



**PATHFINDER PROPOSAL FOR A
NATIONAL SECURITY
STRATEGY FOR
SRI LANKA – 2026**





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Pathfinder Foundation

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Acronyms

AI	-	Artificial Intelligence
BRI	-	Belt and Road Initiative
DIME	-	Diplomatic Information, Military and Economic
EEZ	-	Exclusive Economic Zone
IOR	-	Indian Ocean Region
IUU	-	Illegal, unreported and unregulated
KPIs	-	Key Performance Indicators - Measurable
LTTE	-	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDA	-	Maritime Domain Awareness
NAM	-	Non-Aligned Movement
NFIC	-	Net-food-importing country
NPP	-	National People's Power
NSP	-	National Security Policy
NSS	-	National Security Strategy
NSS	-	National Security Secretariat

NSC	-	National Security Council
RCEP	-	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SMEs	-	Small and Medium Enterprises
SLOCs	-	Sea Lines of Communication – Indian Ocean's
UN	-	United Nations
UNCLOS	-	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
VNSA	-	Violent Non-State Actors

Foreword

Sri Lanka's national security, encompassing both traditional and non-traditional dimensions, extends well beyond its territorial boundaries. Since independence, the country has navigated complex regional and global power dynamics while safeguarding its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the security and well-being of its people.

Over the past several decades, Sri Lanka has been shaped by a succession of significant natural and human-induced events that have profoundly influenced its national security environment. These include periods of internal unrest and a protracted separatist conflict involving external actors; the assassination of political leaders; major natural disasters, including the Indian Ocean tsunami; large-scale terrorist attacks; a global pandemic; and episodes of acute social and political instability, culminating most recently in the November 2025 natural disaster, Cyclone Dithwah, which caused extensive loss of life and damage to critical infrastructure. Collectively, these experiences have underscored the increasingly

multidimensional character of national security and the importance of institutional preparedness and resilience.

The unprecedented economic crisis of 2022, culminating in a sovereign debt default, exposed long-standing structural weaknesses in fiscal governance and public financial management. Together with a significant democratic political transition following national elections in late 2024, it has created an opportunity to reassess national priorities in light of evolving domestic, regional, and global realities. Contemporary policy discourse emphasises that a secure state rests on safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity; pursuing independent and balanced diplomacy; ensuring democratic governance grounded in respect for human rights, equality, and social cohesion within a diverse society; and maintaining professional, accountable security institutions dedicated to the protection of the state and its citizens.

Against this backdrop, the proposed National Security Strategy (NSS) aims to provide a coherent framework for addressing emerging risks, enhancing national resilience, and aligning strategic priorities with the aspirations of the Sri Lankan people, while taking account of the evolving strategic dynamics of the Indian Ocean region and the

wider international environment. It also underscores the importance of situating the NSS within a clearly articulated National Security Policy (NSP), which provides the conceptual foundation for effective coordination, prioritisation, and implementation.

In 2020, the Pathfinder Foundation undertook a similar initiative, published as the *'Pathfinder National Security Strategy 2020 for Sri Lanka'*. Six years later, following a period of political and economic turbulence and significant regional and global developments affecting Sri Lanka, the Foundation considered it timely to revisit and reassess the national security imperatives that should guide the country over the next five years.

The Pathfinder Foundation recognises that the formulation and implementation of an NSP and an NSS are the responsibility of the Government of Sri Lanka. It is hoped that this work will make a constructive contribution to national policy deliberations and assist decision-makers in addressing an issue of critical importance to the country's future.

Bernard Goonetilleke

Chairman, Pathfinder Foundation

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Introduction

The evolving multipolar world order, characterised by intensifying competition among major powers, particularly in the Indian Ocean, where Sri Lanka occupies a geographically pivotal position, is transforming the island into a decisive arena for influence, opportunity, and strategic engagement. The emerging geopolitical rivalries, together with the growing impact of non-traditional threats such as climate change, global trade tensions, cyberattacks, pandemics, terrorism, and transnational crime, have added new layers of complexity to national security planning.

A well-defined NSS would provide a clear vision of the path Sri Lanka must follow to achieve its national interests. It should serve as a guiding framework to ensure

consistency in policy directions across relevant government institutions, safeguard the country's sovereignty, enhance the well-being of its citizens, and guide state institutions, ensuring alignment with policy directions and fostering cooperation across sectors. This would support sustainable development in an increasingly complex global environment. However, the NSS should be based on a well-developed NSP, a medium- to long-term plan that can be revisited as needed. To avoid previous shortcomings, it is hoped that the core principles and policy guidelines outlined in this proposed NSS will be incorporated into an Act of Parliament, as initially envisaged by the government in 2019.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka has enshrined the responsibility to protect the rights, freedoms, and dignity of all its citizens while safeguarding its territorial integrity, national unity, and cultural heritage. The island has adhered to the five principles adopted at the 1955 Bandung Conference, upholding mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, peaceful co-existence, and mutually beneficial ties in its relations with other nations. Non-alignment has been the mainstay of Sri

Lanka's foreign policy, enabling the island to safeguard its autonomy while fostering mutually beneficial relations with countries possessing diverse political structures and ideologies. However, in the context of the evolving world order, Sri Lanka should pursue a foreign policy of strategic alignments that best serve its national interests. Sri Lanka must also address pressing domestic challenges that threaten the well-being of its people and the island's peace, stability, and economic prosperity.

The threats and security challenges identified in the proposed NSS are dynamic and evolve in response to social, international, technological and other emerging developments. Ensuring national security is therefore a shared responsibility of the state and society, and it requires continuous vigilance and review of the evolving threat landscape to anticipate, prevent and mitigate risks that may undermine national security.

National Vision and Mission

A National Vision should be developed as a long-term strategic framework to establish a resilient, prosperous, and inclusive Sri Lanka that protects the island's sovereignty, upholds the rule of law, and promotes the well-being of its citizens, grounded in principles of good governance, sustainability, and harmonious coexistence. The vision statement could prioritise human capital development by strengthening healthcare systems, modernising education, promoting targeted skills training, and fostering youth-led innovation. It should also advance institutional reform by modernising public health and judicial administration, promoting effective decentralisation, and strengthening national capacities for disaster preparedness and crisis management. Economically, the Vision may drive structural

transformation by developing large-scale industries and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), attracting sustained foreign investment, expanding the digital economy, and diversifying export portfolios to enhance competitiveness. A firm commitment to justice and reconciliation would reinforce long-term stability, while strategic infrastructure development should improve national, regional, and global connectivity, including logistics and financial services. Strong environmental stewardship must ensure sustainability and protect critical ecosystems, particularly marine and forest resources. Based on the foregoing analysis, the Pathfinder proposes the following vision statement: **“A future Sri Lanka that is secure, sovereign, and resilient, prosperous and safe for all its citizens”**.

A National Mission should be formulated to build a just, inclusive, and resilient nation by empowering its people, strengthening democratic institutions, promoting sustainable economic development, and ensuring citizens' safety, human rights, and well-being. The mission should ensure equitable access to quality education and healthcare, enhance youth skills, and reduce poverty and inequality. It must reinforce national cohesion through

ethnic harmony, reconciliation, and a shared identity that respects diversity. Economically, it should guide value-added industries and SMEs and ensure robust food, energy, and economic security. Effective governance and the rule of law are central, with transparency, accountability, anti-corruption measures, media freedom, judicial independence, and civil-society engagement. Environmental sustainability should be advanced through the protection of biodiversity, forests, oceans, and water resources, as well as through renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and regional climate leadership. The mission should also focus on strengthening critical infrastructure, digital connectivity, disaster preparedness, and climate-resilient development. Strategic autonomy should be maintained through balanced foreign relations, constructive regional engagement, and a modernised, right-sized defence, intelligence, and maritime security framework, ensuring national stability and long-term prosperity. The Pathfinder proposes, following the mission statement, **“To protect Sri Lanka’s sovereignty, strengthen national resilience, promote stability, and ensure the safety, prosperity, and well-being of its citizens through coordinated national efforts”**.

