Non-Traditional Security Threats and Decision-Making Mechanisms in Pakistan

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1. Introduction

The state-centric global security apparatus that emerged after World War II to safeguard states' territorial integrity and political independence underwent significant changes after the end of the Cold War. The post-Cold War global security landscape faces a growing challenge from geopolitical competition in an increasingly multipolar world and rapid technological advancements.[1] The evolution of a more human-centric security apparatus is a direct result of globalization, driven by interdependence and interconnectedness. In today's scenario, states prioritize growth and development, employing economic tools to engage in political battles,[2] promote and defend national interests, and yield favorable geopolitical outcomes.[3] Additionally, non-traditional security (NTS) challenges compound the existing security issues. Today, more people die due to hunger and lack of safe drinking water than to armed conflicts. Lack of access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene causes 1.4 million deaths globally every year.[4] In comparison, 238,000 people lost their lives in armed conflicts.[5]

Pakistan is also facing an unprecedented poly-crisis, the worst since 1971, triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and exacerbated by severe climate change events, political and economic instability, and regional geopolitical shifts marked by great power rivalry. In 2023, Pakistan's economy contracted by 0.6%, inflation increased to 29.2%, its public debt stock reached 82.3% of GDP, and poverty increased 39.4%, resulting in approximately twelve million more Pakistanis falling below the poverty threshold.[6] Pakistan is the fifth most climate-vulnerable country in the world and its human and economic security is being threatened significantly due to the intense and frequent climate-related events and slow transition towards climate adaptability.[7] The floods of 2022 caused economic losses of approximately fifteen billion US dollars and affected thirty-three million people.[8] These challenges have exposed weakness in its ad hoc national security decision-making structures that affect its response to internal and external challenges and relationships with other countries. To effectively deal with these internal, external, and transnational security challenges, Pakistan must strengthen its national security decision-making.

The paper's main objective is to discuss challenges related to Pakistan's decision-making process associated with NTS. To better understand the case, the paper first discusses the evolving nature of NTS challenges and the concept of comprehensive security. Secondly, although the national security decision-making involves multiple players and mechanisms, the paper will only examine the role of the National Security Council (Council), National Security Committee (Committee), and the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA). The final section will focus on ways to effectively enhance Pakistan's decision-making process to address security challenges, particularly NTS challenges.

2. Non-Traditional Security Challenges

It is feared that expanding the contours of the term "security" may undermine its intellectual coherence and affect national security decision-making.[9] However, it is difficult to overlook the impact of non-military threats on national and global security. NTS challenges include natural

disasters, climate change, infectious diseases, population, mass migration and displacements, economic security, food and energy security, threats to cyber security and critical infrastructure, cyber warfare, artificial intelligence, terrorism, hybrid warfare, lawfare, and transnational crimes, among others. The significant socio-economic impact of NTS threats on states' social cohesion and stability[10] underscores the importance of deliberated, coordinated, and data-informed decision-making processes for NTS threats.

The NTS threats are not new and have resulted in the rise and fall of empires. Droughts caused the collapse of the Akkadian Empire (2334 - 2154 BC) and Mayapan Empire (1441-1461), while Yu the Great's effective management of floods in the Yellow River laid down the foundation of the Xia dynasty (2070 BC).[11] Similarly, during World War II, the UK established the Ministry of Economic Warfare "to wage economic warfare against the Axis Powers" by interfering with industrial production and food supply.[12] Today, the NTS challenges are far more complex, affect the well-being and dignity of citizens, and result in political, social, and economic instability.[13]

Most NTS challenges are interconnected and have transnational characteristics, requiring greater cooperation between regional and global communities. Climate change causes food insecurity and increases the likelihood of natural disasters and armed conflicts (fourteen out of the twenty-five most climate-vulnerable countries are also experiencing armed conflict).[14] Carbon-intensive armed disputes[15] affect not only political and social cohesion, economic development, and governance mechanisms but also the state's capacity to deal with the NTS challenges.

Similarly, traditional and NTS challenges are interlinked, and states cannot achieve one without the other. It is challenging to attain military security without economic stability. To sum it up, states must achieve comprehensive security or integrated security[16] that encompasses the military, economic, political, environmental, and sociocultural aspects of security. To ensure comprehensive security, states need to adopt the whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approaches,[17] especially when dealing with pandemics, human rights violations, and cyber security challenges.

