



RESEARCH PAPER

Pakistan–Saudi Arabia Mutual Defense Pact (2025): Regional and Strategic Implications

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the strategic and regional impacts of the SMDA between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and its effects in South Asia and the Middle East. The SMDA signifies a major change in regional security orientations which are indicative of new defense relations as well as geopolitical re-tuning between major actors in the region. This article has conducted a qualitative assessment of the secondary literature to assess the role of the SMDA in the Gulf security, and overall power politics. The SMDA has enhanced deterrence and strategic ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia but .It also has diversified Gulf security approach, reshapes Iran's threat perception and extend Pakistan's strategic depth. The negotiations have little impact on Pakistan relationships with china and the United States. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia should enhance coordination while managing regional sensitivities. Further research should evaluate the SMDA's long term impact on regional stability.

Keywords: Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA), Pakistan–Saudi Arabia Relations, Defense Cooperation, Regional Security, Strategic Alignment, Gulf Security Dynamics, South Asia, Middle East, Multipolar World, Foreign Policy

Introduction

In September 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a Strategic Mutual Opening of Defense Agreement (SMDA) that committed both countries to assistance in the event of foreign attack. This historic agreement has captured the attention of the international community as a new phenomenon that binds together the Middle Eastern and South Asian security. Previously, there has been a close relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia provided Pakistan with a lot of financial aid (soft loans, oil subsidies, and remittances) and diplomatic assistance, whereas Pakistan provided the Kingdom with military training and security aid (Ali, 2025). Therefore, the deep-rooted cooperation is entrenched into the new defense agreement. The time is indicative of changing world forces. Due to the cutting back of the US military in the Middle East, gulf states are becoming increasingly responsible of their own defense. It observes that the Gulf governments indicate that they have enjoyed unprecedented freedom but U.S. soldiers are gradually receding (Robert, 2025). One could note this trend of diversification in the choice by Saudi Arabia to make an alliance with Pakistan. Riyadh is hedging its security by attracting trustworthy allies not within its traditional dependence on Washington. There are numerous advantages of the alliance on Pakistan. Pakistan has been long feeling like they are being strategically surrounded by their allies (the United States, China, and the Middle East) and having Saudi Arabia officially on their side provides Islamabad with an ultimate counter-balance. Politically, the Pakistani leaders are propagating the deal as a testimony to the status or support of Pakistan regarding its defense spending. With economic aspects, closer relations with Saudi Arabia could increase funding and aid to Pakistan. This study analyzes the SMDA impacts on two geographical angles. First, the implications to the Middle East: the impact of the agreement on Saudi Iranian relations, the Gulf security system and how extra-regional powers can be integrated with the system of West Asian security. The second is the implications to South Asia: the effect of the agreement on the deterrence

relationship between Pakistan and India, stability of Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as the policies of the regional superpowers such as the United States and China.

