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## **Pakistan–Saudi Arabia Defense Cooperation and Strategic Implications**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research aimed to examine the recent defense partnership between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that directly affects Pakistan's military security and strategic affairs with other countries. The study approaches defense cooperation as a policy matter which shows how this relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia affects Pakistan's regional security and strategic positioning amid the recent geopolitical developments. Although, historically Pakistan has been extending defense support and military training to Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia played pivotal role in Pakistan's economic stabilization. The existing information regarding the topic under consideration is largely dominated by review-based analyses that provide historical information and strategic dimensions of the relationship. The current research employs qualitative research method to investigate and report the strategic implications, benefits and nature of Pakistan-Saudi defense cooperation especially after a formalized Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) which is based on Saudi Arabia's vision 2030. The qualitative research design utilized primary data to gather the main findings. The secondary data sources including open-access government documents, reports, academic research articles, policy briefs, official statements, parliamentary records and trustworthy national and international news outlets were utilized to build the context and support the discussion. The primary data collection was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with members of the defined population. Purposive sampling technique along with snow-ball purposive sampling was used to obtain detailed information about defense collaboration and related strategic implications assessment. The interview was based on themes including nature of Pak-Saudi Cooperation, its strategic benefits, national security risks, foreign policy implications, regional security dynamics, and future prospects. An online survey along with telephonic discussions were used to gather the required information. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

The findings indicate that the shift from informal cooperation between two countries to a formal cooperation in the form of SMDA will have a substantial impact on Pakistan's



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strategic orientation, defense diplomacy, and involvement in the Middle East security architecture. Respondents identified possible benefits such as increased deterrence, stronger strategic relationships, and diversification of military collaborations. However, the deal may present strategic concerns, such as constraints on Pakistan's foreign policy balance and the possibility of engagement in regional wars. It is likely that the future collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia will include increased defense manufacturing infrastructure, military hardware supply, technology transfer, and combined military training, as well as improved information sharing and military-to-military interaction

**Keywords:** Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement, Strategic Implications, Deterrence, Pak-Saudi Cooperation, Military Interaction

### INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's defense diplomacy has become a pillar of its foreign policy during the era of regional realignments and shifts in alliances globally, especially with its long-time partner Saudi Arabia. These alliances are not simply strategic collaborations but also based on common religious beliefs historical links and security concerns (Shaffan & Aquil, 2025). In the past, Saudi Arabia helped Pakistan with foreign exchange, oil supplies and diplomatic support. In return Pakistan gave Saudi Arabia training and security cooperation (Ali, 2025). The two countries have for the first time formalized their partnership through the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement in September 2025 promising to help each other against security concerns (Hussain, 2025). Saudi Arabia is forming new security partnerships beyond its Western partners and Pakistan aspires to be a key security provider in the Muslim world and to have an increased regional influence. The SMDA has shown that Pakistan is strengthening its alliances with Saudi Arabia to achieve these goals (Ali et al., 2025).

Saudi Arabia's threat perceptions have grown stronger due to increasing regional instability. The situation includes both Israeli military operations in the Gulf and the international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions and its network of proxy forces (Al Jazeera, 2025). The mutual defense clause of the agreement states that "any attack against either state shall be considered an attack against both states", which is inspired by Collective Defense under NATO Article 5 (Ilyas et al., 2025). The agreement serves to strengthen deterrence while committing that both parties would put up a joint defense during an attack (Al Jazeera, 2025; AP News, 2025; Reuters, 2025). The agreement benefits Pakistan by improving its geopolitical position through formalised defense agreements with a significant Gulf nation which grants Pakistan additional diplomatic power in the face of changing global alliances and India's rising power. The agreement provides ways for economic collaboration and military partnership which will enhance international standing of both nations. The agreement supports Saudi Arabia's security partnership diversification plans which aim to establish multiple security alliances instead of depending on a single external security provider (Arab News, 2025; Benaissa, 2026).

The Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defense agreement holds significant importance for both countries because of its economic and strategic value. Pakistan sees improved relations with Riyadh as a key to address its economic problems which currently include low foreign exchange reserves and increasing debt and ongoing inflation troubles while Saudi Arabia considers it strategic backup to increase its military preparedness (Ali et al., 2025; Yaseen et al., 2023). Islamabad expects the agreement to result in increased Saudi



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investment and better oil payment terms which will help balance of payments and enhance trade and job creation for Pakistan (Arab News, 2025). Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have been working closely regarding defense and Pakistan has been training and guiding the Saudi military (Karim, 2023). Pakistan has also traded security equipment to Saudi Arabia with a deal of \$81 million in 2016 (Haider, 2016).

The agreement brings advantages to Saudi Arabia because it enables the country to achieve its Vision 2030 objectives through enhanced security partnerships and joint defense production initiatives and gradual reduction of its dependency on external defense support (Financial Times, 2025). The agreement demonstrates a current international political pattern which enables nations to form economic and military alliances that help them achieve their shared strategic and development objectives (Arab News, 2025). Furthermore, it has been declared that Saudi Arabia will get protection under Islamabad's nuclear umbrella in the context of Gulf's increased tensions with Israel as well as regional instability (Defense Security Asia, 2025). The pact marks a shift in strategic landscape of South Asia and Middle East. However, this cooperation raised some questions regarding its impact on security conditions in both countries, stability of South Asia and potential of new alliances across the region.