National Interests and Core Values

Sri Lanka's ability to realise its core national interests depends on how effectively it strengthens and utilises the core instruments of national power: Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic (DIME). By fostering strong, balanced relationships with major and middle powers, as well as nations of the Global South, Sri Lanka can secure valuable economic partnerships, development assistance, and diplomatic support. A resilient, diversified economy, supported by sound policies and investment in critical sectors such as renewable energy, technology, and the blue economy, will enhance the country's capacity to address poverty and reduce debt dependency.

Stability within the country, rooted in transparent governance, adherence to the rule of law, and anti-corruption measures, will not only engender public trust

but also attract foreign direct investment and foster long-term economic growth, as demonstrated by Southeast Asian economies. Social harmony, built on inclusivity and respect for Sri Lanka's diverse communities, will foster national unity and help reduce the risk of internal divisions that could harm the island's fragile social fabric or impede economic, political and social well-being. Taken together, the coordinated and strategic application of Sri Lanka's national power will be essential to safeguarding its sovereignty, fostering economic prosperity, strengthening governance, ensuring social cohesion, and pursuing a balanced and independent defence and foreign policy.

These proposals aim to balance primary and secondary national interests to establish a clear prioritisation of the country's strategic objectives. Primary national interests are the essential goals vital to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and survival of the state, making them non-negotiable. Secondary national interests, while still important, can be pursued more flexibly, depending on resource availability and the geopolitical context, for example:

- **Sovereignty and Territorial Borders:** Sri Lanka must protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity against conventional and unconventional security threats, safeguard its maritime borders, and maintain its autonomy in shaping domestic and foreign policies.
- **Sustainable Economic Development:** Sustainability in economic development is vital for Sri Lanka to address challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and debt dependency. Decades of economic mismanagement and recent policy missteps, in the main, led to the country's default on its external debt in mid-April 2022. To prevent such avoidable crises from recurring, Sri Lanka must implement sound economic policies, including fiscal and monetary measures; deepen and broaden access to external markets for exports; diversify the economy to lessen reliance on a few export products or trading partners; develop a robust blue economy through the development and management of ocean resources; reduce unsustainable dependence on

external borrowing; and commit to investing in sectors that support long-term growth.

- **National Security and Political Stability:** Safeguarding the country and its citizens against internal and external threats while ensuring stable governance, law and order, and social harmony.
- **Democratic Governance:** For decades, corruption has undermined Sri Lanka's economic progress, deterred robust foreign investment, and eroded the integrity of its bureaucracy and political structures. Strengthening the rule of law is crucial to ensuring justice, equality, and accountability, which are vital for maintaining public trust in institutions and preserving social stability.
- **Human Rights:** In addition to domestic legislation, Sri Lanka, as a party to all the main international conventions and optional protocols without reservations, has demonstrated its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights. The state should uphold these obligations.

- **Social Cohesion:** Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious society. Social harmony among diverse groups is vital for political stability, economic progress, and for all citizens to live with dignity. By fostering inclusivity and respect among its diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities, a tolerant society can be built.
- **Balanced Diplomacy:** Sri Lanka must uphold strategic autonomy among major powers, avoiding alienation or over-reliance on any single power; it should move beyond non-alignment towards strategic alignments that safeguard its national interests. It should take appropriate measures to prevent its territory, including its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), from being exploited by any power to threaten another state. Maintaining balanced bilateral relations with all states, including major powers, will ensure that Sri Lanka benefits from a diverse range of opportunities.

Strategic Environment

Sri Lanka's geostrategic location at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean makes it a focal point for maritime trade and regional connectivity. Its proximity to critical sea lanes and chokepoints underscores its strategic significance, attracting the attention of both regional and extra-regional actors. However, this advantageous position also poses a range of challenges involving state and non-state actors. External pressures are compounded by vulnerabilities in Sri Lanka's trade-dependent economy, susceptibility to climate change, and other evolving security threats, including those in cyberspace. This strategic assessment of the external environment provides a foundation for understanding the interplay between external factors and the island's national security strategy. It identifies key challenges, including geopolitical rivalries, economic disruptions, and environmental risks.

Strategic competition in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has intensified since the early 21st century, as major powers have increasingly sought to assert influence over this crucial maritime space. The presence of naval forces from major maritime powers, alongside mini-lateral initiatives

and growing military infrastructure in the IOR, has further complicated the strategic landscape. For Sri Lanka, the escalating geopolitical rivalry between two major Asian powers places it in a delicate balancing act, requiring the country to safeguard its national interests while maintaining relations with both. Major powers have also sought control of critical chokepoints in the IOR through strategic partnerships with littoral states to safeguard the Indian Ocean's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

Sri Lanka's EEZ, spanning over 500,000 sq. km., is a critical extension of its sovereign rights and maritime jurisdiction. The EEZ holds economic, ecological, and strategic importance, encompassing vital resources such as fisheries, hydrocarbons, and marine biodiversity. However, this zone remains under-monitored and under-exploited. Sri Lanka must assert effective control over its EEZ to deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, prevent resource exploitation by unlicensed foreign vessels, and develop sustainable economic ventures within this maritime expanse. Strategic surveillance, regional cooperation, and investment in maritime scientific research are crucial to transforming Sri Lanka's EEZ into a cornerstone of national economic and

environmental security. Disruptions to trade flows and supply chains leave Sri Lanka vulnerable, forcing it to allocate more resources to sourcing essential imports from alternative markets and to diversify its trade links to meet the needs of its population.

Violations of international laws and norms in conflict zones across the Middle East, parts of Africa, and Eastern Europe have caused devastating loss of life, widespread destruction, displacement, and mass migration. These violations create an environment of uncertainty, obstruct opportunities for constructive dialogue between belligerents, and complicate efforts to uphold the rule of law. This increases the risk of prolonged conflicts and fosters a volatile environment that threatens regional security. Although Sri Lanka is geographically distant from some of these hotspots, the consequences are strongly felt.

The Global South has increasingly observed, with concern, the growing tendency of regional and international institutions to serve the strategic, economic, and political interests of major powers. This often comes at the expense of smaller and developing states, whose voices and priorities are sidelined in decision-making. Such

trends undermine the core objectives of multilateral institutions, which are meant to serve as neutral platforms for cooperation, mediate disputes, and protect global public goods, including maritime security and safety, climate stability, and balanced development outcomes. Challenges in areas such as maritime governance, climate change mitigation, cyber regulations, and global pandemics require coordinated responses. If these institutions and multilateral frameworks fail to act, they risk losing both their efficacy and legitimacy. Sri Lanka has consistently advocated for reforms to enhance the accountability and inclusiveness of these institutions.

Threats, Challenges and Risk Assessment

Sri Lanka's threat perception has been complex and multilayered, encompassing both traditional and non-traditional dimensions. The country successfully eliminated the separatist threat by defeating the LTTE in 2009 and attempts to revive it have been effectively countered. The Tsunami (2004), the Easter Sunday bombings (2019), the Covid-19 pandemic (2020), the economic crisis (2022), and the Cyclone Dithwah (2025) have all negatively affected the country, while new and emerging threats continue to shape its security landscape.

Terrorism

Sri Lanka continues to face persistent security challenges from terrorism, particularly the evolving threat of extremism. Although the defeat of LTTE terrorism brought stability, attempts by remnant elements to revive the organisation in the post-conflict period (2012-2016) indicate ongoing risks. The Easter Sunday bombings and failed attempts by a few extremists in the Eastern Province in late 2024 to carry out violent acts further demonstrate

the ability of extremist networks to operate independently of traditional structures. Ideologically driven extremist elements can rapidly mobilise, radicalise, and conduct attacks with devastating impact in a short span of time. Such developments highlight a clear shift in the behaviour of Violent Non-State Actors (VNSA) from well-organised hierarchical terrorist structures to more decentralised, fluid networks driven by ideological motivations and shaped by both global and regional narratives. This evolving threat landscape can be broadly understood across four stages: Ideology, Extremism, Violent Extremism, and Terrorism. Addressing this trajectory requires the development and implementation of proactive policies to counter radicalisation, well-coordinated surveillance and intelligence systems, and strengthened community engagement mechanisms to prevent and mitigate emerging terrorist threats.