In recent years, several states have reprioritized their security challenges. For instance, the US has identified two strategic challenges: major powers' competition and shared transnational challenges that impact humanity collectively, such as climate change, food and energy insecurity, diseases, and terrorism.[18] Other countries like Japan, South Korea, and Australia have identified NTS threats to their countries, including economic and energy security, technological development, cyber, maritime, space, intelligence, and development assistance in their national security strategies. Pakistan, too, reprioritized its security challenges and adopted the concept of comprehensive security, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.1. Non-Traditional Security Challenges and Pakistan's National Security Policy 2022-2026

In 1947, after gaining independence, Pakistan faced two significant NTS challenges: the refugee crisis and water. The Indian subcontinent's partition displaced at least fifteen million people, and Pakistan received more than seven million refugees.[19] It struggled to rehabilitate refugees, provide basic healthcare facilities and control outbreaks of cholera and other diseases in refugee camps. The 'Standstill Agreement' of 1947 between India and Pakistan, which froze water allocations and flow, expired on 31 March 1948. The next day, which marked the start of the Kharif (summer crop) sowing season, India stopped water flow to the Dipalpur Canal and Upper Bari Doab. The

water flow resumed after five weeks,[20] but the dispute remained unresolved until the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 concluded.

Despite facing NTS challenges in its early years, Pakistan has always viewed its security from a traditional security perspective, and the whole narrative remained hostage to the 'gun vs. butter' debate. Although this was a result of historical and geopolitical realities of the region, some of this could be traced back to the brinkmanship of populist political leaders. Pakistani leaders have always entrusted geoeconomics to geopolitics and territorial disputes; for instance, economic projects [21] and trade[22] between India and Pakistan were linked to the settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. The leadership placed "Pakistan's security and territorial integrity" above its "economic development."[23] This reflects the belief that the state is primarily responsible to ensure territorial security, which is considered more important than economic and human security. This mindset inadvertently puts the armed forces on a pedestal above all other institutions. Territorial integrity and independence are of paramount importance for all states, but territorial integrity and economic security are not mutually exclusive.

Over the years, Pakistan held internal deliberations about its security strategy. The first known articulation of the alternative policy was made in 1990 by then NSA Iqbal Akhund (December 1988 - August 1990), who described national security as not just the safety of "borders but also safety within". He identified economic security, internal cohesion, and population dynamics as the most critical challenges to security.[24] In recent times, economic security and geoeconomics have received unprecedented attention due to the country's financial crisis, and policymakers have recognized that territorial integrity cannot be guaranteed without ensuring economic security.[25] Also, the changing geopolitical interests of the US and its allies in the region have resulted in Pakistan losing its geostrategic importance. Consequently, policymakers have been forced to reconsider security priorities, which resulted in the reorientation of the strategy from geopolitics to geoeconomics and human security.

The new national security vision was launched in January 2022 in the form of Pakistan's first-ever National Security Policy (NSP). The NSP presented a "citizen-centric comprehensive national security framework" to "ensure the safety, security, dignity, and prosperity of all citizens". It placed "economic security at the core of comprehensive national security." The NSP appreciated the "symbiotic relationship between economic, traditional, and human security" that allows the articulation of holistic policy actions and can help in optimizing Pakistan's national security outcomes, i.e., "sustainable and inclusive economic growth" is needed to expand Pakistan's "national resource pie," which will, in turn, allow greater availability of resources "to bolster traditional and human security."[26]

Besides economic security, the NSP has a separate section on 'Human Security,' which examines several NTS challenges, including health, population, migration, climate, water, food, and gender issues. The strategic NTS threats, which are challenging Pakistan's very existence and stability, require a data-informed and effective decision-making process. This needs a clear NTS-related assessment and prioritization, inter-ministerial and civil-military coordination, increased resource allocation, and oversight. The following section will examine Pakistan's past attitudes and approaches to institutionalized decision-making through the Committee/Council and the ONSA, as well as the attention given to NTS threats by decision-makers.

3. Stocktaking of National Security Decision-Making Apparatus in Pakistan

Since independence, Pakistan has been facing acute political and security challenges. The coordination of civil and military institutions is crucial to deal with these challenges and make effective national security decisions. The military's increased involvement in decision-making and implementation has been facilitated by the political leadership's abdication of responsibility,[27] the absence of institutional coordination, and the military's independent position[28] on foreign policy issues. On 25 March 1969, Pakistan, following the US, established the Council to ease tensions and institutionalize national security decision-making.