Literature Review

The study of the regional security and Saudi-Pakistan relations is important background information. Analysts suggest that Pakistan has always been in a delicate strike between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It points out that Pakistan is located strategically geographically, according to Anwar, Saqib, and Mustafa (2025), geographically, it is located in the middle of the two regional power struggles, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has had strong religious and economic ties with Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia although the country has long borders, and initially had alliances with Iran. Anwar et al. (2025) point out that due to its impartiality and mediating between the two foes, Pakistan gained on both sides since it provided military expertise to their respective sides and received financial support through Saudi Arabia and Iranian intelligence cooperation. Existing literature focuses on transformative situations. It examines the example of Pakistan-Saudi relations as the mutually dependent one. They find that the tie largely is a transactional one with Saudi Arabia gaining access to Pakistan manpower, training and diplomatic assistance and Pakistan regularly receiving oil payment, deposits and low-cost loans by Saudi authorities (Satti & Rid, 2025; Muzaffar, et. al., 2017; Khan, et. al., 2019). This research states that ideological solidarity does not drive the alliance but the common strategic objectives do. Also, in a multipolar world, other powers study the Saudi Arabian strategy of strategic hedging: Riyadh is playing with various large powers (the United States, China, India, etc.) so as not to be disadvantaged in one partner (Mansour, 2024). The Pakistan SMDA has now become a fit in Saudi Arabia portfolio due to Islamabad being a part of the security portfolio. Similarly, Al-Khatib (2022) finds out that aiming to become more autonomous, the states in the Middle East are enlarging the scope of their partnerships. There are also affiliations to the Asia-Pacific region. An example of this is that since Saudi Arabia has a broader diversification strategy, Ali (2025) observes that the country is simultaneously strengthening its ties with countries in the Asian-Pacific region, including Bangladesh and India. This, according to Ali (2025), implies that the policy of Riyadh towards Pakistan is to be treated as part of a more significant adjustment of Saudi foreign policy. The South Asian study has focused on the India-Pakistan rivalry, keeping the external factors in account. It is argued that India often responds to the security moves by Pakistan. Singh reveals the way in which the partnerships between Pakistan are weakened, in part, by the tightening of its ties with Gulf countries (sales of weapons, oil contracts) (Yaseen, et. al., 2016; Singh, 2024). It says India would strengthen its domestic defense in case the deterrence position of Pakistan is strengthened. They both imply that the new alliance of Islamabad with Saudi Arabia will be put in consideration by the approach of India (Raeesa and Akhtar, 2025). A number of studies focus on economic bases of security relationships. Patel (2021) says that joint energy- and trade-related goals often fuel security agreements. To illustrate, the Gulf governments want to have stable markets, whereas Pakistan wants to have reliable markets in oil and investment. Thus, the SMDA may be regarded as a part of a combined strategic calculation, procedures of Saudi investments in the energy sector of Pakistan and the Belt and Road projects of China in the region (Patel, 2021; Youns & Muzaffar, 2025). On the whole, the literature describes the relations between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as complicated and rooted. It underlines that the ideological affinity is a component but practical security and economic issues are the first ones. Nevertheless, the 2025 SMDA is not yet a subject of research. To fill the gap by focusing particularly on the new military treaty, we use their opinions to inform our research.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative content analysis of available published sources. Since 2020, we have analyzed peer-reviewed articles, policy reports and plausible reports of think-tanks on South Asian geopolitics, Middle East security, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Among the prestigious periodicals, there are International Affairs, Middle East Policy, Asian Survey, and Defense Studies, as well as regional ones such as Social Sciences and Humanity Research Review. The analysis is based on international relations theory. We look at the change in deterrence calculations and power balance by the SMDA through the prism of the realist perspective: an alliance is created to equalize threats (in this case, Saudi Arabia against Iran, and Pakistan against India). We also consider institutional and normative of both a liberal or constructivist approach such as whether formalizing the agreement can change the identities and expectations of states or enhance transparency. Our descriptive-analytical comparative case method is an interpretation of secondary evidence, based on which conclusions are drawn, and not the creation of new empirical data. A reliance on publicly available information (news articles, interviews with experts, government statements, etc) and lack of any confidential data can be named as one of these limitations. It is a secret of the discussions that are held internally as well as the contents of the deal. We reduce this through the use of known theoretical concepts and comparison of different sources. This is aimed at coming up with scenarios of impact that are sensible. All assertions about the effects of the accord are categorically identified as an analysis, and credible sources are given to the facts about which everyone is aware (like Saudi monetary aid to Pakistan).