Transnational Crimes

Sri Lanka's strategic location along the Indian Ocean sea lanes makes it vulnerable to transnational trafficking, including drugs, arms, and human smuggling. Transnational trafficking syndicates that use these maritime routes to smuggle illegal narcotics not only threaten national security but also have broader implications for maritime security in the Indian Ocean. The threat, particularly from illicit narcotic smuggling syndicates, has grown in recent years, with Sri Lanka emerging as both a destination and a transit hub between South and Southeast Asia. Monitoring and controlling these routes remain an ongoing challenge for safeguarding both Sri Lanka's waters and the broader Indian Ocean maritime domain.

Cyber Threats

Marked by rapid digital transformation, cybersecurity has become an issue of utmost importance. The threat of cyber-attacks that could jeopardize national infrastructure and undermine public confidence is real and must be addressed as a priority. As major powers compete in

technological domains such as 5G, artificial intelligence (AI) governance, semiconductor supply chains, and digital infrastructure, Sri Lanka must assert its digital sovereignty and keep pace with advances elsewhere. This includes adopting a technology diplomacy framework that ensures data privacy, avoids reliance on any single digital vendor ecosystem, and promotes open, transparent, and secure digital standards. It also includes building a digitally literate workforce across the country, including in the armed forces. Multilateral fora should be utilised to advocate for fair digital trade rules and global data protection standards, enabling small states like Sri Lanka to protect citizens' data and maintain policy independence in the digital space. At the recent AI summit held in New Delhi in Feb 2026, the President declared the country's position on AI and highlighted the importance of recognising AI as a strategic security domain integral to national sovereignty, resilience and economic stability. The President proposed regional cooperation built upon four key pillars: affordable access, a centrally governed language database, a common evaluation mechanism and security tools, and integrated capacity development.

Environmental Challenges

The island is highly vulnerable to environmental challenges driven by seasonal monsoons and climate change. Rising sea levels, increasingly erratic weather patterns, and the intensification of natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, and cyclones, as the country witnessed in late November 2025, severely affect human livelihoods, displace communities, exacerbate social and economic vulnerabilities, and place immense strain on the country's agricultural and infrastructure sectors. Such climate-related threats undermine food security and necessitate the importation of food items, depleting the nation's foreign reserves. As a nation that relies heavily on rice as its staple food, the country faces significant risks to crop output from shifting rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts, particularly in regions that depend on rain-fed and tank-fed irrigation. A programme should be launched to systematically rehabilitate numerous ancient reservoirs across the country, boosting agricultural production, supporting rural development, and improving farmers' livelihoods.

Public Unrest and Democratic Governance Challenges

Public unrest across South Asia shows how quickly societal tensions can escalate, undermining democratic governance and national stability. Events in Bangladesh in August 2024 and in Nepal in September 2025, marked by sustained protests, political polarisation, and public frustration with governance, demonstrate how unresolved grievances can disrupt state machinery and heighten friction between authorities and citizens. These situations underscore the vulnerability of democratic systems when institutional responsiveness diminishes, and political authorities adopt confrontational strategies rather than constructive dialogue. They also reveal how disinformation, external influence, and opportunistic groups can intensify instability and erode public confidence in constitutional processes. For Sri Lanka, these regional patterns reinforce the need for robust institutions, credible governance, and transparent decision-making to reduce the risk of democratic erosion. Strengthening early-warning capacities, expanding avenues for civic participation, strengthening meritocratic administrative structures, and ensuring proportionate,

accountable security responses are essential to prevent domestic discontent from evolving into wider crises that threaten the democratic order and the broader national security landscape.

Maritime Governance

As an island State in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka understands the necessity and gravity of maritime governance in the prevailing and evolving circumstances. Sri Lanka must invest in enhancing the capacities of existing maritime governance tools and in expanding the scope of maritime governance to meet regional and global expectations. In this regard, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), existing international legal and operational regimes, and the strategic neighbourhood take priority. Internally, the State needs to review its legislative and legal frameworks to meet present-day expectations, whilst externally it needs to broaden collaborative engagements to meet national interests. Sri Lanka's role in maritime security, maritime domain awareness, including underwater domain awareness, information fusion and sharing, effective management of the assigned search and rescue region, and collaborative engagements in regional affairs remain

the highest priorities. For Sri Lanka, what matters is the identity of the Indian Ocean as a model for economic prosperity whilst understanding the effects of various concepts of global players in the Indian Ocean region. As a means of connecting the global economies, the maritime sphere remains the primary driver of this island nation's security architecture.

Geostrategic Competition

Strategic competition in the IOR has intensified as major powers increasingly seek to assert their influence over this crucial maritime space. The presence of naval forces from major maritime powers, alongside mini-lateral initiatives and growing military infrastructure in the IOR, has further complicated the strategic landscape. Additionally, major powers have sought control of critical chokepoints leading to the Indian Ocean and have built strategic partnerships with littoral nations to secure their support, primarily to safeguard SLOCs. Concerning Sri Lanka, the intensifying geopolitical competition among major powers places the country in a delicate balancing act, compelling it to take measures to safeguard its national interests.

Figure 1: Strategic Risk Assessment Matrix

Threat Category	Primary Threats	Impact on National Security
Terrorism/ Extremism	Religious Extremism	Mass civilian casualties. Destructions to infrastructure facilities. Social cohesion and religious harmony. Lone actors. Impact on the economy.
	Ethno-Separatist	Territorial integrity. Social cohesion and civilian displacement Impact on the economy. Regional security implications.
	Emerging Hybrid Threats	Use of Online platforms for Terrorist acts. Lone actors. Cyber-attacks to critical infrastructure facilities.
Transnational Crimes	Drug Trafficking	Increased crime and corruption. Challenges to law enforcement and maritime security Public health crises and social issues.
	Human Trafficking	Sexual exploitations, forced labor, illegal migration.

		Link to local and regional criminal networks. Challenges to law enforcement and maritime security.
	Money Laundering	Link to local and regional criminal networks. Undermines financial stability.
	Arms Smuggling	Link to local and regional criminal networks. Challenges to public safety, internal peace and stability.
Cyber Threats	Attacks on Critical Infrastructures	Threat to the functioning of essential services and its impact on national security.
	Attacks on Government Databases/ Websites	Governance and public trust. Expose the state to espionage and sabotage.
	Financial Crimes	Online frauds, phishing, banking and mobile scams on banking systems and digital economy.
	Cyber Terrorism	Use of online platforms for propaganda,

		recruitment and fundraising and conduct terrorist acts.
Environmental Threats	Climate and Natural Disaster	Climate change, floods, droughts, landslides and cyclones lead to population displacement. Damage to infrastructure facilities. Humanitarian and social challenges. Impact on the economy.
	Land and Water Degradation	Deforestation, land degrading, water pollution and scarcity lead to reduced agriculture productivity, food insecurity, and social unrest.
	Maritime Domain	Threat to fisheries and coastal livelihoods, damage to port and naval infrastructures and vulnerabilities to storms / tsunamis.
	Pollution	Impact on public health, rural and urban instability. Impact on the economy.

Strategic Competition	Coercive Diplomacy and Economic leverage	Risk to strategic autonomy and policy independence. Distortion of national decision making. Security and economic trade-offs affecting long term national interests.
	Influence operations and Strategic interference	
	Power competition in the IOR	
Maritime Threats	Threats to Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC)	Threat to the credibility of the Government and the capacity to exercise the maritime governance in assigned sea areas. (The sea areas include the maritime jurisdiction of up to the EEZ and the obligations under the International Conventions and legal regimes such as 1974 SOLAS and the 2026 BBNJ, beyond the maritime jurisdiction.) Direct threat to sovereignty and indirect threats to internal affairs through socio-political fallouts.
	Illegal activities at sea (including dumping, radiation and contamination)	
	Maritime Accidents and Contingencies	
	IUU Fishing	
	Piracy and Armed Robberies	
	Smuggling and Trafficking	

		Threats on national economies are direct due being an island which links to internal affairs.
	Protection of Maritime Environment	Threats to livelihood issues (Fisheries), Tourism potentials and the credibility of the State in its commitments for the protection of the environment.
Maritime related/associated Threats	Security Concerns of the Strategic Neighbourhood	Threats to sovereignty and externally induced pressure in the geo-political arena leading to political instability and achieving consensuses.
	Climate Changes based on oceans	Threats to all strata of social fabric internally and regionally

Note

*The impact on National Security for each threat category is assessed using a multi-factor, evidence-based approach that draws on open-source data and considers historical trends and emerging risks. Colour coding indicates risk levels (Red – High Risk, Pink – Medium Risk). **The likelihood of occurrence for each threat category is indicative and subject to change as threat dynamics evolve.***

Strategic Objectives

The core objective of Sri Lanka's national security strategy should be to safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the well-being of its citizens. This objective is pursued through a multifaceted approach that addresses both traditional and non-traditional threats.