General Yahya Khan imposed martial law and appointed Maj. General Ghulam Umar as the NSA (March 1969 - December 1971), and established the National Security Council housed in the Office of the President, which included General Yahya[29] (chairman),[30] the Director-General Service Intelligence, the Director-General of Intelligence Bureau, the Home Minister, and the NSA. The Council was established with lofty objectives, but, in reality, it operated merely as a deliberative forum without any clearly defined role, mandate, structure or deliberation process. Consequently, it lacked direct involvement in the actual decision-making process. Decision-making, instead, was highly centralized and informal,[31] as General Yahya heavily relied on a select group of trusted military and bureaucratic advisers,[32] including his NSA. As a result, the regime failed to effectively address both internal and external security threats. Though structural failures in formal decision-making mechanisms[33] had persisted through successive regimes,[34] Yahya's regime significantly hastened events[35] that culminated in the fall of Dhaka on 16 December, 1971, and the declaration of independence by East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, from West Pakistan.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the newly elected President, implemented various measures to discredit the military leadership[36] and reform the decision-making process by diminishing the military's involvement.[37] Firstly, he established a commission of inquiry to investigate the events leading to the Fall of Dhaka. While the complete report remained classified, leaked excerpts revealed a detailed discussion on the roles of the NSA and the Council. The Commission held Yahya, his NSA, and two others primarily responsible for the crimes and atrocities in East Pakistan.[38] Concerning the Council, the Commission asserted that there was no necessity for a supra-Council, which had minimal civilian representation, to control military and civil intelligence agencies. It recommended the abolition of the Council,[39] aligning with Bhutto's aim to decrease military influence on the decision-making mechanism.

In May 1976, Bhutto took two significant steps to ensure civilian control over Pakistan's defense process: he issued a White Paper on Defense Organization to provide intellectual justification for civilian supremacy over national security decision-making[40] and established the Defense Committee of the Cabinet, having Muhammad Akbar Khan as his NSA (February 1976 - March 1977). After the general election 1977, Bhutto appointed General (R) Tikka Khan (April - July 1977) as his State Minister for Defense and National Security. His stint ended due to the imposition of another martial law. While Bhutto's efforts towards the end of his rule had little impact on national security decision-making process, it did provide a template for subsequent civilian governments to establish a Cabinet Committee, and military dictators and hybrid regimes continued to prefer the Council. Most Pakistani political parties have been always against establishing the Council and giving a formal role of the military in national security decision-making, as they considered the involvement of armed forces in the decision-making process as an attempt to encroach on their exclusive decision-making authority.

Two military dictators tried to establish the National Security Council through a constitutional amendment. First, in 1985, General Zia-ul-Haq established the Council by adding Article 152-A to the Constitution,[41] with the mandate to make "recommendations" relating to the proclamation of emergency, security, and other matters of national importance. Secondly, in 2002, General Pervez Musharraf revived Article 152-A[42] to reestablish the Council as a "forum for consultation on strategic matters pertaining to the sovereignty, integrity, and security of the State; and the matters relating to democracy, governance, and inter-provincial harmony". However, during his eleven-year tenure, General Zia appointed Lt. General Ghulam Hassan as his NSA for only a few months (January - July 1978). During his nine-year term, General Musharraf, on the other hand, did not appoint a NSA. Instead, he assigned Tariq Aziz, his Principal Secretary, an additional responsibility as the Secretary of the National Security Council Secretariat (2004 to 2008). It's worth noting that the latter position is more administrative in nature. Although Aziz was never formally designated as an NSA, he conducted the most sensitive, secret, and composite back-channel negotiations with India.[43]

These practices had minimal impact on strengthening the institutionalized decision-making process. Both dictators made half-hearted attempts to establish a structured decision-making mechanism, coinciding with periods in which they were relinquishing some of their powers through Parliamentary elections (1985 and 2002) and appointing a civilian setup under martial law administration. Concurrently, they were involved in making significant constitutional amendments to legitimize their military takeovers and extend their rule. Both dictators eventually reversed their own initiatives, abolishing the Councils within a few months under the influence of political parties or allies with whom they engaged in political bargaining. The support of these parties was crucial for the success of constitutional amendments. General Musharraf later established the Council, a consultative body, through the National Security Act of 2004, which was eventually disbanded by the democratically elected Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gillani in November 2008.