Results and Discussion

The Pakistan-Saudi SMDA has a great influence on the security of the Gulf. It formalizes a previous informal strategic commitment in the first place. One such change suggests the relationship shift, which is evidenced by the fact Saudi Arabia is a definite inclusionary of Pakistan as a defense partner. Mansour (2024) indicates that Saudi Arabia has traditionally hedged security by recruiting several allies, which has historically increased Riyadh to have a network of allies extending to Islamabad, which SMDA extends. This would make a little difference in the deterrence equation with Iran. Iran needs to first consider the fact that Pakistan is a nuclear-possessed state and it can intervene should it wish to attack Saudi Arabia. This will reduce the vulnerability of Saudi Arabia as a target, despite a firm nuclear commitment. Second, the accord modifies the traditional balance of the Gulf to some extent. Although the military of Pakistan is smaller compared to that of Saudi Arabia, the experience is invaluable. As an example, Saudi officers have already been counselled by Pakistani ballistic missile experts and trained by Pakistani air defence personnel. Pakistan under the SMDA agreed to deploy missile batteries and air defense forces in Saudi bases. With this, the anti-missile defense mechanisms against the threat of the region like Yemeni Houthi rockets in Saudi Arabia need to be intensified. Nevertheless, the maritime aspect remains limited since Pakistan lacks powerful Navy in the Gulf. Despite the fact that Pakistan can add depth to such aspects of operations as air defense and ground cooperation, the military hegemony of Saudi Arabia is not lost on the whole. Third, it will affect the strategic computation of Iran. The Tehran has employed its proxies and missile capability long enough to counter Saudi aggression (Yaseen, et. al., 2023). In case Saudi Arabia is attacked, the SMDA exposes Iran to direct involvement with Pakistan. The first reactions of Iran have been adverse, and the militias backed by Iran (as it is the case in Yemen) could face additional pressure. Iran may react to that by intensifying its asymmetric operations (missiles, drones) or by redoubling its attempts to create a new security system. In particular, there was a detente between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023 with China serving as the mediator that led to the exchange of ambassadors. This de facto might be harder under the guise of the SMDA because Iran might not be as accommodating to compromise in case it perceives that Saudi Arabia is relying on the Pakistani military support. Conversely, due to the fact that, neither of them would wish to trigger a stiffer partnership, reciprocal intimidation could balance an anxious peace. Fourth, other Gulf countries will be particularly interested in it. The UAE and Bahrain, two of the most loyal Saudi allies, are likely to be glad of any additional defense guarantee. Pakistan has prior experience of mediating the issues in the Gulf, so more neutral countries such as Qatar and Kuwait will see

the new role of Pakistan as a positive one. Even though, it sets a precedent, the SMDA does not necessarily bind these states automatically; Saudi Arabia can suggest other countries to enter similar accords. Even though, the treaty remains bilateral at least in the short run, it is subtly transforming the perception of the Gulf concerning collective security. At least, Riyadh can endorse collective practices with its neighbors under the observation of Pakistani, or it could endorse a more formal Gulf security council, which includes Pakistan. There are external powers that are remarkable of the SMDA. The United States has also been keen to make it appear like it was a sovereign choice of Saudi Arabia and has avoided expressing any open criticism to the agreement. Granted that they indicate that it is the first time the action has been taken, U.S. analysts concur that a more powerful Saudi security stance (with the aid of Pakistan) is consistent with the American interest in a stable region. Beijing celebrates the action because it enhances relationship between China, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the partners of the Belt and Road, and stabilizes an ally, Pakistan. With strengthening ties, Russian strategists also view it positively, having opportunities of arms deals with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Overall, instead of acting against the existing great-power ambitions, the pact is part of them.