- **Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity:** Sri Lanka aims to preserve its independence and control over its land, air, and sea, while upholding sovereignty to ensure that all domestic and foreign policy decisions are made independently, free from external pressure or interference. This includes defending against external aggression and preventing any actors from using its territory, including the EEZ, in ways that could threaten the national security of other countries.
- **Economic Security and Stability:** Recognising that a stable economy is fundamental to national security, the objective is to build a resilient economic base. This entails sustainable economic

policies that foster development and improve citizens' well-being. As a small economy, Sri Lanka requires effective management of external economic relations, including trade, investment, technology, employment, and tourism, to sustain its economic progress.

- **Maritime Security:** Maritime security is the foremost concern in maritime governance, as it is the threshold measure of the Government's commitment. For Sri Lanka, this remains the primary strength, as it has consistently demonstrated its commitment to making its national maritime jurisdiction and beyond safe through a regular naval presence for decades. Ever since Sri Lanka defeated the separatist terrorism some 15 years ago, in 2009, efforts to ensure the maritime domain is safe and secure for the global common good have been acknowledged regionally and globally. This has broadened the geo-strategic outlook of the island nation, and thus maritime cooperation and collaboration are bound to further strengthen capacities in maritime security. This maritime security encompasses shore-based

surveillance systems, naval and aerial law-enforcement assets, and legislative capacities to extend the long arm of the law.

- **Internal Security and Stability:** To prevent and counter all forms of extremism, terrorism, organised crime and subversive activities while upholding law and order. This objective aims to strengthen institutional resilience, promote social cohesion and national unity, and ensure a secure environment conducive to sustainable growth, democratic governance and the well-being of all citizens.
- **Cyber Security and Emerging threats:** In an increasingly digital world, Sri Lanka should protect its critical digital infrastructure, secure data and institutions, and proactively counter cyber-attacks, misinformation and evolving technology-driven risks that could undermine national security, governance and core values.
- **Environmental and Climate Security:** A key objective is to safeguard the environment and

strengthen resilience to climate change by encouraging sustainable practices, mitigating climate-related risks, protecting natural resources, and fostering collaboration to address environmental and climate security challenges.

- **Strategic Partnership and Diplomacy:**

Sri Lanka's objective should be to develop and maintain a foreign policy grounded in strategic alignment. This entails building strong relations with all countries, particularly its neighbours, while avoiding entanglement in power rivalries.

Instruments of National Power

Sri Lanka's national security strategy must be grounded in a comprehensive, integrated approach aligned with the core instruments of national power (DIME). Effective coordination of these instruments is essential to safeguard national interests, enhance resilience to emerging threats, and promote long-term stability and prosperity.

Diplomatic

Sri Lanka's foreign policy should be guided by engagement, strategic autonomy, and pragmatic partnerships, moving beyond strict non-alignment towards a balanced approach that maximises national interests. While avoiding formal military alliances, Sri Lanka can adopt a posture of "strategic balance" and maintain the freedom to engage with multiple powers and institutions for economic, technological, and development cooperation. This stance is neither passive nor isolationist, thereby protecting sovereignty, preserving manoeuvring space, and safeguarding the country from becoming entangled in polarised geopolitical conflicts, particularly in the contested Indo-Pacific region. At this crucial juncture

of economic recovery and transformation, Sri Lanka must retain broad access to development assistance, investment, and trade opportunities from diverse partners.

A balanced foreign policy enables the country to leverage global engagement without being perceived as taking sides in great-power rivalries, thereby minimising risks while maximising strategic and economic gains. This approach builds on Sri Lanka's historical commitment to independent diplomacy, as exemplified by the Rubber Rice Pact with China (1952), hosting the Colombo Powers Conference (1954), participating in the Bandung Conference (1955), and later attending the first Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade (1961) as a founding member. Although the global order has since evolved, maintaining strategic autonomy and pursuing flexible, national-interest-driven engagement remain as relevant as ever.

Informational

The strategic use of information plays a vital role in shaping the perceptions, beliefs, and actions of foreign audiences, including governments, international organisations, and the public, both local and foreign. This dimension extends far beyond traditional public relations, employing a diverse set of tools, including public diplomacy, cultural exchange programmes, and the strategic use of media platforms. In a world where information spreads instantly, effective information management is crucial for Sri Lanka to safeguard its interests. The ultimate objective is to control the narrative and create a favourable environment that helps the country achieve its strategic goals. Promoting digital literacy is important for raising public awareness, building societal resilience against harmful online content, and fostering digital citizenship. A coordinated approach to information management will help deter malign influence operations, reinforce public trust in institutions, and contribute to long-term peace and stability.

The expansion of the Information domain through the integration of artificial intelligence, unmanned aerial

systems, cyber defence infrastructure, and enhanced signal intelligence capabilities must be prioritised to strengthen intelligence collection, situational awareness, and response effectiveness. Strategic investments in long-range surveillance systems, reconnaissance drones, and sophisticated cyber defences can substantially enhance the operational capability of a professionalised military force. This transformation not only strengthens internal deterrence but also positions Sri Lanka as a dependable partner in regional security coalitions and information-sharing initiatives across the Indian Ocean.

Military

A nuanced analysis of threat perception, demographic trends, geophysical constraints, strategic doctrine, and external alignments invariably shapes the architecture of a professional military. As it faces rapid technological advances, evolving geopolitical landscapes, and a multifaceted array of conventional and asymmetric threats, a clear, proactive military strategy is essential to address future security challenges. Such a strategy not only enhances operational readiness but also increases

the armed forces' flexibility to mitigate unforeseen contingencies that could threaten sovereignty or destabilise national cohesion. It also fosters the necessary link between civilian decision-makers and military leadership, helping to achieve state security objectives and reinforce long-term resilience. The successful implementation of a sound military strategy must align with the current regional situation, geopolitical developments, evolving threat factors, and financial limitations.

An assessment of current and emerging threat trajectories is essential to developing a technologically advanced and efficient military force. Transitioning from a mass-mobilisation approach to a network-centric, precision-centred armed forces structure is essential for fostering a secure environment. However, such a transformation will be complex and costly, requiring a careful balance between reducing personnel and the substantial capital investment needed to equip them with modern technology. Through reorganisation and technological foresight, Sri Lanka could develop a lean yet strong defence force capable of deterring adversaries and deploying limited force when needed.

The country's future defence approach should go beyond traditional models based on manpower numbers and instead adopt a flexible, high-tech structure suited to addressing multifaceted threats. Focusing on capability rather than capacity, and foresight rather than inertia, remains essential. Strategic alliances, especially those involving defence technology transfers and maritime interoperability, can further enhance national preparedness and maintain stability amid rising geostrategic competition.

In support of a balanced foreign policy, the country's defence policy should prioritise strategic autonomy, national security, and regional stability. Defence planning should be closely aligned with diplomatic strategy to enable constructive regional security cooperation, confidence-building measures, and peacekeeping initiatives, without committing to formal military alliances.

Economic

Issues stemming from decades of economic mismanagement were compounded by several policy missteps by the government since November 2019, culminating in an unprecedented economic crisis in 2022, the first in post-independent Sri Lanka. Among the political consequences of the crisis was a change of government in May 2022, following months of socio-political struggle, the '*Aragalaya*', by the people. The new government has since introduced a series of drastic policy reforms, primarily under the aegis of a four-year International Monetary Fund (IMF) extended fund facility programme begun in March 2023, aimed at restoring both macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability. The socio-political chaos and the pain and burden inflicted on people consequent on the economic crisis were so unfathomable and unbearable that the recurrence of economic crises should, at any cost, be avoided, and future economic policies should be geared towards ensuring stability and improving the overall welfare of all segments of the population.

