

Post Roundtable Conference Report

REVIEWING PAKISTAN'S NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY 2022 - 2026

28 January 2026



ISSRA

INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Conversations



@Foothills



Post Event Report
Roundtable Conference

Reviewing Pakistan's National Security Policy 2022-2026

28 January 2026

Supervised by

Brig Masroor Ahmad (Retd)
Director, Defence & Strategic Studies (DSS)

Prepared by

Dr. Hashmat Ullah Khan
Research Fellow, DSS Branch

Disclaimer: The discussions and report have followed Chatham House rules.

The statements, facts and opinions by speakers do not constitute the official policy of ISSRA/NDU.

Concept Note

The current National Security Policy (NSP) of Pakistan, spanning 2022 to 2026, comprises eight chapters and six thematic sections that address a range of critical issues facing the nation. As we approach the conclusion of this tenure, it is imperative to undertake a comprehensive review of the existing policy to inform and guide the formulation of a subsequent NSP that extends beyond 2026. In light of evolving geopolitical dynamics, emerging security threats, and economic challenges, there is a pressing need to reassess Pakistan's strategic priorities and align them with national interests.

With this background, a Roundtable Conference (RTC) on reviewing Pakistan's National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-26, identifying gaps and setting future priorities for the upcoming NSP beyond 2026, was planned to be held at ISSRA, NDU on 28th Jan 26.



Introduction

A Roundtable Conference (RTC) was organised by the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad, to review Pakistan's first National Security Policy (NSP) 2022–2026. The NSP 2022–2026 was a landmark initiative comprising eight chapters and six thematic areas, addressing a broad spectrum of traditional and non-traditional security challenges, articulating strategic priorities, and aligning state institutions with long-term national objectives.

In light of the evolving internal and external security environment, including shifting geopolitical alignments, economic vulnerabilities, climate-related risks, technological disruptions, and governance challenges, the RTC undertook a structured review of the existing NSP. The review aimed to identify gaps, assess implementation outcomes, and propose guiding principles and priorities for formulating a revised NSP beyond 2026. The discussion brought together policy practitioners, academics, and security experts to deliberate on strategic direction, policy architecture, and institutional mechanisms necessary for an effective national security framework. Dr Moeed Yousaf, former NSA, was invited to deliver a keynote address, while Syed Hassan Akbar, Chairman, Strategic Policy Planning, NSD, briefed on preparations for the upcoming NSP.

The event was organised as an initial plenary, followed by breakout sessions in which participants addressed two key questions: Have the objectives of the NSP 2022-26 been achieved? If so, to what extent? Does the current NSP's structure, comprising six thematic sections, require any changes? If so, what should the proposed structure (including topics) for the upcoming NSP be? This was followed by a 2nd plenary in which the breakout session findings were presented, followed by an interactive session.



Key Takeaways

- A question was raised about whether Pakistan needs an NSP. There was consensus that Pakistan does need an NSP; however, it should not be a completely new draft but instead build on and update the existing NSP, correcting its weaknesses, while adapting it to new realities.
- The majority of the participants were of the opinion that the upcoming NSP must remain aspirational but realistic and begin with a clear, shared strategic direction set by Pakistan's top civilian leadership. Parliamentary endorsement of the new NSP is essential not only for legitimacy but also to ensure continuity through political transitions.
- Strategic clarity must precede drafting. Without consensus on where Pakistan intends to position itself in the next five years—politically, economically, diplomatically, and strategically—any policy document, no matter how technically sophisticated, will remain ineffective.
- The NSP should clearly articulate how Pakistan intends to navigate unilateralism, multilateralism, and shifting power alignments without compromising strategic autonomy.
- Majority agreed that approximately 20% of NSP 2022-26 objectives have been achieved. Some had divergent opinions about the numerical estimation as they believed that the quantifiable parameters/matrix are not available in the public domain. They argued that for the upcoming NSP, achievable objectives should be set with a strict system of accountability, supported by quantifiable parameters/matrix to measure progress in the public version of NSP. An annual review should be conducted to assess the extent of implementation.
- While considering the existing NSP framework, most of the participants agreed that the existing sections of the NSP 2022-26 should be part of the upcoming NSP. The concept of comprehensive security should remain valid. Traditional and non-traditional security aspects should continue as part of the policy.
- There was a unanimity that the environment should be discussed first, and the sections should then follow a hierarchical structure. Developmental Economy should remain at the core.
- Many participants argued for more emphasis on Climate Change, Maritime Security, the Blue Economy, and Emerging Technologies/Innovations (Cybersecurity, data protection, AI, etc.), Pakistan's bilateral relations with friendly countries, as well as Kashmir/Water issues with India, as they are no longer peripheral concerns.
- There is a need to make the National Security Division (NSD) an effective watchdog for the implementation of all sectoral policies in accordance with the NSP. To achieve this, NSD must have the necessary powers within the government's rules of business. The designation of NSA should be permanent.
- There was general agreement that NSP should continue to be people-centric.

