



RESEARCH PAPER

Politics of Idealism and Policy of Realism: A Stakeholder's Perspective of Gaps in National Security Policy of Pakistan 2022-2026

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to uncover important elements of Pakistan's National Security Policy 2022–2026, by contrasting it with the policies of the United States and India. Identifying gaps aid help in determining prospective changes. This study examines the national security issues like civil-military interactions, political stability, external threats, regional isolation, and the necessity of a geo-economic focus for improved human security. Open-ended, semi-structured questions are employed in the qualitative method using snowball sampling reach out reticent experts. Findings reveals that political governments carry rhetoric of idealism but state policy remains embroiled with realism. Critical issues such as Kashmir, misuse of Islamic ideology fueling extremism, and inclusive stakeholder engagement remain inadequately addressed. Security institutions dominate policymaking, sidelining diplomatic and intellectual contributions. The NSP neglects Pakistan's ideological underpinnings and public perspectives. The paper advocates a shift toward a people-centered approach that integrates societal, economic, and administrative dimensions, aligning security with broader national development goals.

Keywords: National Security Policy, Strategic Policy Framework, Geopolitical Dynamics, Internal Security

Introduction

A nation's stability, sovereignty, and prosperity all depend on its national security, especially Pakistan's given its geostrategic location and myriad security threats. These include border issues with India, terrorism, separatism, extremism, and new cyber threats. This study compares Pakistan's national security policies with those of India and the USA, examining societal perceptions of national security. It provides insights into policy similarities and differences, highlighting gaps in Pakistan's security policy. (Imran, Murtiza, & Akbar, 2023)

Pakistan's complicated geopolitical and strategic environment makes national security a crucial concern. Pakistan is confronted with numerous security issues, such as regional instability, terrorism, cross-border militancy, and internal strife. (Ahmed, 2021) Pakistan's national security strategy has been significantly shaped by its geographic position in the region (Yaseen, Jathol, & Muzaffar, 2016). Because of its advantageous location, it is also susceptible to external security risks including nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and cross-border infiltration (Hanif & Muzaffar, 2025). Attacks on Pakistan have increased due to the emergence of extremist organisations like the Taliban and al-Qaeda. There are serious security risks to Pakistan from the TTP, IS-K, and BLA's comeback. (Alpamis & Turaeva, 2023)

Pakistan, being an ideological state, has always built an idealist public opinion on various issues of national and international interests. However, official policies have been

based on realism, such as in the case of Pakistan's claim on OJ&K. In domestic politics, public representatives get elected on an idealist narrative on OJ&K but adopt a realist and more pragmatic policy, suggesting that war isn't possible between two nuclear-armed states. (Hanif, & Muzaffar, 2025) Various governments in Pakistan have pursued idealism in politics but realism in international relations, national security, and foreign policies. Other countries such as Iran, (Bhatti & Shahrukh, 2023) India, (Chaudhry, Abbas, & Yuan, 2020) and Japan, (Ganguly, Pardesi, & Thompson, 2023) which have faced difficulties in forming their respective national security policies reflecting the opinions of masses as major stakeholders, have focused on making more inclusive policies.

Separatist movements and sectarian violence are among Pakistan's internal security issues; the BLA and other groups frequently attack security troops and civilians in Baluchistan. In Pakistan, sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia groups has frequently resulted in deadly attacks against religious minorities. (Bhatti & Shahrukh, 2023)

