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## Evaluating the Pakistan-Saudi Defense Pact and Its Role in Muslim World Security Architecture

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the Pakistan-Saudi defense pact, signed in September 2025 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, formally endorsed by Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, in terms of its role in shaping security in South Asia and the Middle East. The agreement includes a collective defense clause similar to NATO's principle, committing both countries to assist each other in the event of external aggression and to enhance cooperation in military training, intelligence sharing, and defense technology. By formalizing their long-standing military collaboration, the pact signals a deeper, more structured partnership. The objective of this study is to examine the motivation behind the pact, its strategic significance, and its implications for India and the broader region. For Pakistan, the agreement strengthens regional influence, opens economic and energy opportunities, and reinforces its image as a reliable security partner. For Saudi Arabia, it provides military depth and dependable regional support amid tensions and uncertainty over Western commitments. The study also considers India's concerns, as the pact shifts the regional balance and could draw Saudi Arabia into any future conflict involving Pakistan. Drawing on official statements, media reports, and academic research, this research argues that if successful, it could pave the way for a broader alliance of Muslim nations dedicated to collective defense and regional stability, possibly evolving into a bloc more united and strategically cohesive than NATO.

**Keywords:** Defense Pact, Regional Cooperation, Security, Aggression, Implication, Muslim World

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## INTRODUCTION

In international politics, states form alliances to protect their interests in an uncertain and often unstable global system. No state, regardless of its size or power, can ensure its security in isolation. Defense alliances allow states to deter potential threats, share military responsibilities, and reduce the risks associated with external aggression. Over time, such arrangements have become essential tools for maintaining regional stability, particularly in areas marked by conflict, power rivalry, and weak security institutions.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim world has long faced a shortage of effective and reliable collective security mechanisms. Despite shared political concerns and common security challenges, Muslim-majority states have often depended on external powers for defense and crisis management. This reliance has produced mixed outcomes. While external partnerships have at times provided short-term stability, they have also exposed regional states to uncertainty when outside actors fail to respond decisively during crises.<sup>2</sup> Recent developments in the Middle East have once again highlighted the limitations of externally driven security arrangements and underscored the need for enhanced intra-Muslim defense cooperation.

Against this backdrop, the Pakistan-Saudi Defense Pact, officially referred to as the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA), was signed between Pakistan's Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud on September 17, 2025, in Al-Yamamah Palace in Riyadh, which represents a significant development in regional security cooperation. It formalizes nearly eight decades of closed political, military, and economic relations between the two nations, elevating their partnership into a structured strategic alliance.<sup>3</sup>

The most significant element of the SMDA is its collective defense clause, which states that any aggression against one country will be considered an aggression against both. This commitment, similar in principle to Article 5 of the NATO treaty, moves Islamabad-Riyadh relations beyond symbolic cooperation towards a binding security partnership. By introducing shared responsibility for defense, the agreement aims to strengthen deterrence and discourage hostile actions by signaling unity and resolve.<sup>4</sup>

The defense pact reflects the broader strategic outlook of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Historically, neither country has pursued expansionist policies nor initiated wars against sovereign states. Both have emphasized respect for sovereignty,

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<sup>1</sup> Leeds, B. A. (2015) "Why Do States Sign Alliances?" 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0387>

<sup>2</sup> Qolbi, Y. et. al. (2024) "Geopolitics and Muslim Countries: Navigating Challenges and Opportunities in Contemporary International Political Dynamics." *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review*. 3 (2): 217–35. <https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/milrev/article/view/9910>

<sup>3</sup> Ali, W. et. al. (2025) "Strategic Pacts in a Shifting World Order: The Pakistan–Saudi Defense Pact 2025." *Advance Social Science Archive Journal*. 4 (2): 366–383. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17311862>

<sup>4</sup> Jalil, G. Y. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA): Symbolism and Implications (Issue Brief)." *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*. <https://www.scribd.com/document/957999176/SMDA>

peaceful coexistence, and diplomatic engagement. Their defense cooperation, therefore, is not intended to promote confrontation but to prevent instability and reduce the likelihood of conflict through credible deterrence.<sup>5</sup>

The pact comes at a particularly critical moment. The agreement was signed shortly after Israel's military attack on Qatar, an incident that raised serious concerns not only in the Gulf region but also in the whole Muslim world. Doha, a major non-NATO ally of the US and host to Washington's largest military base in the Middle East, did not receive effective protection during the crisis. This event exposed the limitations of relying on external security guarantees and eroded confidence in traditional security umbrellas. For Riyadh and other Gulf states, the episode reinforced the need to diversify security partnerships and seek reliable allies who are willing and capable of responding to regional threats.<sup>6</sup>