The current literature provides limited understanding on how this defense cooperation will affect Pakistan's national security, its ability to conduct independent foreign relations and what will be the other strategic implications. The current study will attempt to address this gap by analyzing what this defense cooperation might entail for Pakistan and how it can affect the country's security and foreign policy choices according to the policy officials and other relevant stakeholders in Pakistan.

### **Research Scope**

The study focuses on understanding the nature of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia cooperation and its impact on Pakistan's foreign policies, military involvement and other strategic implications. It includes the analysis of stakeholder's perspective regarding nature, national security risks, foreign policy implications and regional security dynamics that may follow the recent cooperation (SMDA).

### **Research Objectives**

To assess the nature and potential implications of Pak-Saudi defense cooperation on Pakistan's national security and strategic positioning.

To examine the regional strategic implications and security dynamics based on relevant stakeholder's standpoints.

### **Statement of Problem**

Despite the long-established relationship of Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia, systematic analysis of nature and the implications of the defense cooperation remains limited as most of the literature relies on the secondary data sources with little incorporation of insights from relevant officials, policy makers and researchers who are directly involved with or observing this cooperation. The gap constraints the understanding of the strategic alignments, security dynamics and overall implications in a broader analytical framework.

### **Research Questions**

What is the nature of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's recent defense cooperation (SMDA)?

How this cooperation can impact Pakistan's national and regional security?



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What will the strategic benefits as well as implications of this partnership in terms of military involvement and foreign policy?

How this cooperation can lead to new strategic alliances in the region?

### **Limitations**

Considering the scope, this study has some limitations which include secret defense information unavailability, expert assessment and open-source data dependence. Due to these boundaries, the research will mainly focus to examine the strategic implications of Pakistan–Saudi Arabia defense cooperation including threat perception, diversification, military involvement, areas of cooperation that might enhance under this pact, changes in strategic alliances in the region etc. to support decision making on the basis of insights from relevant stakeholders and available literature.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Following the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the country has undergone various crucial stages to establish its political as well as economic systems and Saudi Arabia was one of the foremost countries who officially recognized and supported Pakistan (Khan & Sajjad, 2023). Their cooperation elevated during 1979 when Soviet invaded Afghanistan. These two countries along with United States supported the Afghan Mujahideen (Rashid, 2010). This cooperation deepened the Pak-Saudi institutional linkages between their security sector (Iftikhar et al., 2025). Saudi Arabia extended its economic assistance along with oil supplies and occasional loans (Nawaz, 2008). The relationship created interdependencies through Saudi Arabia's financial backing while Pakistan became reliable partner with strategic military strength (Iftikhar et al., 2025). Despite the periods of fluctuations, Saudi–Pakistan relations established practical ties which base their connections on ideological affinity, long-term military cooperation, and sustained political trust according to most research studies. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan yet follows a transactional pattern which benefits both nations through their respective resource exchanges (Satti & Rid, 2025; Muzaffar et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2019).

In a recent study, Yaseen et al. (2023) highlighted how Saudi Arabia and Israel's connections can impact Middle Eastern political stability, as well as how Arab countries respond to these developing relationships. It emphasized how regional rivalry and US intervention can lead to instability. The study suggested that Islamic States' joint diplomatic efforts might assist to alleviate regional tensions. Moreover, around the same time as Israel's targeted hits in Doha, Saudi Arabia has expanded its alliances beyond its partnership with the United States, China and India to create multipolar strategic options which decrease Saudi Arabia's dependency on its traditional alliances (Mansour & Ahmed, 2024). The Agreement (SMDA) between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan matches their defense needs through a comprehensive security portfolio. Middle East countries establish closer relations with Asia-Pacific nations to obtain greater independence in their foreign affairs according to the studies (Ali, 2025). The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan demonstrates a new direction for Saudi Arabia's international diplomatic approach. The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan serves as a fundamental element that determines how South Asian countries respond to different situations. The Pakistani defense partnerships especially with Gulf countries, which India monitors closely, might lead India to enhance its defense capabilities as a countermeasure (Singh, 2024; Yaseen et al., 2016).



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The SMDA is part of a larger strategic arrangement that links long-term economic goals with energy-related investments and initiatives regarding regional connectivity as well as defense partnerships. Security related cooperation between South Asia and Middle East states has been limited and informal. By institutionalizing their security ties through a formal security pact, the SMDA between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia represents a significant departure from this precedent. A stronger element of mutual security is introduced within the regional framework by the treaty's collective defense provision, which states that an armed attack on one party is considered an attack on both (AP News, 2025; Reuters, 2025). Perceptions of regional threats in the Middle East and South Asia are also influenced by the SMDA's establishment. As indicated earlier, sensitivities of a volatile and unpredictable environment have been reinforced by recent Israeli military operations, including widely reported strikes in Gaza and Doha, which have raised security concerns among Gulf states (Al Jazeera, 2025; Reuters, 2025). The perceived need for more formalized and credible deterrent partnerships has been highlighted by these developments, which have also led to a re-evaluation of current security arrangements.

### **MATERIALS & METHODS**

The existing information regarding the topic under consideration is largely dominated by review-based analyses that provide historical information and strategic dimensions of the relationship. The current research employs qualitative research method to investigate and report the strategic implications, benefits and nature of Pakistan-Saudi defense cooperation. The qualitative research design utilized primary data to understand and examine various themes regarding this defense cooperation. The secondary data sources including open-access government documents, reports, academic research articles, official statements, and trustworthy national and international news outlets were utilized to build the context and support the discussion.