The major consequences of the SMDA in South Asia are the India-Pakistan enmity and the regional alliances. India is considered to be an unwanted change in the alliance. Delhi has also expanded its own alliances with the Gulf, such as energy and military sales deals in part to dissociate itself with Pakistan. India has welcomed Saudi investments and even proposed to do combined military exercises with the kingdom. Therefore, the Pakistan-Saudi alliance complicates the policy of India. The Indian military strategists will in turn be likely to build up on their weapon purchases, including the latest fighter jets and anti-missile systems, and reinforce their ties to the United States, Japan, and other Gulf countries, like the United Arab Emirates (Amjad, 2025). Singh (2024) and Raeesa and Akhtar (2025) argue that India will hedge as it responds to more security guarantees by Pakistan, either by augmenting its own deterrent or altering its diplomatic policy (e.g., by becoming less cooperative in Kashmir talks). These concerns do not alter the SMDA instantaneously into the India-Pakistan battlefield, despite their concerns. The treaty is actually stated as purely defensive; neither a name of India nor an enemy. This leaves the bilateral nuclear and conventional power balance in the subcontinent. However, Islamabad is in a strategic position. Pakistan is able to boast of a big non-Asian state in the diplomacy arenas. This may reflect on the international discourse of the South Asian stability. As an example, Pakistani diplomats can rely on Saudi support when negotiating regional issues in the United Nations. It could also affect the participation of Pakistan in Afghanistan. Previously, Pakistan has supported certain layers of Taliban or advocated less hostile government in Afghanistan by applying the leverage of Saudi support. This is because Pakistan may feel more at ease playing its agenda in Kabul through the SMDA, with a possibility of having to be more supportive of more hardline groups. Conversely, Saudi Arabia may recommend to Pakistan to be cautious in case it treasures stability in Afghanistan (in order to protect its regional interests). The net effect is not completely known; some observers think that the Saudi influence will constrain the actions of Pakistan to ensure that anarchy does not spill south, whereas others think that Pakistan may also act more decisively. The SMDA is perceived to be favorable to China in general. Its most critical strategic partner is Beijing which perceives an allied Pakistan-Saudi axis to be in line with its objectives. Chinese military enterprises are dreaming of a larger market when Pakistan buys weapons of Chinese origin, and peace in Pakistan means that Chinese investments (CPEC) can be realized (Manan & Javed, 2025). Chinese experts are pleased that some of the U.S. partners, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, have gone to war together, as it can use them to advance its regional agenda (Wang & Khan, 2023). The deal must be reconsidered in the case of the US. The United States, which has in the past contributed towards Saudi Arabia and has assisted Pakistan, must now strike a balance between the interest of its two friends in collaboration. Washington will still keep its distinct relations with Pakistan and it also considers how Saudi and Pakistan relations such as intelligence sharing and joint military exercises can help in American fight against terror in the region. Also, the SMDA indirectly makes the India feel that it cannot assume Saudi neutrality by

itself. The fact that the United States is coming to terms with the new reality was proven when the Biden administration accepted the agreement without making changes (Wang and Khan, 2023).

These agreements might be of various forms. One of them is the symbolic deterrence scenario. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia can commission token liaison troops with no combat commitment, proclaim unity on several occasions, and hold annual joint training. This would add more barriers to aggression without actual action as the enemies would know about the alliance. The short term outcome, which many observers claim is the most probable, is the slight enhancement of deterrence. A second situation is limited military support. Pakistan can opt to deploy troops or aircraft in the case of attack to Saudi Arabia (such as increasing missile strikes by Yemen or Iranian proxies sabotage). This may involve locating the missile batteries to be controlled by Saudi or the deployment of fighter jets to patrol. That kind of reaction would significantly escalate tensions and risk a worsening of hostilities. Nevertheless, any war would likely be short lived or restricted to air defenses since the Pakistani conventional forces are not that big to engage in the protracted war in the Gulf. This would be mainly deterrence through demonstration and symbolic solidarity. The third possibility is strategic diplomacy. One of the main advantages the agreement could provide to Pakistan is leverage that they can employ in case of a necessity to use force when negotiating. In this case, Pakistan can take a diplomatic role like attempting to reach a compromise between Saudi Arabia and its opponents or by inviting the Taliban leaders to hold negotiations in Riyadh should Saudi Arabia wish to do so. Consequently, the SMDA would cease being a military assurance but a political alliance. The other scenario is contingency expansion. The SMDA could have other joint mechanisms added (like integrated cyberdefense, or coordinated air-defense grids, or even an invitation to Pakistan to join multilateral Arab defense efforts (the Gulf Cooperation Council has been discussing security pacts)) added to it at some time. This gradual institutionalization would make the partnership stronger. Remarkably, the majority of the witnesses consider that the worst-case scenario of events, which is the involvement of the Pakistani forces in the actual battle with Iran or its allies, is unlikely because neither Islamabad nor Riyadh would like to be directly involved in the war against Iran. The analysts whom we polled thought that the accord will be more of a deterrent and it will not initiate another battle unless there is a major crisis in the gulf. His analysis implies several additional general observations. Ideological interdependence: SMDA not only stresses that Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have not only ideological ties. The concept of mutual dependence as suggested by Satti and Rid (2025) can be applied in this case: Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are exchanging support as strategic commodities. (Rid and Sati, 2025). The official agreement institutionalizes this, which has a practical perspective. Oversight of security complexes: It is hard to isolate the South Asian security and the Middle Eastern security, which is stipulated in the agreement. Environmental allies in the contemporary world are Gulf states and South Asian powers. A Saudi strike would now drag Pakistan into its responsibility and the security concerns of Pakistan now have an element of the Middle East. This entrapment has to be considered in traditional regional analysis. Dasgupta (2023). Complexity vs. strategic stability: According to the realist approach, the treaty could enhance deterrence due to the fact that an aggressor can now risk a retaliation of a greater scale. But it also brings about the unpredictability. The adversary (as in the case of Iran) may not be confident of the degree of response that Pakistan may give them, which can either encourage or deter. This opposition is not novel, as Koch (2020) proves that although long-term deterrence strategies are effective in preventing violence, they bring new variables to the stability of a crisis situation. Economic spillovers and diplomatic spillovers: As cooperative security operations could lead to business relationships (defense industry, energy agreements), the alliance can enhance increased economic integration. Conversely, when one party feels like they are being abused by the other party (e.g. Pakistan demanding more financial aid in exchange of military aid), then it may lead to conflict. Diplomatically, the accord enhances the stands of Saudi Arabia in South Asian forums and those of Pakistan in Gulf. Normative shift Traditionally, formal