Historical Development of NSP of Pakistan

Because of shifting geopolitical landscapes and strategic priorities, Pakistan's national security strategy has changed over time. In order to advise the government on military and security issues, the Military Advisory Council (MAC) was founded in 1948. To bolster its defence capabilities and defend its borders during the Cold War, Pakistan joined the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in the 1950s and negotiated military agreements with the United States. (Ganguly, Pardesi, & Thompson, 2023) Pakistan's national security strategy changed in the 1960s to emphasise regional cooperation and economic growth, with the establishment of the Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC). (Bhatti & Shahrukh, 2023) In the 1970s and 1980s, Pakistan's national security strategy was impacted by the Cold War and regional tensions with India. (Roy & Rehman, 2019) Pakistan's national security strategy was dominated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s and the emergence of terrorist organisations in the 2000s.. (Shah & Ma, 2023) Pakistan's National Action Plan (NAP) was established in 2014 with the goal of combating sectarianism, terrorism, and extremism. In 2014, the National Security Policy (NSP) was developed with an emphasis on a holistic strategy that included social, economic, and military aspects. (Sahay, 2023) Pakistan's national security policy, influenced by government agencies, military, intelligence services, politicians, and civil society, aims to protect sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interests, and promote regional stability. This study uses the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework to compare the national security strategies of the United States, India, and Pakistan, (Hayden, 2011) taking India as a regional adversary and USA as global benchmark.

Literature Review

Analysis of National Security Policies using IAD framework

By analysing actors, norms, institutional settings, incentive structures, rules, action arenas, participants, exogenous variables, and action scenarios, the Institutional Analysis and Development framework investigates institutions. It provides an organised way to comprehend how these elements interact to affect how people behave and what happens in social systems. (Koontz, 2003)

Key Elements of NSP of United States of America

The US plays a crucial role in global affairs, addressing issues like climate change, COVID-19, and national security. The United Nations and NATO promote peace and stability, while the US is committed to democracy and countering authoritarianism. The US modernizes its military to defend national interests and deter conflict, and uses power to

outcompete China and Russia. The US employs strategies like trade agreements, supply chain diversification, technological innovation, and energy independence. It also fosters an open, interconnected and inter-dependent approach in Indo-Pacific region. It supports Ukraine, and expands engagement in the Arctic, Africa, and the Middle East to address global threats. ¹⁶ It can be said that US foreign policy depends upon making international alliances, traditional and strategic weapons' support in a pragmatic way and diplomatic maneuverability due to its economic might arising from dollar being an international trade currency. (Biden, 2022)

Analysis using IAD Framework

The American policy aims to modernize the military, and uses themes such as, combat climate change, strengthen democracy, and competition with global nations selectively to pursue its national interests, not as a matter of principle to be universally applicable. The goal is to create a free, open, safe, and prosperous world community. The policy claims Russia and China as US allies. It outlines international law, treaties, and agreements and provides guidelines for actors to enhance American influence. However, it does not provide enough detail on how these regulations would be applied or modified in response to evolving conditions.

Critical Analysis

The policy presents numerous actions but does not outline specific implementation strategies and contingencies, leading to challenges in achieving its goals. The vague rules and enforcement mechanisms, along with the importance of allies, rivals, and global institutions, are unclear. The idealistic goals are idealistic without clear pathways, and real-world complexities and geopolitical challenges often require more nuanced strategies. The absence of thorough plans and enforcement methods may make the policy less effective, but it may also make it more flexible in response to shifting global conditions.

Key Elements of NSP of India:

In order to preserve regional peace and stability, the policy places a high focus on building solid ties with major powers, adjacent countries, and regional partners. It deals with domestic disputes, maintaining national security, and promoting economic expansion. It addresses new dangers such as environmental issues, cyber threats, and technological upheaval (Saeed, Muzaffar & Yaseen, 2023). The policy promotes indigenous capabilities in sectors like defence, space, and cyber security. It also calls for policy reform and capacity building to enhance law enforcement. The policy also focuses on cyber and space security, enhancing communication and information security. In order to preserve natural resources and guarantee long-term security, it also highlights the necessity of radical environmental policies and sustainable energy transitions. (Government of India, 2019)

Analysis using IAD Framework

India's national security policy involves multiple actors like government, defence forces, intelligence agencies, police, R&D organizations, the private sector, and the public, all governed by specific laws and regulations. Citizens are increasingly engaging in public sector oversight, necessitating legal standing, continuous presence, and structured access to official information and dissenting views. (Nandy, Saifuzzaman, Patra, & Besra, 2025)

Critical Analysis

Although the policy places a strong emphasis on fortifying relations with neighbouring countries and major powers, it might not take into account China's increasing aggressiveness. Although internal tensions are acknowledged, there are no explicit

integration rules. Although it recognises environmental issues, cyber threats, and technological upheaval, it lacks a well-thought-out plan. Although the policy encourages the development of domestic capabilities, it does not provide a path towards self-sufficiency in fields like cyber security and defence.