For the primary data collection, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from the members of the defined population. The study captures and analyzes the views of participants who are either directly involved with or conversant about the subject. The research excludes all classified documents and sensitive operational data which require special clearance, and it restricts data usage to publicly available content or expert-acquired permissions.

### **Participants and Design**

Purposive sampling (non-random) technique was used to conduct semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was employed because the research domain was very specific and there are limited number of individuals who carry the relevant information. The most relevant and productive sample was selected to respond to the questions of the interview. Furthermore, the data collection led to the purposive-snowball sampling.

Participants sampling was designed to establish data power in the framework of qualitative interview by collecting rich information from a suitably diverse set of participants relevant to the study (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The participants included relevant academic / university sector, government / policy officials, diplomats, independent researchers and former diplomats, current management consultants.



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### The Research Context

The data was collected from the participants that primarily focused on nature of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Defense Cooperation (mainly SMDA), its strategic benefits, national security risks, foreign policy implications, regional security dynamics, and future prospects.

### Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the guidelines from (Khan, 2022). An online survey along with telephonic discussions were conducted containing both closed and open-ended questions. An initial list of fifteen participants was formulated. Some of the participants suggested other respondents leading to snow-ball purposive sampling. At final twenty respondents were finalized and interviews were scheduled between February 25, 2026 to March 22, 2026. An online survey containing both closed and open-ended questions was formulated. As per the guidelines, the respondents were asked for clarifications where required.

The data was arranged and initial coding was executed using open coding methods by analyzing the recurrent patterns across the responses in open-ended questions. The close-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages. Overall, the thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The maximum number of respondents were Government / Policy officials (57.1%) strictly relevant to the subject under investigation followed by Diplomats (14.3%). About 61.9% respondents were highly experienced with 11-15 years of relevant experience. The respondent's profile is presented in figure 1.

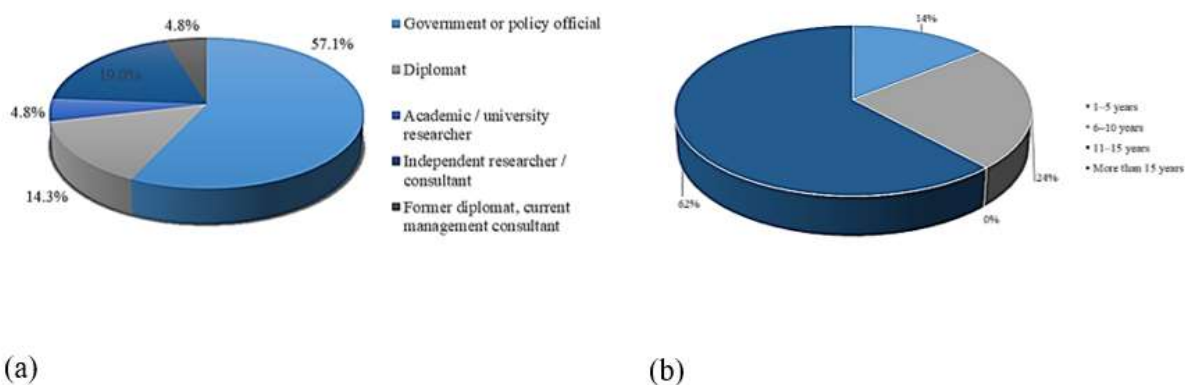


Figure 1: Respondents profile (a) Professional area of expertise (b) Years of Experience

### Nature of Pakistan -Saudi Defence Cooperation

The results indicate that the cooperation of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is mainly perceived as Strategic Partnership. Several respondents have characterized it as transactional arrangement while others take it as security cooperation or emergency alliance. A few participants considered it as long-term alliance or a balanced cooperation. One participant stated, "It's not only a transactional arrangement or a fully integrated military cooperation but it sits somewhere in between these two conditions, and that ambiguity in the pact may be by design". Overall, the current nature of defense cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia can best be characterized as a strategic partnership that is evolving beyond its traditionally transactional foundations.



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When describing the distinction between earlier Pak-Saudi military cooperation and the SMDA, the responses indicate that SMDA is widely seen as substantial advancement over previous types of military cooperation between these two countries. Some participants believe that the arrangement is “more comprehensive and strategic in nature”, because of a “binding mutual defense clause” in the agreement, under which an attack on one country would be considered an attack on both, requiring collective defense. According to various studies, the formalization of such relations through the SMDA directly marks a significant change from earlier mood of cooperations. Studies conducted by Hussain (2025) and Ali et al. (2025) stress that this agreement transforms what was priorly an informal security arrangement into a formal binding defense agreement. Similarly, Dodiya (2025) responds to this shift as a transition from “informal security networks to treaty-level commitments,” which reshapes the regional perception and lead to establish clear expectations for mutual support and access to military bases.

A few participants suggested that it is “the first time the two countries have formally recognized each other within a mutual defense framework”. The responses mark it as a shift from earlier informal form of cooperation to formal cooperation. The respondents suggested that “reciprocity and long-term strategic alignment” would strengthen the already existing defense relationship. According to one participant, regardless of the impression of stronger cooperation, the practical impact may still be “less significant than the level of cooperation observed in the 1970s”. Moreover, one respondent stated that:

“Under Muhammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia is diversifying its predominantly US dependence for its defenses. It depicts its faith in strong military capacity of Pakistan, based on the expectation that Pakistan will support Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in case of any crisis in the Middle East. The formalized pact also gives Pakistan increased access to diplomatic and economic strength of KSA, particularly in terms of oil and petrodollars”.

