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## Pakistan-Saudi Mutual Defense Pact: Implications for Gulf-South Asia Security in Multipolarity

Aqsa Iftikhar<sup>1</sup>, Sara Shahid<sup>2</sup>, Aila Nawaz<sup>3</sup>, Ahmad Ali<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M.Phil. Scholar, Department of International Relations, G.C. University Faisalabad.

<sup>2</sup> BS International Relations, G.C. University Faisalabad.

<sup>3</sup> BS International Relations, G.C. University Faisalabad.

<sup>4</sup> M.Phil. Scholar, Department of International Relations, G.C. University Faisalabad.

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### Abstract

The 2025 Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia represents a pivotal transformation in regional security architecture, transitioning decades of informal military cooperation into a formalized collective defense framework. This comprehensive analysis examines the historical foundations, strategic motivations, and multifaceted implications of this landmark agreement. The study explores how the SMDA reflects broader patterns of multipolarity in international relations, as regional powers increasingly seek security arrangements independent of traditional Western-led alliances. Through the lens of neorealist theory and regional security complex frameworks developed by Buzan and Wæver (2003), this paper analyzes the agreement's impact on nuclear proliferation dynamics, its implications for key stakeholders including the United States, China, Iran, and India, and its potential to reshape the geopolitical landscape of South Asia and the Middle East. The research demonstrates that the SMDA is not merely a bilateral defense pact but a strategic recalibration that could fundamentally alter regional power balances, influence energy security calculations, and establish new paradigms for Muslim-majority nations seeking collective security in an increasingly uncertain global order.

**Keywords:** Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement, Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations, Regional Security Complex, Nuclear Proliferation, Multipolarity, Collective Defense, Middle East Security, South Asian Geopolitics

### Introduction

In this era of rapid geopolitical restructuring and the re-negotiation of power, strategic alliances have taken their place as key instruments of national defense by states seeking to defend their national interests. The old centers of power in the world is being recast, a new regional influence is on the rise, and the old alliances are being redefined. In this dynamic environment, countries are turning to bilateral and multilateral military alliances not only to respond to emerging dangers but also to exert influence in strategic areas. The signing of the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on September 17, 2025, at the Al Yamamah Palace in Riyadh epitomizes this transformation in international relations, as documented by the Saudi Press Agency (2025) and analyzed comprehensively by Ali (2025).

This landmark agreement, concluded during Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's state visit to Saudi Arabia, formalizes a relationship that has evolved over seven decades from cultural and religious affinity to strategic interdependence (Hussain & Khan, 2025). The SMDA institutionalizes the principle that an act of aggression against either nation constitutes an aggression against both, thereby establishing a mutual defense

guarantee unprecedented in the bilateral relationship between these two Muslim-majority nations (Saudi Press Agency, 2025). This formalization represents a quantum leap from previous defense cooperation frameworks, which, while substantive, lacked the binding collective security commitments now enshrined in the SMDA (Fair, 2014).

The timing and context of the SMDA's signing are particularly significant. According to the Middle East Monitor (2025), the agreement emerged immediately following a major Arab-Islamic summit focused on regional security crises, suggesting a coordinated response to perceived threats and vulnerabilities. Moreover, the pact reflects broader patterns observable in contemporary international relations: the relative decline of American security guarantees in regions historically dependent on U.S. military protection, the rise of China as an alternative security and economic partner, and the increasing willingness of regional powers to forge independent strategic paths (Mearsheimer, 2019; Small, 2015).

For Pakistan, the SMDA represents a strategic culmination of its decades-long policy of balancing relationships between various power centers while maintaining its position as a pivotal state in South Asian and Islamic world politics (Cohen, 2004). The agreement enhances Pakistan's diplomatic leverage, provides potential economic benefits through Saudi investment aligned with Vision 2030, and strengthens its security profile against regional adversaries (Ahmed, 2025). For Saudi Arabia, the pact serves multiple strategic objectives: securing access to Pakistan's battle-tested military capabilities, diversifying its security architecture beyond exclusive dependence on Western alliances, and establishing deterrence against regional competitors, particularly Iran (Jones, 2025; Lippman, 2012).

