

# Pakistan-Saudi Defense Relations: Strategic, Economic, and Regional Implications

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## ABSTRACT

*The Pakistan-Saudi defense agreement of September 2025 is a strategic partnership that is established based on historical collaboration, religious connection, economic interdependence, and mutual interests of security. The qualitative research design discussed in this paper is based on an interpretivist ontological and subjectivist epistemological position and utilizes secondary sources. It examines the multidimensional nature of the benefits and issues of this developing alliance, and the focus should be on the military, economic, and diplomatic benefits of Pakistan and the strategic interests of Saudi Arabia, as well as on the regional security concerns in general. The study, based on the Alliance Theory, specifically the focus on asymmetric alliances, explains how Pakistan capitalizes on its experience in operations, symbolic legitimacy and geostrategic position to enhance Saudi security without becoming overly reliant on Iran. The analysis also establishes the difficulties involved in this association such as domestic political sensibilities, expanding economical dependence, and the possibility of becoming involved in a regional conflict. On the whole, the research adds to the insights into the ways in which current defense collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is an indication of a compromise between the conscious approach to ensuring the security and the development of the independent foreign policy. It ends with a set of policy proposals to establish a more balanced, sustained, and win-win defense relationship to enhance the strategic position of both countries in a more complex regional order.*

## KEYWORDS:

Pakistan-Saudi defense pact, strategic alliance, asymmetric alliances, regional security, economic interdependence, military cooperation

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## BACKGROUND

The Pakistan-Saudi relation is perhaps one of the longest lived, multidimensional and most strategic relationships in the present Muslim world. The relationship is based on historical trust, mutual strategic need, and shared religious identity which over the decades, has been developed and nurtured by political, military, and economic cooperation (MacHaffie, 2021). Since its very origins, this alliance has been not only pegged on a solidarity of faith but it has been pragmatically pegged on factors of national security, energy reliance and geopolitical orientation. The beginning of the military relations between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) could be traced back to the early 1960s, when Pakistan received military contingents to train and offer advisory and defensive support to the young Arab militia (Goldewijk, 2023; Riedel, 2017). These shipments were part of an overall plan by Riyadh to modernize its military institution and lessen its dependence on Western contractors and to develop a strategic depth by way of collaboration with a fellow Muslim-majority kingdom. Nevertheless, the military relationship eventually turned into a highly institutionalised form which had a foundation of mutual trust and synergy to their actions.

It was in the 70s and 80s that this cooperation was further developed. The Pakistani advisors were involved in key positions in creating the military policies of the Saudi Arabia, training facilities, and fortification of their vital infrastructures such as air bases and command posts (Khan,



2019). This time was a symptom of an unparalleled degree of defensive intimacy that made Pakistan not only the provider of security, but also the main component of the military planning of the Kingdom (Sadia and Fatima, 2024). The Pakistani military played a more than technical advisory role, as well as operational preparedness, the evaluation of strategic threats and even the symbolic expression of the Islamic military unity. In contrast to transactional alliance only guided by material advantages, the Pakistan-Saudi defense collaboration had a rather distinct trust-based nature- one which had been supported by the comprehending ideological introspection and mutualism of perceiving regional insecurities.

In exchange, Saudi Arabia provided a lot of economic and diplomatic support to Pakistan at every crucial point of time. This was in terms of generous aid packages after the war in 1971, financial support in times of international sanctions in 1990s and concessional oil deals that enabled Pakistan to cope with the chronic balance-of-payment crises (Anwar, Saqib, and Mustafa, 2025; Ulrichsen, 2020a). This kind of support was not only economic in the sense that it represented the recognition of the Saudi Arabia to Pakistan as a strategic friend and protector of the Islamic cause (Anwar, Mustafa, Taimoor, and Akram, 2025). These mutual interactions enhanced bilateral dependency and gave rise to a tendency towards mutual reassurance which remained despite change of regimes or shifting alliances in the world. In addition to financial support, the Saudi position also strengthened Pakistan in the domestic political legitimacy of the country, especially conservative and religious parties, who considered the Kingdom as the spiritual center of the Muslim world (Javaid, 2016a). This convergence of ideological unity, strategic need and interdependence of the economies, therefore, created a long lasting and stable bilateral structure that has run across decades of upheaval in the region (Mojaddedi, 2024).