Summary of the Proceedings

- A question was raised regarding the necessity of an NSP for Pakistan. There was broad agreement that such a policy remains essential; however, rather than drafting an entirely new document, it would be more effective to revise and build upon the existing NSP. This approach should focus on addressing its shortcomings while updating it to reflect evolving circumstances and emerging challenges.
- The new NSP should be politically owned at the highest level, rather than remain confined to institutional ownership by the NSD.
- The upcoming NSP must begin with a clear, shared strategic direction set by Pakistan's top civilian leadership. Parliamentary endorsement of the new NSP is essential not only for legitimacy but also for continuity across political transitions.
- The new NSP should be framed as a national agreement reflecting shared priorities between the central government and provinces, as well as across federating units, with special emphasis on the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The lack of provincial ownership of the NSP undermines implementation.
- The NSD should be strengthened as a central coordinating and oversight body, with clearly defined authority within the government's institutional framework. Additionally, formalizing the position of the NSD was recommended.
- The NSP should remain aspirational but realistic; however, it should be narrower and more focused, providing strategic direction rather than serving as an all-encompassing national vision document.
- Without consensus on where Pakistan intends to position itself in the next five years—politically, economically, diplomatically, and strategically—any policy document, no matter how technically sophisticated, will remain ineffective.
- There is a need to bridge the gap between policy ambition and ground reality by aligning strategic goals with available resources, institutional capacity, and practical on-the-ground implementation.
- A clear separation between policy and execution is recommended. While the NSP should serve as a high-level strategic framework, it should continue to encompass both the existing public and classified versions. This dual-track method helps keep the NSP concise and accessible, while allowing detailed planning and coordination within government.
- The new NSP should explicitly identify the sovereign capabilities Pakistan must strengthen its industrial capacity, technological self-reliance and export capacity, mineral resource development, trade resilience, the blue economy, and institutional credibility.

- The policy should include clear strategies for rural development, poverty alleviation, agricultural reforms using scientific methods, the creation of smaller administrative divisions, the regulation of religious education, countering extremism and terrorism through kinetic and non-kinetic measures, and promoting national reconciliation.
- Cybersecurity, data protection, AI, maritime security, the Blue Economy, climate change, and technological governance are no longer peripheral concerns. These domains require dedicated attention, regulatory clarity, and institutional capacity-building.
- A far more rigorous assessment of the global and regional environment is needed. The new NSP must move beyond descriptive analysis and incorporate strategic foresight to identify uncertainties, blind spots, and likely trajectories. Particular attention must be given to the evolving China–US strategic competition, the behaviour of middle powers, and the vulnerabilities of the existing international order, and to the implications of these factors for Pakistan.
- Pakistan should avoid “camp politics” and pursue issue-based partnerships. It must preserve its strategic partnership with China while maintaining constructive, functional relations with the US. The NSP should clearly articulate how Pakistan intends to navigate between unilateralism and multilateralism and shifting power alignments without sacrificing strategic autonomy.
- Enhanced engagement with regional and international organisations is also required to strengthen Pakistan's diplomatic leverage.
- Rising food prices, climate shocks, and displacement have been clearly linked to increasing crime rates in Pakistan, underscoring the need for deeper policy coordination in this domain. Therefore, human security, already recognised in the existing NSP, should be more explicitly and coherently integrated into the new NSP.
- A rights-based, citizen-centric approach is essential. Fostering trust between the state and society is vital. Minorities should be protected through inclusive policies that reinforce national cohesion rather than exacerbate alienation.
- A recurring concern throughout the discussion was the weak implementation of the current NSP. Only a minority of objectives have been meaningfully achieved, largely because of the absence of clear accountability, measurable indicators, and monitoring mechanisms.
- Budgetary considerations must also be addressed more realistically. While ministries should align their budgets with NSP priorities, some classified initiatives will require explicit resource commitments to ensure credibility and successful execution.
- While recognising that action plans should remain the responsibility of ministries and divisions, the NSP must set robust performance benchmarks, reporting requirements, and periodic review cycles.

