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National Security Council (NSC)

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In May 1998, India tested nuclear devices at Pokhran. The world noticed. Then a quiet question came up at home. Who plans for India's security over the long run, across all ministries? There was no formal body for it. Six months later, the government created one. This is the story of the National Security Council, or NSC.



The NSC coordinates India's security agencies and strategic planning. Photo: BSF, Wagah Border, CC BY-SA 3.0.

19 Nov 1998 NSC set up
PM Chairs the Council
3 bodies SPG, NSAB, NSCS
30 May 2014 Doval became NSA

1 What Is the National Security Council?

- The **National Security Council** is India's apex body for national and strategic security policy.
- Security threats do not stay inside one department. A terror plot can involve the Home Ministry, the Defence Ministry, intelligence agencies and diplomats together.
- So the NSC brings the people responsible for defence, foreign affairs, finance and internal security to one table.
- Instead of several ministries pulling in different directions, the Council sets one coordinated line.

Remember: The NSC is a joined-up body. It brings defence, foreign affairs, finance and home affairs together under the Prime Minister.

Quick check 1. The National Security Advisor chairs the National Security Council. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 2. The NSC was created after the 1962 war with China. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 Why Was the NSC Created, and Who Sits on It?

- The trigger was the **Pokhran-II tests of May 1998**. They showed that India had no formal body for long-term strategic planning.
- Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee set up the NSC on 19 November 1998.
- It was created by a government decision. Parliament did not pass a separate law for it, so it is not a constitutional or statutory body.
- Brajesh Mishra became India's first National Security Advisor. He was also the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary at the time.
- The Prime Minister chairs the Council. This is the most tested fact about the NSC.
- Think of it as a **four-key council**. The Ministers of Defence, External Affairs, Home Affairs and Finance are members. The Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog also sits on it.
- Reports on the Council's membership also list the Chief of Defence Staff, the Additional NSA and the Deputy NSAs as members.
- The NSA heads the secretariat and acts as the Council's secretary.
- Each minister brings a different lens. Defence looks at the armed forces. External Affairs looks at neighbours and treaties. Home Affairs looks at internal security. Finance looks at what the country can afford.
- After 1998, the world watched India closely. A permanent planning body for security risks made good sense.
- With four key ministries in the room, no single view dominates. Decisions reflect the whole government.

3 What Are the Three Supporting Bodies?

- The NSC does not work alone. Three bodies feed it analysis and advice.
- The **Strategic Policy Group**, or SPG, prepares policy inputs. It includes the Cabinet Secretary, the service chiefs, key secretaries and the heads of the intelligence agencies.
- Until 2018, the Cabinet Secretary chaired the SPG. Since October 2018, the NSA chairs it.
- The **National Security Advisory Board**, or NSAB, gives outside expert advice. It has no serving officials. Retired officers, diplomats and experts sit on it.
- The National Security Council Secretariat, or NSCS, is the administrative arm. The NSA heads it.
- The first NSAB in 1998 was chaired by the strategic analyst K. Subrahmanyam. Since then, the Board has been reconstituted from time to time.
- Think of it this way. The SPG is the **inside team** of officials. The NSAB is the outside team of experts. The NSCS keeps the

paperwork moving.

- Together, they give the Council both inside expertise and independent views.

4 Who Is the National Security Advisor?

- The NSA is the Prime Minister's principal advisor on national security.
- The NSA sits between the Prime Minister and the security establishment. Advice flows up, and decisions flow down.
- Ajit Doval has held the post since 30 May 2014. He is the longest-serving NSA so far.
- In July 2024, Rajinder Khanna took charge as Additional NSA. This was the first time the post had been filled.
- Beneath the Additional NSA, T.V. Ravichandran serves as a Deputy NSA. Deputy NSAs look after specific areas of security.
- A long-serving NSA brings continuity. It also raises a fair question about how much depends on one person.

5 What Security Reforms Followed?

- In April 2018, India formed the **Defence Planning Committee**. The NSA chairs it.
- Its aim is to fix a single-service mindset. It brings the three armed forces and key ministries into one long-term plan.
- The change in the SPG chair in October 2018 tied strategy more closely to the NSA.
- Both steps moved the NSA to the centre of strategic planning. The Prime Minister gets one adviser who can work with the military and the civil services.