Overall, the SMDA represents a significant departure from earlier ad hoc and personality-driven military cooperation. Previous engagements were largely informal, based on bilateral goodwill, and often lacked institutional mechanisms for sustainability. The SMDA introduces a formal legal and strategic framework that outlines specific areas of cooperation, including joint defense production, intelligence sharing, and strategic planning. It also signals a shift from a donor-recipient dynamic to a more equitable partnership model. Additionally, the SMDA reflects the changing geopolitical realities in the Gulf, where Saudi Arabia is actively seeking to diversify its security partnerships beyond its traditional reliance on Western powers. Similar interpretations were made by Maksad (2025) that the partnership is Saudi Arabia’s step away from the US after Israel strikes on Qatar. Although some countries in the region may interpret this pact as border against excessive reliance on great powers (White, 2025). Nevertheless, this should not be inferred that Saudia will move completely away from the United States (Jalil, 2025).

While inquiring about the areas of defense cooperation that are more likely to expand under this cooperation, the results indicated that SMDA is anticipated to increase in defense cooperation regarding strategic planning cooperation (76.2%) and military training (71.4%). A substantial number of participants (66.7%) highlighted that joint military exercises have the potential to expand under this cooperation. Furthermore, 57.1% of respondents mentioned defense technology transfer and intelligence sharing as possible areas for growth (Figure 2). Dossani (2025) also suggested that this cooperation will increase joint military exercises and placement of more Pakistani military personnel in Saudi Arabia.

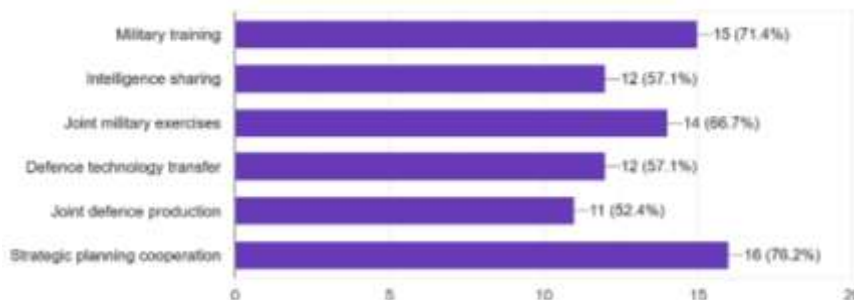


Figure 2: Areas of defence cooperation that are likely to expand under the said cooperation

Overall, the results indicate that the agreement is anticipated to improve strategic coordination and operational cooperation, as well as open doors for joint military projects and technology cooperation between the two nations. These results clearly describe the transfer of technology and joint manufacturing is consistent with “Saudi Arabia’s broader Vision 2030” agenda. As highlighted in studies that Riyadh is actively seeking to diversify its defense partners to lessen its dependence on the West and increase its domestic defensive capabilities. While Pakistan is a major beneficiary of this sudden change, but researchers warn that in longer run, Saudi Arabia's will push itself towards industrialization to manufacture their own defensive tools, might eventually reduce its reliance on foreign military forces, even if strategic political ties remain robust (Ali et al., 2025; Hussain, 2025).

The findings indicate that the SMDA is expected to be very significant (47.6%) for Pakistan’s defense diplomacy and regional strategic positioning. This is followed by moderate significance (Figure 3). Notably, none of the respondents indicated that the agreement would have no significance in this matter.

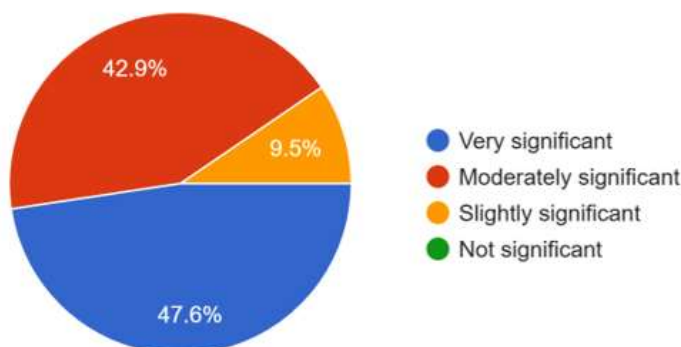


Figure 3: Significance of SMDA for Pakistan’s diplomacy and regional strategic positioning

Studies supported the idea that SMDA changes the security linkage of Gulf-South Asia. A study conducted by Amir et al. (2025) highlighted that such formal agreements draw Pakistan further into the Middle Eastern security architecture, thus increasing its diplomatic leverage but also questioning its neutrality in future regional conflicts.

### Strategic Benefits

The current study suggests that the potential benefits of the agreement for Pakistan are largely perceived in terms of “economic and financial support”, including “deferred oil payments, financial assistance, and support in balance of payments”. The recent funding of \$5 billion from Saudi Arabia and Qatar also supports this agreement. Pakistan is



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planning to repay \$3.5 billion debt to United Arab Emirates to gain regional stability (Khan, 2026). Some of the respondents also highlighted prospects related to the “sale of defense equipment and defense cooperation”, as well as “protection against aggression and regional conflict”. Some participants stressed the importance of “strong ties and a mutual defense alliance for security”, which could help Pakistan “retain its alliance with Saudi Arabia and strengthen its position within the Middle East security paradigm”. Others noted possible “economic cooperation, access to Saudi resources, and access to the Red Sea”, which may create broader economic prospects. Additionally, a few respondents suggested that the agreement could provide “economic and diplomatic advantages and contribute to deterrence against India”. However, some participants expressed “uncertainty regarding the tangible benefits or suggested that opportunities may depend on the emergence of a broader alliance among Muslim countries”. FPCCI Policy advisory board (2025) also expresses that being only Muslim majority state with nuclear power, role of Pakistan can be seen as central in safeguarding Saudi Arabia’s sovereignty. The table 1 shows the major themes derived from the statements of the participants along with description and proportion of responses that fall under each theme.