The modern realities of the Pakistan-Saudi alliance, and particularly, the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) that will be signed in September 2025 have to be interpreted in the wider frames of the Middle Eastern instability. The last 20 years were characterized by the metamorphosis of the Middle East into one of the most volatile spaces of the globe due to the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. (2003), the Arab Spring revolutions (2010-11), the Syrian civil war, and the Saudi-Iranian rivalry (Mabon, 2020). The current war in Yemen that broke out in 2015 is a kind of microcosm of this larger conflict, where the Saudi-led coalition of countries clashes with the Iranian-backed Houthi militias. The incidents have revealed the weakness of the classical security system and increased the vulnerability of Riyadh to reliable, professional, and ideologically compatible military allies (Alterman, 2018). As Washington has become more doubtful in its commitment to Gulf security, Saudi Arabia has been realigning its defense links, with a shift in attention to Western allies to those states, such as Pakistan, that provide not only operational plausibility but also cultural similarity.

On its part, Pakistan sees this renewed defense partnership as a chance to establish its geopolitical applicability as it deals with the incessant economic problems. Being a nuclear country with one of the largest operational armies in the Muslim world, when it comes to defense cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan also strengthens its position in the region and provides new opportunities to invest strategically and cooperate in the field of defense industry. Nonetheless, the main focus of academic research on the Pakistani-Saudi relationship has been on the economic aspects of that relationship, especially labor migration, remittances and aid, without considering the complex elements of defense and intelligence (Javaid, 2016b; Rieck, 2016a). There is a lack of research concerning the operational cooperation with regards to joint training activities, the counter-terrorism activities, and the production of defense which leaves a gap in the knowledge on the holistic nature of the bilateral alliance (Gause, 2019b). These

aspects are vital in an overall review of the evolving structure of the regional security and what the growing role of Pakistan in the affairs of the Gulf entails.

The signing of Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement SMDA in September 2025 will be a milestone in this course. In contrast to informal or restricted security conceptions in the past, the SMDA codified an institutionalized mutual defense provision that armed assault on one of the countries would be seen as an assault on both countries (Financial Times, 2025). It was a breakthrough shift to an advisory or representative form of cooperation to a codified defense partnership that involved intelligence transfer, joint military exercises, counter-terrorism cooperation, and the possibility of joint production in the defense sectors (Walther-Puri, 2025). It is also the agreement that will offer a formal structure of crisis management and military coordination and in effect entrench Pakistan into the long term strategy of Saudi Arabia.

What is more, the agreement should be placed in the context of the Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, which places the emphasis on the self-sufficiency, diversification of strategic alliances and progressive localization of military potential. As U.S. influence is seen to be diminishing and with the threats in the region becoming more diversified, Riyadh has found an easy ally in Islamabad in its quest to seek a more independent security policy. To Pakistan, this framework is a supplement to its desire to integrate the region more, receive investment, and increase the export of defense expertise (Bano and Batool, 2024). Even though the SMDA does not name nuclear cooperation directly, analysts have pointed to the latent signals of strategic signaling in its ambiguity, in which Saudi Arabia can gain implicit reassurance by the nuclear deterrent ability of Pakistan (Bukhari, 2024). This image in turn has provoked some reserved reactions among the Iran, India and Western powers, all which see the pact as a process that has many implications other than a bilateral defense cooperation.

In sum, the Pakistan–Saudi alliance has evolved from a primarily religiously inspired partnership into a comprehensive strategic relationship that interweaves security, economy, and ideology. The 2025 defense pact signifies not merely a continuation of historical ties but a redefinition of them in light of the shifting regional balance of power. Understanding this evolution requires acknowledging the historical depth, strategic pragmatism, and geopolitical foresight that continue to underpin one of the Muslim world’s most consequential bilateral partnerships.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study is premised on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the concept of Alliance Theory and specifically on the concept of asymmetric alliances as advanced by (Walt, 1987) and developed by (Snyder, 1997b). In its very essence, Alliance Theory aims to understand the reasons as well as the methods in which states may form strategic alliances despite the differences in their size, power, and resources to reduce the perceived threats and to pursue the national interests. In this school of thought, asymmetric alliance is defined as the partnership between two or more states that significantly vary in terms of their economic abilities, military strength or political impact. The exchange that is usually typified by such alliances is a complementary one, the weaker party in the alliance has unique strategic benefits like manpower, ideological legitimacy, or geographic location whereas the stronger party has compensated it with financial benefits, technological aid, and blanket security assurances (Snyder, 1997b; Walt, 1987).