Accordingly, promoting economic growth and advancing the welfare of the people should be a priority in preventing the recurrence of crises, thereby firmly laying the foundation for economic stability and sustainable debt. In that context, making effective use of the country's productive resources to augment output is a significant avenue for improving the well-being of the population.

Besides, the infusion of competition across all market products, factors, and foreign exchange, with a view to improving overall economic efficiency, should be seriously considered when formulating future policies. As Sri Lanka is a small economy, promoting economic growth and improving people's welfare requires greater economic integration with the rest of the world. In that regard, while ensuring greater openness in the country, an important strategy is to develop preferential integration schemes, particularly with countries in Asia, including accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and to diversify export products and markets. Further, since Sri Lanka is a capital-deficient country, it is important to develop a policy framework that is attractive to foreign direct investment. As there are world-scale investment initiatives by major powers, such as the Belt

and Road Initiative (BRI) and similar enterprises, these should, however, be carefully appraised against, inter alia, the country's national security interests before being integrated into the national policy agenda. Further, large-scale national infrastructure investments associated with geopolitical concerns, supported by major individual countries on a bilateral basis, should similarly be appraised against the national interests. Besides, economic stability also requires promoting two other important sources of foreign exchange inflows, the tourism industry and remittances from abroad.

Figure 2: Instruments of National Power



Note:

As per the *Lighting Press*, "**National power** is defined as the sum of all resources available to a nation in pursuit of national objectives. National power stems from various elements, also called instruments or attributes; these may be grouped into two categories based on their applicability and origin, "national" and "social". The "national" category includes geography, resources, and population. The "social" category includes economic, political, military, psychological and informational. The phrase, instruments of national power, refers to the tools a country uses to influence other countries, international organisations, or even non-state actors. The United States National Security Strategy is mandated by Congress and is the principal document that sets out how the President plans to use the instruments of power to achieve US National Security objectives. The NSS (December 2017) is available via the [White House Web site](#)".

Pillars of National Security Strategy

The pillars of the national security strategy aim to protect Sri Lanka's sovereignty, stability and long-term prosperity. Holistically, each pillar is linked to the strategic application of the DIME, and together they form the core architecture of the national security framework, enabling the state to anticipate risks and withstand complex challenges. Sri Lanka should ensure that security efforts are comprehensive, adaptive and aligned with national interests, thereby strengthening the country's ability to anticipate and respond to emerging security challenges. The key pillars of the NSS, beyond those directly addressed through the DIME framework, are discussed below.

Good Governance

People's expectations have changed significantly over the decades. More vocally than ever, people demand transparent, effective governance and tangible, equal improvements to their daily lives. Recognising this, the government has prioritised alleviating poverty, eradicating corruption and strengthening the rule of law. These expectations, alongside national objectives, must be

linked to national security. Governance issues remain a significant challenge in Sri Lanka, with corruption and graft undermining public trust in institutions, impeding economic growth and weakening respect for the rule of law. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2024) ranked Sri Lanka 121st out of 180 countries, reflecting persistent issues with accountability and governance. Corruption has been particularly rampant in public procurement, infrastructure projects and state-owned enterprises, resulting in substantial economic losses. The 2022 '*Aragalaya*' can be viewed as a response to the deep-rooted governance crisis affecting the island, expressing the frustration of citizens, particularly the youth, with a political system that has consistently failed to deliver on its promises. Consequently, the 2024 elections became a crucial turning point, signifying the urgent need for a shift in the island's political culture. While the establishment of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (1994) and recent legislative measures, such as the Anti-Corruption Act (2023), indicate attempts to address these issues, enforcement has remained weak and political interference has hindered the implementation of laws. However, signs of change are on the horizon.

Key Challenges

- Persistent corruption undermines economic growth and public trust.
- Legislation exists; however, its enforcement has been hindered by political interference and institutional deficiencies.
- Corruption in state-owned enterprises, including procurement and infrastructure projects.

Proposed Action

- Strengthening meritocratic administrative structures.
- Adopt evidence-based budgeting practices to optimise public expenditure and minimise waste.
- Enhance transparency in government spending and implement robust anti-corruption measures to prevent waste and foster public trust.
- Strict enforcement of anti-corruption law.
- Implement safeguards to minimise political influence and manipulation.
- Encourage public confidence through accountability and transparent political reforms.

Internal Security and Law and Order

Sri Lanka's security landscape has long been shaped by both traditional and non-traditional threats, including youth rebellions against the state in the south and a separatist conflict in the north and the east. The prolonged conflict with the LTTE remains the most significant challenge in the country's post-independence history. It inflicted extensive damage on the nation's socio-economic fabric. Although its conclusion in 2009 ended armed hostilities, it did not eliminate inter-ethnic tensions. Post-2009, security challenges, some dormant, reemerged. These include religious extremism and organised crime, while cyber threats emerged as a new challenge. The expansion of ISIS in the Middle East, coupled with the rise of extremist groups in Sri Lanka, created fertile ground for radicalisation, culminating in the Easter Sunday bombings of April 2019. Simultaneously, organised crime groups gradually increased their operations, particularly in the maritime domain, exploiting Sri Lanka's strategic location to facilitate drug smuggling, human trafficking, and the illicit arms trade. These evolving threats demonstrate that security is not a static condition but a dynamic continuum, one that requires an adaptive, multifaceted strategy to

mitigate the spread of new forms of extremism and criminal networks. Furthermore, lingering grievances that fuelled past insurgencies persist, with economic deprivation, political grievances, and youth disillusionment remaining key potential drivers of unrest. Both the left-wing youth uprisings in the south during the 1970s and 1980s and the insurgency that began in the north and the east in the 1980s were rooted in socio-economic inequalities. These developments must guide Sri Lanka's future security strategy.

Key Challenges

- Ethnic Tensions
- Separatist Movements
- Religious Extremism
- Organised Crime

Proposed Action

- Promote reconciliation by addressing ethnic grievances.
- Pre-empt radicalisation by developing and implementing proactive policies.

- Implement measures to curb organised crime, both domestic and foreign.
- Prioritise the digital economy.

Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure

In the realm of cybersecurity, Sri Lanka remains in the early stages of transformation despite efforts to integrate digital systems into critical sectors such as banking, energy, and transportation. The proliferation of cyber threats has outpaced the development of robust security measures to protect these systems. State-sponsored cyberattacks aim to achieve strategic objectives, including espionage and the exploitation of weaknesses in government technology and digital architecture. Such incursions compromise national defence systems, disrupt critical infrastructure, and erode public confidence in government institutions. Foreign entities may also utilise cyberspace to disseminate disinformation and propaganda, exploiting existing ethnic, religious, or political divisions to sow discord and exacerbate tensions. These challenges underscore the urgent need for Sri Lanka to strengthen its cybersecurity framework to safeguard its

critical infrastructure, social cohesion, and economic stability.

In addition to conventional cyber threats, Sri Lanka must prepare for the growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in national security. AI has the potential to transform surveillance, cyber defence, threat prediction, and disaster response through advanced data analysis and automation. However, it also introduces vulnerabilities, including the misuse of AI by malicious actors for disinformation, deepfakes, or autonomous cyberattacks. Integrating AI into the national security architecture must be done with safeguards for ethics and transparency, under the strict oversight and responsibility of the state.

Key Challenges

- Critical Infrastructure Vulnerabilities
- Financial crimes
- Espionage
- Cyber terrorism

Proposed Action

- Build capacity and develop expertise
- Strengthen cybersecurity infrastructure.
- Promote digital literacy.
- Develop legal and policy frameworks.

Energy Security

Sri Lanka's energy security remains a significant challenge, characterised by heavy reliance on imported fossil fuels, an underdeveloped renewable energy sector, trade union activity in response to reforms, and frequent power shortages. The country relies on oil and coal imports for over 50% of its electricity generation, leaving it vulnerable to global price swings and supply chain disruptions. Hydropower, once a dominant energy source, has become less dependable due to rising demand and unpredictable weather patterns linked to climate change. Although the country has set ambitious targets to expand its use of renewable energy, aiming for 70 per cent by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, investment in solar, wind, and other alternative energy sources remains inadequate. Coupled with unreliable power generation,

including repeated breakdowns and allegations of corruption associated with power generation at the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant, the nation urgently requires a more resilient and diversified strategy to ensure energy security. To strengthen this aspect and mitigate vulnerabilities, Sri Lanka must urgently transform its energy sector through a comprehensive plan that reduces external dependencies by accelerating the transition to renewable energy sources. Such a transition requires increased investment in renewable energy, supported by incentives to spur private-sector participation. Strengthening energy infrastructure, including grid modernisation and energy storage systems, is crucial for enhancing reliability and alleviating disruptions. By transitioning to a more sustainable and diverse energy mix, Sri Lanka can lessen its vulnerability to global market fluctuations. These measures, coupled with energy conservation policies and demand-side management programmes, will help Sri Lanka establish a more secure and sustainable energy foundation.