*Table 1: Strategic Benefits of Pakistan-Saudi Defense Cooperation*

Theme	Description	Prevalence
Economic / Financial Support	Deferred oil payments, financial assistance, balance of payment support, economic cooperation	35.7%
Defense Cooperation	Defense equipment exports, mutual defense support, protection against aggression	21.4%
Strategic / Security Alliance	Strengthening long-term Pakistan–Saudi strategic partnership and regional security cooperation	14.3%
Uncertainty / Skepticism	Responses indicating unclear or limited benefits	14.3%
Geostrategic Access	Access to the Red Sea and Middle East strategic environment	7.1%
Diplomatic / Strategic Leverage	Strengthening Pakistan’s diplomatic position and deterrence	7.1%
Remittances & Labour Ties	Continued employment and remittance flow from Pakistani expatriates	7.1%

It can be inferred that Pakistan stands to gain several strategic advantages from this formalized cooperation. Firstly, it strengthens Pakistan’s position as a credible defense partner in the Middle East, which enhances its diplomatic leverage across the region. Secondly, Saudi financial support and investment in Pakistan’s defense industry could accelerate indigenous capabilities in areas such as missile technology, armored vehicles, and naval platforms. Thirdly, the partnership provides Pakistan with a degree of economic security through preferential energy arrangements. The expected economic benefits reflect the continuation of the traditional "oil-for-security" agreements. However, as noted by Hussain (2025) and Begum (2025), the nature of this relationship is continuously evolving. Although the element of mutual exchange is still existing, the modalities are shifting toward conditional investments and defense industrial cooperation, reflecting Saudi Arabia's new fiscal strategies under Vision 2030. The findings indicate that the agreement will have high impact (47.6%) in strengthening Pakistan’s geopolitical influence in the region while 9.7% suggested that it will have



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very high impact (Figure 4a). Out of total, 30.8% respondents strongly agree that the SMDA will significantly boost Pakistan’s strategic leverage in the Middle East. However, 23.1% disagreed to the statement (Figure 4b).

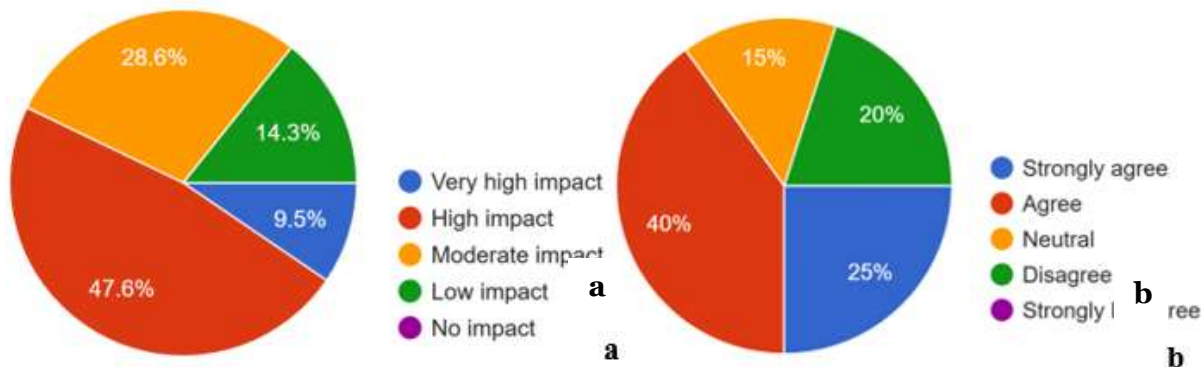


Figure 4: Impact on Pakistan’s geopolitical influence (a), Boost in Pakistan’s strategic leverage in the Middle East (b)

The cooperation could support Pakistan’s defense sector development mainly through export opportunities and supply orders, including the potential to export military technology and promote defense exports. Several respondents also emphasized the possibility of petro-dollar funding and increased investment in research, development, and production facilities, which could strengthen Pakistan’s defense capacity. Others highlighted that the agreement could provide an impetus to Pakistan’s defense production industry and technological advancement. However, some participants suggested that the effect may be minimal or limited, quoting Saudi Arabia’s dependence on overseas defense expertise and limited native competences. Moreover, it was also highlighted that Saudi Arabia’s great defense budget could profit Pakistan’s defense division if collaboration expands. The table 2 summarizes the major themes of contribution of this cooperation towards Pakistan’s defense sector development or technological advancement.

Table 2: Responses: how might this cooperation contribute to Pakistan’s defense sector development or technological advancement?