Key Elements of Pakistan's NSP:

Pakistan's security strategy, which emphasises internal security, territorial integrity, national cohesion, and citizen welfare, blends traditional and non-traditional methods. It seeks to combat maritime rivalry in the Indian Ocean, modernise the military forces, lessen external imbalances, and make investments in cyber security. Along with prioritising the fight against terrorism, violent sub-nationalisms, extremism, sectarianism, and organised crime, the policy also seeks to neutralise attempts to jeopardise Pakistan's security and stability and to forge strong diplomatic ties in support of national objectives. Pakistan's youth, health security, water and climate stress, gender equality, and human rights are also covered in the strategy. (Government of Pakistan, 2022)

Analysis using IAD framework:

The government, military, intelligence community, and civilians all contribute to the policy, and consultations are held to ensure inclusive decision-making. Traditional, non-traditional, and regional security are examples of action venues. The policy is intended for five years and requires periodic evaluations. The intended outcomes include national cohesion, territorial integrity, economic independence, state sovereignty, and financial equilibrium.

Critical Evaluation

In order to improve economic security by lessening external imbalances, the policy formulation process purports to involve and consult with a wide range of stakeholders, specialists, and individuals. Both conventional and non-traditional security measures are emphasised in the policy, but how resources are allocated and priorities are set will determine how effective it is. The policy also emphasizes regional and international diplomacy, prioritizing social and environmental challenges for long-term stability

Material and Methods

This qualitative study explores Pakistan's national security policy gaps using an interpretive approach, incorporating grounded theory. The research population includes stakeholders representing the National Security Division, intellectuals, researchers, and armed forces personnel. Snowball sampling was used due to data confidentiality and difficulty in accessing experts. A total of 26 experts were interviewed, providing diverse viewpoints. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted as the primary data collection method expecting detailed insights.

This study uses thematic analysis, involving manual and NVIVO software analysis. Despite limitations like time and budget constraints, sample selection bias, and participant roles, the findings offer valuable insights into improving Pakistan's national security policy and fostering a more secure and resilient nation. The recommendations offer practical pathways for policymakers to address identified gaps and enhance policy efficacy

Table 1
Comparative Analysis of the National Security Policies (Pakistan, India, USA)

Characteristics	Pakistan	USA	India
Actors	Government	Government	Government
	Military	Military	Military

	Civil society	Partners and Allies	
	Private sector	Private sector	Private sector
		Global Community	Global community
	Local policy guidelines	Involvement in global affairs	
Performers		Local and regional	
	Security actions based on regional situation		
		Global collaboration	Security
	Constitutional Standards	Transnational laws	
Guiding Points		Legal Rules and Regulations	
	Legal Arrangement	Treaties & accords	
		International agreements	
	Increased focus on security	Worldwide stability	
Outcomes		Comprehensive Growth	
	Growth in Economy	Strong democracy	
		Stability in Region	
	Attention to security	Full range scope	All-encompassing strategy
Advantage	Economic development	Transnational support	
		Sustainable progress	
	Regional alliances	Attention to rules and regulations	
		Technology Emphasis	
Weak Areas	Lack of resources	Absence of specificity	
		Issues in execution	
	institutional capacity is limited	Insufficient analysis of actors' motivations	
		Insufficient collaboration	
	key stakeholders are not involved	Possibility of going overboard	
		Insufficient Involvement of Stakeholders	

Above comparative table shows the USA's policy outlines comprehensive actions, but faces weaknesses such as unclear implementation strategies and idealistic goals whereas in US policy the 'stated' and 'actual' policies are two different entities. India's policy emphasizes ties with major powers, acknowledging internal conflicts, and technological challenges India has been successful in entering into regional alliances for example in I2U2 and in QSD which has expanded its outreach beyond its immediate neighbours.

