



Gulf Research Center

Knowledge for All



The Evolution of Saudi-Pakistani Security and Military Relations

From Bilateral Cooperation to the Engineering of New Balances in the Gulf and South Asia

Dr. Abdulaziz Sager

Founder & Chairman of the Gulf Research Center (GRC)



@Gulf_Research Gulfresearchcenter gulfresearchcenter gulfresearchcenter

Saudi-Pakistani relations are a model of deep-rooted strategic ties, having developed in successive stages from the mid-20th century to the present day to encompass political, economic, security, and military dimensions. The historical context of this partnership can be traced as follows:

1. The Founding Phase (1947–1960)

Saudi Arabia was one of the first countries to recognize the independent state of Pakistan, extending political and moral support in international forums. From the outset, the relationship was linked to a shared Islamic identity, with Pakistani leaders viewing Saudi Arabia as the guardian of the Islamic world. The first phase saw diplomatic and economic cooperation that paved the way for subsequent security convergence in the face of early regional challenges.

2. Deepening Cooperation (1960–1979)

With regional threats escalating, especially following the India–Pakistan wars, Saudi Arabia deepened its military cooperation with Islamabad. Pakistani military experts participated in training Saudi forces, particularly in the areas of aviation and air defense. A defense cooperation agreement was signed in 1967, which established the exchange of military personnel and laid the institutional foundation for defense cooperation.



Introduction

Security and military relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are key strategic pillars of their alliance network. These ties originated in the wake of Pakistan's independence in 1947, when the Kingdom was quick to recognize it and extend political and economic support. This relationship was not circumstantial but developed over decades into a partnership based on shared Islamic identity, mutual interests, and common regional challenges. With the signing of the Strategic Defense Agreement in 2025, relations are expected to enter a new phase—one that could redefine the concept of Islamic collective security within a balanced framework, encompassing deterrence, mutual dependence, and geopolitical flexibility. This paper examines the details that have been revealed about the agreement, as well as its merits and future implications, by tracing the historical trajectory of Saudi-Pakistani relations, and the history of joint security and military agreements and maneuvers.



Pakistan's role was highlighted during the occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, when Pakistani special forces helped restore control, thereby strengthening political and security trust between the two countries.

3. Strategic Partnership Phase (1980–2001)

The 1980s was a golden decade for defense cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq War led to the institutionalization of cooperation through the 1982 Joint Defense Protocol, which resulted in the establishment of the Saudi-Pakistani Armed Forces Organization (SPAFO). More than 20,000 Pakistani soldiers were stationed in the Kingdom, mainly in Tabuk and the Eastern Province, for training and operational roles. At Riyadh's request, Pakistan also deployed more than 11,000 soldiers to safeguard its borders and holy sites during the Gulf War (1990–1991). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan economically in the face of Western sanctions following its 1988 nuclear tests, supplying it with oil at preferential prices.

4. The Counterterrorism Phase (2001–2010)

Following the events of September 11, 2001, counterterrorism emerged as a key pillar of bilateral relations, through intelligence sharing, security training, and countering al-Qaeda and other similar organizations. The Pakistani military also continued to send advisers to the Kingdom to enhance border security and protect vital installations.

5. Regional Alliances Phase (2011–present)

Pakistan joined the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, which was announced in Riyadh in 2015. Pakistani General Raheel Sharif took command of the Islamic coalition in 2017, signaling Saudi confidence in Pakistan's capabilities.

Although the Pakistani parliament refused to send troops to fight in Yemen, the two countries continued their security coordination and joint training exercises. Saudi and Pakistani forces participated in multiple exercises such as Samsam, Naseem al-Bahr, and Aman, laying the foundation for a joint operational culture.

Notable Joint Exercises and Training		
Exercise	Type	Location
Al-Sumsam	Land/Special Forces	Saudi Arabia/Pakistan
Naseem Al-Bahr	Naval	Saudi Arabia/Pakistan
Aman	Naval	Saudi Arabia/Pakistan
Al-Kasah	Land	Saudi Arabia/Pakistan
Coastal Confrontation	Naval	Saudi Arabia/Pakistan



The Institutional Structure of Joint Security and Military Agreements



The security and military cooperation system between Riyadh and Islamabad includes a set of supporting agreements, most notably:

- Treaty of Friendship
- Air Services Agreement
- Extradition Agreement
- Defense Cooperation Protocol/Defense Agreement
- Scientific and Technological Cooperation Agreement
- Technical and Vocational Training Agreement
- Strategic Agreement on Joint Defense (2025)

These agreements function as an interconnected system covering traditional security, air defense, maritime cooperation, countering unmanned aerial vehicles, joint training, and the development of defense industries.