The use of this framework to the Pakistan Saudi defense relationship can enable one to understand the functional nature of the 2025 Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA). Through the prism of economic capacity and energy dependence, Pakistan, though being a

nuclear power, is placed in the comparatively weak position in this bilateral order. However, it balances out this organizational disadvantage by giving the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) very specific benefits: professionalized, battle-tested military, strategic experience gained over decades of counterinsurgency warfare, and, most importantly, a symbolic advantage as the single nuclear-armed Muslim state in the world (Gause, 2019b; Riedel, 2017). These resources render Pakistan a one of a kind partner, not only as a source of military man power but also as a nation that can strengthen ideological and geopolitical aspects of Saudi Arabian regional ambitions.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is the material and financial overpowering factor in this asymmetric equation. It gives Pakistan a range of strategic advantages such as long-term financial support, subsidized oil, and entry to larger Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) defense and investment channels (Ulrichsen, 2020b). Moreover, the huge resource base of Saudi Arabia gives it the opportunity to boost the defense modernization process in Pakistan by providing fund, conducting joint exercises as well as armament transfers. Pakistan can also involve the Kingdom, in culturally and religiously sensitive settings, especially in counterterrorism operations, advisory missions, and stabilization of the situation in the region, which boosts the influence of Saudi Arabia throughout the Islamic world (Javaid, 2016b; Khan, 2019).

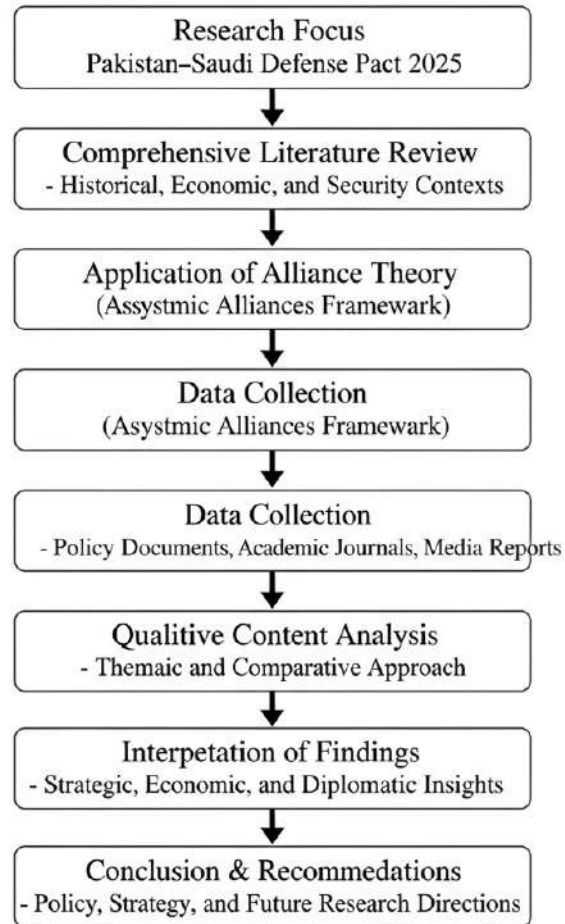
Applying this theoretical framework, it is possible to understand the Pakistan-Saudi alliance as an elaborate and mutually supporting set up that balances structural asymmetry with strategic interdependence. Although it gives Pakistan access to long-term economic support, training, and increased diplomatic leverage in the Muslim world, it also helps Saudi Arabia to rise to a new level of military preparedness and legitimacy without risking the political consequences of being actively engaged in large-scale combat operations (Alterman, 2018). This theoretical framing therefore brings into the limelight the twin-sidedness of the alliance where one partner gains material strength and the other obtains symbolic and strategic fortification. After all, the asymmetric alliance model presents an analytical framework that allows considering the 2025 defense pact more than a bilateral security time archetype, but as a developing mechanism of the power balance and joint stability in the Middle East security environment that is quickly evolving (Mabon, 2020). Figure 1 shows the framework of the paper. .

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

However, the lifespan and complexity of the relations between Pakistan and Saudi have been discussed but the defense aspect of this relationship has been relatively less discussed in the policy circles and the academic literature (Javaid, 2016b; Ulrichsen, 2020b). Most of the literature available gives much emphasis on economic collaboration, labour movement and religious unity and the strategic calculus that is followed to allow African military contacts, military synergy and asymmetric transactions is underdeveloped in the literature. This knowledge gap is critical in view of the fact that the military aspect is the mainstay of the overall strategic alliance- this is one of the most important mechanisms of how both states maneuver through the shaky regional security environment as well as external geopolitical forces.