Pakistan's policy focuses on economic security, traditional and non-traditional security measures, and diplomacy, but faces weaknesses in resource exploitation need for prioritization, and clarity in achieving long-term stability. The country's policy shows strengths in inclusive development and a balanced security approach, but faces weaknesses in resource exploitation, need for clearer prioritization, and achieving long-term stability. One of the biggest risks to national security is the aftermath of political unrest.

Policies are not put into effect long enough to achieve their full potential. The power struggle between military and democratic norms has prevented democratic norms from becoming sufficiently ingrained for political and economic stability in the country. Pakistan's absence from the ME scene has shown yet another significant flaw in its security strategy. Political and economic relations with ME have significantly deteriorated, making space for India.

Results and Discussion

This Research paper evaluates Pakistan's policies, identifying areas for improvement or inferiority compared to other countries. Pakistan's strategic location is crucial for national security, with potential advantages in regional dynamics and global geopolitics. To leverage this position, Pakistan needs an ideological character, cultivating enduring relationships with neighbouring countries and fostering collaboration with international actors. However, challenges like lack of clear political vision and intermittent martial laws hinder the development of a strong political culture. Pakistan's political landscape is influenced by weak institutions, a strident relationship between civilian government and military, and incompetent leadership. The decision to align with the USA has influenced Pakistan's Freedom Party (FP), affecting its international relationships.

Military Representative: *It has been both a boon and a bane, yes. Pakistan has faced numerous internal issues as a result of its strategic location on the western edge of Afghanistan, which is considered to be part of Mackinder's heartland hypothesis. This has been true throughout the Cold War and since the USSR's demise. The geography also drove home the fatal outcomes of the US-led War on Terror, which could fill a book.*

Role of Regional Cooperation:

Pakistan's advantageous location presents opportunities for political stability, economic expansion, and national security. But relationships with the USA and EU need to be reconsidered. Security, trade, and connectivity in the region can be improved by putting an emphasis on long-lasting relationships, pursuing an open foreign policy, and concentrating on economic development.

Person from Think Tank: *Pakistan has historically used its geographical location to gain benefits, particularly from great powers like the United States and China. However, this 'locational narcissism' has hindered Pakistan from diversifying its relations with these powers. In today's world, where technology influences geopolitical events, relying solely on geographical location is insufficient to meet Pakistan's national security objectives, as technology influences the outcome of geopolitical events. Therefore, a more strategic approach is needed.*

Alignment of Pakistan with the USA has constrained its foreign policy, limiting the NSP's independence and focusing it on location-based strategies. The shift towards China via CPEC signals a potential move from US-centrism to China-centrism, complicating policy independence. Unlike Pakistan, India has successfully diversified its NSP, expanding influence in the Middle East through economic investments and cultural initiatives.

Regional security targets:

The framework strikes a balance between soft power through cultural diplomacy, regional organisations, and big power connections. Some point out the difficulties, while others recognise the strategic significance. The conclusion of the Afghan War, border fence, connectivity discussions, and the extension of the Belt and Road Initiative are among the accomplishments. However, other respondents believe that limited progress has been made because of the effect that internal instability has on national security.

Representative of Academia: *Very few! We assert sovereignty, but Allah is ultimate, therefore everything is still theoretical. There is some obvious hypocrisy. We haven't done much to secure ourselves. It's a complex concept. If domestic instability continues, developing weapons and missiles won't be enough since it would undermine our national security.*

Perspective on its Allies and Adversaries, and its goals for Regional Security:

India is acknowledged as an enemy, Afghanistan's stability is vital, China is a key partner, and Pakistan has issues related to its strategic location and national security potential. Since these problems have not been resolved by Pakistan's policies, attention has shifted to regional stability. The nation's security goals are still centred on stability, which positions it as an American watchdog rather than a global force. Economic growth is not always a direct result of Pakistan's emphasis on conflict resolution, nuclear deterrent, and fortifying its ties with China (Hanif, & Muzaffar, 2025a)