Theme	Description	Prevalence
Export opportunities	By getting good supply orders from Saudi Arabia. Other friendly nations may also follow suit Pakistan can export military technology to KSA and other partners Exports promotion	21.4%
Funding for defense capacity, Research and Development	May be able to secure petro dollars for further defense capacity enhancement, innovations & production; More funding can enable more investment in Research and Development as well as production facilities.	14.3%
Boost to defense production industry	This cooperation will enhance defense cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi, giving an impetus to Pakistan’s defense production industry and	14.3%



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Theme	Description	Prevalence
	research and development, Pakistan's defense production will get further boost	
Positive technological advancement	It will have a positive impact; It will contribute a lot to Pak's tech advancement	21.4%
Limited or minimal impact	The impact of cooperation in terms of technological advancement will be minimal	14.3%
Constraints due to limited indigenous technology	Only some advancement is expected, the technology that the Saudis have is not indigenous US defense projects in KSA have limited interest in providing Pakistan with the same tech.	7.1%
Impact due to large Saudi defense budget	Significant impact because KSA spends much more on defense budget.	7.1%

### National Security Risks

The responses indicate varying perspectives on how the SMDA can influence Pakistan's national security strategy. According to a large number of participants, the transaction might have a significant influence on Pakistan's strategic position (Table 3). It can be considered as a paradigm revolution that can strengthen Pakistan's involvement in Middle East safety concerns. Others highlighted potential benefits such as enhanced defense capabilities, more defense production, and a security approach that extends beyond an India-centric framework. However, the shift toward a formal defense pact introduces "multi-front challenges". Dodiya (2025) and Amir et al. (2025) highlight the strategic stress Pakistan might have to face if it becomes entangled in Middle Eastern conflicts while simultaneously managing volatile borders with Afghanistan and India. Furthermore, recent studies examine how these ties affect South Asian deterrence, it was noted that strengthened Saudi-Pakistani military cooperation could alter India's regional engagement and influence the probability of drastic escalation in the subcontinent (Saraswat, 2025).

Some respondents, however, voiced skepticism, implying that Pakistan's security posture would only slightly or not at all alter as a result of the deal. Several delegates expressed concern about the potential strategic costs and implications to regional security. These included the possibility of Pakistan being entangled in new regional wars on top of its existing security challenges with Afghanistan and India.

*Table 3: Impact of Pakistan–Saudi defense agreement influence Pakistan's national security strategy in the coming years*

Theme	Responses	Percentage
Significant / substantial impact on national security strategy	It will influence the national security strategy a great deal. It's a paradigm shift Pakistan shall leverage security strategy in the Middle East	28.6%
Limited or no significant impact	Very little Don't think there will be a big impact Don't see much of change No significant impact	28.6%



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Theme	Responses	Percentage
Increased strategic engagement / burden	It will have significant impact as the engagement horizon has increased while being already strategically placed in very active zone. So, it's an added burden too.	7.1%
Potential negative or conflict-related implications	Either it will not make any difference, or it can negatively impact the strategies by putting strain on foreign policy, thus leading to more conflicts.	7.1%
Regional security risks and multi-front involvement	With the Middle East crisis in the aftermath of US-Iran war, Pakistan may find itself involved on another front when it's engaged with Afghanistan and India already.	7.1%
Defense capability and production enhancement	It will increase our defense production and national defense capability against India and Afghanistan.	7.1%
Shift beyond India-centric security strategy	It will enhance it beyond Indian centric while syncing with the KSA defense strategy as well.	7.1%
Continuation of existing commitments	Not much. We had already been committed to defend the holy sites in Saudi Arabia before signing this agreement.	7.1%

The analysis of whether the SMDA primarily intended as a deterrent framework, or could it realistically lead to direct military involvement of either country in defense of the other during a conflict, the results revealed that the agreement could lead to direct military involvement during a major conflict (33.3%) followed by the arrangement that it is likely to involve military cooperation without direct combat involvement while others suggested that it is too early to determine (23.8%). As per 19.1% participants, it is primarily a deterrent arrangement. According to Dossani (2025), it is uncertain that the agreement actually specifies nuclear deterrence. Although another source suggest that the agreement does not provide any nuclear umbrella to Saudi Arabia as it is India-centric with no wider ambitions and the policy does not seem to change (Sultan, 2025).

Regarding potential risks or strategic challenges that can rise for Pakistan under this defense partnership, participants highlighted that there would be greater pressure to become involved in regional conflicts (81%). There are similar reports by Al Jazeera (2026). There can be strain on Pakistan foreign policy balance (57.1%). Out of total, 33.3% stressed that there will be economic or military commitments burden. Husain (2026) also supports this assertion. According to FPCCI (2025), there might be fiscal pressure on Pakistan if protection of Saudi interests is forced but there are obvious strategic gains. Some respondents predicted rising regional tensions (33.3%). However, 14.3% of the participants stated that no substantial risks were anticipated. Overall, the results direct that though the pact offers strategic benefits, it can also cause foreign policy along with regional safety concerns to Pakistan.

The current scenario seems to be in accordance with the results suggesting that Pakistan's direct military involvement is possible in case of major conflict as it has been witnessed that following the Irani's strike on the energy infrastructure leading to the death of a Saudi national, Pakistan has deployed fighter jets and armed forces to Saudi Arabia to increase its security as part of the agreement (Reuters, 2026).

According to the findings, the strategic aspect most likely to be affected by the Pakistan and Saudi defense cooperation is Pakistan's place in Middle East's security architecture,



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as highlighted by 71.4% of the participants. A significant percentage of participants (38.1%) mentioned the possible influence on regional deterrence and security balance. The participants also anticipated likely consequences for military business collaboration as well as technology transfer (23.8%). Only 4.8% participants prioritized intelligence and security cooperation frameworks. However, 14.3% of respondents did not expect any considerable strategic consequences (Figure 5). The Policy Advisory Board FPCCI (2025) affirms that SMDA can be considered as part of bigger integration of defense cooperations, investments, trade corridors that would strengthen both countries and lead to long-term stability.