In this changing security environment, Pakistan emerged as a credible and acceptable partner for Saudi Arabia. Islamabad possesses professional and experienced military capabilities and a recognized nuclear deterrent. Its response during the May 2025 conflict with India, following New Delhi's miscalculated escalation, demonstrated both operational readiness and strategic restraint. These factors strengthen Pakistan's position as a dependable defense partner in a volatile region.<sup>7</sup>

For Saudi Arabia, the SMDA represents a step towards greater strategic independence and regional self-reliance. While Riyadh continues to maintain relations with Western powers, growing regional instability and declining trust in external guarantees have encouraged it to seek stronger ties with capable Muslim states. Cooperation with Islamabad allows Riyadh to enhance its security without relying solely on outside actors.<sup>8</sup> From Pakistan's perspective, the agreement reflects recognition of its strategic significance beyond South Asia. The pact enhances Islamabad's role within the Muslim world and aligns with its broader foreign policy goals of defense diplomacy, regional stability, and responsible power projection. The agreement also opens opportunities for deeper cooperation in military training, intelligence sharing, and defense planning.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond defense, the SMDA carries wider implications. If implemented effectively, it could promote joint defense production, technology sharing, and expanded economic cooperation in areas such as energy and trade. More importantly,

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<sup>5</sup> FPCCI. (2025) "A New Chapter in Regional Security: An Analysis of the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Strategic Defense Agreement." 1-18. <https://fpcci.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/A-New-Chapter-in-Regional-Security-An-Analysis-of-the-Pakistan-Saudi-Arabia-Strategic-Defense-Agreement.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Defence Pact: A New Dawn for the Region." *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/pakistan-saudi-defence-pact-a-new-dawn-for-the-region/>

<sup>7</sup> FPCCI. (2025) "A New Chapter in Regional Security: An Analysis of the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Strategic Defense Agreement." 1-18. <https://fpcci.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/A-New-Chapter-in-Regional-Security-An-Analysis-of-the-Pakistan-Saudi-Arabia-Strategic-Defense-Agreement.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Kotokey, A. (2025) "Beyond Oil & Allies: Saudi-Pakistan Defence Pact and Shifting Geopolitics." *Vivekananda International Foundation*. <https://www.vifindia.org/print/14016>

<sup>9</sup> Qayyum, S. (2025) "Riyadh-Islamabad Axis: A Defence Pact That Reshapes the Geopolitical Chessboard". *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/riyadh-islamabad-axis-a-defence-pact-that-reshapes-the-geopolitical-chessboard/>

the pact has the potential to serve as a foundation for a broader Muslim world security framework based on collective deterrence, mutual support, and regional ownership of security challenges. The paper evaluates the SMDA by examining its strategic motivations, security implications, and potential contributions to a broader Muslim world security architecture. It explores whether the agreement can move beyond a bilateral defense pact to serve as a practical model for collective security among Muslim states.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the SMDA between Islamabad and Riyadh, focusing on its strategic motivations, significance, security implications, and potential regional impact. The research draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official statements, while secondary sources comprise media reports, academic research, and think-tank analyses. These sources provide insights into the intentions of both countries, regional responses, and the broader implications of the SMDA for Muslim world security. The research also considers India's perspective, analyzing why the pact is viewed with concern and how the agreement could influence India's strategic planning and relations with the Gulf states. By systematically analyzing multiple sources and situating the agreement with regional and strategic contexts, the study aims to provide a rigorous evaluation of the agreement's significance, its potential to reshape regional power dynamics, and its role in promoting a cohesive and strategically autonomous Muslim world security framework.

### The Rationale of SMDA

The SMDA must be examined within the context of growing security threats and deepening instability in South Asia and the Middle East. The regional security environment has become increasingly fragile, shaped by unresolved conflicts, frequent military strikes, and the weakening of traditional deterrence structures. Gulf states, one shielded by external security guarantees, now face direct and indirect threats that challenge their ability to rely on existing alliances.