The local situation also promotes the topicality of this supervision. Saudi Arabia has a long-standing threat of strategic rivalry with Iran, instability in the region after the Syrian civil war, and proxy wars, including Yemen, which started in 2015 and is still a focal point of confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Mabon, 2020). Simultaneously, the slow withdrawal of the United States of the historical role of the major security guarantor in the Gulf has compelled Riyadh to spread the military alliances. It is in this changing geopolitical landscape that Pakistan stands out as an irreplaceable partner that can offer ideological and professional military

### Research Methodology Figure



**Figure 1:** Theoretical Framework of given Paper

assistance. It is thus considered that the 2025 Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) is a qualitative shift in the relationship between the two states, offering a platform where modern security scenarios can be handled in a formalized, structured way that maximizes the benefits of the relationship between both states in terms of strategic, economic, and symbolic benefits.

Therefore, the gap identified in the current study is the lack of theoretical and empirical knowledge on the subject of Pakistan-Saudi defense nexus. Particularly, the way in which this non-symmetrical alliance can be used as a strategy of adaptation to the international landscape and regional stabilization is a less-researched field of study of international relations and Middle Eastern security. The key to closing this gap lies in creating an overall picture of the dynamics of regional security and the emerging defense diplomacy of Pakistan in the Muslim world.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. question How does the Pakistan-Saudi defense pact benefit the strategic, economic and security interests of both the states?
2. What are the wider regional security effects of this defense alliance and especially in refer-

ence to the evolving power balance in the Middle East and South Asia?

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To critically examine the advancement of the strategic, economical, and security interests of both states by the Pakistan Saudi defense agreement in relation to the current geopolitical changes.
2. To investigate the wider regional attendant of this defense alliance, especially on how it impacts the inter-state relations, regional security systems and power equilibrating in the Middle East and South Asia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The available literature on the development of the relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is largely focused on religion, labor migration, and economic cooperation as the pillars of bilateral relations in the course of the history of the relations between countries (Javaid, 2016a; Khan, 2019). Religious identity is an important binding factor, which justifies political affiliations and provides a common ideological system that strengthens domestic and international credibility of both states. As an example, the fact that Saudi Arabia is the custodian of two of the sacred sites of Islam increases the symbolic power of this country, whereas Pakistan is a nuclear state dominated by Muslims, which gives it a certain kind of military and ideological legitimacy that must be admittedly unique to this state Ulrichsen (2020a). Equally, the fact that millions of Pakistani expatriates have employment in Saudi Arabia and send substantial remittances that contribute to the fiscal stability of the country and Saudi financial assistance and concessional oil have historically cushioned the balance-of-payments crises is also a critical aspect of the economy: labor migration and remittances are significant economic factors of the country (Khan, 2019; Ulrichsen, 2020b).

But as much as economic and religious aspects are well established, there is hardly a study to ask the defense and strategic aspects of the relationship. Such aspects as troop deployments, military training activities (jointly), the intelligence-sharing system and the role of Pakistan as advisor in the Saudi defense strategy are under-researched areas (Gause, 2019a). This paucity of emphasis on these dimensions restrains us in knowing the depth of the operations of the bilateral partnership, the strategic calculation and its long term effects on the security of the region. The role of Pakistan is not only transactional; it offers the Saudi security architecture a strategic depth, as well as increasing the leverage of Pakistan on the region, which is a subtlety that is not present in literature.

### Middle Eastern Security Dynamics and Pakistan's Role

Middle East security analysis provides the understanding of Saudi-Iran rivalry, proxy war and the strategies of coalition-building approach (Juneau, 2020; Mabon, 2020). Saudi intervention against Iran is not only direct military involvement, as in Yemen, but also indirect by alliances, regional cooperation and support to Sunni participants. However, such studies seldom incorporate the influences that Pakistan has, albeit indirect, but critical to Saudi military agendas. By providing manpower, professional military skills, and advisory services, it is possible to refer to Pakistan as a contributor to sonar security without having to fight on the front lines. Its involvement in Saudi-led formation like the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition (IM-CTC) proves its operational applicability in counterterrorist and security operations (?). In spite

of this importance, the efforts of Pakistan have very often been sidelined by academic discussions and the alliance is seen through the prism of economic or religious motivations.