At least two other Army Chiefs, General Mirza Aslam Beg (August 1988 - August 1991) and General Jehangir Karamat (January 1996 - October 1998), strongly advocated for a formal role for the armed forces in national security decision-making but remained unsuccessful in convincing civilian leadership.[44] During General Beg's tenure, the army proposed the formation of a National Security Advisory Group to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (December 1988 - August 1990). General Karamat advocated the establishment of a three-tiered Council that would give the military a constitutional role in running the country, would help to avoid conflict between the civilian and military leadership, and would include a think tank of experts.[45] The civilian leadership's distrust of the Committee is so deeply rooted that they were irked by mere suggestion to establish the Council, as they perceived it as an attempt by the military to encroach on their decision-making authority. General Karamat was forced to resign just two days after making the statement.[46]

Between 1988 and 1999, four successive civilian governments made a conscious effort to restrict the formal role of military leadership in national security decision-making. The only exception to this period was the caretaker government of Prime Minister Meraj Khalid (November 1996 - February 1997), despite having limited powers, established a Council for Defence and National Security through a Presidential notification, which was promptly declared null and void by the next Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif.[47] On 14 May, 2006, the exiled leadership of Pakistan's political parties signed the 'Charter of Democracy' and once again formally expressed their opposition to the Council. They promised to abolish the Council and restore the Defence Cabinet Committee headed by the Prime Minister after the restoration of democracy.[48]

In August 2013, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif established the Cabinet Committee on National Security and the National Security Division (NSD) as the Secretariat of the Cabinet Committee to restore civilian supremacy.[49] Within months, the Government caved in to the pressure and replaced the Cabinet Committee with the 'National Security Committee' through a notification of the NSD, as under the law, the Cabinet Committee cannot have non-cabinet members as permanent members of the Cabinet Committee like Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff, and three Services chiefs as its members.[50] The Committee is notified as a "principal decision-making body on national security", and consists of eleven members, including the Prime Minister, Minister for Defence, Minister for Finance and Revenue, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Minister for Interior, NSA, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, and Chief of Air Staff. The Committee is operative till today.

With regard to NTS decision-making, only General Musharraf's first National Security Council, established in 1999, right after the imposition of martial law, was empowered to deliberate a wide range of issues including both traditional security (foreign affairs, law and order) and NTS issues (corruption, accountability, recovery of bank loans and public debt, finance, socio-economic welfare, education, health, Islamic ideology, human rights, religious minorities, and women development). However, the Council was soon replaced by another National Security Council, established with a limited mandate by reviving Article 152-A of the Constitution.

Another aspect contributing to the poor national security decision-making process is that all NSAs (1969 - 2021) were appointed without specific mandates or terms of reference. In Pakistan, the NSA's position is not constitutional or statutory. NSA's or ONSA's functions or mandate is not mentioned even in the Rules of Business, 1973, which provides guidelines for the government of Pakistan to run its operations. In October 2015, for the first time, the need to define the mandate of the NSA was felt when Lt. General (R) Nasser Khan Janjua was appointed by then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. General Janjua's appointment notification stated that the terms and conditions of his appointment shall be issued separately, which were never issued. General Janjua was succeeded by two Caretaker NSAs, Abdullah Hussain Haroon (05 - 26 June 2018) and Lt. General Naeem Khalid Lodhi (27 June - 8 August 2018). Like their predecessors, both Caretaker NSAs worked without any clear mandate.

In 2021, Dr. Moeed Yusuf became the first Pakistani NSA appointed with a clear mandate. Keeping in view the international best practices, the NSA's mandate included eight key tasks: i) providing solicited and unsolicited input and analysis on strategic traditional and non-traditional security issues; ii) formulating, reviewing, and monitoring the progress of NSP in collaboration with NSD; iii) conducting regular briefings and assisting the Prime Minister in preparation for strategic foreign engagements; iv) advising the Prime Minister or on his behalf conducting national security dialogues; v) communicating the Prime Minister's vision publicly; vi) building Pakistan's positive image internationally; vii) collating relevant information about the mandate of NSA or for the Prime Minister; and viii) convening meetings of stakeholders to either coordinate or reconcile positions on issues related to comprehensive national security or other issues directed by the Prime Minister.[51] The mandate gave clarity on the formal duties of the NSA, but strong civil-military support and trust is required to perform all these functions. It seems that the structure still does not have support of all political actors as the Committee remains underutilized as the former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (April 2022 - August 2023) relied more on one-to-one meetings with the Army Chief and did not appoint the NSA in an otherwise 84-member cabinet. The position of the NSA has been vacant since April 2022.

