national security."

Section III on 'National Cohesion' states that "it is imperative that we reinforce our coherent national identity based on the principle of unity in diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> January 14, Press Trust of India Islamabad. "Pakistan Launches First-Ever National Security Policy; Here's What It Says about India." India Today. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/pakistan-national-security-policy-nsp-india-war-nuclear-triad-1900251-2022-01-14>.

<sup>2</sup> Dawn.com. "Read: Full Text of Gen Bajwa's Speech at the Islamabad Security Dialogue." DAWN.COM, March 18, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1613207>.

Divisive discourse around ethnic, religious, and social differences is a concern, exacerbated by disruptive external support that aims to undermine national cohesion and incite disharmony on issues of identity." The section lays down guidelines on the preservation of the Islamic character and Pakistan's diverse cultural heritage, ensuring unity and stability, and making public service responsive to the needs of citizens. It is after this section that the NSP starts increasingly resembling a wish list rather than outlining practical and implementable policies.



Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan signing the National Security Policy of Pakistan with National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf (left) in Islamabad, January 14, 2022.

Source: Pakistan PMO's Twitter Account

Section IV is titled 'Securing Our Economic Future'. It focuses primarily on reducing the three challenges in the economic sphere - external imbalance, vertical inequalities, and horizontal inequalities. There is a realistic identification of the problems caused by the current account deficit and the social unrest and political instability that could result from the socio-economic inequality between the rich and the poor. The NSP acknowledges that "disparities in prosperity and opportunity between regions have been used by sub-nationalist elements to generate a narrative of grievance based on under-development in their regions."

However, despite acknowledging the challenges, the NSP makes light of them, stating that "Pakistan's economic resilience is demonstrated by a positive growth trajectory and vibrant economy despite political uncertainty and security challenges." It makes much of "Pakistan's prized geo-economic location", which "provides a unique opportunity through north-south and east-west connectivity for South and Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa." None of these assertions can be supported by the current state of Pakistan's economy or in any confidence about its future trajectory.

In a statement that appears disconnected from reality, the NSP calls for promoting economic policies for Pakistan to join the ranks of upper middle-income countries. To achieve this, Pakistan's per capita Gross National Income of \$1280 will have to jump four times its current level. It is good to have an ambitious vision, but unrealistic hope makes for poor policy and strategy.

Section V on 'Defence and Territorial Integrity' provides some pointers on Pakistan's military strategy. While not directly naming India, the NSP states that with a "regressive and dangerous ideology gripping the collective conscience in our immediate neighbourhood, the prospects of violent conflict have grown immensely." It also talks about the "self-professed role of any one country as a so-called net-security provider in the wider Indian Ocean" affecting the "region's security and economic interests negatively."

The traditional thinking about reliance on nuclear deterrence as a counter to India's conventional military superiority remains a vital pillar of Pakistan's military strategy. The NSP states that "Nuclear deterrence occupies a critical role in the security calculus of South Asia. Pakistan's nuclear capability deters war through full spectrum deterrence within the precincts of credible minimum nuclear deterrence in concert with our conventional military capabilities and all elements of national power."

The Pakistan military's view on nuclear deterrence has created an echo chamber within the country that ignores India's strategic thinking on the space between conventional and nuclear war fighting. While the NSP claims that "Pakistan's deterrence regime is vital for and aimed at regional peace", the possession of nuclear weapons by Pakistan has actually had a destabilising effect on the region.<sup>3</sup>

Section VI focuses on 'Internal Security', examining the challenges of terrorism, violent sub-nationalisms, extremism and sectarianism, and

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<sup>3</sup> The Economic Times. "Nuclear Pakistan Has Destabilising Effects: US Expert." Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://m.economictimes.com>.

organised crime. This section appears to be devoted to convincing the global audience about Pakistan's sincerity in combating terrorism and extremism. The NSP claims that "Pakistan pursues a policy of zero tolerance for any groups involved in terrorist activities on its soil. With national resolve and dedication, Pakistan has fought one of the most successful wars against terrorism in the past two decades." The NSP identifies extremism and radicalisation on the basis of ethnicity or religion as a challenge to society and goes on to state that "exploitation and manipulation of ethnic, religious, and sectarian lines through violent extremist ideologies cannot be allowed."