Saudi Arabia's security concerns are central to understanding the logic behind this agreement. Riyadh remains deeply uneasy about Iran's regional ambitions and its expanding strategic footprint across the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Israel's repeated and largely unrestrained military actions in the region, most notably the attack in Qatar, have highlighted that such aggressive acts can occur without any pushback, further destabilizing the region. The absence of a firm US response to these actions sent a strong signal to Riyadh that Western powers are increasingly selective and, at times, silent in enforcing red lines. This silence reinforced Saudi perceptions

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<sup>10</sup> Alsmadi, F. (2024) "Opportunities and Challenges Along the Path of Saudi-Iran Relations." *Middle East Council on Global Affairs*. [https://mecouncil.org/publication\\_chapters/opportunities-and-challenges-along-the-path-of-saudi-iran-relations/](https://mecouncil.org/publication_chapters/opportunities-and-challenges-along-the-path-of-saudi-iran-relations/)

that US commitments are no longer dependable in moments of crisis.<sup>11</sup>

The Doha attack marked a turning point in Saudi strategic thinking. It exposed the limits of external protection and highlighted the risk of regional spillovers that could directly threaten Gulf stability. For Riyadh, this incident underscored the urgency of moving beyond reliance on distant powers and towards building practical defense partnerships with trusted regional actors.<sup>12</sup> The Doha attack revealed the unreliability of Washington's security guarantee; Riyadh realized that if Washington failed to respond to a major attack against Qatar, it could not be counted on to safeguard Saudi interests either. This assumption proved right later, when Iran retaliated to US attacks by attacking American bases in the Middle East, and the US left all those Middle Eastern countries on their own. Recognizing this, Saudi Arabia moved decisively, without waiting for further reassurances. Although the SMDA had been under discussion for more than a year, it was the Doha attack that accelerated the process, ultimately bringing the pact into effect and making a shift towards autonomous, regionally focused defense cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

For Pakistan, the rationale for engaging in this pact is equally significant. Islamabad's motivation extends beyond military cooperation to include broader strategic and economic considerations. During periods of economic strain and shifting regional alignments, strengthening ties with Riyadh presents Islamabad with an opportunity to deepen defense collaboration while simultaneously benefiting from Riyadh's economic strength and financial stability. Riyadh's vast wealth, economic strength, and role as a major energy supplier and investor make closer engagement particularly valuable for Islamabad's economic diplomacy, especially in a region where India's growing influence is increasingly felt.<sup>14</sup> The agreement enables Pakistan to strengthen its position as a reliable security partner and enhance its relevance in Gulf security affairs. Moreover, the agreement allows Pakistan to project itself as a bridge between South Asia and the Middle East, leveraging its military experience and long-standing partnership with Riyadh. This role not only enhances Pakistan's regional standing but also aligns with its broader goal of diversifying ties across key regional actors.<sup>15</sup>

Taken together, the pact reflects a broader shift in regional security thinking. It is not merely a symbolic gesture or a conventional bilateral agreement. Instead, it

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<sup>11</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "Doha's 9/9: Did Washington Enable Israel's Attack?" *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/dohas-9-9-did-washington-enable-israels-attack/>

<sup>12</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Defence Pact: A New Dawn for the Region." *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/pakistan-saudi-defence-pact-a-new-dawn-for-the-region/>

<sup>13</sup> Zehra, I. (2025) "From Doha to Riyadh: How Israel's Strike Sparked the Saudi-Pakistan Defense Pact." *Geopolitical Monitor*. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/from-doha-to-riyadh-how-israels-strike-sparked-the-saudi-pakistan-defense-pact/>

<sup>14</sup> Younus, M. U. (2025) "Beyond the security paradigm: What Pakistan must do to truly leverage the defense pact with Saudi Arabia." *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/>

<sup>15</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Defence Pact: A New Dawn for the Region." *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/pakistan-saudi-defence-pact-a-new-dawn-for-the-region/>

represents a conscious move by both states toward collective security and greater strategic autonomy at a time when Gulf anxieties are rising, and the US credibility in the Middle East is increasingly questioned. Studying this agreement is therefore essential to understanding how regional powers are responding to uncertainty, recalibrating alliances, and attempting to shape their security futures in an increasingly unstable regional order.

### **Strategic Significance of the Pact**

The strategic significance of the Islamabad-Riyadh defense pact lies in the way it transforms a long-standing and trusted relationship into a formal security partnership. Islamabad and Riyadh have cooperated closely for decades, but the development marks a shift from an informal arrangement to organized and planned defense coordination. By putting cooperation into a structured framework, the pact ensures that defense ties remain stable and consistent, even when political leadership changes or short-term priorities shift.<sup>16</sup> Another key feature of this agreement is that it operates outside the Western-led alliance system. This makes it a notable example of countries from the Global South strengthening their security cooperation on their own terms, reflecting a growing desire among non-Western states to shape their own defense and security decisions.<sup>17</sup>