The historical account provides important insights into the mindset of civilian and military leadership. The military favors the establishment of a US-style Council, which gives them a formal role in decision-making. The civilian leadership tends to see it as an attempt to infringe on its exclusive decision-making role mandated by the Constitution. Pakistan, unlike other countries such as India,[52] did not hold thorough Parliamentary debates about the need, mandate, and structure of the Council/Committee and ONSA in the Parliamentary form of government, which prevented it from gaining wider political ownership. The conflict between civilian and military leadership hindered the strengthening of institutions, especially no serious effort was made to institutionalize strategic decision-making related to NTS. This warrants the question about the importance of the ONSA and Committee's roles in long-term strategic policy and effective national security decision-making, particularly in addressing NTS challenges. Is the delay in the appointment of the NSA preventing Pakistan from seizing potential opportunities for NTS-related partnerships and impacting its national security and international engagements? These questions will be explored in the next section, along with suggestions to make the decision-making process more informed, effective, and structured.

4. Restructuring of the National Security Architecture

4.1. Whole-of-Government Approach

Effective decision-making, including in matters related to NTS, requires a comprehensive security assessment, security prioritization, fair resource allocation, coordination, and oversight.[53] To ensure that decision-makers have adequate information,[54] it is essential to ensure close coordination and inter-departmental synergy[55] because contemporary NTS challenges are complex and cross-cutting. Without a whole-of-government approach, Pakistan could not chart a cohesive, unified, and responsive security policy.[56] To improve coordination, civilians should not view the military as a competitor[57] and vice versa. The civil-military struggle regarding the Council is not unique to Pakistan. In 1945, the US established the National Security Council essentially to address the competing civil-military requirements for foreign and defense issues.[58] The Council allowed the US Presidents to manage and control the competing interests of different stakeholders[59] and institutionalize national security policymaking. Also, state institutions in various countries either objected to the creation of the Council or fought to exert control over it. In the US, during the Truman era (1945 - 1953), the then Navy Secretary and later Defense Secretary, James Forrestal, strenuously lobbied to place the Council in the Pentagon rather than the White House.[60] In India, the Ministry of External Affairs opposed the establishment of the NSC due to vested bureaucratic interests.[61] In most countries, the NSA is the coordinator chief for the Chief Executive, so the ONSA is located in the Chief Executive (Prime Minister or Presidents) Offices. Therefore, in Pakistan too, the ONSA is located in the Prime Minister's Office.

Globally, the Committee/Council and NSA play a key role in formulating, reviewing, coordinating, and implementing national security policies or strategies.[62] Most NTS issues are technical, and timely and evidence-driven discussions are essential for better decision-making. The need for comprehensive evidence-driven decision-making is evident from the COVID-19 handling by then-US President Trump, who ignored early warnings about the outbreak of the pandemic by the National Center for Medical Intelligence and recommendations of the US National Security Council and officials, including his own NSA. Instead, he took the advice of friends and close

advisors, who were not fluent in immunology, resulting in the mishandling of the situation, fierce infighting between multiple power centers, ambiguity regarding who was in charge, and a delayed and disorganized response to the global disease.[63]

Several countries have included NTS challenges in the mandate of their NSAs and councils. In Pakistan, the ONSA and Committee are entrusted with formulating, reviewing, and monitoring the implementation of the NSP,[64] which includes both traditional and NTS issues. The policymakers must optimally utilize the Committee to institutionalize and streamline NTS decision-making, implementation, and review process. It is also essential for Pakistan to appoint an NSA with a clear mandate to facilitate inter-ministerial, inter-agency, and civil-military coordination on strategic NTS national security issues and long-term strategic planning.