The reality does not bear out these assertions on the ground. While the challenges posed by terrorism and extremism are well understood, the approach towards tackling these remains selective and weak. Terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) continue their anti-India operations with the support of the Pakistan Army. A recent survey by Christine Fair and Karl Kaltenthaler found that 94 percent of LeT cadre deaths happen in India.<sup>4</sup>

The record of action against extremist groups is poor. In October, 2021 the Pakistan government agreed on a peace deal with the outlawed Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) after days of violent protests around Lahore. Under the terms of the agreement, the government released frozen accounts and assets of the TLP and lifted the ban on the party.<sup>5</sup> Noting the Pakistan government's appeasement, the Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat and the Shia Ulema Council have raised demands on lifting the ban on Sipah-i-Sahaba and Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan.<sup>6</sup>

Section VII on 'Foreign Policy in a Changing World' gives a view of Pakistan's global and regional concerns. It seeks to project "Pakistan's positive reality" by emphasising its "economic and human security-centric outlook and reverse any unfair negativity attached to its image due to sustained disinformation and influence operations by adversaries." An attempt to improve Pakistan's global image is a constant theme that runs through the NSP.

Jammu & Kashmir finds a separate section in the NSP. It is stated that "a just and peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute remains a vital

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<sup>4</sup> Fair, Christine. "We Asked Why Pakistanis Support Lashkar-e-Taiba. Results Will Surprise You." ThePrint (blog), January 24, 2022. <https://theprint.in/opinion/we-asked-why-pakistanis-support-lashkar-e-taiba-results-will-surprise-you/809550/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Pakistan Lifts Ban on Far-Right TLP behind Anti-France Protests." Accessed January 26, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/8/pakistan-lifts-tlp-ban-france-blasphemy>.

<sup>6</sup> "Removal of Ban on Sipah-i-Sahaba, Tehrik-e-Jafria Demanded." Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/907277-removal-of-ban-on-sipah-i-sahaba-tehrik-e-jafria-demanded>.

national security interest for Pakistan." The NSP then goes on to declare, "Indian occupation forces continue to undertake human rights abuses and oppression through war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocidal acts in IIOJK [Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir]." It is statements like this that raise doubts on subsequent pronouncements that Pakistan wishes to improve its relationship with India.

The NSP shows deep concern about India's "rise of Hindutva-driven politics", "the political exploitation of a policy of belligerence towards Pakistan", and India's "attempts to impose one-sided solutions that can have far reaching negative consequences for regional stability." However, this attempt to paint India as the primary reason for the deterioration in bilateral ties is outrightly disingenuous. It will give Indian policy-makers little cause to believe that Pakistan is serious about a shift in its deep-rooted hostility and suspicion of India.

The NSP declares that Pakistan seeks to broaden its relationship with the United States "beyond a narrow counter-terrorism focus" and does not subscribe to 'camp politics'. The latter is perhaps a reference to the U.S.-China rivalry. Addressing the Islamabad Conclave 2021, Prime Minister Imran Khan had talked about the situation moving towards a Cold War where new blocs were forming and the desire of Pakistan to remain out of these blocs.<sup>7</sup> However, Pakistan's drift towards China is self-evident.

