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Israel's Attack on Doha:
Qatar's U.S. Shield and Saudi
Arabia's Turn to Pakistan

By
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23 October 2025

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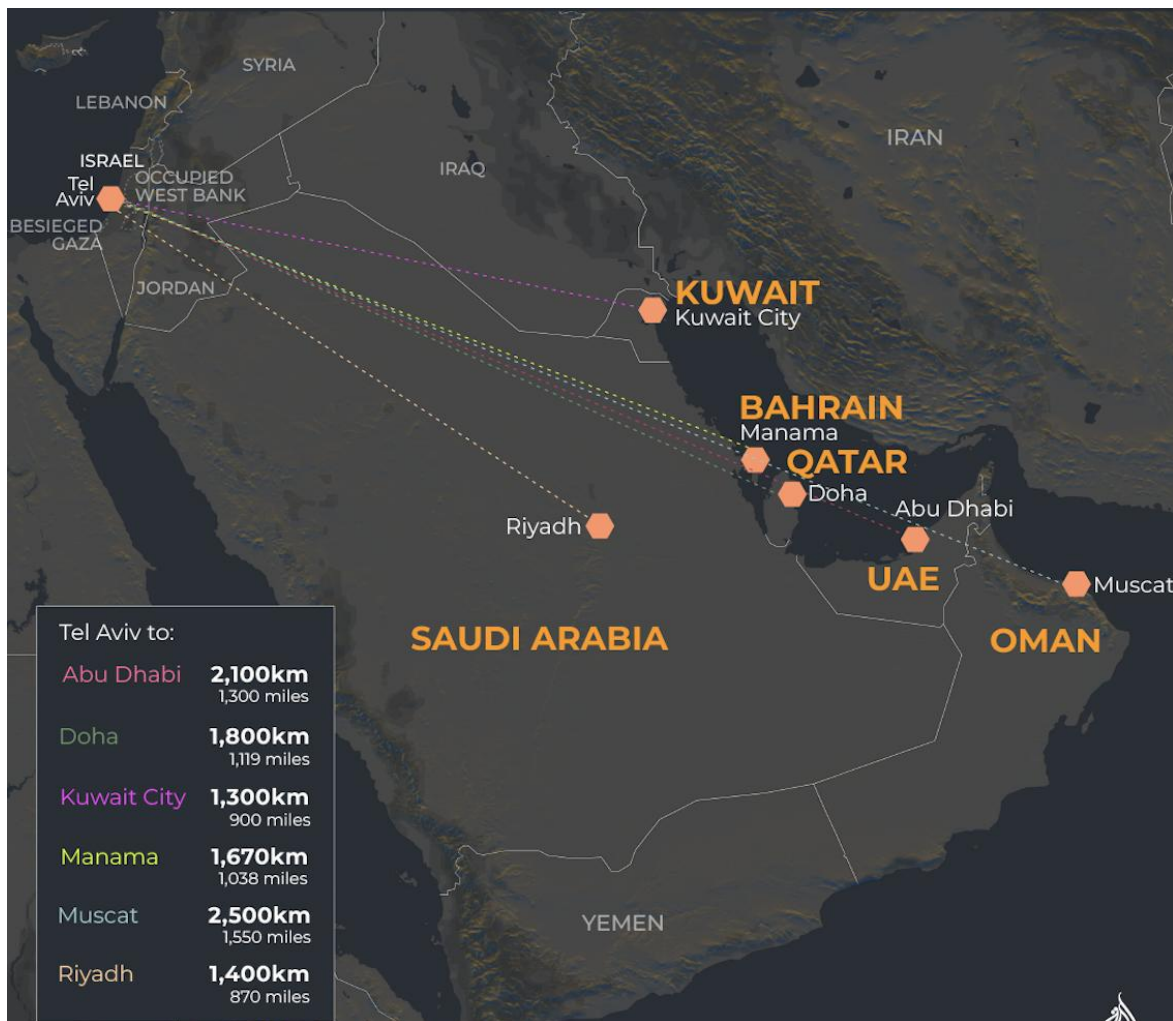
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Executive Summary

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- ✦ Israel's strike on Doha (Sept 9, 2025) targeted a Hamas delegation, violating Qatari sovereignty and exposing the limits of U.S. deterrence.
- ✦ Washington's response came through an executive order granting Qatar a "NATO Article 5-style" defense guarantee; a strong but legally ambiguous commitment.
- ✦ Saudi Arabia responded by signing a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement with Pakistan (Sept 17, 2025), signalling a shift toward regional and non-Western security partnerships.
- ✦ The pact introduces a new deterrence layer, leveraging Pakistan's military and nuclear capabilities.
- ✦ These developments mark a turning point in Gulf security, from U.S.-dependent defense to strategic diversification and regional autonomy.

Key Picture: Proximity Between Israel and GCC States



Source: [The Military Balance 2024, on Al Jazeera](#)

1. Israel's Attack on Doha

On September 9, Israel conducted airstrikes on Qatar, targeting a Hamas delegation that was part of the ceasefire negotiations at the time¹. The attack occurred in parallel with a full assault on Gaza, adding Qatar to the list of 6 countries Israel has bombed this year.

Multiple countries condemned the attack as it is a violation of international law and Qatar's sovereignty. The attack targeted a Hamas office located in a residential district that also hosts embassies, schools, supermarkets, and housing compounds².

However, Israel miscalculated as the Hamas delegation was not present on the site; six others were killed instead.

