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**The Saudi-Pakistan Defense Pact
and Its Implications for West Asia**

By

Gulf State Analytics



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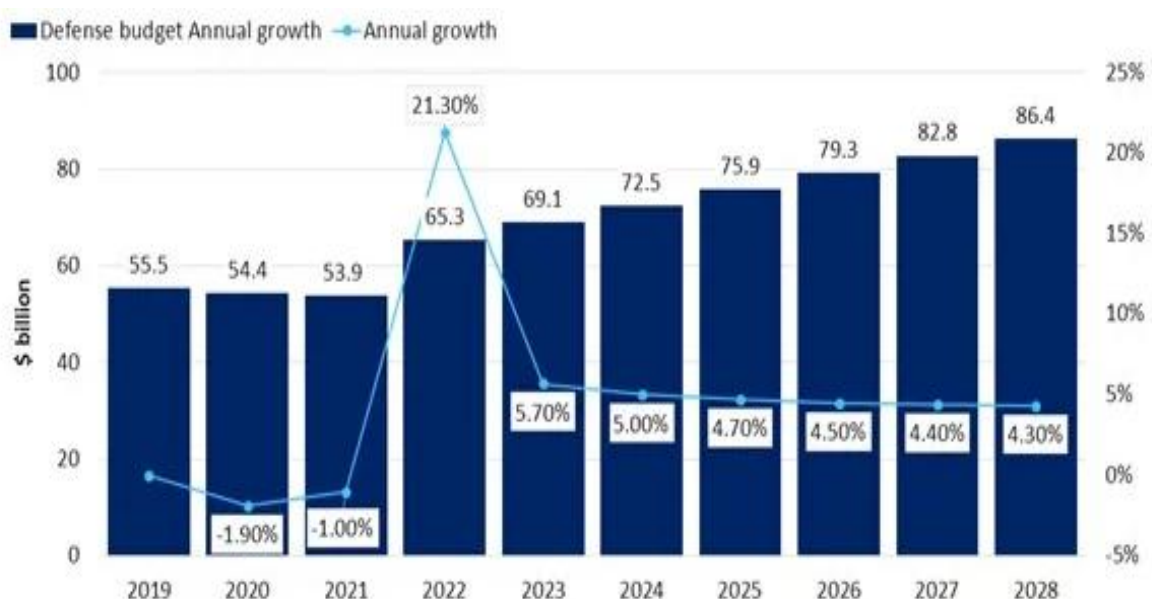
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Executive Summary

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- ✦ Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) reflects Riyadh's effort to diversify its security partnerships amid doubts about long-term U.S. commitment, without cutting ties to Washington.
- ✦ Signed in September 2025, the SMDA obliges both countries to treat aggression against one as aggression against both, encompassing "all military means," potentially including Pakistan's nuclear umbrella.
- ✦ The pact builds on a decades-long defense relationship dating back to the 1951 Treaty of Friendship and Pakistan's military support to Saudi Arabia since the 1980s.
- ✦ Pakistani troops have defended Saudi territory and holy sites, while Saudi Arabia has supported Pakistan economically, especially during crises, reinforcing a mutually beneficial alliance.
- ✦ The pact's finalization plays out against the backdrop of the geopolitical fallout from Israel's September 2025 strike on Hamas in Doha, which undermined Gulf trust in the U.S. security umbrella.
- ✦ Riyadh's deepening reliance on Islamabad, especially for nuclear deterrence, marks a shift toward broader defense diversification in an increasingly unpredictable regional landscape.
- ✦ While the SMDA boosts Saudi defense posture vis-à-vis Iran, current détente and Pakistan's growing ties with Tehran suggest the pact won't destabilise Iranian-Pakistani relations—for now.
- ✦ India is monitoring the agreement closely, wary of its implications, while Pakistan likely hopes to leverage the pact to gain greater Saudi backing in future conflicts with India.
- ✦ The SMDA serves as both a symbol of enduring Saudi-Pakistani ties and a broader barometer of shifting power dynamics and alliance structures across West Asia and the Gulf.

Key Picture: Saudi Arabia's Total Defense Budget (\$ Billion) and Growth Rate (%), 2019-28 (Projection)



Source: [Ministry of Finance, Saudi Arabia, and GlobalData Intelligence \(2023\)](#)

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1. Background

The recently signed Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan marks a key development in West Asia's evolving security landscape. Against rising geopolitical volatility and doubts over the U.S.'s long-term Gulf commitment, the accord reflects Riyadh's effort to diversify security partnerships beyond Washington without severing their historic ties. Rather than a pivot, the SMDA signals a recalibration, underscoring Saudi Arabia's intent to bolster its defense amid a shifting international order.