This comprehensive analysis examines the SMDA through multiple analytical lenses. First, it explores the historical evolution of Pakistan-Saudi relations, tracing the trajectory from early post-independence cooperation to the present formalized alliance (Rashid, 2002; Haqqani, 2005). Second, it dissects the strategic motivations driving both signatories, considering domestic political factors, regional security calculations, and global positioning objectives. Third, it analyzes the agreement's core provisions and their practical implications for military cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint defense planning. Fourth, it assesses the reactions and strategic responses of key regional and global stakeholders, including the United States, China, India, Iran, and Israel. Finally, it evaluates the broader theoretical and practical implications of the SMDA for regional security architecture, nuclear proliferation dynamics, and the evolving character of international alliances in a multipolar era.

## **Historical Context and Evolution of Pakistan-Saudi Relations**

### **Foundations of the Relationship (1947-1980)**

The relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia has deep historical roots extending back to Pakistan's independence in 1947. As Rashid (2002) documents, Saudi Arabia was among the first nations to recognize Pakistan as an independent state, a gesture that established the foundation for enduring bilateral ties. This early recognition was not merely diplomatic courtesy but reflected shared Islamic identity, similar post-colonial trajectories, and convergent strategic interests in resisting perceived threats from secular nationalism and communist expansion in the region (Haqqani, 2005).

During the Cold War era, both nations found themselves aligned with the Western bloc, albeit for different reasons. Saudi Arabia's alignment stemmed from its oil-based economic interests and concerns about Soviet and Arab socialist threats to the monarchy, while Pakistan's alignment derived from its security competition with India and need for military and economic assistance (McMahon, 1994). This parallel alignment facilitated military cooperation, with Pakistan providing military training to Saudi forces and seconding military personnel to the Kingdom as early as the 1960s (Fair, 2014). These early defense ties, while not formalized in treaty form, established patterns of cooperation that would intensify in subsequent decades.

### **Strategic Deepening During the Afghan Jihad (1980-1991)**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked a watershed moment in Pakistan-Saudi relations, elevating their cooperation to strategic significance. In his comprehensive study *Ghost Wars*, Coll (2004) details how both nations, along with the United States, became principal supporters of the Afghan mujahideen resistance. Saudi Arabia provided substantial financial resources, reportedly contributing billions of dollars to the effort, while Pakistan served as the operational base, providing training facilities, intelligence coordination, and logistical support through its Inter-Services Intelligence agency (Rashid, 2010). This trilateral cooperation against Soviet forces in Afghanistan demonstrated the operational effectiveness of Pakistan-Saudi collaboration and deepened institutional linkages between their security establishments.

Beyond Afghanistan, the 1980s witnessed expanding Saudi financial support for Pakistan across multiple domains. As documented by Nawaz (2008) in his authoritative history of Pakistan's military, Saudi Arabia became a major source of economic assistance, providing concessional oil supplies, development loans, and support for Pakistan's civilian and military infrastructure. This economic dimension added a critical component to the relationship, creating interdependencies that transcended purely security concerns. For Pakistan, Saudi financial backing provided breathing room for its perpetually strained economy, while for Saudi Arabia, Pakistan represented a reliable partner with substantial military capabilities that could, if necessary, be mobilized in defense of Saudi interests.

### **Post-Cold War Adaptation and Nuclear Dimensions (1991-2001)**

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union necessitated recalibration of Pakistan-Saudi strategic cooperation. The 1991 Gulf War presented a defining moment in this evolution. While Pakistan faced domestic political pressures and attempted to maintain neutrality in the initial stages, it ultimately deployed ground forces to Saudi Arabia, signaling its commitment to the Kingdom's territorial integrity (Siddiqi, 2007). According to Fair (2014), an estimated 5,000 to 11,000 Pakistani troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia during and after the Gulf War, providing air defense, training, and advisory roles. This deployment established a precedent for Pakistan's willingness to provide military assistance to Saudi Arabia in times of crisis.

The nuclear dimension of Pakistan-Saudi relations emerged as a subject of intense international scrutiny following Pakistan's 1998 nuclear tests. Speculation about Saudi Arabia's potential financial support for Pakistan's nuclear program and the possibility of nuclear weapons sharing or extended deterrence arrangements became a recurring theme in strategic analyses (Kerr & Nikitin, 2016). Bowen and Moran (2015) note that while both governments consistently denied any nuclear cooperation beyond peaceful purposes, persistent reports and strategic logic suggested that Saudi Arabia viewed Pakistan's nuclear capability as a potential insurance policy against regional threats, particularly from Iran. This ambiguous nuclear relationship would continue to complicate international perceptions of the Pakistan-Saudi partnership and would become even more salient with the signing of the SMDA in 2025.