1.2 Gulf Crisis

The attack was an alarm for the Six Gulf monarchies. Qatar is a major non-NATO ally; it is home to Al-Udeid Air Base which hosts the US 9th Air force and the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command³. So, for the country to get attacked with no warning from its Western Ally (The US) with apparent impunity, it means that no one was safe from Israel's convictions. It is worth noting that Hamas's office in Qatar is legal and was opened after a request from the United States back in 2012⁴.

It became obvious that there is a strategic imbalance where Israel could act unilaterally, even against countries considered essential to US regional operations. A line blurred between ally and target, bringing up questions about whether dependency on Western (or foreign) powers for security has made them more insecure.

2. Washington's Response

The white house faced immense pressure to reinstate and confirm their position; especially that their defense promises remain in place. The US responded with an even stronger defense commitment described to be as effective as a "NATO Article 5-style" guarantee. The U.S. Executive Order stipulates that any armed attack on Qatar's territory, sovereignty, or critical infrastructure will be regarded as a threat to U.S. peace and security, prompting "all lawful and appropriate measures—including diplomatic, economic, and, if necessary, military" action⁵. This act of assurance is distinct from mere deterrence: whereas deterrence seeks to influence an adversary's decision-making, assurance seeks to influence the ally's perception of protection⁶.

Yet, this order was an executive one rather than a Senate-ratified treaty, its binding nature under the U.S constitution and international law remains vague⁷. Whereas past U.S mutual defense commitments have involved congressional oversight. This is concerning for Qatar because it undermines one of the core pillars of deterrence, if adversaries question the reliability of the commitment (because its legal status is unclear), the deterrent effect is weakened. The reassurance component remains incomplete if the partner (the U.S.) might claim flexibility or escape mechanisms.

Furthermore, the order states that prior U.S. designation of Qatar as a "major non-NATO ally" did not guarantee defence in the event of attack; this new order significantly deepens the commitment, but it does so selectively.

Other Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, have long sought similar guarantees. The question then arises: why Qatar and not others?

3. Saudi Arabia's Turn to Pakistan

The credibility of U.S. security assurances in the Gulf has been fading for years, a trend that became clearer for Saudi Arabia after the 2019 attacks on Saudi Aramco's facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais⁸. For Gulf states, it was a reminder that American protection had limits. And after The Israeli strike on Qatar, there was a general sense that the U.S. either failed to prevent or tacitly allowed the operation. The U. S's upgraded defense commitments did little to change these perceptions.⁹

Since 2017, Doha has sought to balance its reliance on the U.S. by hosting a Turkish base alongside Al-Udeid¹⁰. The reality is that dependency on U.S. power remains central, but diversification became a strategic necessity.

The Saudi–Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement was signed on September 17, 2025¹¹. It commits both countries to cooperate in the event of external aggression and expands joint efforts in intelligence, training, and defense production.

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The pact shows a major shift in the regional security structure of the region. For decades, Saudi Arabia’s defense strategy revolved around reliance on U.S. protection and weapon imports. The move towards Pakistan is rooted in Islamic and regional partnership rather than Western dependency. After all, in a multipolar world, protective umbrella’s must be diversified, not assumed.

The two countries share decades of military cooperation and political alignment. Since the late 1970s, Pakistani officers have been embedded in Saudi forces, providing training and operational expertise¹². Saudi Arabia, in turn, has long been one of Pakistan’s main financial backers, especially during periods of economic crisis¹³. Many analysts and news reporting linked this as a direct result to the Doha attack, but correlation does not equal causation. Deals of this kind are rarely formed overnight. Negotiations between Riyadh and Islamabad had been ongoing for months, the strike on Qatar only offered new urgency and political weight¹⁴.

The agreement goes beyond symbolic promises, it established mechanisms for joint defense coordination, intelligence sharing, and counterterrorism cooperation. By including provisions for joint military exercises and logistical access to bases, the pact becomes an additional deterrence layer. Many other details remain classified, and the announcement does not specifically mention nuclear cooperation, however the underlying logic of “extended deterrence” is clear¹⁵. Pakistan’s possession of nuclear weapons adds a hidden deterrent value that shifts regional calculations, particularly in the context of Iran’s capabilities and Israel’s unpredictability.

4. Conclusion

The pact introduced a new variable into the Gulf’s security equation. Saudi Arabia has been hedging for years whether through deepening economic ties with China, acquiring Turkish drones, and now sealing a comprehensive defense pact with Pakistan that covers all major military domains¹⁶. For the U.S, it raises questions about the viability of its influence in a region where partners are hedging.

As for Iran, it introduces a more complex deterrent environment, one where Saudi retaliation could involve coordination with a nuclear-capable partner. Still, one day before the pact’s announcement, Iran’s Supreme Security Council secretary’s visited Riyadh showing that dialogue remains possible. Iran may now weigh diplomacy as a way to manage the emerging bloc rather than confrontation.

For smaller Gulf states, it sets a precedent: collective defense does not need to depend solely on Western backing. It could serve as a blueprint for a broader security architecture that links Gulf, South Asian, and East Asian powers.

The Saudi–Pakistan defense pact does not replace U.S. reliability, while Washington remains central to Gulf security, it redefined how Gulf states think about security itself. In today’s environment, survival depends on diversification, deterrence, and autonomy, not on the assumption of American intervention. Israel’s strike on Doha did not cause this shift, but it made it visible. What follows may be a new era of strategic pluralism in which Gulf security is not guaranteed by one power, but negotiated among many.

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