



# **DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

**TOPIC**

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**SAUDI ARABIA–PAKISTAN STRATEGIC  
MUTUAL DEFENCE AGREEMENT AND  
ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

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## SAUDI ARABIA–PAKISTAN STRATEGIC MUTUAL DEFENCE AGREEMENT AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

### Context

- The recent **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan** marks a seismic shift in **South Asian geopolitics, including India** that challenges long-held assumptions about its regional security architecture and its diplomatic outreach to the Gulf.

### About the SDMA Between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan

- It **builds on nearly eight decades of cooperation** rooted in Islamic solidarity and shared strategic interests, elevating their relationship into a formal treaty framework.
- It states that *'any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both'*, effectively committing each side to respond to threats to the other.
- It includes provisions for:
  - ♦ Permanent coordination mechanisms;
  - ♦ Joint military committees;
  - ♦ Intelligence-sharing arrangements;
  - ♦ Expanded training programs;

### Saudi Arabia & Pakistan: Shifting Alignments

- **Religious & Cultural Foundations:** Closer alignment with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques reinforces Pakistan's domestic and ideological identity, reinforcing **people-to-people ties**.
  - ♦ **Pan-Islamic Solidarity:** Pakistan has often positioned itself as a **guardian of Saudi Arabia's sovereignty**, especially in times of regional tension.
- **Diplomatic & Strategic Milestones:**
  - ♦ **1947 Onward:** Saudi Arabia was among the first countries to recognize Pakistan, just after Pakistan's independence.
  - ♦ **1974 Islamic Summit, Lahore:** It marked a high point in **Muslim unity**, with Saudi-Pakistan ties at the forefront.
  - ♦ **1998 Nuclear Tests:** Saudi Arabia provided crucial financial aid and oil subsidies to help Islamabad weather international sanctions, after Pakistan's nuclear tests.
  - ♦ **2019 Visit by Crown Prince MBS:** The visit led to a \$10 billion investment **pledge in Gwadar**, including a refinery and petrochemical complex.
- **Military Cooperation:**
  - ♦ **1967 Defence Protocol:** Initiated formal military collaboration, including Pakistani advisors training Saudi forces.
  - ♦ **1982 Expansion:** Included **stationing Pakistani troops in Saudi Arabia** and joint exercises.
- **Economic & Humanitarian Support:**
  - ♦ **Financial Lifelines:** Saudi Arabia has repeatedly bailed out Pakistan during economic crises—most notably in 2018 with a \$6 billion package.
  - ♦ **Diaspora Bridge:** Over 2 million Pakistanis live and work in Saudi Arabia, sending **billions in remittances** and serving as a living bridge between the two nations.

### Strategic Importance for Saudi Arabia

- **Security Assurance Beyond US Reliance:** Pakistan provides a tested partner with nuclear capabilities, amid concerns over waning US commitment as the Gulf's security guarantor.

- ♦ It is a hedge against growing uncertainty in West Asia, especially after **Israel's attack on Qatar**, which hosts the Al-Udeid airbase—the largest US military base in the region.
- **Counterbalance to Iran and Israel:** Saudi Arabia faces threats from Iran-backed proxies like the Houthis and increasing Israeli assertiveness across the region.
  - ♦ SMDA strengthens Saudi deterrence posture by aligning with Pakistan's military capabilities, including its nuclear potential—though not explicitly stated, the symbolism is potent.
- **Expanding Strategic Depth:** The pact includes joint military committees, intelligence-sharing, and expanded training programs.
  - ♦ It formalizes decades of informal cooperation, including Pakistan's long-standing troop deployments in the Saudi Kingdom.
- **Military Expertise:** Pakistan's army has historically trained Saudi forces and guarded holy sites.
- **Economic and Energy Corridors:** Partnership secures routes for **Vision 2030** investments, especially via **CPEC and Gwadar**.
  - ♦ **Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia** are part of China's strategic orbit through **CPEC and Belt & Road Initiative**.

### Strategic Importance for Pakistan

- **Economic and Military Leverage:** The agreement allows Pakistan to convert economic dependency into strategic influence.
  - ♦ It positions Pakistan as a regional security provider, enhancing its global relevance amid domestic challenges.
  - ♦ Saudi Arabia remains Pakistan's largest source of concessional loans, remittances, and oil subsidies.
- **Nuclear Diplomacy:** Pakistan hinted that Saudi Arabia could access Pakistan's nuclear capabilities if needed.
  - ♦ It elevates Pakistan's status as a potential nuclear umbrella for the Gulf, a role with significant geopolitical weight.
- **Military Prestige and Influence:** The presence of Pakistan's Army Chief at the signing ceremony signals Pakistan's military establishment's central role in shaping foreign policy.
  - ♦ It is leveraging this pact to bolster its domestic standing and international clout.
- **Strategic Depth Against India:** An agreement **enhances Pakistan's bargaining power with India**, indirectly strengthening its deterrence.
- **Military Technology & Training:** Access to advanced Saudi-funded military equipment, joint exercises, and strategic partnerships.

### Associated Global Uncertainty & Risks

- **Regional Security Order:** The US agenda of **expanding the Abraham Accords** has been **derailed by Israel's war in Gaza**.
  - ♦ Saudi Arabia made it clear it will **normalise relations with Israel** only if there is a **commitment to a Palestinian state** — a demand **Israel rejects**.
- **Regional Rivalries:** Pakistan could be pulled into Saudi Arabia's **rivalries with Iran** or into Yemen's protracted conflict.
  - ♦ Saudi Arabia may find itself entangled in **South Asian instability**, particularly over India–Pakistan tensions.
  - ♦ It could deepen **divides with Iran and Qatar**, challenging **OIC unity**.

### India's Strategic Concerns

- India has deepened relations with Saudi Arabia through **energy, trade, and diaspora ties**, while maintaining a **pro-Israel tilt in West Asia policy**. The defence pact complicates this balance.

- Saudi Arabia signals that it will **prioritise its own security interests**, by choosing Pakistan as a formal defence partner, even if this unsettles India.
  - ♦ For India, the **challenge is twofold**:
  - ♦ Preventing erosion of its influence in the Gulf if Pakistan positions itself as a credible security provider.
  - ♦ Adapting to a **post-US-dominant order**, where alliances are more fluid and transactional.

### Reconsidering Strategic Assumptions By India

- **Gulf Neutrality**: India had long viewed Gulf nations, especially Saudi Arabia, as neutral actors in South Asian disputes.
- **Regional Deterrence**: The pact enhances Pakistan's deterrence posture, potentially emboldening its stance in future conflicts.
- **Diplomatic Balancing**: India needs to navigate a more polarized regional landscape, balancing its ties with Saudi Arabia while countering the implications of the Saudi-Pakistan axis.

### Conclusion

- The Pakistan–Saudi pact is less about ironclad defence and more about **perception, prestige, and deterrence through uncertainty**. It elevates Pakistan's global profile, provides Saudi Arabia a measure of insurance, unsettles India, and forces global powers to recalibrate.
- Above all, it signals that regional boundaries are dissolving, giving way to a new era of interlinked security architectures.

Source: TH

### Daily Mains Practice Question

Q. Critically examine how the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan reshapes India's regional security calculus and influences broader global geopolitical alignments.