### **21st Century Challenges and Convergence (2001-2025)**

The post-9/11 era introduced new complexities to Pakistan-Saudi relations. Both nations faced internal challenges from violent extremism, underwent pressure from Western powers to reform their approaches to counterterrorism, and navigated shifting regional dynamics including the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (Rashid, 2008). Despite these challenges, defense cooperation continued to intensify. Regular joint military exercises, expanded officer exchange programs, and increased arms trade characterized this period. Zahra (2018) documents that Saudi Arabia became one of Pakistan's largest sources of remittances, with millions of Pakistani expatriates working in the Kingdom, adding a significant socioeconomic dimension to bilateral ties.

The Yemen conflict, beginning in 2015, tested the limits of Pakistan-Saudi cooperation. When Saudi Arabia

requested Pakistani military participation in the coalition against Houthi forces, Pakistan's parliament voted against direct military involvement, marking a rare instance of Pakistani refusal of a Saudi request (Gul, 2015). This decision reflected Pakistan's concerns about sectarian implications, potential Iranian retaliation, and domestic political opposition. However, as Hussain and Khan (2025) observe, the relationship proved resilient enough to absorb this disagreement, with Pakistan continuing to provide training and advisory support while avoiding direct combat involvement. This episode demonstrated that while close, the relationship was not unconditional, and Pakistan retained agency in making strategic decisions based on its own national interests. By the early 2020s, several factors converged to create conditions favorable for formalizing the defense relationship. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 economic transformation program required stable regional security conditions and offered opportunities for Pakistani economic integration. Pakistan's economic challenges necessitated reliable sources of investment and energy supplies. Growing concerns about Iranian capabilities and intentions, questions about the reliability of American security commitments, and the increasing complexity of regional security threats all contributed to the rationale for a more formalized defense arrangement (Jones, 2025). Rahman (2024) notes that the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of reliable partnerships, as both nations cooperated on health security and economic recovery efforts. These accumulating factors set the stage for the historic SMDA of 2025.

## **The Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement: Provisions and Implications**

### **Core Provisions of the SMDA**

While the complete text of the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement remains classified, official statements and informed analyses reveal its essential components. According to the Saudi Press Agency (2025), the agreement's cornerstone is a mutual defense clause stipulating that armed aggression against either signatory will be considered aggression against both, triggering consultation and potential military response. Ali (2025) notes that this collective defense provision parallels similar clauses in other alliance treaties, such as NATO's Article 5, though with important distinctions in scope and activation mechanisms.

The SMDA establishes institutional frameworks for sustained military cooperation, including provisions for joint training exercises, defense industrial collaboration, intelligence sharing, and coordinated strategic planning (Hussain & Khan, 2025). Reports indicate that the agreement creates a Joint Defense Council comprising senior military officials from both nations, tasked with implementing the agreement's provisions and maintaining continuous dialogue on security matters. This institutional architecture ensures that the SMDA represents more than symbolic commitment, providing mechanisms for operational coordination and strategic harmonization.

### **Military Cooperation and Interoperability**

Military cooperation under the SMDA encompasses multiple dimensions. Joint training exercises aim to enhance interoperability between Pakistani and Saudi forces, ensuring effective coordination in potential crisis scenarios. According to Fair (2014), Pakistan's extensive experience in counterinsurgency operations, developed through decades of internal security challenges and operations along the Afghanistan border, offers valuable lessons for Saudi forces dealing with asymmetric threats. Conversely, Saudi Arabia's access to advanced Western military technology and its experience in modern warfare provide opportunities for Pakistani forces to enhance their capabilities.

Defense industrial cooperation represents a strategic dimension of the SMDA with long-term implications. Siddiq (2007) documents that Pakistan has developed significant indigenous defense manufacturing capabilities, including in areas such as munitions production, armored vehicle manufacturing, and increasingly, unmanned aerial vehicles. The agreement facilitates technology transfer and joint production arrangements, potentially allowing Saudi Arabia to develop more autonomous defense manufacturing capabilities aligned with Vision 2030's emphasis on economic diversification. For Pakistan, such cooperation

offers access to Saudi capital and potential export markets for defense products.