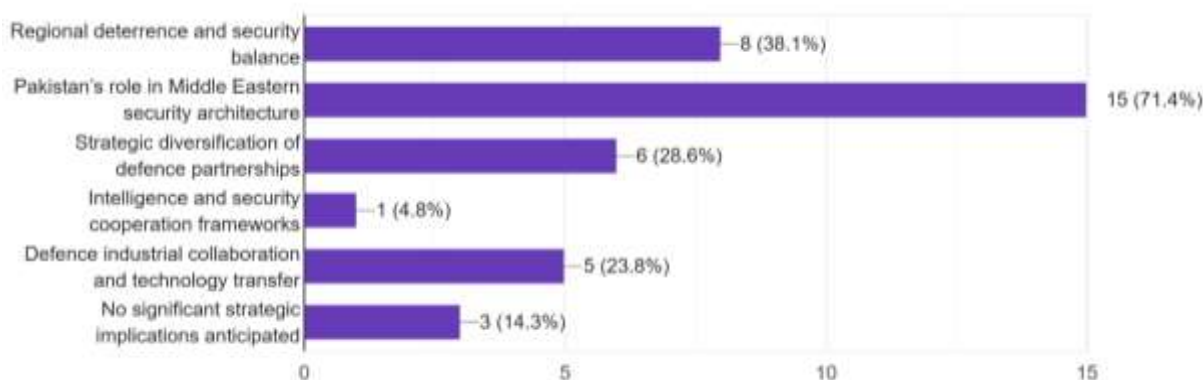


Figure 5: Strategic dimension likely to be influenced by Pak-Saudi defense partnership

### Foreign Policy Implications

Regarding the effect on Pakistan's foreign policy autonomy due to closer cooperation with Saudi Arabia, 28.6% participants suggested that there will be a significant or moderate affect while 19% stressed that the cooperation will have slight affect.

Regarding the escalation involving USA and Iran and the rising tensions in Gulf region, Pakistan's strategic role was evaluated by the respondents. The responses showed that the increasing tensions between the United States, Iran, and the Gulf region have complicated the implications for defense cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Some respondents were concerned about the consequences for Pakistan, which might get drawn into a conflict in the region or might be affected by the strategic interests of the United States, Iran, and the Gulf region. The problem of dealing with Iran and Saudi Arabia at the same time was also highlighted. However, some respondents were of the opinion that Pakistan might remain neutral, while the changes might have little effect on Pakistan. However, few respondents suggested that Pakistan might open diplomatic dialogue with both parties to resolve the tensions in the region. The reports regarding the recent arrival of Iranian delegation to Islamabad regarding peace negotiations (Javaid, 2026) strengthens these assertions.

As per the current situation the cooperation under subject might influence Pakistan's diplomatic relations with regional and global powers. It was suggested that intensifying regional tensions might force Pakistan into a difficult situation, needing a vigilant assessment of ties with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other regional powers. A number of respondents pointed out the likelihood of constrained foreign policy autonomy and more problems in upholding impartiality.

### Regional Security Dynamics

There were mixed perceptions about how the defense agreement could impact regional security in the Middle East and South Asia. The defense agreement might have



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significant strategic impacts on regional security, possibly enhancing the national power of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, providing greater deterrence, and creating a balance of power in the region. The agreement may also have an impact on Pakistan's foreign policy and could encourage other nations to enter similar defensive alliances, as argued by some of the participants. The impact could be limited or unknown, and some were even concerned that it could overstretch Pakistan's security capabilities.

The SMDA can impact the ties between Pakistan and India. The study found that there are chances that Pakistan and India might portray themselves as dependable defense allies for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, while others claimed that the deal may boost Pakistan's strategic position through Saudi Arabia's assistance and collaboration with partners such as China. Several participants suggested that Saudi influence may assist to prevent an escalation between Pakistan and India, while others noted that the deal may have little or no substantial impact on India's policy. Some also anticipated the risk of Iran moving closer to India, or that Pakistan's reserves may become overextended, thereby changing its strategic stance toward India. Overall, opinions differ on the degree to which the deal would affect Pakistan-India dynamics, while it could also impact regional alliances and strategic considerations. Although India's foreign secretary called it "grave misstep" by Saudi Arabia and warn it as a serious implication for national security of India (Biswas, 2025). Moreover, although the Saudi Arabia and India's relationship have improved in recent years but it can be inferred after the agreement that in case of any future conflict Saudi Arabia will show solidarity with Pakistan – may not be in military terms but in spirit (Jalil, 2025). As per FPCCI (2025), this agreement sent the message to the rogue states (India and Israel) that any state terrorism and aggression will not be feasible any longer and the agreement can be considered is anticipated to assure that aforesaid rogue countries are effectively discouraged by forcing them to forego their combative goals.

The majority (61.9%) had the opinion that Saudi-Pakistan cooperation will lead to new strategic alliances and counter alliances in the region. According to 38.1% of the participants, it may happen while none of the respondents negated it. According to the reports, the SMDA can lead to rebranding of native strategic coherence (Siddiqui et al., 2025).