### **Historical Context of Pakistan–Saudi Defense Relations**

Defense cooperation has been a pillar of Pakistan Saudi relations ever since the 1960s. Training, operational guidance and advisory support have been given by the Pakistani military personnel in response to the training, border security, air defence, and modernization of the Saudi capabilities and also the positioning of Pakistan as a credible partner in the Gulf (Riedel, 2017). The economy of Pakistan was stabilised in tough times of crisis during economically important moments like the post-1971 war and the 1990s sanctions through Saudi financial support, such as the deferred oil payments, the concessional loans, and facilitation of remittances into the country (Khan, 2019; Ulrichsen, 2020b). Politically, the integration of institutionalized Islamic institutions enhanced collective ideological and strategic interests, forming a networked alliance based on identity and pragmatism in the form of a networked partnership formation (Javaid, 2016b). The defense contract of September 2025 is based on these historical bases, formalizing several decades of cooperation, but updating the strategic orientation in the conditions of modern Middle Eastern instability.

### **The Pakistan–Saudi Defense Agreement (September 2025)**

The 2025 defense agreement touches upon many aspects: joint exercises, weapon cooperation, anti-terrorist coordination, intelligence exchange, and military advisory assistance according to the priorities of Saudi Vision 2030 (Ulrichsen, 2020b). Professional military experience, operational direction and involvement in Saudi led coalitions like the IMCTC help Pakistan to improve the security of the region without necessarily engaging in direct combat. Strategically, the agreement is a pragmatic-ideological compromise: it responds to the calculated need to ensure security, deter threats to the region, and exert influence and maintain validity based on the similarity of Islamic identity and historical comradeship.

The Pakistan-Saudi military cooperation treaty of September 2025 is a complex agreement that formalizes decades of bilateral military relations, as well as providing answers to the current security challenges in the Middle East. The agreement has a few key dimensions, such as collective training, weapon cooperation, coordination of counterterrorism, intelligence-sharing processes, and military advisory assistance, all of which is designed to be consistent with the Vision 2030 defense modernization objectives of Saudi Arabia (Ulrichsen, 2020a). Not only are joint training exercises improving interoperability between the two militaries but also the Pakistani forces are given exposure to advanced Saudi defense technologies, strategic planning in operation and coordinating with the theater level. Arms cooperation provides the access to the latest equipment, co-production possibilities, and the transfer of knowledge and enhances the internal defense industrialization of Pakistan and enhances the operational preparedness of Saudi Arabia.

Another essential post of the agreement is the coordination of counterterrorism and intelligence sharing, as it shows the interest of both states in the joint fight against the threats posed by extremist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and local militant groups. Pakistan provides its operational direction, strategic-planning experience, and involvement in Arab-led groups like the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), which allows the nation to increase the security of the region without bearing the political and military operational expenses of direct combat involvement. Such steps also allow Saudi Arabia to display military presence in the

strategically sensitive areas, like Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, without having to use its own armed forces entirely (Gause, 2019b; Riedel, 2017).

Ideologically, the agreement is a pragmatic-ideological compromise, a combination of real-world security concerns and the symbolic legitimacy of the common Islamic identity and history. The nuclear capability, the professional military skills and the long-term advisory positions of Pakistan grant some credibility and deterrent effects or powers, whereas the Saudi Arabian gives support financially, energy security levels and political support in multilateral Islamic forums. Not only does this alignment improve the posture of the two countries in the region, but it also enables the process of burden-sharing in the conflict-prone theaters and improves the mechanism of collective security in the Gulf, but it also strengthens the bilateral trust and the long-term strategic interdependence at the same time (Javaid, 2016b; Khan, 2019). Overall, the 2025 defense pact is not just a military deal but a holistic security framework that incorporates operational, strategic, and symbolic aspects and makes Pakistan and Saudi Arabia self-affirming allies who can overcome volatility in the region and pursuant to their individual geopolitical motives.

### **Challenges and Prospects for Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia also encounters numerous issues towards maintaining and developing its military alliance with Pakistan. Among the most pressing issues is that it is in constant competition with Iran, which is one of the key elements of the Middle Eastern geopolitics. The Houthi movement in Yemen, the Shia militias in Iraq, and the support of the Assad regime is still a direct threat to the security interests of Riyadh due to its influence in the region at that time (Gause, 2019b). The proxy war in Yemen has been a burden on Saudi military and financial resources specifically, raising concerns about the possibility of long-term interventions to be sustainable (Juneau, 2020). The defense agreement with Pakistan in this regard is an asset and liability, in the sense that it offers military assistance but on the other hand, it can tie Pakistan in the regional warring of Saudi Arabia thus making it difficult to find a balance between Tehran and Islamabad.