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Signed during Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's September visit to Saudi Arabia, the SMDA commits both countries to regard aggression against one as aggression against both. It aims to enhance bilateral defense cooperation and joint deterrence, encompassing "all military means."¹ Pakistani officials have notably affirmed that their nuclear capabilities could support Saudi security if needed, underscoring the pact's far-reaching geopolitical implications.²

2. Historical Foundations: Decades of Saudi-Pakistani Defense Cooperation

Saudi-Pakistan defense cooperation rests on a decades-old "special relationship."³ It began with the 1951 Treaty of Friendship and deepened in 1982, three years after Iran's Shah fell, with an agreement allowing Pakistani troops to train and advise in Saudi Arabia.⁴

At various points since then, over 10,000 Pakistani troops have been deployed in the Kingdom, contributing significantly to the defense of Saudi territory and Islamic holy sites.⁵ Their presence was particularly consequential during the 1990–91 Gulf crisis, when fears of a potential Iraqi incursion following the invasion of Kuwait prompted Riyadh to reinforce its security posture. In return, Saudi Arabia has consistently extended generous financial assistance to Pakistan—including oil shipments and loans—especially during periods of acute economic distress, underscoring the reciprocal nature of their strategic partnership.

However, Saudi Arabia was unable to secure Pakistan's participation in its military coalition against Yemen's Houthi movement following the rebel group's capture of Sana'a and other key territories in 2014. Despite longstanding defense ties, Islamabad opted to distance itself from the conflict, with the Pakistani parliament passing a resolution affirming the country's neutrality.⁶ That decision exposed the limitations of the bilateral relationship at the time, particularly in the context of Riyadh's regional military engagements. With the recent signing of the SMDA, however, Saudi Arabia is now significantly better positioned to rely on Pakistani support in any future contingency resembling the crisis that unfolded along its southern border in 2014/15.

3. The Geopolitical Context: Fallout from Israel's Strike on Doha

It is difficult to assess the significance of the newly signed SMDA without situating it within the broader regional fallout from Israel's 9 September 2025 strike on Doha, which targeted Hamas officials in the Qatari capital.⁷ The attack—widely viewed as a watershed moment in Gulf security dynamics—has compelled not only Qatar and Saudi Arabia, but all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member-states, to reassess longstanding assumptions about the reliability of Washington's security umbrella. These reassessments have been further intensified by multiple reports alleging some degree of U.S. complicity in the Israeli operation.

Although Saudi and Pakistani officials had already been engaged in negotiations over a defense pact prior to the strike, the timing of the SMDA's finalisation sends a clear message: Riyadh is prepared to deepen its strategic reliance on Islamabad, including potentially sheltering under Pakistan's nuclear umbrella, as part of a broader effort to diversify its defense partnerships in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape—one in which exclusive dependence on the United States no longer appears tenable.

4. The Iranian and Indian Factors

While Saudi Arabia currently perceives a diminished threat from Iran—owing to the ongoing Riyadh-Tehran détente (in place since March 2023) and the notable weakening of the Iran-led “Axis of Resistance” since 2024—the newly signed SMDA with Pakistan nonetheless serves to reinforce Riyadh’s strategic sense of security vis-à-vis Tehran. Saudi officials remain committed to sustaining the diplomatic thaw with the Islamic Republic. However, Iran’s pre-announced strike on al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar this past June sent a clear signal to all GCC states regarding Tehran’s willingness to target military installations on Gulf Arab soil. Despite this backdrop, the 12-Day War between Iran and Israel in June 2025, which fostered closer ties between Tehran and Islamabad, suggests that the Saudi-Pakistani defense pact is unlikely to adversely affect Iranian-Pakistani relations—at least in the current geopolitical climate.

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An important variable in the equation is India, which has responded to the signing of the SMDA between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan by declaring that it will study the arrangement’s security implications closely.⁸ Saudi Arabia will probably take careful measures to ensure that the deepening of its defense partnership with Pakistan does not strain its strategically important ties with India. At the same time, a key Pakistani motivation for entering into this agreement appears to be the expectation that Riyadh will adopt a more supportive stance toward Islamabad in the event of future crises with New Delhi, particularly in light of the May 2025 India–Pakistan conflict.

5. Saudi Arabia’s Pivotal Recalibration

In conclusion, this SMDA represents a pivotal recalibration of security dynamics in West Asia. Against a backdrop of heightened regional tensions and growing uncertainty over traditional defence partnerships, this agreement underscores Riyadh’s strategic imperative to diversify its relationships while maintaining close ties with Washington. Pakistan’s role as a longstanding nuclear-armed ally adds a new dimension to Saudi Arabia’s security calculus, signaling a nuanced approach to deterrence in an increasingly complex environment. As the geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, the SMDA will serve not only as a testament to enduring bilateral ties between two Sunni Muslim powers, but also as a barometer for broader regional realignments and the shifting contours of influence in the Gulf and beyond.

NOTES

¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/18/middleeast/pakistan-saudi-arabia-defense-allies-intl>

² <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-saudi-nuclear-pact-defense-e66e0ded8045812c8aea39e21d764836>

³ <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/saudi-arabia-and-pakistan-unease-and-reassurance-amid-changing-regional-realities>

⁴ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-saudi-pakistan-defense-pact-highlights-the-gulfs-evolving-strategic-calculus/>

⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-signal-and-substance-of-the-new-saudi-pakistan-defense-pact/>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32246547>

⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/10/middleeast/israel-strikes-hamas-qatar-explainer-intl-hnk>

⁸ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-saudi-pakistan-defense-pact-highlights-the-gulfs-evolving-strategic-calculus/>