4.2. Constitutional and Statutory Cover for the National Security Committee

The Committee's strength is primarily due to its powerful membership, as it lacks a constitutional or statutory basis. The scope and working process of the Committee is not clear, and its meetings are not held regularly. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who established the Committee, only called nine meetings in his four-year term, clearly in contradiction to international practices. The succeeding prime ministers also convened the Committee's meetings at irregular intervals, often without an agenda or sharing the actual agenda with the public. Most of these meetings were event-based[65] and, in some cases, were called to show solidarity or a united front.[66]

During 2017 - 2022, the Committee played a significant role in achieving civil-military or stakeholder consensus on various national security issues, including the NSP. To strengthen the mechanism, it is vital to ensure that the Committee's status as a "principal decision-making body on national security" should be in accordance with the Constitution. The Constitution under Article 90 has entrusted the executive authority to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. Hence, there is a need for multi-partisan political consensus on the need, benefit, role, scope, mandate, and power of the Committee/Council, which should then be given constitutional or legislative cover. Prime Minister Gillani disbanded the Council, but the National Security Council Act 2004 was not repealed. The Statute may be amended to enhance the mandate of the Council by broadening the definition of "national security". The Act may also be amended to restructure the Council's membership and to democratize and streamline the decision-making process.

There is not much literature that discusses the Committee's decision-making process. It is reported that some civilian leaders have expressged displeasure over the diverse views expressed by participants in national security meetings,[67] which undermines the decision-making process. During a television interview, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the former Prime Minister, implied that the Prime Minister lacks the power to veto the Committee's decisions.[68] The lack of public data on the committee's meetings makes it impossible to independently verify these claims. However, it seems that politically powerful Prime Ministers have little patience for diverse opinions and tend to make decisions without considering alternative policy options, while weaker Prime Ministers tend to entertain diverse views, particularly those of the military leadership.

Since 2022, the committee's decision-making process has been governed by the rules of procedure adopted by the committee itself.[69] While the rules may not fully explain the decision-making process, they distinguish between decisions made following physical meetings and those made through summarily circulating among members of the Committee. According to the Rules, if a

proposal is circulated to seek approval from the Committee, members can submit their comments for consideration and final decision by the Prime Minister. Although it is clear that, contrary to popular belief,[70] the military does not have a veto in national security matters and the Prime Minister has the authority to make the final decision, the rules are unclear on whether the Prime Minister has the power to veto the consensus of the Committee members.

To streamline the decision-making process of the Committee, it is essential to revitalize its Planning Committee, which should highlight the important issues that need further research and deliberations. The Strategic Policy Planning Cell (SPPC), which was established in 2019 to operate as an "intellectual hub for evidence-based policy input on issues relevant to National Security" should provide alternative policy options for internal and external strategic challenges, either through original research or by analyzing and distilling inputs from other stakeholders[71] to the Committee. This will make national security deliberations and decision-making processes robust and evidence-driven.

4.3. Constitutional Position of the National Security Adviser

In Pakistan, NSAs are either appointed by executive order, and/or as one of the five constitutionally authorized Advisers or Special Assistants to the Prime Minister (SAPM). According to the Court's decision, advisers and SAPM are not members of the cabinet and cannot exercise executive authority or influence the working, functioning, or policy of a division or ministry.[72] As mentioned above, the functions of the ONSA are not defined in any Statute or Rules of Business, 1973. There was a deliberate effort to ensure flexibility in the role of the NSA,[73] as it is ever-changing[74] and is often molded in light of the security challenges and the vision of the Prime Minister. This arrangement is not unique to Pakistan, as in the US, the role is unlike other cabinet positions and does not require congressional approval, giving the President flexibility and ease to pick his NSA and assign tasks per growing challenges.[75] Similarly, in India and Japan, the NSA is separate from the cabinet, often saving it from parliamentary oversight. However, in some countries like the UK Parliament's select committees securitize the work of the NSA.

However, to strengthen the position of the NSA and his office, it is essential to give it a constitutional or statutory cover. In this regard, two models are available under the current scheme of the Constitution. First, the NSA may be appointed and hold office at the pleasure of the President. In this case, the President is bound by the advice of the Prime Minister, which would be similar to the appointment of the Attorney-General of Pakistan under Article 100 of the Constitution. Second, the President may appoint the NSA for a fixed five-year term on the advice of the Prime Minister, which would be similar to the appointment of the Election Commissioner of Pakistan under Article 215 of the Constitution of Pakistan. Keeping in view the nature of the work, the confidence of the Prime Minister is important for the work of the NSA. Hence, option one is more practical. The existing jurisprudence of Pakistan is also helpful in this regard, as in a related case,[76] the Supreme Court held that "The Attorney-General for Pakistan is a constitutional post, and it cannot be left vacant." This will help ensure the continuity of the Office. Due to the ever-changing security requirements, the Rules should empower the Prime Minister to issue the mandate of the NSA separately at the time of appointment.