Key Challenges

- Heavy reliance on imported fossil fuels.
- Allegations of corruption and environmental issues arising from reliance on coal for power generation.
- The impact of climate change on hydropower energy generation.
- Inconsistencies in renewable energy policy.
- Power shortages and infrastructure vulnerabilities.
- High cost of energy.
- Policy inconsistencies that hinder the integration of non-renewable energy into the national grid.
- Delays in transition to liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Proposed Action

- Modernise the national grid while pursuing regional connectivity.
- Reduce dependence on coal for power generation over time.
- Broaden the energy mix.
- Invest in renewable energy sources.
- Implement demand-side management and energy-saving programmes.

- Assess the medium- and long-term ramifications of investment programmes on energy generation.
- Implement a plan for the transition to LNG.

Food Security

As a net-food-importing country (NFIC), Sri Lanka continues to face food security threats due to issues of availability, accessibility, and affordability stemming from economic, agricultural, and climate-related challenges. Despite abundant natural endowments, Sri Lanka ranks moderately in global food security, placing 66th out of 113 countries in the Global Food Security Index (2022), with over a quarter of the population facing food insecurity. A joint assessment by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (2022) estimated that 28 per cent of the population was food insecure, despite more than 26 per cent of the employed population working in agriculture. By early 2023, conditions had improved; however, 17 per cent of the population, approximately 3.9 million people, remained acutely food insecure, particularly in the Northern, Eastern, and Central provinces. The three main plantation crops, tea, rubber, and coconut, as well as the main staple, rice, are largely rain-fed.

Additionally, food imports accounted for 15.29 per cent of Sri Lanka's total merchandise imports in 2024. This dependency leaves the nation vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions, currency fluctuations, and rising import costs, making food increasingly unaffordable for many households.

Dairy and fisheries are essential for national nutrition security, affordability, and rural income generation. They provide complementary sources of protein and micronutrients, support rural employment, and strengthen household economic resilience. To enhance their impact, national food security strategies should prioritise these sectors through investments in sustainable practices, efficient cold-chain systems, and nutrition-focused policies that link production to public health outcomes.

Key Challenges

- Dependence on rain-fed agriculture
- Supply chain disruptions
- Malnutrition

Proposed Action

- Rehabilitate the irrigation network.
- Develop robust food production and storage facilities.
- Promote the export of agricultural products.
- Promote modern agricultural technologies.
- Improve mechanisms for post-harvest technology.
- Adhere to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).
- Maintain sufficient buffer stocks to cover contingencies.

Health Security

Health security is a critical concern. Despite significant progress in improving health indicators through free health services, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, are rising, necessitating immediate changes in the health system to address these issues. As of 2021, life expectancy in Sri Lanka was 77 years, with a median age of 34.5 years. This demographic shift requires a focus on geriatric care and the management of age-related health conditions. Communicable diseases, including dengue, new variants

of COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, leprosy, and tuberculosis, continue to pose significant challenges. Although the number of deaths from communicable diseases remains relatively low, their infectious nature is a matter of public concern.

Key Challenges

- Limited resources, an increasing population, and rising demand for health services.
- Prevalence of non-communicable diseases.
- Threats of communicable diseases.
- Unequal access to quality healthcare
- Brain-drain

Proposed Action

- Enhance healthcare facilities, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas.
- Develop domestic pharmaceutical production capacity.
- Improve surveillance systems for the detection and response to infectious diseases.
- Provide support to expand the laboratory system across the island.

- Integrate mental health services into primary healthcare.
- Strengthen emergency health response systems.
- Address the growing loss of qualified and experienced medical personnel and adopt measures to address the situation.

Human Capital and Knowledge Security

Human capital and knowledge are critical strategic assets for national resilience and competitiveness. This pillar focuses on developing a skilled, educated, and innovative workforce while safeguarding intellectual property, research, and technological capabilities. Unemployment and underemployment remain persistent issues, with an estimated 26,000 Sri Lankans leaving the country each month (2024) in search of greener pastures, thereby exacerbating the skills gap. Inadequate infrastructure, unequal access to quality education, and a lack of resources for teachers and students continue to challenge Sri Lanka's education sector. Despite significant progress in primary education enrolment, disparities persist, particularly in rural areas, where students often face

obstacles such as limited access to schools, poor facilities, and insufficiently trained teachers.

Sri Lanka should learn from other countries, such as Switzerland's practical, industry-integrated model and Singapore's lifelong learning and technology-oriented system, to revamp its post-secondary skills training. With youth unemployment and skills mismatches as key challenges, such reforms can create a more inclusive, employable, and future-ready workforce.

Higher education is also under pressure, with limited opportunities for qualified students due to a shortage of university places. The lack of adequate places drives students to pursue higher education abroad, contributing to a significant outflow of foreign exchange estimated at USD 800 million to 1 billion annually. These issues underscore the pressing need for reforms, including the establishment of private universities.

A robust education reform agenda covering technical, vocational, and tertiary education must be central to Sri Lanka's national security strategy, as human capital development directly affects economic resilience and

social stability. Increasing infrastructure investment in rural areas, including digital learning facilities and well-equipped schools staffed by trained, high-quality teachers, can help bridge the urban-rural education divide. Offering competitive incentives to attract and retain qualified teachers, particularly in underserved regions, is essential to improving learning outcomes. Higher education also requires significant restructuring, including expanding universities' intake capacity.

Key Challenges

- Unemployment and underemployment.
- Educational inequality.
- Limited opportunities for higher education.
- Large-scale skilled migration.

Proposed Action

- Enhance rural education infrastructure and human capital resources, including vocational training and skills development programmes, to maintain a consistent education policy.

- Improve the quality and delivery of English language proficiency throughout the island.
- Provide attractive incentives to attract and retain skilled teachers.
- Increase university placements to better align with the job market.
- Strengthen financial support for education and research, particularly in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) sectors.
- Facilitate private-sector involvement in providing tertiary educational institutions.

Environmental Security

Environmental security is a growing concern due to the country's high vulnerability to natural disasters, including cyclones, floods, droughts, and landslides, which profoundly affect livelihoods. As climate change intensifies these extreme weather events, rural communities reliant on agriculture face unpredictable rainfall and crop failures, while rising sea levels and coastal erosion increasingly threaten coastal ecosystems and populations. Since 2010, around 13 million people in Sri Lanka have been affected by natural disasters,

primarily floods, droughts, and landslides. Environmental challenges not only threaten food security but also cause internal displacement and economic instability. In this context, Sri Lanka needs to invest substantially in sustainable development initiatives, particularly within the blue economy. This includes efforts to protect marine ecosystems, such as expanding marine protected areas, promoting sustainable fisheries, implementing coastal conservation measures, and conducting resource surveys within the EEZ. Sri Lanka's claim in the Outer Continental Margin should be vigorously pursued. An authority should be established to manage and develop the country's ocean resources.