Pakistan-China relations are described as being "based on trust and strategic convergence". Pakistan looks at the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a project that is "redefining regional connectivity and providing impetus to Pakistan's economy". In a clear indicator of which country is a more valued partner, Pakistan declined to attend U.S. President Joe Biden's Summit for Democracy in December 2021. Following the decision, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Lijiang Zhao, tweeted, "Pakistan declined to attend democracy summit. A real iron brother!"<sup>8</sup>

Chapter VIII looks at the opportunities and challenges of 'Human Security'. It identifies population growth and migration, health security, climate and water stress, food security, and gender security as the key areas to be addressed. The human security challenges are enormous. According to the World Economic

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<sup>7</sup> Dawn.com. "Pakistan Desires to Bridge Gaps between US, China Instead of Joining Any Bloc: PM Imran." DAWN.COM, December 9, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1662812>.

<sup>8</sup> Afzal, Madiha. "Pakistan Skipped the Summit for Democracy. Why?" Brookings (blog), December 13, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/12/13/pakistan-skipped-the-us-summit-for-democracy-why/>.



Forum Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan was ranked 153 out of 156 countries on gender inequality.<sup>9</sup> The 2021 Global Climate Risk Index ranks Pakistan as the 8<sup>th</sup> most affected country by weather-related events in the world.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, a focus on human security is a step in the right direction. However, while the problems are correctly identified, the policy directions are far too generic.

## General Observations

After the announcement was made in December 2021 that Pakistan has crafted the NSP, the release of the document was keenly awaited to see if there is any change in its policies that have made Pakistan a state which is widely considered to be a sponsor of terrorism. The NSP is an attempt to show that the focus has now shifted to economic security and human welfare. Still, it is difficult to take this shift seriously because the prescriptions are too simplistic and are not borne out by the facts on the ground.

A document of this nature must articulate the ends, ways, and means of achieving the policy. While the ends are spelled out, there is little clarity on the ways and means. It could be said that the individual organs of the government must work out the ways and means, but a broad, clear direction needs to be outlined. The NSP fails to commit Pakistan firmly to a courageous and new path.

In his book "Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead", former U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis wrote, "Of all the countries I've dealt with, I consider Pakistan to be the most dangerous, because of the radicalisation of its society and the availability of nuclear weapons." The NSP does touch on these two issues, but as already stated, provides little comfort that they are being addressed in any meaningful way.

Key elements of Pakistan's traditional security thinking have been the framing of India as an existential threat, an attempt to paint itself as a bulwark against India's regional dominance, and describing Jammu and Kashmir as the 'core' issue. There is nothing in the NSP to suggest that this thinking has changed. Therefore, despite the statement that Pakistan desires to improve relations with India, there is unlikely to be any significant shift in the current state of bilateral ties.

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<sup>9</sup> ANI News. "Gender Discrimination Worsened Poverty in Pakistan: Analysts." Accessed January 27, 2022. <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/gender-discrimination-worsened-poverty-in-pakistan-analysts20211212225429/>.

<sup>10</sup> Eckstein, David, Vera Künzel, and Laura Schäfer. "Global Climate Risk Index 2021 | Germanwatch e.V." Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777>.

In his book "Pakistan: Between the Mosque and Military", Husain Haqqani mentions "three major intersecting fault lines: between civilians and the military, among different ethnic and provincial groups, and between the Islamists and the secularists." As long as the civil-military fault line remains, the Pakistan Army will continue to hold sway over policy decisions and resources. In these circumstances, despite the proclamations in the NSP, diverting funds from military expenditure towards human security and economic growth appears unlikely.

## Conclusion

Pakistan's NSP was an opportunity to review some of its strategic policies and choices that have adversely affected economic development, increased extremism in society, and damaged Pakistan's standing as a responsible member of the international community. Unfortunately, while the NSP ticks all the right boxes in identifying Pakistan's security challenges, it simplifies the solutions to the extent that the document loses the semblance of seriousness.

From Pakistan's perspective, engaging in perpetual hostility and un-winnable competition with India has driven the country into many of the national security problems that it confronts today. Perhaps this is too much to expect, but unless there is a change in Pakistan's revanchist pursuits, the "bold visions and big ideas" spelled out in the NSP would remain confined to paper.

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