For Riyadh, the agreement signals a deliberate effort to achieve greater strategic autonomy. In recent years, Riyadh has increasingly recognized that relying primarily on external powers could leave it exposed to shifting global priorities and unexpected crises. Regional conflicts and the evolving security calculus of traditional allies have underscored the need for more diversified and reliable defense arrangements. By strengthening defense ties with Islamabad, Riyadh not only broadens its security partnerships but also enhances its strategic resilience, ensuring it can respond more independently to regional threats and shifting power balances. This pact, therefore, marks a significant step in Riyadh's pursuit of a more self-reliant and flexible security strategy.<sup>18</sup>

For Islamabad, the pact is a strong affirmation of its growing military credibility and diplomatic relevance beyond South Asia. Pakistan's defense performance in recent years, particularly after the May 2025 conflict with India, has enhanced international recognition of its deterrence capability, operational discipline, and military readiness.<sup>19</sup> Saudi Arabia's decision to deepen defense ties reflects this recognition and elevates Pakistan's strategic standing in the Middle East. The partnership also allows Pakistan to expand its influence in a region where India

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<sup>16</sup> Saudi-Pakistan Defense Pact: A New Security Frontier. (2025) *Institute of Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.ifa.gov.et/2025/10/11/saudi-pakistan-defense-pact-a-new-security-frontier/>

<sup>17</sup> Arkent, A. F. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Arabia SMDA: A New Chapter of Global South Cooperation." *Global South Forum*. <https://www.globalsouthforum.org/article/pakistan-saudi-arabia-smda-a-new-chapter-of-global-south-cooperation>

<sup>18</sup> "Lawati, A. A. (2025) "As US reliability falters, Saudi Arabia turns to a nuclear-armed ally". *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/18/middleeast/pakistan-saudi-arabia-defense-allies-intl>

<sup>19</sup> Kidwai, K. A. (2025) "No ifs and buts." *South Asia*. <https://southasia.com.pk/2025/11/03/no-ifs-and-buts/>

has been actively seeking greater strategic space through defense and technology cooperation, especially with Israel. In this sense, the pact strengthens Pakistan's regional reach while reinforcing its position in an increasingly competitive strategic environment.<sup>20</sup>

At the regional level, the pact contributes to a rebalancing of security dynamics. Stronger defense coordination between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia introduces a stabilizing factor in an otherwise volatile region. It sends a clear message to aggressive states that unilateral military actions will face credible counterweights. Rather than encouraging confrontation, this balance can help deter adventurism by states with expansionist policies, including India and Israel. In this way, the pact holds clear deterrent value and has the potential to support regional stability rather than undermine it.<sup>21</sup>

The broader significance of the pact becomes even more evident when viewed in the context of the growing crisis within the Western alliance system. Turkey's interest in engaging with or aligning alongside the Pakistan-Saudi defense framework is particularly telling.<sup>22</sup> Recent US signals regarding Greenland have alarmed European allies, with Denmark and others warning that any US military move against Greenland would effectively "end NATO" by violating Article 5 from within. This episode has shaken confidence in NATO's credibility and exposed a fundamental contradiction: if the main guarantor of collective defense becomes a potential threat, the alliance loses its strategic purpose.<sup>23</sup>

Recognizing these uncertainties, Turkey appears unwilling to wait for NATO's internal fractures to deepen. As a major military power within the alliance, Ankara is recalibrating its security outlook by exploring alternatives based on capability, trust, and shared interests rather than rigid ideological alignment. Its interests in the Pakistan-Saudi defense framework suggest that even core NATO members are preparing for a more uncertain, post-NATO security environment. This shift highlights how the pact is increasingly regarded as a credible and dependable alternative to a weakening Western security framework.<sup>24</sup>

When combined, these developments elevate the Pakistan-Saudi defense pact beyond a simple bilateral agreement. It is increasingly seen as a potential nucleus for a broader regional or Islamic security framework. Pakistan's proven military capability, combined with Saudi Arabia's economic strength and political influence,

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<sup>20</sup> Hussain, S. (2025) "Pakistan–Saudi Arabia Mutual Defense Pact (2025): Regional and Strategic Implications." *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 6(4), 295–302. [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2025\(6-IV\)23](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2025(6-IV)23)

<sup>21</sup> Ali, W. et. al. (2025) "Strategic Pacts in a Shifting World Order: The Pakistan–Saudi Defense Pact 2025." *Advance Social Science Archive Journal*. 4 (2): 366–383. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17311862>

<sup>22</sup> Yıldız, G. (2025) "Turkey-Saudi–Pakistan Pact and The Security Market That's Replacing Old Certainties." *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/guneyyildiz/2026/01/11/turkey-saudipakistan-pact-and-the-security-market-thats-replacing-old-certainties/>