Person from Think Tank: *India remains the most credible threat as a nation-state, while Iran and Afghanistan pose a concerning trend. Despite lacking traditional allies, relationships are forged through partnerships, with Central Asian nations eager to join forces. China is a strategic collaborator, and Central Asian states like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan support the country. Central Asian states maintain strong connections and are open to fostering robust relations.*

Treaties:

Pakistan's involvement in regional treaties is restricted due to political tensions, territorial disputes, security concerns, and internal instability. Despite achievements like the Indus Water Treaty and China engagements, Pakistan struggles to sign or execute impactful treaties due to complex geopolitical rivalries and lack of trust among regional players. Proactive diplomatic efforts and mutually beneficial agreements could help overcome these hurdles and enhance regional security, economic growth, and technological development, but foreign policy independence is required.

Security objectives:

The majority of respondents in a survey about Pakistan's achieved regional security targets show mixed opinions. Some acknowledge accomplishments like removal from the FATF Grey List and human rights awareness, while others stress on-going national security projects. The majority, however, feel that certain goals have not been entirely achieved, pointing to issues like ongoing terror attacks, economic failures, border transgressions, and the underuse of strategic assets.

Ideology:

Rather than rigorously adhering to its declared Islamic philosophy, Pakistan's national security policy is mostly influenced by pragmatic and secular factors. While some contend that the program is not particularly consistent with Islamic principles, others recognise that Pakistan's security strategy has been influenced by religious ideology and extremist thought. It is accepted that striking a balance between resolving undesirable results and upholding principled ideas is difficult, underscoring the necessity of a nuanced strategy that takes into account both practical and policy considerations.

NS Analyst: *Although we as a state uphold some Islamic principles, the NSP text itself needs to address some very practical problems. others of these questions are quite secular, and others may call for an Islamic solution, while others may not. That would call for a practical strategy. What we need to do would be provided by policy. a specific set of enquiries to obtain.*

It's more about tackling real-world issues. Ideology has very little bearing on our issues, which are largely secular.

Security Paradigm:

Most responders concur that Pakistan's regional significance has diminished as a result of the United States military's withdrawal from Afghanistan. They stress that Pakistan's global security paradigm needs to be improved and that internal strengths should be prioritised. Given the interdependence of security, development, and sustainable growth, the analysis highlights the significance of a strong global security strategy. Pakistan can take a more active role on the international scene because of its sizable Muslim population and distinct geopolitical location.

Person from Think Tank: *"With the withdrawal of American military forces from Afghanistan, Pakistan has lost its significance in the region. Pakistan must improve its own capabilities.*

The responses to Pakistan's strategy to address unimplemented resolutions in Occupied Kashmir show diverse views. Some acknowledge Pakistan's stance within the UN Security Council but express uncertainty following India's actions. Others assert active efforts in international forums and diplomatic support. The complex nature of the issue and Pakistan's internal dynamics contribute to this diversity.

Person from Think Tank: *(Sarcastically) you ought to be aware of the actions it has taken in the UN. It is paddled in a traditional manner. Resolutions 48–49 serve as its foundation. Gen. Musharraf led the demilitarisation of Kashmir in an attempt to depart from those resolutions! The Kashmir policy has not worked. Kashmir is the source of Pakistan's difficulties, and its needless persistence on it has caused several nations to turn their backs on Pakistan.*

Veto Powers:

The UN Security Council's veto power has been criticized for creating imbalances and undermining equality and democracy. Critics argue that the Council has historically prioritized Europe and the developed world, failing to protect Asian and African nations' human rights. Post-Cold War, human rights violations have increased, impacting global affairs. Alternative mechanisms for representation, fairness, and collaborative engagement may help mitigate the broader implications of veto power.

intelligentsia: *The UN has long needed reform; it is ineffectual for a variety of reasons, including the veto power, but being a Muslim nuclear state cannot be a requirement for a permanent seat. To gain a permanent seat at the UNSC, one must have global influence, adhere to human rights and international law, and have economic clout—all while obtaining the support of the majority.*

Pakistan's policy success hinges on effective implementation, national cohesion, and addressing water management and population growth issues, requiring long-term solutions, policy consistency, and a holistic approach.