4.4. Strengthening the Role of National Security Adviser

In Pakistan, some envision only a limited role for the NSA to support the Committee and hold 'back-channel' or track 1.5 diplomacy with select countries.[77] Whereas, in other countries, like India, the UK, and the US, the role of the NSA is now far more extensive, including providing advisory on national security issues, interagency coordination, implementation and execution of policies, public speaking to further foreign policy vision, and holding negotiations and diplomacy.[78] In some countries, the NSA makes policies; in others, the NSA only reviews and makes recommendations for policymaking. In other countries, especially in the US, the NSA contributes to national security decision-making by acting as an honest broker among the critical stakeholders on issues related to national security.[79]

4.4.1. National Security Adviser as Honest Broker

Pakistan needs an "honest broker" in national security decision-making to ensure a fair and balanced representation of stakeholders' views. The NSA ensures that the principal decision-makers have all the necessary information, including all possible viable policy options, related legal issues, and honest representations[80] of stakeholders' input. NSA is neither above other cabinet ministers nor plays the role of a policy advocate, but only analyzes and distills input received from different stakeholders and presents it holistically. In Pakistan, this function, to an extent, was formally or informally performed by the senior minister or by the Prime Minister.[81] The NSA should have the mandate to reconcile different stakeholders' positions on strategic national security issues. The NSA can perform the role of honest broker in a structured manner, with in-depth analysis, and can present the consensus decision (lower minimum dominator) or the most optimal policy option to the Prime Minister and the Committee. This is important to streamline national security deliberations, especially about NTS challenges. The NSA's honest inter-ministerial and civil-military brokering has helped Pakistan complete several projects, including Pakistan's first ever NSP, which was delayed for seven years.

4.4.2. Foreign Policy and the Role of the National Security Adviser

In recent years, most countries have led their national security policy with diplomacy.[82] NSAs lead national security diplomacy either through multilateral forums like the Meeting of Security Council Secretaries of Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States or through bilateral meetings to discuss diverse issues from the armed conflict to strategic trade, semiconductors, and maritime security. The question is, in the presence of trained diplomats of foreign or external affairs, why is diplomacy by the NSA important?

Pakistan's career diplomats are trained to conduct only political diplomacy and not to conduct other types of diplomacy like economic, cyber, or science diplomacy. As other countries are not too eager to negotiate the NTS agenda with Pakistan,[83] Pakistan has to position itself as a state interested in building partnerships on the NTS issues with other countries. The NSA, through effective external narrative building, can lead the effort to position Pakistan as a country that genuinely transitioned from geopolitics to the human-centric security approach. In the absence of the NSA and permanent staff of the ONSA, Pakistan is not only missing out on opportunities to build new NTS partnerships but also fails to conduct national security diplomacy. In the absence of the NSA, Pakistan either does not participate in the multilateral security dialogues or is represented by bureaucrats, who, unlike their counterparts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are neither trained diplomats nor national security professionals.

Pakistan does not feature in the recently released national security strategies of countries like the US, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Malaysia, and Thailand, neither as a state of interest nor a state

of concern. Pakistan's diminishing geostrategic importance limits its ability to negotiate traditional security issues with other countries. However, the security strategies/policies of all these countries have objectives similar to Pakistan's NSP with regard to human security, health, climate change, and other areas of NTS concerns. This gives Pakistan an opportunity to build NTS partnerships with other countries.

Japan aims to lead international efforts to solve global issues such as poverty, health crises, and climate change and strives for advanced health systems in developing countries. Pakistan can collaborate with Japan to develop a partnership to provide universal health coverage for its citizens. Germany considers pandemic preparedness and food security to be global issues, and Pakistan can collaborate to achieve a common NTS agenda. The US and Pakistan, too, can diversify their relationship and cooperate on issues like climate adaptation.[84] Similarly, there is little India-Pakistan dialogue on traditional security issues in the current situation. Still, they can initiate climate and cyber security dialogues, as Indian national security officials are engaged in such dialogues with various other countries.[85]

Without the NSA, Pakistan misses out on direct contact with the President and Prime Minister Offices of the important capital, as unlike State and foreign offices, ONSA are mostly placed at the offices of the Prime Ministers/Presidents. Japan benefited from establishing the Council because it opened direct communication channels with the White House and brought the two countries closer.[86] Between December 2019 and April 2022, Pakistan, too, managed to have more direct and meaningful NSA-to-NSA engagements with Central Asia and the US. The continuity of the process is necessary for meaningful gains.