<sup>23</sup> Al Jazeera. (2025) "European leaders hit back at Trump's US takeover designs on Greenland." *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/6/danish-pm-says-us-attack-on-greenland-would-be-the-end-of-nato>

<sup>24</sup> Ynetnews. (2026) "Turkey seeks to join Saudi-Pakistani defense pact in move that could reshape Middle East." *Ynetnews*. <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/sjfltebrzg>

gives the framework both credibility and durability. There is a strong likelihood that other Muslim and regional countries, particularly those dissatisfied with Western security guarantees, may gradually seek to associate with or join this emerging security arrangement. If managed carefully, the SMDA may come to be seen not merely as a defense agreement but as a turning point in regional self-reliance, shifting away from dependence on uncertain Western guarantees towards security partnerships shaped by regional priorities, shared interests, and mutual trust.

### **What Does Pact Mean for India?**

For India, SMDA creates a strategic constraint that it does not anticipate. India's unease over the agreement stems from the way it directly disrupts New Delhi's long-standing approach towards Pakistan. Historically, New Delhi has operated with a wide margin of freedom, frequently pursuing an aggressive security posture by shaping narratives around alleged attacks or false flag operations to legitimize military action. Attacks such as the Pahalgam incidents and the subsequent Operation Sindoor reflect this pattern.<sup>25</sup> What unsettles India now is that this freedom no longer exists in the same way. With Saudi Arabia formally tied to Pakistan through a defense understanding, any military move against Islamabad risks expanding beyond a bilateral confrontation, forcing India to think more carefully before acting.

The core of India's concern lies in the collective nature of the pact. The unambiguous clause that an attack on one would be considered an attack on both alters the strategic environment. Under this framework, India cannot assume that pressure on Pakistan will remain contained. Riyadh would be expected to respond militarily, politically, economically, and diplomatically to maintain the credibility of the SMDA.<sup>26</sup> For India, this is a serious complication. Actions that once carried limited regional consequences could now provoke responses that affect India's energy security, diplomatic standing in the Gulf, or broader international image. This explains why Indian officials reacted sharply and reportedly termed the pact a "grave mistake" by Riyadh.<sup>27</sup>

Another factor intensifying India's discomfort is the lack of international opposition to the pact. Major powers such as the US and China have not criticized the pact, suggesting it is viewed as a legitimate security arrangement rather than a destabilizing step. For New Delhi, this lack of response is hard to ignore.<sup>28</sup> New Delhi often relies on international support or at least rhetorical alignment to justify its regional actions. The absence of such backing in this case highlights India's limited

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<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan. (2025) "Pakistan strongly condemns India's blatant aggression." *Press release*. <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/pakistan-strongly-condemns-indias-blatant-aggression>

<sup>26</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Defence Pact: A New Dawn for the Region." *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/pakistan-saudi-defence-pact-a-new-dawn-for-the-region/>

<sup>27</sup> Business Today Desk. (2025). "Grave mis-step by Saudi Arabia': Kanwal Sibal slams Pakistan defence pact, warns of risks for India." *Business Today*. <https://www.businesstoday.in/india/story/grave-mis-step-by-saudi-arabia-kanwal-sibal-slams-pakistan-defence-pact-warns-of-risks-for-india-494563-2025-09-18>

<sup>28</sup> Hindustan, T. (2025) "Why Asim Munir Is Guaranteed to 'Weaponized' Pakistan." YouTube Video. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJ5cjD-jA1w>

ability to shape global narratives around South Asian security and reinforces the sense that the pact represents a strategic setback rather than a diplomatic misstep by Islamabad or Riyadh.

Military considerations further add to India's anxiety. China's military support has enhanced Pakistan's defensive and deterrent power. The prospect of Pakistan gaining access, directly or indirectly, to Saudi-funded or Saudi-linked military technologies raises serious concerns in India.<sup>29</sup> Riyadh's financial strength and access to advanced defense platforms mean that even limited cooperation could strengthen Pakistan's military posture. From New Delhi's perspective, facing a Pakistan supported by both Chinese technology and Saudi resources creates a more complex and less predictable security challenge than before.

Recent operational experiences have made these fears more immediate. During Operation Sindoor, India reportedly suffered a significant setback, including the loss of Rafale jets to Pakistan's response. This incident appears to have damaged India's confidence in its conventional military edge. The realization that similar losses could occur in future confrontations is difficult for India to accept.<sup>30</sup> The possibility that Islamabad could now be supported by a powerful and wealthy partner like Riyadh only deepens this discomfort. India's concern is not hypothetical; it is rooted in the fear that future conflicts could expose even greater vulnerabilities.