Key Challenges

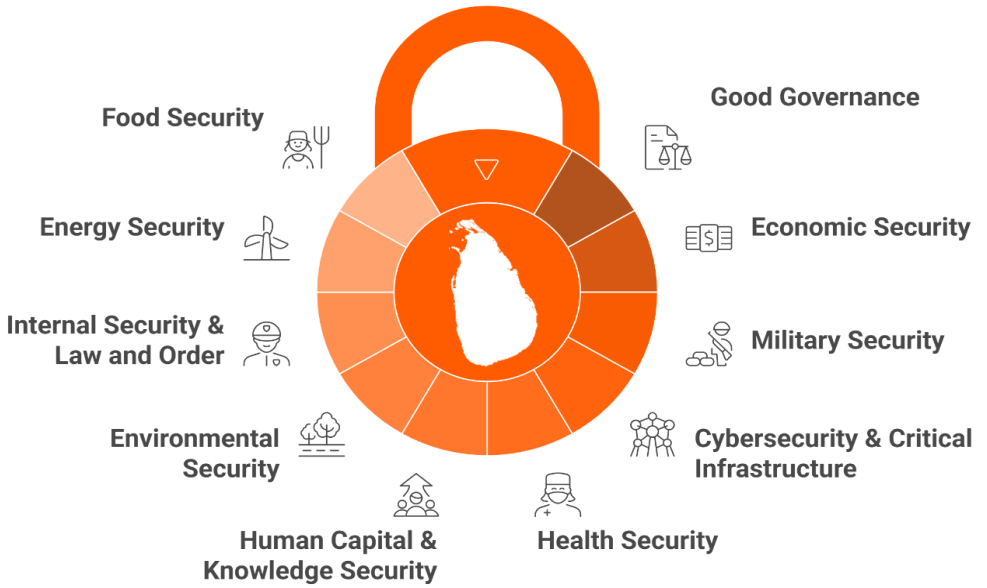
- Climate Change and natural disasters.
- Coastal and marine ecosystem degradation.
- Loss of flora and fauna.
- Pollution.

Proposed Action

- Climate and natural disaster resilience.
- Maritime accidents, pre-emption, and preparedness.
- Implement climate-resilient agricultural practices, coastal protection measures, and reskill vulnerable populations to mitigate the impact of climate change.
- Safeguard marine ecosystems by expanding marine protected areas, promoting sustainable fisheries management, and implementing coastal conservation projects.
- Forest conservation and reforestation.
- Enhance public awareness of environmental concerns and climate adaptation strategies.
- Promote the circular economy and enforce waste management regulations.

Figure 3: Pillars of National Security Strategy

PILLARS OF NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY



Policy Recommendations

It is imperative to study the threats Sri Lanka has faced over the past three decades to develop policy recommendations for future challenges. Issues such as terrorism, the proliferation of cyber-attacks, irregular warfare, transnational crime, natural disasters, threats from non-state actors, rising maritime disputes, and geopolitical rivalries in the Indian Ocean all require a fundamental shift in security strategy. Such an analysis should also draw on the experiences of other South Asian states. The proposed NSS aims to provide a coherent framework for addressing emerging risks, enhancing national resilience, and aligning strategic priorities with the aspirations of the Sri Lankan people, while taking account of the evolving strategic dynamics of the Indian Ocean region and the wider international environment. It must be emphasised that these proposals are intended only to guide authorities in developing an NSS based on an NSP and should ideally be included in a broader security vision. For an NSS to be effective, the policy recommendations outlined here must secure broad political consensus. National security should not be politicised or driven by short-term electoral calculations. A

robust national security strategy must be anchored in long-term strategic foresight.

Global Engagement

- Strengthen Sri Lanka's diplomatic engagement at bilateral, multilateral and regional forums.
- Continue collaboration with like-minded states to uphold international law.
- Ensure that positions in Sri Lanka's diplomatic missions abroad are filled by trained and experienced personnel, an objective that can be achieved through a professional foreign service.
- Empower the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies to achieve its objectives.

Security Sector Reforms

- Assess and optimise the size and structure of its armed forces to ensure an efficient, modern, and adaptable force.
- Right-size troop numbers to meet future security challenges, align military capabilities with emerging threats, and ensure the ability to meet operational demands.
- Invest in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) technologies to anticipate and respond to emerging threats.
- Strengthen foresight capabilities through improved cyber intelligence, data analytics, and early-warning systems developed in collaboration with regional partners.
- Train and equip the military to work alongside national development efforts that extend beyond security, including humanitarian missions, disaster relief, and public infrastructure projects.
- Develop a public-private-sector collaborative plan for retired, discharged, and demobilised armed forces personnel to receive skills training and

access to resources that support their reintegration into civilian society.

- Ensure the urgent replacement of the PTA with effective alternative legislation that complies with international human rights instruments to which Sri Lanka is a State Party.
- Develop and implement proactive policies to counter radicalisation whilst strengthening community engagement, thereby preventing evolving terrorist threats.

Maritime Security

- Enhance maritime law enforcement by expanding joint patrols and cooperative security frameworks with regional and extra-regional naval forces.
- Strengthen partnerships with key littoral maritime nations and multilateral organisations to enhance Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) capabilities.
- Enhance port security and customs enforcement.
- Enforce environmental regulations, coordinate across institutions, and address maritime pollution.

- Foster collaboration in oceanography, climate resilience, and disaster risk management.
- Establish frameworks for cooperation in the blue economy.
- Establish dedicated protocols and patrol units to monitor and secure the EEZ.

Economic Resilience

- Formulate a robust policy framework to support deeper integration into the global economy.
- Enter into bilateral and plurilateral preferential integration agreements—aligned with Sri Lanka’s trade and economic interests.
- Strengthen cross-border trade facilitation measures to remove barriers to the free flow of trade and improve the ease of doing business.
- Increase transparency in negotiating external economic and financial agreements, including parliamentary oversight.
- Accelerate investment in renewable energy.
- Grant incentives to boost domestic manufacturing, including high-value exports.

- Upgrade island-wide tourism infrastructure to improve accessibility and enhance the visitor experience.
- Develop a new Tourism Strategic Plan to succeed the 2022-2025 Plan.
- Set realistic targets for visitor arrivals and foreign exchange generation.

Governance, Law and Order

- Strengthen whistleblower protection laws.
- Conduct regular audits of government expenditure.
- Revise the public service recruitment procedure to ensure meritocracy.
- Enact a new constitution that reforms the executive, ensures ethnic harmony, and upholds the rule of law.
- Implement transitional justice.

Cyber Security

- Developing and implementing a robust national cyber policy is essential to safeguard critical information infrastructure, enhance cyber

resilience, and counter state- and non-state-sponsored cyber threats.

- Establishing a national AI task force that brings together government, academia, and private-sector stakeholders is vital to developing a legal and operational framework for AI use.

Energy Security

- Prioritise establishing grid connectivity with the South Asian network to enable two-way power trade, incorporating energy storage solutions.
- Give priority to the long-term renewable energy strategy.
- Encourage energy efficiency in industries, businesses, and households through regulatory measures and awareness campaigns.

Food Security

- Enhance long-term agricultural productivity.
- Develop modern irrigation infrastructure, particularly in drought-prone regions, to reduce reliance on unpredictable rainfall by adopting water-efficient techniques such as drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting.
- Develop a strategic plan for the rehabilitation of the ancient irrigation network.
- Strengthen social safety nets by introducing long-term livelihood development programmes for vulnerable households.
- Strengthen research and development in climate-resilient crop varieties, including rice
- Promote value-added agricultural exports.
- Develop a robust and resilient food production system and food storage infrastructure.
- Promote drought- and salinity-resistant crop varieties to enhance agricultural productivity.

Disaster Resilience, Environmental Protection and Public Health

- Enhance early-warning systems and real-time data collection for extreme weather events.
- Strengthen coastal infrastructure, including seawalls and mangrove reforestation projects, to support environmental protection.
- Strengthen international cooperation to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.
- Impose enhanced penalties against illegal logging and encroachments on protected forest reserves, while taking steps to increase forest cover.
- Enhance waste collection, disposal and recycling programmes in both urban and rural areas and promote investment in waste-to-energy and composting projects.
- Enhance healthcare infrastructure, improve laboratory capacity island-wide, establish national stockpiles of essential medical supplies for rapid deployment, and streamline procurement.
- Develop AI and streamline the operational functions of the Disaster Management Centre.

- Drive regional climate diplomacy through platforms such as BIMSTEC, IORA, and SAARC to coordinate disaster-resilience strategies, water resource sharing, and regional carbon finance initiatives.

Human Capital Development and Knowledge Security

- Enhance rural education infrastructure and human capital resources including vocational training and skills development programmes.
- Upgrade classroom facilities by integrating digital learning tools.
- Offer teachers competitive salaries, career development opportunities, and other benefits, especially to those serving rural areas.
- Improve the quality and delivery of English language proficiency
- Facilitate research and development in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and establish public-private research partnerships to promote innovation and technology-driven economic growth.