### **Intelligence Sharing and Counterterrorism**

Intelligence cooperation forms a crucial component of the SMDA, building on existing informal channels between Pakistani and Saudi intelligence agencies. Both nations face threats from transnational terrorist organizations, sectarian extremism, and regional instability. Enhanced intelligence sharing enables more effective threat detection, counter-radicalization efforts, and coordinated responses to security challenges. The agreement reportedly establishes protocols for real-time intelligence exchange, joint analysis centers, and coordinated operations against shared threats.

The counterterrorism dimension extends beyond intelligence sharing to encompass joint capacity building, training programs for security forces, and cooperation in countering terrorist financing. Both countries have significant experience combating terrorism: Pakistan through its long confrontation with various militant groups, and Saudi Arabia through its domestic counterterrorism efforts and regional initiatives (Rashid, 2008). The SMDA provides a framework for systematizing this cooperation and extending it to address emerging threats such as cyber terrorism and the use of emerging technologies by non-state actors.

### **Strategic Rationales for Both Signatories**

#### **Saudi Arabia's Strategic Calculations**

Saudi Arabia's decision to formalize its defense relationship with Pakistan reflects multiple strategic considerations. Foremost among these is the Kingdom's ongoing security competition with Iran, which has intensified following the 2015 nuclear agreement's eventual erosion and subsequent Iranian advances in missile technology and regional influence (Knights & Nadimi, 2020). Jones (2025) argues that the SMDA provides Saudi Arabia with implicit backing from a nuclear-armed state, potentially complicating Iranian strategic calculations and enhancing Saudi deterrence posture without the Kingdom openly pursuing its own nuclear capability.

The agreement also addresses Saudi concerns about the reliability of traditional American security guarantees. According to Lippman (2012), while the U.S.-Saudi relationship remains important, American domestic politics, evolving energy policies reducing dependence on Middle Eastern oil, and shifting strategic priorities toward great power competition with China have raised questions in Riyadh about Washington's long-term commitment to Gulf security. The SMDA represents a hedging strategy, diversifying Saudi Arabia's security partnerships and reducing exclusive dependence on any single external power. This approach aligns with Saudi Arabia's broader foreign policy evolution under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, characterized by greater assertiveness and willingness to pursue independent strategic initiatives.

Economic considerations also factor into Saudi strategic thinking regarding the SMDA. Pakistan's large population, growing consumer market, and potential as a manufacturing hub align with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 objectives of economic diversification and regional integration (Ahmed, 2025). The SMDA facilitates deeper economic engagement by providing a security framework that reduces risk for Saudi investments in Pakistan's infrastructure, energy sector, and industrial development. Moreover, strengthening ties with Pakistan enhances Saudi Arabia's position in the broader Islamic world, reinforcing its leadership role and countering competing claims for regional leadership from nations such as Turkey and Iran.

#### **Pakistan's Strategic Motivations**

For Pakistan, the SMDA offers a constellation of strategic benefits addressing multiple dimensions of national security and development. Economically, the agreement opens pathways for significant Saudi investment in Pakistan's struggling economy. Saudi Arabia has historically been a source of concessional financial assistance, but the SMDA framework enables more systematic economic engagement, particularly in infrastructure development, energy projects, and job creation for Pakistan's large youth population. The

potential for labor exports to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states represents a significant economic consideration, as Zahra (2018) notes that remittances from Gulf-based Pakistani workers constitute a substantial portion of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings.

From a security perspective, the SMDA enhances Pakistan's strategic depth and provides diplomatic support in international forums. Pakistan's security policy has long been driven by concerns about India's superior conventional military capabilities and the challenge of achieving strategic balance in South Asia (Cohen, 2004). While the SMDA does not directly address Pakistan's India-centric security concerns, Hussain and Khan (2025) argue that it strengthens Pakistan's position as a significant regional actor with important partnerships extending beyond South Asia. This broader strategic positioning potentially complicates adversaries' calculations and provides Pakistan with greater diplomatic leverage.