- These steps show a pattern. India keeps building new bodies to join up security work.

6 What Is in the News?

- On **22-23 June 2026**, India hosted the BRICS National Security Advisers' meeting in New Delhi. NSA Doval chaired it.
- Counter-terrorism and cybersecurity were among the topics discussed.
- Modi flagged three areas: terrorism, cyber security and emerging technologies.
- Prime Minister Modi met the visiting security advisers on 23 June.
- China's Wang Yi attended too. He held talks with Doval on gradual normalisation of ties.
- On 30 April 2025, days after the Pahalgam attack, the government reconstituted the NSAB. Former R&AW chief Alok Joshi became its chairman, leading a seven-member board.

7 What Should You Remember for Exams?

Must Know

- The NSC was set up on 19 November 1998, after Pokhran-II.
- The Prime Minister chairs it.
- The NSA is its secretary, and Brajesh Mishra was the first.

Good to Know

- The three supporting bodies are the SPG, the NSAB and the NSCS.
- The NSA has chaired the SPG since October 2018.
- The NSAB has no serving officials.

Great to Know

- The NSA does not chair the NSC **(Trap)**.
- The trigger was not a war **(Trap)**.
- The NSC is not a single-ministry body **(Trap)**.

Practice MCQs

1. India's National Security Council (NSC) was set up in November 1998, in the aftermath of which event?

A. The Kargil War

B. The 26/11 Mumbai attacks

C. The Parliament attack of 2001

D. The Pokhran-II nuclear tests

See answer ↓

2. Who chairs the NSC's own Strategic Policy Group (SPG), and since when has this been true?

A. The Defence Secretary, since 2014

B. The National Security Advisor, since October 2018

C. The Prime Minister directly, since 1998

D. The Cabinet Secretary, since the SPG's founding in 1999

See answer ↓

3. What kind of members make up the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)?

A. Serving state Chief Secretaries

B. Sitting Members of Parliament

C. Retired officials and outside strategic-affairs experts, not serving officials

D. The three armed forces chiefs

See answer ↓

4. As of August 2026, who is India's National Security Advisor (NSA), and since which year has he held the post?

A. Brajesh Mishra, since 1998

B. Shivshankar Menon, since 2010

C. M.K. Narayanan, since 2005

D. Ajit Doval, since 2014

See answer ↓

5. The Defence Planning Committee, formed in April 2018 and chaired by the NSA, was set up mainly to fix what problem?

A. Disputes over Border Security Force deployment

B. A shortage of NSA-level advisory board members

C. Delays in defence pension payouts

D. India's fragmented, single-service-siloed approach to long-term defence planning

See answer ↓

6. On 23 June 2026, PM Modi met National Security Advisors and senior officials of BRICS countries.

Which three areas did he flag as shared security challenges?

A. Climate change, pandemics, and food security

B. Terrorism, cyber security, and emerging technologies

C. Piracy, smuggling, and money laundering

D. Border disputes, refugee flows, and trade wars

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **D.** The NSC was set up after the May 1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests exposed the lack of a formal body for long-term strategic planning. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** Until 2018, the Cabinet Secretary chaired the SPG. Since October 2018, the National Security Advisor chairs it instead -- a change many older prep sources still miss. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** The NSAB has no serving officials. It is made up only of retired officers, diplomats, and outside experts, appointed for fixed two-year terms. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** Ajit Doval has been India's NSA since 30 May 2014, making him India's longest-serving NSA and the first ever appointed for three consecutive terms. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** The Defence Planning Committee coordinates long-term strategy across the three armed services and key ministries, a gap no single existing body owned before 2018. ↑ Q5
6. **B.** The correct answer is terrorism, cyber security, and emerging technologies. PM Modi flagged these while meeting National Security Advisors and senior security officials of BRICS countries. This happened on 23 June 2026, ahead of India's 2026 BRICS Chairmanship. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2

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