Defence is another problem facing Saudi Arabia due to the dependency on foreign allies. Saudi Arabia has long relied on the United States to provide security insurance, but the fragility of the latter in announcing its long-term interest in the Gulf has led to the diversification of the partnership (Alterman, 2018). This change opens opportunities in the further cooperation with Pakistan, yet, it also demands that Riyadh is able to balance the conflicting interests between the allies, especially when Islamabad is able to maintain the relations with China at the same time (Ismail, 2025). Within the country, the reforms of Vision 2030 in the Kingdom require significant financial investment and the restructuring of the economy to stop depending on oil supply as its main activity. Saudi policy makers are in a dilemma of balancing internal reforms with the external costs of the regional security competition. However, the future of Saudi Arabia is also great: the alliance with Pakistan not only extends its military potential but also enhances its validity in the Muslim community, where Pakistan is frequently regarded as a valid military strength with nuclear power and repercussions.

### **Pakistan's Benefits and Interests**

The pact gives Pakistan multidimensional benefits, both economically, in the military, diplomatically, and strategically:

- **Domestic Stability:** The agreement is a stimulus to domestic political and economic

stability as it guarantees employment of Pakistani expatriates in Saudi Arabia, stable energy sources, and international concern. These aspects enhance public trust and governmental legitimacy, as foreign policy is associated with domestic political stability.

- **Military Benefits:** The modernization of military forces in Pakistan is provided by joint exercises, professional training courses, and technology-sharing programs to enhance readiness, operational capacity, and the formation of the doctrines and policies of military commands and forces preterolum (Riedel, 2017).
- **Diplomatic Leverage:** The association with Saudi Arabia makes Pakistan more influential in the multilateral forums within the Islamic community, such as the OIC and the IMCTC, and allows the country to exert influence and ensure that the majority of the Muslim states are in line with it on important regional issues.
- **Economic Benefits:** Domestic fiscal stability and the ability to withstand macroeconomics of Pakistan as a whole is backed by access to Saudi investments, continued remittances, and energy supplies (Ulrichsen, 2020b).
- **Strategic Gains:** Pakistan can use the alliance to navigate tensions between Saudi and Iran, acquiring some local influence and reducing a direct exposure to frontline issues (Khan, 2019). The agreement enables Pakistan to be a strategic buffer and mediator to counsel the security interests of the Gulf and its national interests in the region.

Taken together, the 2025 defense partnership is a multidimensional strategic tool, which strengthens the economic security of Pakistan, their military development, diplomatic power and regional power and gives Saudi Arabia operational capabilities, credibility and depth.

### Regional Security Implications

PakistanSaudi defense relations have a wide-ranging effect on the regional security, a Gulf and a South Asian phenomenon. To begin with, the Iran Saudi rivalry forces Pakistan to walk the fine line. Although strategic and military aid is being given to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan has traditionally not intervened directly in sectarian conflicts and has remained neutral not to lose Iran and retain its regional credibility (Juneau, 2020; Mabon, 2020). Such balancing act increases the flexibility of the diplomatic course of Pakistan and it emerges as a strategically neutral but operationally supportive player in Middle East wars.

Second, in the Yemen war, the indirect involvement of Pakistan, including training, advisory services, and sharing of intelligence enables it to play a role in Saudi-led operations without necessarily deploying its forces to the direct combat. This strategy will give Pakistan a way to safeguard its economic and strategic interests without causing domestic reaction or increasing tensions with Iran (Alterman, 2018).

Third, the presence of Pakistan contributes to the Gulf security framework. Pakistan helps to fight terrorism, maritime security, and regional balance by strengthening the operational capacities of Saudi led coalitions such as the IMCTC, strengthening collective security mechanisms and sending signals of reliability to partners in the Gulf region (Ulrichsen, 2020b).

Fourth, the alliance is trans-regional in nature. Pakistan involvement in South Asia influences the strategic computation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Arabian Sea maritime security, and the growing Indian power in the Gulf. Through alignment with Saudi Arabia, there is a potential to counter the regional threats, energy paths, and assure that

the strategic channels are under its indirect control linking the Gulf security and South Asian strategic stability as well.

Lastly, the defense alliance strengthens the symbolic power of Pakistan on the larger Muslim community. Being a nuclear-capable, Muslim-majority country with enforceable experience, Pakistan espouses soft power and strengthens its position as a leader in Islamic institutions, adding legitimacy and diplomatic influence into the region in a limited form of conception.