The Key to Growing Security and Military Relations

Saudi diplomacy also helped defuse a conflict that was escalating over the disputed region of Kashmir. The year 2025 saw the culmination of this process with the signing of a joint strategic defense agreement, which stipulated that any attack on one party would be considered an attack on the other. This confirmed the transition of the relationship from defensive coordination to a joint deterrence alliance, with continued Saudi economic support for Pakistan through concessional loans and oil supplies, reinforcing the integrated nature of the partnership.

The key behind the strength of Saudi-Pakistani relations lies in the convergence of their strategic interests across multiple domains. Saudi Arabia has found in Pakistan a reliable military and nuclear power of strategic weight in South Asia—one capable of contributing to regional balance and deterrence. Conversely, Pakistan has found in Saudi Arabia an economic and political partner that provides financial support, energy resources, and diplomatic cover in international forums. The shared Islamic dimension was also evident in Saudi Arabia's leadership of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, headed by a retired Pakistani commander, giving the relationship a broader dimension that transcends bilateral ties.

Thus, it can be said that the basis to the growth of these relations lies in the intertwining of religion, politics, security, and economics. Saudi Arabia represents the spiritual and economic foundation,





The agreement does not translate into a nuclear umbrella, as Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is primarily directed towards India, while Saudi Arabia is committed to a policy of nuclear non-proliferation and the development of conventional and missile deterrence



while Pakistan serves as the military arm with nuclear capability. The fusion of these two dimensions has given rise to a unique strategic alliance that goes beyond the framework of traditional cooperation and is poised to further expand in response to emerging regional and international challenges.

Reading the Strategic Defense Agreement (2025)

The Saudi-Pakistani defense agreement of 2025 represents a strategic shift in regional security architecture. But it is not a military alliance in the same sense as NATO. Rather, it is a flexible deterrence agreement based on interoperability and defense integration without entanglement in foreign wars.

1. At the Gulf level

The agreement may be a direct response to the dual attacks on Qatar, in which Iran and Israel participated. These attacks revealed the limits of

absolute reliance on the US security umbrella and could further push the GCC countries to diversify their defense partnerships. In this context, the alliance with Pakistan serves as a defensive insurance policy that promotes self-reliance and expands partnerships to fill gaps in operational, training, and skill capabilities in modern defense technologies. It does so without compromising US interests, expressing complementarity rather than substitution for the US partnership.

2. In South Asia

The agreement does not translate into a nuclear umbrella, as Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is primarily directed towards India, while Saudi Arabia is committed to a policy of nuclear non-proliferation and the development of conventional and missile deterrence. The practical dimensions of the agreement focus on readiness, air defense, maritime security, countering drones, and the exchange of operational expertise. In addition, the agreement sends a message to New Delhi that Riyadh is seeking regional stability rather than alignment, aiming to protect its economic interests with India while avoiding direct involvement in the Pakistan-India conflict.

Strategic Implications and New Balances

1. Calculated deterrence without escalation: The agreement reinforces regional deterrence and encourages the Gulf states to diversify their defense partnerships, as this diversification raises the cost of aggression against any Gulf state without dragging the region into complex formal alliances.



2. Sharing the defense burden: Saudi-Pakistani cooperation fills gaps in manpower, training, air defense, and logistics, reducing complete dependence on Western forces.
3. Strategic flexibility: Saudi Arabia maintains its balance between Washington and Beijing, while Pakistan balances its ties to China with its openness to the Gulf, creating a network of intersecting interests.
4. Enhancing Gulf self-security: The agreement reframes the concept of collective defense in the Gulf on Islamic and Asian foundations, not just Western ones.
5. Calculated strategic independence: The agreement enables Riyadh to maintain its growing economic relations with India while keeping a safe distance from regional tensions, contributing to a more stable and pragmatic foreign policy.