India's reaction to this shifting balance has been telling. Instead of reassessing its regional posture, New Delhi has moved quickly to strengthen defense and strategic ties with Western powers. The long-term defense cooperation agreement with the US and the uranium deal with Canada suggest an attempt to make up for the strategic ground India believes it is losing.<sup>31</sup> These moves appear reactive rather than confident, reflecting an effort to rebuild deterrence and international backing in response to the Islamabad-Riyadh alignment.

In broader terms, the SMDA challenges India's sense of regional dominance. It limits New Delhi's ability to act aggressively without consequences, undermines the assumption that Pakistan can be pressured in isolation, and signals that Islamabad is gaining meaningful strategic partners beyond its traditional alliances.<sup>32</sup> India's discomfort, therefore, is not simply about security cooperation between the two states; it is about the erosion of a strategic environment in which India once acted with relative impunity. The pact forces India to confront a reality it finds uncomfortable, that its aggressive postures are now constrained by a more interconnected and less forgiving regional order.

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<sup>29</sup> Hindustan, T. (2025) "Why Asim Munir Is Guaranteed to 'Weaponized' Pakistan." YouTube Video. *Hindustan Times* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJ5cjD-jA1w>

<sup>30</sup> Karnad, B. (2025) "Rafale failed in Sindoor! Rethink this French option for MFA." *Security Wise*. <https://bharatkarnad.com/2025/05/10/rafale-proved-crappy-in-sindoor-rethink-this-french-option-for-mfa/>

<sup>31</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "The Canada-India Uranium Deal." *Policy East*. <https://policyeast.com/the-canada-india-uranium-deal/>

<sup>32</sup> Amir, S. et, al. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Strategic Mutual Defense Pact (2025): Geo-Political and Security Implications." *Pakistan Journal of Social Science Review*, 4(5), 668–681. Retrieved from <https://pjssrjournal.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/227>

## Broader Regional and Global Implications of SMDA

The SMDA marks a strategic development with significant regional and global implications. For much of the Muslim world, there is a long-standing sense of disappointment with international institutions, particularly the United Nations (UN). From the lack of action on India's conduct in Kashmir and silence during Pakistan's breakup in 1971, to the ongoing failure to stop violence in Gaza or manage tensions in the Middle East, the UN is often seen as ineffective. This wider frustration has shaped how nations think about their security. In such an environment, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia increasingly see regional cooperation and mutual defense as more dependable ways to protect their interests than relying on distant global bodies.<sup>33</sup>

One of the clearest implications of this pact is its potential to reshape how Muslim nations approach collective security. The pact demonstrates that meaningful and practical defense cooperation can be achieved when shared interests align. Islamabad contributes military experience and strategic depth, while Riyadh offers economic strength and regional influence.<sup>34</sup> Together, they present a functional example of coordination that moves beyond rhetoric and highlights the value of tangible partnerships, particularly in an international environment often marked by silence.

The SMDA has clearly reduced India's freedom to act violently in the region. In the past, Indian leaders believed they could raise tensions with Pakistan while outside countries would stay neutral or respond only with statements. That belief no longer exists. Since Riyadh is now closely linked to Pakistan's security, India has to think about how Riyadh might react before taking any military step. Actions that were once seen as limited or manageable could now lead to serious diplomatic problems, economic pressure, and harm India's relations with a significant Middle Eastern partner. As a result, India is being pushed away from aggressive military signaling and toward greater caution, because even a small mistake could create problems beyond South Asia.<sup>35</sup> In this context, claims by Indian leadership that operations like "Operation Sindoor" are still ongoing may appeal to domestic audiences, but in reality, the pact forces India to think far more carefully before acting. The agreement raises the cost of aggression and serves as a clear warning that miscalculation could damage India's standing in the region.

Israel faces a similar warning. For years, it has projected its military power in the Middle East without accountability, striking freely while destabilizing the region and ignoring the human cost. The pact sends a clear signal that this environment is changing. Saudi Arabia's formal defense alignment with Pakistan, a country respected

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<sup>33</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Defence Pact: A New Dawn for the Region." Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research. <https://cscpr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/pakistan-saudi-defence-pact-a-new-dawn-for-the-region/>

<sup>34</sup> Nawaz, N. (2025) "Understanding the Pakistan-Saudi Defense Agreement." *Global Security Review*. <https://globalsecurityreview.com/understanding-the-pakistan-saudi-defense-agreement/>