## ANALYSIS

The Pakistan-Saudi defense partnership is a major milestone in the bilateral strategic cooperation that is a culmination of the trust that existed in the past, regional security issues, and emerging geopolitical changes. Historically, the state of Pakistan has had a strong defensive relationship with Saudi Arabia since the 1960s, when the Pakistani military service troops started to train and offer guidance to Saudi armies (Riedel, 2017). The established basis of institutional trust by this long-term collaboration granted Pakistan a permanent role in the Gulf defense structure. In its turn, Saudi Arabia enjoys the services of nuclear-capable and professionally disciplined armed forces of Pakistan, which provides greater access to expertise, tactical training, and experience of operations, which strengthen its defense capacity.

The financial and security interdependence converge economically through the partnership. Financial aid, concession of oil supplies and high rates of remittance inflows by Saudi have always held the shaky fiscal framework of Pakistan together, with the continuation of economic and defense planning (Khan, 2019; Ulrichsen, 2020b). The relationship between economic security and defense cooperation as a symbiosis highlights the realism-oriented character of the relationship that is characterized by both states aiming to maximize tangible and intangible returns by maintaining the cooperation. The defense experts engaged in the training and advisory activities in Saudi Arabia enhance their operational expertise and at the same time earn the country a good foreign exchange, which empowers institutions in the nation.

At the local level, the military alliance is a strategic tool that helps the two nations to overcome dynamic geopolitical environments. The involvement of Pakistan allows the country to remain neutral in the Saudi-Iran conflict, and at the same time, providing Saudi Arabia with regional defense stances, although not combating roles and technical cooperation (Mabon, 2020)]. Such a formula also enables Islamabad to engage in strategic hedging which means that it can maintain economic cooperation with Riyadh but not to turn away Tehran. This is symbolic of the Alliance Theory by Walt (1987), where asymmetric partners have a mutual benefit without a corresponding dependency. Operational depth and legitimacy in a way is provided to Saudi Arabia due to the participation of Pakistan in the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), and vice versa, Pakistan is receiving regional leverage and international visibility as a responsible and moderate Muslim-majority power.

Politically, the defensive alliance extends the Pakistan sway throughout the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and even the bigger Islamic geopolitical alliances (Javaid, 2016b). Pakistan strengthens its reputation as a peace-making power through joint security projects and counterterrorism training, as this allows the country to fill the political gaps between South Asia and the Middle East. Moreover, the agreement also has a tertiary role in the relationships of South Asian security, as Gulf stability has directness in determining the energy security of Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and regional trade routes (Khan, 2019).

Nevertheless, regardless of these benefits, the correlation is one-sided. Strategic contribution

is mostly the one on man power, military expertise and legitimacy in the Muslim world, whereas Saudi Arabia has upper leverage through its financial and material power. Such asymmetry does not depend on the mutual utility of the partnership but emphasizes the strategic calculus which every state should uphold to ensure the maintenance of balance and independence within the alliance.

**Table 1:** Strategic Dimensions of the Pakistan–Saudi Defense Partnership

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description and Strategic Significance</b>
Historical Foundation	Built on over six decades of military cooperation, training, and shared defense objectives.
Economic Linkage	Saudi investments and remittances reinforce Pakistan’s defense sustainability and fiscal resilience.
Operational Collaboration	Joint exercises and military advisory programs enhance interoperability and regional readiness.
Diplomatic Leverage	Elevates Pakistan’s influence in the OIC and Islamic coalitions through defense participation.
Strategic Hedging	Allows Pakistan to balance between Saudi and Iranian interests without direct confrontation.
Symbolic Legitimacy	Reinforces Saudi Arabia’s Islamic leadership image through collaboration with a nuclear-capable ally.

## CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

Pakistan Saudi defense alliance has several issues which even with all the intensity of cooperation may hamper its stability and sustainability. One of the key issues concerns suspicion towards Iran because the apparent Pakistani orientation towards Riyadh frequently Turkey the Tehran concern related to the Pakistani impartiality (Juneau, 2020; Mabon, 2020). This balancing is very delicate since states near Iran border, sectarian sensitivities and economic cooperation overlap.

The issue of political sensitivity in the country is also an ongoing challenge. The Pakistani running and political factions view involvement in Saudi led coalitions as too much. The danger of sectarian polarization is even greater in case the alliance is regarded as involvement in Sunni-Shia conflicts within the region (Riedel, 2017). In the same regard, the over-reliance of Saudi aid and investments poses a structural fragility, and any disruption of such support would have a destabilizing economic effect (Ulrichsen, 2020b).