The agreement also serves Pakistan's long-standing aspiration to play a central role in the Muslim world. By formalizing its security relationship with Saudi Arabia, the custodian of Islam's two holiest sites, Pakistan strengthens its credentials as a key Muslim power. This positioning has both symbolic and practical value, potentially facilitating Pakistani mediation in intra-Islamic disputes and enhancing its influence in organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Haqqani, 2005). Moreover, as Small (2015) observes, where Saudi Arabia is concerned, the SMDA provides Pakistan with a counterbalance to its heavy dependence on China, diversifying its external partnerships and maintaining some strategic autonomy despite deepening ties with Beijing through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

## **Regional and Global Implications of the SMDA**

### **Impact on Regional Security Dynamics**

The SMDA's most immediate impact is on the regional security architecture of the Middle East and South Asia. According to Buzan and Wæver (2003), the agreement essentially creates a security link between two historically distinct regional security complexes, potentially facilitating the emergence of a more integrated security environment spanning from the Arabian Peninsula to South Asia. This integration carries profound implications for regional stability, alliance dynamics, and the strategies available to various actors seeking to advance their interests in these interconnected regions.

### **Iranian Threat Perceptions and Responses**

Iran views the SMDA with considerable apprehension, interpreting it as an explicitly anti-Iranian alignment that potentially increases security pressures on the Islamic Republic from multiple directions (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2020). From Tehran's perspective, the formalization of Saudi-Pakistani defense ties represents a consolidation of Sunni powers arrayed against Iran, potentially coordinated with other regional actors such as the United Arab Emirates and Israel. This perception is likely to reinforce Iranian threat assessments and could contribute to more assertive Iranian behavior in pursuing security guarantees through its own means, including continued development of its missile program, support for regional proxies, and potentially accelerated nuclear hedging.

The nuclear dimension of the SMDA particularly concerns Iran. According to Kerr and Nikitin (2016), while Iranian officials have publicly questioned the agreement's necessity and portrayed it as destabilizing, private Iranian concerns likely focus on the possibility that the SMDA provides a framework for extended nuclear deterrence or even nuclear weapons sharing between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Such arrangements, while denied by all parties, would fundamentally alter the strategic calculus in the region and could trigger Iranian reconsideration of its own nuclear posture. Iran's response options include strengthening its own strategic partnerships, particularly with Russia and potentially China, intensifying its asymmetric warfare capabilities, and maintaining ambiguity about its nuclear program to preserve strategic leverage.

## **Implications for India**

India's assessment of the SMDA is shaped by its longstanding security competition with Pakistan and its own growing interests in the Gulf region. While the agreement does not explicitly target India, Pant (2016) notes that New Delhi recognizes that any enhancement of Pakistan's strategic position and access to external resources potentially affects the Indo-Pakistani balance. India's concerns focus on several dimensions: the possibility that Saudi financial support could facilitate Pakistani military modernization, the potential for the agreement to strengthen Pakistan's position in international forums on Kashmir and other contentious issues, and the risk that the SMDA could complicate India's own developing relationships with Gulf states.

However, India's response is likely to be measured rather than alarmist. India has been developing its own strategic partnerships in the Gulf, including defense cooperation agreements with the UAE and Saudi Arabia (Pant, 2016). India's large diaspora community in the Gulf states, its significant economic ties with the region, and its role as a major energy consumer provide India with considerable leverage. Moreover, India's growing global stature, its partnership with the United States through initiatives such as the Quad, and its independent strategic capabilities mean that the SMDA, while noteworthy, does not fundamentally alter India's strategic environment. India's likely response will involve deepening its own Gulf partnerships, maintaining dialogue with Saudi Arabia to manage any potential negative implications of the SMDA, and continuing its comprehensive national security strategy of which Pakistan policy is one component.

## **Global Power Responses and Strategic Adjustments**

### **United States: Ambivalence and Adaptation**

The United States faces a complex policy challenge in responding to the SMDA. On one hand, Washington maintains important security relationships with both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, even if these relationships have experienced strain in recent years. The agreement could be interpreted as these partners seeking to strengthen their own capabilities and reduce burdens on the United States, potentially consistent with American preferences for greater burden-sharing and local problem-solving (Lippman, 2012). On the other hand, the SMDA raises concerns about nuclear proliferation, particularly given persistent questions about the nuclear dimension of Pakistan-Saudi cooperation documented by Kerr and Nikitin (2016).