<sup>35</sup> Reuters. (2025). "India says it expects Saudi Arabia to mind 'sensitivities' after pact with Pakistan." *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-says-it-expects-saudi-arabia-mind-sensitivities-after-pact-with-pakistan-2025-09-19>

across the Muslim world and possessing credible and well-trained military capability, means that unilateral aggression is no longer a low-risk option. Both India and Israel are forced into caution, showing that the balance of power is no longer skewed in their favor.<sup>36</sup>

At the global level, the SMDA is a wake-up call for the major powers. For the US, it signals that its influence in the region is no longer unquestioned. Washington can no longer assume that regional security will unfold according to its preferences. China, on the other hand, gains strategically from this pact. By strengthening Pakistan's security, China helps protect its key investments and energy routes, particularly those linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Improved stability in Pakistan ensures the safety of Chinese infrastructure and trade corridors, allowing Beijing to maintain a stronger and more reliable presence in South Asia and better connectivity with the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Practically, the agreement weakens long-standing Washington dominance while forcing regional powers such as New Delhi and Tel Aviv to rethink their strategies since their actions can no longer be taken for granted.

Overall, the pact is shifting the balance of conflict costs, forcing countries to pause before taking aggressive actions. It encourages caution, promotes restraints, and contributes to greater stability in the region. Over time, the agreement could encourage Muslim nations to work together on defense in a more structured way, potentially forming a formal collective security framework. In a world where international organizations often struggle to respond effectively to crises, this pact makes it clear that regional cooperation, backed by real capabilities, is becoming an increasingly important tool for preventing aggression and maintaining peace.<sup>38</sup>

### **Recommendations**

This is the moment for Muslim states to stop thinking individually and start acting collectively. The Pakistan-Saudi defense pact should be clearly presented for what it truly is: an open and inclusive platform that invites other countries, particularly Muslim countries, to join and strengthen their security together. It should not remain a limited bilateral arrangement. Islamabad and Riyadh must actively encourage participation and make it clear that the purpose of this agreement is straightforward: no state should stand alone in times of crisis.

Pakistan should take the lead in promoting and operationalizing the pact. Its military professionalism, demonstrated in operations such as Operation Sindoor, reflects its capacity as a disciplined and capable security actor. More importantly,

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<sup>36</sup> Irrum, S. (2025) "Pakistan-Saudi Defence Pact: A New Dawn for the Region." *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/pakistan-saudi-defence-pact-a-new-dawn-for-the-region/>

<sup>37</sup> White, J. T. (2025) "The signal and substance of the new Saudi-Pakistan defense pact." *Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-signal-and-substance-of-the-new-saudi-pakistan-defense-pact/>

<sup>38</sup> Rasanah Editorial Team. (2025) "The strategic dimensions of the Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defense pact." *International Institute for Iranian Studies (Rasanah)*. <https://rasanah-iiis.org/english/monitoring-and-translation/reports/the-strategic-dimensions-of-the-saudi-arabia-pakistan-defense-pact/>

Pakistan's recent role during tensions involving Iran and the US highlights a critical strength: credibility with restraint. At a time when the Middle East was dangerously close to a nuclear confrontation, Pakistan prioritized de-escalation over escalation. This balanced approach reinforces its position as a reliable and responsible partner in any collective defense framework.

Saudi Arabia should complement this role by expanding the pact's outreach in clear and practical terms. The framework should allow Muslim states to join at different levels, based on their capacities and security needs. The guiding principle must remain simple: security through cooperation, not isolation.

At the same time, the urgency of such cooperation is clear. The actions of Israel in Palestine and India in Kashmir continue unchecked, enabling them to adopt a more assertive posture, while Muslim countries often respond in a fragmented and limited manner. Political signals, such as Modi's visible alignment with Israel, further reflect a pattern that cannot be ignored. In this context, Saudi Arabia should adopt a clearer and firmer stance toward India in situations involving Pakistan or broader Muslim concerns. If any actions by India are seen as affecting the Muslim population or contributing to instability in Pakistan, Riyadh would need to respond in political, economic, and military ways to show its commitment. This could mean suspending oil exports to India, recalling Indian workers, or even deploying limited military forces to support Pakistan. Considering these possibilities, India, which has often relied on aggressive military designs, will now have to think twice before taking any actions.

Alongside this, rising Islamophobia in parts of the Western world has influenced perceptions and, at times, policy responses towards Muslim states. Together, these trends create a sense of selectivity and imbalance in the international system, where the concerns of Muslim countries do not always receive equal attention. In such an environment, relying solely on external powers is no longer sufficient. Muslim states need to move beyond statements and toward practical unity and coordination, and the Pakistan-Saudi defense pact can serve as a starting point for building this collective strength, helping states cooperate, support one another, and reduce their vulnerability in an increasingly uneven global order.