The other issue is the threat of entanglement in the region. Intensive military cooperation can unwillingly make Pakistan involved in the conflicts that do not align with its long-standing policy of non-intervention in the Middle East conflicts (Gause, 2019a). Furthermore, the alliance sustainability relies on the domestic priorities and economic diversification of Riyadh within the framework of the Vision 2030 that can influence the future defense obligations (Alterman, 2018). The Gulf geopolitics, which encompasses Turkey, UAE, and Iran, complicate the strategic positioning of Pakistan even more.

## FINDINGS

The results reveal that the Pakistan Saudi defense alliance is a perfect example of an advanced model of asymmetric cooperation, which is typified by strategic hedging, economic interdependence, and symbolic legitimacy. The balance actor position allows Pakistan to gain economic

**Table 2:** Key Challenges and Potential Mitigation Strategies

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Mitigation Strategy</b>
Iranian Suspicion	Maintain active diplomatic engagement with Tehran while emphasizing non-combat cooperation with Riyadh.
Domestic Political Sensitivity	Strengthen transparency in defense cooperation and involve parliamentary oversight.
Economic Dependence	Diversify funding sources through multilateral defense collaborations and regional partnerships.
Risk of Regional Entanglement	Limit deployments to training, intelligence, and advisory capacities rather than active combat.
Long-term Sustainability	Align defense cooperation with broader economic and diplomatic frameworks.

assistance and modernization of defence without taking sides in regional disputes (Mabon, 2020). The defense alliance is therefore a stabilization mechanism in the environment of regional instability to help both nations seek security and influence.

The economic contribution is not the only advantage of the Pakistani contribution to Saudi defense projects: its involvement in the Saudi defense programs positively affects the quality of its professional military, its weight in the world community, and its acceptance within the region (Riedel, 2017; Ulrichsen, 2020b). In the case of Saudi Arabia, however, it acquires operational depth and plausible Muslim military ally without necessarily going into full-scale war fighting, which fits exactly in Walt (1987) model of asymmetric war alliances. South Asian geopolitics are also implicated in the alliance, especially on the maritime routes, CPEC, and counterterrorism networks (Khan, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Pakistan-Saudi 2025 defense cooperation is a long-term and balanced alliance, which was formed on decades of trust, religious sympathy, and practical geopolitical factors. The alliance is an extension of the years of cooperation that both countries have had in joint defense areas, training and intelligence exchange, and considers the new dynamics within the region and new security issues. To Pakistan, the deal offers it a route to economic stability on matters of defense investments, creation of employment opportunities as well as in energy collaboration. It also increases the exposure of Pakistan to the high technologic defense and improves the diplomatic position of Pakistan not only in the Muslim world but also in the inner world. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the coalition gives it a dependable and experienced military partner that is able to offer it strategic depth and operational support without being involved in conflicts directly within the region. That agreement thus reflects the precepts of a contemporary asymmetric alliance, in which both partners enjoy different, though mutually complementary benefits and maintain strategic independence. However, the survivability of this alliance will be determined by how Pakistan will manage to sustain its fragile balance between key players in the Middle East, especially, without getting into sectarian or geopolitical adhesions. Pakistan needs to have a realistic foreign policy with diversification in terms of both economic and military alliances, protection of political agreement within the country and importance of national interests over the foreign pressures in order to achieve long-term benefits. Finally, defense pact is a monument to the changing strategic vision of the two countries, which should pursue the goals of mutual security in the region and stability without exceeding the boundaries of power imbalances and

interdependent relations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) **Risk Assessment and Strategic Hedging:** Pakistan needs to periodically review its exposure to proxy conflicts and have balanced participation to avoid being directly involved in regional hostilities.
- b) **Economic Diversification:** Economic and defense alliances with China, Turkey and UAE will guarantee both financial and strategic independence.
- c) **Policy Balance:** It is essential to remain neutral in keeping Saudi Arabia and Iran at peace without sectarian retaliation and Pakistan as a mediator in the region.
- d) **Regional Diplomacy:** Islamabad has the opportunity to make use of its credibility to mediate between Tehran and Riyadh to increase its Diplomatic importance on the Gulf issues.
- e) **Military Modernization:** Pay attention to the transfer of technologies, training, and cyber-defense collaboration to strengthen the military capacity of Pakistan without combat operations.
- f) **Transparency and Public Communication:** Publicity of parliamentary monitoring and communication concerning the commitments of Parliament on the issue of defence will develop domestic approval.
- g) **Institutional Integration:** Incorporating defense cooperation into OIC and IMCTC frameworks can be used to more effectively predict and make the partnership sustainable.

## CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

**Asma Begum:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Writing—Original Draft Preparation, Visualization, Investigation, Writing—Reviewing and Editing, Supervision, Validation.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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