Lastly, Pakistan does not have comprehensive security dialogues with different countries, which are usually conducted by NSAs. NSAs are responsible for coordinating ministries that work on different aspects of traditional and non-traditional security, and facilitating joint and comprehensive dialogue with other countries under the ambit of the Joint Security Commission. Pakistan and Uzbekistan have signed a protocol to establish the Joint Security Commission, but Pakistan cannot fully exploit these opportunities without the NSA.

4.5. Restructuring the National Security Structures to Strengthen Decision-Making

In Pakistan, stakeholders work in silos to deal with NTS challenges, but recently, several coordination mechanisms were established to deal with these challenges. The National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) helped Pakistan deal with the pandemic better than many other developed countries. A Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is established to attract foreign direct investment through civil-military coordination. The Prime Minister heads the Apex Committee of the SIFC, and the Chief of Army Staff participates in the meeting on special invitation from the Government.[87] The new decision-making mechanisms are created to address NTS challenges while the Committee remains underutilized. While some in the US are suggesting creating a separate Economic Security Council,[88] for Pakistan where the Committee is still struggling to establish a foothold, it is suggested that instead of creating new structures, all aspects of the national security strategic decision-making should be carried out through the Committee. The SIFC and NCOC should work as sub-committees and submit their proposals after deliberations of stakeholders to the Committee for further action.

The states constantly restructure their national security structures to deal with NTS challenges. In 2021, the US has appointed two additional Deputy NSAs for cyber and emerging technology and international economics. The US also included the NTS issue like democracy and human rights as a key part of the Council's work. In Pakistan, the SPPC, headed by the NSA, "operates with policy experts specializing in areas of Traditional Security, Non-Traditional Security, and International Law".[89] The ONSA should be restructured to add more specific experts and teams to deal with climate change, emerging technologies, cyber, and terrorism/extremism.[90]

Proper staff is required to meet the ever-increasing functions of the NSA. The staff supporting the US NSA now reaches more than three hundred people; in Japan, more than a hundred people work at the National Security Secretariat. In comparison, until very recently the ONSA was only supported by two staff members.[91] The NSD, staffed by career bureaucrats with no background in national security issues, provides administrative support to ONSA, the Committee, and SPPC.[92] The relationship between ONSA and NSD is complex and cumbersome. Although too many people just bottleneck the work and a smaller team is more productive, there is a need to hire qualified national security experts as part of the ONSA, and career bureaucrats without any prior knowledge or experience of working on national security issues should not be placed at the ONSA or Committee's Secretariat.

4.6. Improving the Role of Peripheral Actors in Pakistan's National Security Decision-Making

The strategic community, think tanks, expert working groups, academia, and other peripheral actors are crucial in providing research, policy, and data-informed input for informed national security decision-making, especially concerning NTS challenges. Government-affiliated think tanks support the current national security apparatus directly or through a dedicated and integrated Policy Advisory Portal of the NSD.[93] Improving the quality of scholarship and policy input is necessary for optimal decision-making, as most NTS-related input is rudimentary and fundamental. To obtain helpful research and solutions, especially regarding NTS issues, the ONSA should collaborate closely with experts to harness the right ideas.

5. Conclusions

Pakistan faces several traditional and non-traditional security challenges, but the decision-making process is still ad hoc, rudimentary, and personality-driven. Globally, the NSA and Council are playing important roles in dealing with NTS challenges, but Pakistan is embroiled in a civil-military power struggle. Pakistan needs a mechanism to play honest broker between national security stakeholders and provide evidence-driven analysis to the Committee member and Prime Minister for informed, sustainable, and effective coordination, decision-making, implementation, and oversight. The ONSA needs permanence, a clear mandate, and the support of specialists to play an influential role in national security decision-making. An effective NSA can be an honest broker internally and an effective principal diplomatic representative of the Prime Minister to negotiate on all issues, including the NTS challenges.

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