NS Analyst: *Pakistan's National Security Policy prioritizes resources based on overall strategy, focusing on key areas like national cohesion, population growth, food security, climate and water stress, and emerging technologies. The implementation plan outlines how to optimize resources for securing national security needs, with some short-term and others long-term goals. The country's problem lies in its resource organization system.*

Managing Dearth of Resources:

The majority of respondents believe economic, political, and internal stability are crucial for Pakistan's national security policy objectives. Successful policy implementation, national cohesion, and addressing issues like water management and population growth are essential for sustainable progress.

Think Tank Representative: *The state and its institutions have monopolised national security, with civil society playing a negligible role. Therefore, the institutions or the national security strategy are in agreement with the civil society organisations that are in sync. They might have a part in spreading certain policies, but their contribution is quite little.*

The National Security Policy (NSP) in Pakistan is considered inclusive but faces challenges like representation of Islamic ideology and international issues. To improve inclusivity, regular consultations, university engagement, and incorporating think tanks from political parties are proposed strategies. Translation of policy documents into Urdu Language and university talk-shows can also enhance understanding. The success of the NSP depends on stability in national and international politico-economic indicators.

Conclusion

Due to a number of flaws, Pakistan's National Security Policy (NSP) is heavily criticised. With a poorly defined and targeted foreign policy, it is seen as neither free nor independent. The situation is made more difficult by internal issues including secession, radicalism, and civil-military ties as well as external threats from regional powers. A thorough examination of the perspectives of many society segments is absent from the NSP's partial alignment with stakeholder aspirations.

Pakistan's capacity to protect its interests and participate effectively in international affairs is hampered by political instability and a lack of a defined political vision. Political leadership often prioritise the ties with the establishment ahead rather making reasonable and mature choices that serve the interests of the country as a whole. Inflation, debt, and a balance of payments crisis are examples of economic issues that demands for structural changes and outside assistance.

Pakistan must maximise the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a trade route and capitalise on the natural riches of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and Baluchistan in order to reach its full economic potential. However, as the US sees favourable developments for China as strategic threats, this approach would be counter to US interests in the area. With leaders like Ayyub and Musharraf having secular views that benefit the US and Zia's Islamic attitude supporting the US-led war in Afghanistan, Pakistan's martial laws have historically been pro-American.

Economic difficulties call for structural changes and outside assistance. Focusing on regional trade alliances, infrastructure development, and economic growth can reduce reliance on foreign aid and generate a freer approach in selection of regional allies. Policies must focus a gradual shift towards long-term national vision that doesn't change with changes in regional power dynamics is essential for internal stability.

The study highlights Pakistan's political system's weaknesses, where political unrest makes it more difficult to obtain funding from foreign agencies. There are internal dangers and conflicting interpretations as a result of Pakistan's limited participation in regional accords and unclear basic values.

The National Security Policy (NSP) needs to adopt a more inclusive strategy to accommodate diverse societal groups. In-depth discussions with all relevant parties is vital, apart from military officials, the general public, , civil society activists, and intellectuals,

should be included in policy making. Clear definition of key values can prevent misunderstandings and foster envisioning a clearer description of national aspirations.

To improve democracy, democratic institutions should be strengthened through electoral reforms, transparent elections, and civilian-military oversight. Regional cooperation and addressing press freedom and media restrictions are crucial. The Kashmir issue should be resolved diplomatically and internationally, and domestic capabilities should be developed to promote transparency and accountability. Inclusivity and think tanks can enhance stakeholder engagement.

Limitations and Future Directions:

Due to time restrictions and reluctance to divulge sensitive material, the study encountered difficulties scheduling appointments with experts. This hampered the gathering of thorough data and possible viewpoint gaps. Future studies should concentrate on the efficacy of the suggestions made, the difficulties encountered during the reform of civil-military relations and decentralisation, comparisons of Pakistan's policy with that of other countries, and the implications of an inclusive curriculum for education in combating extremism. These lines of inquiry can offer a thorough comprehension of Pakistan's national security strategy and its possible effects on the course of the nation in the future.

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