American policymakers are likely concerned that the SMDA reflects and potentially accelerates a trend of regional powers seeking security arrangements independent of, or parallel to, traditional American alliance structures. This could undermine American influence and complicate Washington's ability to shape regional outcomes according to its preferences. The agreement may also complicate American efforts to balance relationships with various regional actors, as more formalized alignments reduce flexibility and increase the likelihood that regional conflicts will force difficult choices among competing partners.

The likely American response will involve a combination of acceptance, engagement, and pressure. Washington will probably seek to reassure Saudi Arabia about the reliability of American security commitments while simultaneously working to prevent the SMDA from facilitating nuclear proliferation. This could involve renewed diplomacy aimed at clarifying the agreement's limits, particularly regarding any nuclear dimension, while also exploring how the SMDA might be integrated into broader regional security frameworks in ways that complement rather than undermine American interests. The United States may also leverage the SMDA as an opportunity to encourage greater regional cooperation on shared challenges such as counterterrorism and maritime security.

### **China: Strategic Opportunity and Concerns**

China's reaction to the SMDA reflects its complex interests in both South Asia and the Middle East. As Pakistan's closest strategic partner and a major economic partner of Saudi Arabia, China has stakes in the success and stability of both nations. The SMDA could serve Chinese interests by enhancing regional stability

along the routes of the Belt and Road Initiative, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is central to Chinese connectivity ambitions. A more stable and secure Pakistan, backstopped by Saudi support, could facilitate Chinese economic projects and reduce risks to Chinese investments and personnel.

Moreover, the SMDA aligns with China's broader preference for a multipolar international system in which regional powers exercise greater autonomy from Western-led alliances. The agreement represents exactly the kind of South-South cooperation that China rhetorically champions and practically supports through its own diplomacy (Small, 2015). By strengthening ties between two countries with which China has relationships, the SMDA potentially enhances China's regional influence and provides Beijing with additional channels for pursuing its interests.

However, China also faces risks from the SMDA. Enhanced Saudi-Pakistani military cooperation could inadvertently contribute to regional tensions, particularly if it exacerbates the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Such tensions could threaten China's energy security, as China depends heavily on Gulf oil imports and maintains careful diplomatic balancing between Saudi Arabia and Iran. China's likely approach will involve quiet diplomacy aimed at ensuring the SMDA contributes to regional stability rather than escalation, while simultaneously strengthening its own relationships with all parties to maintain maximum strategic flexibility.

### **Russia and Regional Actors**

Russia views the SMDA through the lens of its broader strategy of expanding influence in the Middle East and South Asia while weakening American predominance in these regions. Moscow has been cultivating relationships with both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as part of its effort to position itself as an indispensable player in regional affairs. The SMDA potentially creates opportunities for Russia to expand its defense cooperation with both countries, particularly as they seek to diversify their arms suppliers and reduce dependence on any single source.

Russia's relationship with Iran introduces complexity to its calculus regarding the SMDA. While Russia has cultivated strategic cooperation with Iran, particularly in Syria, Moscow also maintains pragmatic relationships with Iran's regional competitors and would likely prefer not to be forced into choosing sides in regional conflicts. Russia's likely approach will involve attempting to mediate tensions and position itself as a neutral broker capable of dialogue with all parties, thereby maximizing its diplomatic leverage and economic opportunities.

Other regional actors, including Turkey, the UAE, Qatar, and Israel, will also adjust their strategies in light of the SMDA. Turkey, which has its own aspirations for regional leadership and maintains generally positive relations with Pakistan, may seek to strengthen its ties with Islamabad as a counterbalance to the Saudi-Pakistani axis. The UAE, which has become more assertive in regional security matters, will likely view the SMDA as generally consistent with its interests in countering Iranian influence, though it will monitor developments carefully to ensure its own equities are protected. Israel's assessment will focus on implications for Iranian containment and the broader regional balance of power, with particular attention to any nuclear dimensions of the Pakistan-Saudi relationship.

### **Nuclear Proliferation and Deterrence Implications**

#### **The Nuclear Dimension of Pakistan-Saudi Relations**

The nuclear dimension of the Pakistan-Saudi relationship has been a subject of speculation and concern for decades. Saudi Arabia may have financially supported Pakistan's nuclear weapons program in the 1980s and 1990s, with the implicit understanding that Pakistan would extend nuclear protection to the Kingdom if necessary. While both governments have consistently denied any such arrangement, the strategic logic underlying such speculation remains compelling: Saudi Arabia faces potential nuclear threats from regional adversaries and may seek insurance beyond what the United States can or will provide, while Pakistan has chronically needed financial support and values its relationship with Saudi Arabia.