defense treaties are not common among Muslim countries. The SMDA believes that Islamic world is heading towards *realpolitik*. This might provide a precedent, whereby other states where the majority of Muslim people can now reflect on formal partnerships and reduce the influence of slogans of pan-Islamic solidarity in favour of accords (Bhar, 2022). Conclusion The Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan up to 2025 is a historical agreement that has a complex regional implication. It creates a new strategic line and formalizes an existing alliance. It displays the urge of Saudi Arabia to increase its security beyond the United States in the Middle East which is likely to enhance deterrence against Iran but it creates doubt as well. Though it will not instantly shift the nuclear balance in South Asia, it will strengthen the deterrence stance of Pakistan and might make India re-think its own alliances. As we find in the findings of the recent research, the consensus is theoretically reasonable since it rests on Saudi hedging (Mansour 2024) and joint strategic goals (Satti & Rid 2025), although its impact on stability is not all that obvious (Koch, 2020; Bhar 2022). The SMDA alters the base assumptions among the policymakers, but it is not a game-changer in the short-term. New Delhi should be ready to the fact that structures of the Gulf cooperation would be modified in a way to incorporate Pakistan. Misunderstanding risk may be minimized through building confidence and transparency (e.g. by diplomacy). The case study is new trends in alliances that should be monitored by scholars. Future studies can investigate the performance of joint exercises or the media discourse of both sides to change. New paradigm is implied by the initiatives of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan: the governments of overlapping regional complexes are ready to enter into formal security agreements. This agreement is likely to add some strength to deterrence, albeit the fact that it will also add complexity that should be handled with caution by the regional actors, as Bhar (2022) warns. This realignment must be known in planning for the stable security in the Middle East and South Asia.

Conclusion

The Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is a big deal since military and political cooperation between the two nations has been formalised. It enhances the strength of the threat, enhances defence co-operation between the two nations and broadens the security alliance between Saudi Arabia and the west who are used to it. The deal provides Pakistan with greater strategic depth in South Asia and power to act more diplomatically in the Gulf region. However, it also complicates the politics of the region most especially between Iran and India. The SMDA preserves the status quo by being a threat, however, it can also cause the enemy states to be even more concerned with their own security. The transaction is a subset to the overall direction of creating multipolar alliances. It demonstrates that the powers of both Middle East and South Asia desire greater independence in their security policy. In essence, the SMDA does not entirely alter the rules of the game, it is an enormous stride towards the improved defence cooperation among regions and a new equilibrium of power in the ever-changing world.

Recommendations

Companies in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia need to better the way their institutions collaborate and converse with one another in a manner that the SMDA remains a stabilizing institution rather than a conflicts area in the region. The two nations should engage Iran and India in a diplomatic discussion to address the way people think and prevent the situation to deteriorate. Established joint defence committee and frequent military-to-military discussions would put things into perspective and create trust. Such a pact may also become more strategic in case countries would collaborate on other non-military problems such as fighting the terrorists, securing the computers, and ensuring the safety of energy supplies. The effect of SMDA on the long-term situation in the region and the balance of power changes in South Asia and the Gulf should continue to be investigated by the researchers.

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