- Improve accessibility and employment prospects for people with disabilities.
- Promote protection against gender-based violence and discrimination in the workplace.

Implementation, Monitoring, Review, and Adaptation

An NSS is critically reliant on an actionable policy. An NSP serves as a blueprint, providing guidance and direction to safeguard the country against current and future threats. The responsibility for creating an NSP should lie with the President, as Head of State, Minister of Defence, and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. However, the development of such a vital policy document will require a combined effort, including those responsible for Defence, Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Public Security, assisted by a team of experts. The NSS is a practical plan that translates policy into goals. Consequently, it requires an operational plan that includes an organisational structure defining the composition, operations, roles and tasks, and command-and-control lines of the implementing agency with legal status. While the NSP is long-term, it will require revisions to account for domestic, regional, and global developments that may arise over time.

Since gaining independence in 1948, the government of Sri Lanka has not officially published a comprehensive NSP that is publicly accessible or gazetted. Consequently, the

country lacked a dedicated agency to manage national security. Until the late 20th century, Sri Lanka's approach to security challenges was primarily reactive, relying on standard security and law enforcement mechanisms. The 1962 and 1966 attempted coups by the armed forces, the 1971 and 1988/89 youth insurgencies in the south, and the separatist conflict in the north from 1983 were managed by the armed forces and law enforcement agencies. This situation changed significantly in 1999, when Sri Lanka needed to address the increasing security threats posed by the separatist movements. In response, the government established a National Security Council (NSC) by Presidential Decree under the Emergency Regulations (National Security Council Regulations No. 1 of 1999), which was gazetted on 27 May 1999. After 28 years, the state of emergency was lifted in August 2011, following the end of the northern rebellion. With the termination of the emergency, the legal basis for the NSC's continued existence lapsed, although it continued to function without a formal legal foundation.

Following the reintroduction of the state of emergency in March 2018 in response to escalating anti-Muslim riots in the Kandy District, the Cabinet of Ministers decided in

September 2019 to replace the 1999 NSC with a fully legislated NSC, supported by a National Security Advisor (NSA), an NSA Advisory Committee, and an NSC Secretariat. Despite this decision, no formal legislation was enacted in Parliament to implement it. Although an NSA was appointed in 2022, that role was not a legally constituted position. As a result, Sri Lanka still operates under the NSC established by a presidential decree (1999), which lacks legislative backing.

The composition of the NSC and NSS varies by country, reflecting established institutional arrangements. Therefore, Sri Lanka should define the NSC's role and functions and tailor them to ensure it remains a permanent institution serving successive governments. In most countries across South Asia and Southeast Asia, National Security Councils and related entities are established through executive action, such as Presidential decrees, Cabinet decisions, or administrative orders. For example, Nepal established its National Security Council under a Constitutional provision (Art. 266 of the Constitution), which provides for its establishment, defines its membership, outlines its responsibilities, and mandates annual reporting of its activities to the President. Other

countries, such as Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, have set up such mechanisms without resorting to Acts of Parliament. The only exception is Pakistan, which gave its NSC a statutory basis through the NSC Act of 2004.

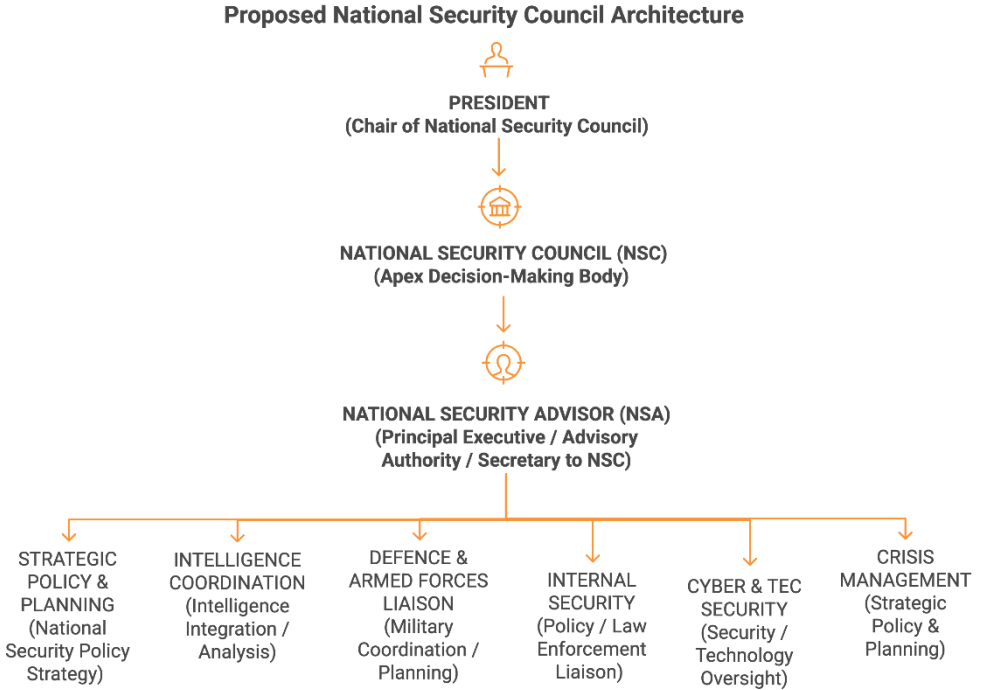
Given historical precedents and to ensure effective oversight of policy implementation, the government should establish a fully legislated NSC and NSS, headed by the Executive and NSA, respectively. The functions and responsibilities of each institution, both collective and individual, should be clearly set out in the proposed legislation. The NSA serves as the primary strategic counsellor to the head of government on all matters concerning internal and external security, foreign policy and strategic affairs. The NSA's role includes policy architecture, intelligence coordination, diplomatic engagement and crisis management. Unlike cabinet ministers, the NSA need not be an elected member of the Cabinet and is appointed by the executive authority, based on personal trust and specialised expertise rather than political patronage. As a coordinating body between government ministries, the NSS/NSA will be answerable to the Executive and the Cabinet of Ministers. In carrying out its duties, the NSS/NSA should liaise with local and

international think tanks, research institutions, and subject-matter experts. Through this role, the NSS/NSA would ensure Sri Lanka's national security policies remain proactive, adaptive, and consistently implemented across successive administrations, reinforcing a long-term, depoliticised approach to national security.

To ensure the proposed recommendations are both feasible and actionable, they must undergo further refinement through consultations with sector experts, relevant line ministries, and key stakeholder specialists. Engaging specialists from diverse fields will help assess the practicality of these recommendations, make necessary adjustments to align them with best practice and Sri Lanka's immediate and long-term needs, and establish measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor their effectiveness. By integrating expert insights, these policies can evolve from broad strategic directives into targeted initiatives that deliver tangible results in strengthening Sri Lanka's national security and economic resilience.

Sri Lanka currently lacks a centralised institutional mechanism for anticipatory governance capable of systematically assessing and preparing for future risk scenarios, ranging from geopolitical disruptions and AI risks to pandemics and climate tipping points, and of managing crises and emergencies. The absence of such a mechanism restricts the State's ability to anticipate and respond cohesively to emerging and non-traditional security threats. Establishing Strategic Policy and Planning and Crisis Management divisions under the proposed NSS would enable dynamic risk modelling, horizon scanning, policy simulations, and coordinated crisis and emergency management at the national level. This would help policymakers prepare for low-probability, high-impact events, such as major cyber blackouts, regional military conflicts, or environmental disasters, thereby strengthening national resilience and decision-making in an increasingly complex and uncertain global environment.

Figure 4: Proposed National Security Council Architecture



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The Pathfinder Foundation is a premier think tank that has played a catalytic role in research and analysis aimed at contributing to economic policy reforms in Sri Lanka. Over the years, it has established a wide network of partner organizations worldwide, thereby enhancing bilateral and multilateral partnerships to promote economic, social, and political development, in addition to its security and strategic focus. Serving as a platform to engage in critical thinking and cross-disciplinary analysis, the Pathfinder Foundation aims to increase knowledge and raise awareness of salient issues with relevant stakeholders locally and internationally.