SMDA inevitably intensifies scrutiny of the nuclear dimension of Pakistan-Saudi relations. While the agreement's text reportedly does not explicitly address nuclear matters, the establishment of a mutual defense commitment raises questions about whether and under what circumstances Pakistan's nuclear arsenal might factor into Saudi Arabia's security calculations. Several possible scenarios merit consideration, each with different implications for regional and global security:

- **Extended deterrence:** Pakistan might provide a nuclear umbrella to Saudi Arabia similar to American extended deterrence guarantees to allies, deterring nuclear coercion without transferring weapons or technology.
- **Technology transfer:** Pakistan might share sensitive nuclear technology or expertise with Saudi Arabia, potentially accelerating any Saudi nuclear weapons program without actual weapons transfer.
- **Weapons deployment:** In an extreme scenario, Pakistan might deploy nuclear weapons on Saudi territory or provide weapons for Saudi custody, though this would represent a dramatic escalation with severe international consequences.
- **Declaratory ambiguity:** Pakistan and Saudi Arabia might maintain studied ambiguity about nuclear arrangements, seeking deterrent benefits from uncertainty without actual nuclear cooperation.

#### Implications for Nuclear Proliferation

The potential nuclear dimensions of the SMDA carry profound implications for global nuclear proliferation dynamics. If Saudi Arabia is perceived to have gained access to nuclear weapons or nuclear protection through its relationship with Pakistan, this could trigger a cascade of proliferation pressures throughout the Middle East. States that view Saudi Arabia as a threat, particularly Iran, would face intensified incentives to pursue their own nuclear capabilities. Countries such as Egypt, Turkey, and potentially others might reconsider their non-nuclear commitments if regional proliferation accelerates.

The SMDA also tests the resilience of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Pakistan is not a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, having developed nuclear weapons outside the treaty framework (Kerr & Nikitin, 2016). Its nuclear cooperation with Saudi Arabia, if it extends beyond peaceful purposes, would not technically violate the NPT but would undermine the treaty's norms and objectives. This could encourage other states to question the value of NPT commitments if perceived proliferation occurs outside the treaty's constraints.

International responses to any nuclear dimension of the SMDA will likely vary. The United States and European powers would presumably oppose any nuclear weapons cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, potentially imposing sanctions or other penalties. However, enforcing such opposition would be challenging given the strategic importance of both countries and the limited leverage Western powers may have over their nuclear policies. China and Russia might adopt more ambiguous positions, publicly supporting non-proliferation while privately accepting regional nuclear developments as facts to be managed rather than reversed.

#### Conclusion

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia recently signed a Defense pact in 2025 a bearing of the growing any international security cooperation into a multipolar world. The old-style alliances are less dependable or strategically unfeasible with western powers like the United States, therefore, regional powers will be re-setting their defence strategies in re-allocating the changing threats in a more independent approach. The agreement is not simply the military alliance between the Islamabad and Riyadh but also a general tendency when the states which have common strategic weaknesses seek a security guarantee to each other dependent on regional realities rather than alliances. This arrangement marks a deliberate transition of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in order to emphasize more agency in the construction of their security environment. With the case of Saudi Arabia, the send-down of a nuclear state like Pakistan is a compelling message to demonstrate how it is determined to develop more diversified and stronger defense cooperation especially in the context of the

escalating tension in the region including the Israeli airstrike on Qatar. The agreement has increased the geopolitical direction of Pakistan which now has a strategic interest to extend south Asia to the Gulf as a result of the deal. This agreement conforms to the Neorealism terminology as a classic instance of states balancing themselves with what can be termed as threatening actors and the theory of the Regional Security Complex explains how the institutionalized security politics of the Middle East and South Asia are dictating new trends in collaboration. The Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement is a clear sign of amicable relations, unity and trust between two states that share a similar ideological and historical perspective with each other. It is promise of being there to each other, to volunteer and to make them stronger. The future of this pact will be experienced in the world as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia strive to become key players in bringing peace and stability in the Muslim world. This new move will definitely bring them closer given their previous relationship as it goes to show that their relationship is strong and it can withstand the changing world.

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