### **Future Prospects**

The results indicate that future collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia will most likely include increased defense manufacturing, military hardware supply, technology transfer, and combined military training, as well as improved information sharing and military-to-military interaction. It is also reported by The Economy (2025) that Pakistan's export to Saudi-Arabia can be extended for the benefit of industries such as information technology, husbandry and textile. Some respondents also mentioned the possibility of economic cooperation and support, while others speculated that the collaboration may impact Pakistan's foreign policy position in regional disputes.

While describing the measures that Pakistan should adopt to maximize the benefits from this cooperation, the participants emphasized the need of ensuring economic assistance, attracting foreign direct investment, and increasing exports, as well as improving defense manufacturing infrastructure and technical collaboration. Siddiqui et al. (2025) also recommended collaboration in defense technology and privatization of bilateral defense mechanism. Some delegates emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation in commerce, personnel, and economic involvement, as well as maintaining frequent diplomatic collaboration and consultations with Saudi Arabia. Others argued that

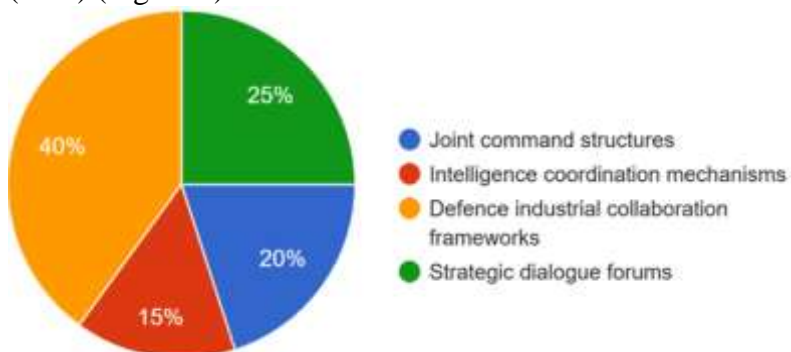


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Pakistan should maintain diplomatic balance while protecting its national interests, and look for ways to widen the cooperation by involving other regional allies such as GCC nations, Turkey, and Central Asian countries.

These responses show that Pakistan must adopt a balanced and cautious policy in addressing any potential strategic threats emanating from this alliance. Some respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining diplomatic stability and good diplomacy, especially in assuring neighboring countries such as Iran that this alliance is not against them. However, given the current scenario the cooperation has been put to test nobody had imagined (Al Jazeera, 2026). It is recommended that Pakistan should act as a mediator between Iran and Saudi-Arabia (Hashim, 2026). Some answers from the delegates recommended that Pakistan must not get involved in internal affairs in Gulf countries and must be cautious about being drawn into crises in the Middle East, but must maintain its current strategy for strategic balancing.

Regarding the institutional mechanisms necessary to effectively operationalize the SMDA, the participants suggested that Defense industrial cooperation (40%) is required for the effective operation of SMDA, in addition to developing strategic dialogue forums (25%) (Figure 6).



*Figure 6: Institutional mechanisms necessary to effectively operationalize the SMDA*

Some participants recommended that Pakistan must prioritize its own interests, strengthen internal security and economic stability, and must not get involved in sectarian conflicts or regional rivalry.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the formal defense cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is a significant move in the developing relations between the two countries in matters of security. According to the study, the agreement has been perceived to be a strategic alliance that may have positive effects on the defense diplomacy of Pakistan, its position in the Middle East, and the avenues may arise to other opportunities in military training, technology, and defense manufacturing. However, other strategic issues were identified in the study, including the need to strike a delicate balance in the foreign policy of Pakistan, especially in its relations with Iran and other countries in the region. While the agreement has the potential to contribute to regional deterrence and improve the strategic position of Pakistan, there are possibilities of conflicts and other alliances that may arise. The success of the alliance will depend on the ability of Pakistan to maximize the economic and strategic benefits while taking prudent steps to address the possible risks.



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### RECOMMENDATIONS

Pakistan must clarify whether the nuclear umbrella extends to the protection of Saudi Arabia as due to the secrecy of the deal document, this area remains unclear. Such ambiguity creates escalation risks and invites miscalculation by regional rivals. Hence, Pakistan should issue a formal, unambiguous public position on the matter.

In order to extend the cooperation beyond what is seen as a “political signal of solidarity and strategic cooperation”, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia should establish joint operational committees, an emergency hotline, and permanent bilateral defense offices with a defined chain of command for implementation of the pact.

Pakistan should further use the pact to fast-track investment agreements, already committed by Gulf nations and Saudi Arabia, in the energy, infrastructure and technology sector. This will convert strategic cooperation into economic stabilization and growth for Pakistan.

If the pact is seen by Iran as a nuclear capability indirectly protecting Saudi Arabia, it may regain interest in pursuing its nuclear program for defense capabilities. Since Pakistan enjoys cordial relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, it should utilize back-channel diplomacy to offset such apprehensions of Iran.

The pact remains shrouded in secrecy. In order to build public legitimacy, prevent speculations about the nuclear dimension, and stop adversaries from exploiting the ambiguity, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia may consider publishing a public version of the pact.

Saudi Arabia is planning to build its own defense production capabilities in the future. This serves as an opportunity for Pakistan’s defense industry – including JF 17 aircrafts, Al-Khalid tanks, and missile systems – to find a major market immediately and co-production partner in future, strengthening both bilateral ties and Pakistan’s defense export.

Pakistan should develop a coherent multi-alignment doctrine — deepening ties with both China and Gulf states — without crossing thresholds that trigger punitive responses from Washington or compromise access to Western financial institutions like the IMF.

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