- The new NSP may comprise both a public and a classified component. The public version should communicate national priorities, build public trust, and enhance transparency, while the classified component should cover sensitive threat assessments, capability development, resource allocation, and implementation mechanisms.
- An integrated security framework, structured around clear threat identification, policy responses, and implementation mechanisms, is endorsed. Security thinking must adopt a layered, risk-based approach that emphasises prevention, detection, resilience, and response rather than reactive crisis management.
- All participants agreed that without a strong economic base, Pakistan cannot achieve strategic autonomy or credible national security. However, some participants argued that the word 'security' may not apply to every factor, such as 'economic security'. Securing the economic future requires trade diversification, resource exploration, energy security, investment in human capital, and allocating a larger share of the budget to research and development.
- Pakistan's geo-economic orientation remains valid but depends critically on regulatory predictability and governance reform. The policy must therefore link economic priorities with institutional performance and human capital development, particularly through education reform that produces skilled, innovative, and critical thinkers aligned with emerging needs.
- The new NSP should clearly identify medium and long-term opportunities and challenges, keeping in view emerging trends, changing regional dynamics, and future national priorities.
- The policy should safeguard national ideology, culture, and social cohesion. It should also promote interfaith harmony, protect minority rights, and make public services more responsive to citizens.
- National security, economic, defence, foreign, and internal policies should be integrated into a unified framework to ensure better coordination, policy coherence, and effective implementation of national priorities.
- Media policy and guidelines for social media networks should be included to better align with mainstream media, promote responsible information sharing, ensure coherent communication, and respect media independence.

Conclusion

The roundtable concluded that Pakistan stands at a critical juncture as it prepares to move beyond its first NSP. The experience of the 2022–26 NSP offers valuable lessons: strategic ambition without political ownership, institutional coordination, and implementation discipline yields limited results. The next NSP must therefore be more focused, more realistic, and firmly anchored in Pakistan's political, economic, and institutional realities.

The new policy should not merely articulate aspirations but also guide choices. Parliamentary endorsement, prime ministerial ownership, a robust working relationship between the centre and the provinces, and the participation of all stakeholders, including the general public, are indispensable to transforming the NSP from a policy document into a national commitment. Beyond 2026, the NSP must serve as a unifying document that guides all sectoral policies under a coherent national direction. Such a policy will not only better address current challenges but also equip the state to navigate uncertainty with confidence and resilience.

In addition, there is a need to move decisively to a comprehensive national security framework. Traditional military threats and non-traditional challenges, including economic vulnerability, climate change, cyber threats, food insecurity, and governance gaps, must be treated with equal weight. Strategic autonomy in an increasingly polarised and fragmented global order should be pursued through proactive diplomacy and issue-based partnerships.

However, there was caution against over-securitising every sector. While economic resilience is indispensable to national strength, participants recommended avoiding excessive “security framing” of development and economic policy. The consensus was that economic stability and growth should be central to national policy, forming the foundation of comprehensive security without militarising economic governance. Forming the foundation of comprehensive security without militarising economic governance.

List of Participants

<u>Ser</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Designation</u>
Keynote Address		
1.	Dr Moeed Yusuf	Vice-Chancellor of the Beacon House National University
Briefing on upcoming NSP		
2.	Mr Syed Hassan Akbar	Chairman, Strategic Policy Planning, NSD
Group 1:		
1.	Dr Maria Sultan	Chairperson and President of the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI)
2.	Mr Ather Imran	CEO Sybrid Pvt. Limited
3.	Ms Javeria Masood	Strategy and Policy Lead, the Urban Practice
4.	Mr Mohsin Kamal	Founder of MK and Associates, International Law Forum
5.	Dr Adil Sultan	Dean, Faculty of Aerospace and Strategic Studies, Air University
Group 2:		
1.	Major General Inam-ul-Haq (Retd)	Defence and Security Specialist
2.	Mr. Jawad Dogar	National Coordinator, NACTA
3.	Ms. Aania Alam	Managing Partner, AEON Advisors
4.	Ms Shandana Humayun Khan	CEO, Rural Support Program Network (RSPN)
5.	Mr Fahad Hussain	Broadcast Media Professional
Group 3:		
1.	Vice Admiral Dr Ahmad Saeed HI (M) (Retd)	Former President NIMA
2.	Ms. Zainab Naeem	Associate RF, SDPI, Islamabad
3.	Ms Saleha Khaqan	Founder of Rawal Institute of Health Sciences
4.	Dr. Najeeba Arif	Chairperson, Pakistan Academy of Letters
5.	Mr. Saqib Sherani	CEO Macro-Economist

Program

<u>PLENARY</u>		
1030-1035	Recitation from the Holy Quran	-
1035-1040	Introductory Remarks	Dir DSS
1040-1050	Welcome Note	DG ISSRA
1050-1105 (15 mins)	Keynote Address	Dr Moeed Yusuf, former NSA and currently serving as Vice-Chancellor of Beaconhouse National University
1105-1115	Update on upcoming NSP	Syed Hassan Akbar, NSD
1115-1125	Briefing about Conduct Modalities	Dir DSS
1125-1130	Group Photo	-
<u>WORKING SESSIONS</u>		
1130-1230	Consideration by Working Groups	Working Group 1-3
<u>PLENARY</u>		
1230-1315	Presentation by All Groups (15 Min Each)	Presenters to be selected by the Group
1315-1415	Interactive Session	-
1415-1420	Vote of Thanks	DG ISSRA
1420 Onwards	Lunch & Dispersal	-

Picture Gallery







Institute For Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA)
National Defence University, Islamabad