While SMDA reflects positive momentum, a key concern that has emerged is the perception that the pact remains largely symbolic and, at times, temporary in nature. This perception was reinforced during recent Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions, where Riyadh did not take any visible or decisive role. Such moments raise a fundamental question about the operational value of the agreement: if a formal understanding exists, its absence in critical situations weakens its credibility. While policymakers may interpret Saudi restraint as prudence, particularly given sensitivities between the two Muslim states, the broader public perception in Pakistan reflects dissatisfaction. Even so, Islamabad has continued to extend support to Riyadh by deploying forces during heightened tensions in the Gulf. To address this imbalance, Riyadh should adopt a more visible and consistent role in future situations. Even measured actions, such as active diplomatic engagement, clear public support,

or limited strategic coordination, would signal that the pact holds practical relevance and is not merely declaratory.

Finally, the economic aspect of the relationship remains just as important. Pakistan's dependence on institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) often restricts its policy options and makes it vulnerable to external pressure. In this context, Saudi Arabia should move toward more structured and continuous economic support. This could include increased investment and prompt assistance during economic crises in war-like situations. Strengthening this part of the partnership would not only improve Pakistan's stability but also boost the pact's long-term credibility, demonstrating that it extends beyond defense to a comprehensive and reliable strategic alliance.

If these proposals gain momentum, their impact could be substantial. The pact can evolve into a broader and more structured Muslim security architecture, where cooperation becomes routine rather than reactive. This will enhance strategic confidence, reduce dependence on external powers, and enable faster coordinated responses to crises. Over time, such unity can reshape regional dynamics, making unilateral actions more difficult and encouraging more balanced behavior at the international level.

As more countries join, the pact can develop into a credible and reliable alliance, giving Muslim states a stronger and more unified voice in global security matters. Acting individually, their influence has remained limited; acting collectively, they can raise the political and strategic cost of aggression and help prevent escalation. In this sense, participation is not about confrontation; it is about protecting sovereignty, strengthening deterrence, and promoting stability. In clear terms, the direction is evident: from division to coordination, from vulnerability to strength, and from reactive policies to a confident and collective role in global security affairs.

## CONCLUSION

The Pakistan-Saudi Defense Pact reflects a broader shift in how many Muslim countries now approach security and alliances. For years, states in Asia and Africa relied on Western guarantees that often came with conditions and contradictions. The so-called US security umbrella sounded reassuring, but in practice, it has been uneven and selective. As the old realist view reminds us, states ultimately act in their own interest, not out of loyalty. The US has frequently spoken the language of partnership while acting with a forked tongue, present when convenient, and absent when the cost rises. This experience has led Muslim countries to a simple realization: their long-term security cannot rest on distant powers whose priorities shift over time.

Seen in this light, the SMDA should be understood as a signal of credibility rather than sentiment. It demonstrates that both nations recognized the uncertain world of today, characterized by regional tensions and unreliable assurances. Rather than relying on informal understanding or vague commitments, both sides have adopted a structured approach that clarifies expectations and reduces strategic

ambiguity. This move serves as a warning, reminding others that hostile actions do not occur in isolation. By strengthening predictability and coordination, the pact encourages caution, limits room for adventurism and reinforces stability in an already volatile region. History shows that strong deterrence often prevents conflict; NATO itself emerged from the same logic after Europe learned the price of standing divided.

This turn towards regional self-reliance is not new. In Africa, the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso reflects a similar break from unreliable external security providers. After years of unmet promises and failed interventions, these states chose regional cooperation over distant assurances. While the Sahel and the Middle East differ greatly, the underlying lesson is the same: when outside guarantees fail, regions begin to take responsibility for their own security. The SMDA sends a clear message not only to rivals, but also to global powers that regional actors are no longer passive players waiting for protection.

How this pact unfolds will depend on the political will and commitment of both sides, but its direction is already clear. If it succeeds, it could do more than strengthen Pakistan-Saudi ties; it could pave the way for a broader alliance of Muslim nations focused on collective defense and regional stability. In a way, it could become a cornerstone of the Muslim world's security architecture, showing that countries can take care of their own security without waiting for others. Whether such a framework formally takes shape or not, the shift itself is hard to ignore. The Muslim world is starting to stand on its own, set its own rules, and act together to maintain stability. Who knows, over time, this cooperation could grow into something more united and strategically cohesive than NATO.