Challenges to the Continuity of Saudi-Pakistani Security and Military Relations

Despite the depth of Saudi-Pakistani relations, their continuity faces some challenges that may affect their momentum, most notably:

1. The balance between divergent international alliances: Pakistan is linked to China, while Saudi Arabia seeks to diversify its partnerships between the West and the East.
2. Pakistan's internal economic and political

situation and the accompanying volatility that may limit its foreign commitments.

3. Differing security priorities: Saudi Arabia focuses on Gulf security, while Pakistan is preoccupied with India and Afghanistan.
4. Sensitivity towards Riyadh's growing relations with India and the apprehension this may provoke in Islamabad.
5. Parliamentary restrictions and Pakistani public opinion on sending troops to participate in foreign conflicts.

The Future of Saudi-Pakistani Security and Military Relations

The future of Saudi-Pakistani relations is heading into a more mature and sustainable phase, transcending the traditional nature of military cooperation to a comprehensive strategic partnership that extends to security, defense, military industries, and advanced technology.

With the signing of the 2025 Strategic Defense Agreement, the relationship is moving from bilateral coordination to an institutional defense alliance grounded in the principles of collective security and deterrence of regional threats. This development opens the door to the establishment of an integrated security architecture in the region—one that leverages Pakistan's military capabilities and Saudi Arabia's growing technical expertise. Although some observers question its full practical applicability for various reasons, the agreement nonetheless represents a qualitative

development in the framework of Islamic defense cooperation. Its gradual implementation through joint coordination and planning mechanisms establishes a flexible structure that enhances deterrence and enshrines the concept of collective security, without compromising the national sovereignty of either party.

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan also seek to localize defense industries and exchange knowledge in the fields of military manufacturing, unmanned aerial vehicles, and smart systems, thereby enhancing self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on external suppliers. In this context, Saudi-Pakistani companies are expected to be established to design and produce defense equipment and train national cadres. At the regional level, the Saudi-Pakistani alliance is likely to play an increasingly important role in maintaining stability in the Gulf and South Asia, especially given escalating terrorist threats and cross-border challenges.

In connection to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, defense cooperation with Pakistan could serve as a successful model for integrating investment and security into a single system that advances shared interests. It also lays the groundwork for a balanced Islamic alliance combining Saudi economic depth with Pakistani military capabilities, making this alliance one of the most important pillars of security and stability in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Conclusion

The historical trajectory and strategic analysis of Saudi-Pakistani relations show that the alliance has evolved from a bilateral cooperation, to a cornerstone of emerging security systems, reinforced by religious dimensions and a shared Islamic identity--perhaps even the nucleus of a joint Islamic peacekeeping alliance. The 2025 Strategic Defense Agreement doubles capabilities, promotes self-reliance, and establishes diverse defense partnerships in the face of a rapidly changing global order. While the United States remains the primary security partner for Saudi Arabia, cooperation with Pakistan introduces a new model of calculated deterrence and intelligent integration, positioning this alliance as a potential paradigm for regional security in the 21st century.



Gulf Research Center
Knowledge for All



مركز الخليج للأبحاث
المعرفة للجميع



**Gulf Research Center
Jeddah
(Main office)**

19 Rayat Alitihad Street
P.O. Box 2134
Jeddah 21451
Saudi Arabia
Tel: +966 12 6511999
Fax: +966 12 6531375
Email: info@grc.net



**Gulf Research Center
Riyadh**

Unit FN11A
King Faisal Foundation
North Tower
King Fahd Branch Rd
Al Olaya Riyadh 12212
Saudi Arabia
Tel: +966 112112567
Email: info@grc.net



**Gulf Research Center
Foundation**

Avenue de France 23
1202 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel: +41227162730
Email: info@grc.net



**Gulf Research Centre
Cambridge**

University of Cambridge
Sidgwick Avenue,
Cambridge CB3 9DA
United Kingdom
Tel: +44-1223-760758
Fax: +44-1223-335110



**Gulf Research Center
Foundation Brussels**

4th Floor
Avenue de
Cortenbergh 89
1000 Brussels
Belgium
grcb@grc.net
+32 2 251 41 64



@Gulf_Research Gulfresearchcenter gulfresearchcenter gulfresearchcenter

www.grc.net

مركز الخليج للأبحاث
المعرفة للجميع