

Pakistan–KSA Defense Deal and Its Implications for the Middle East Peace Process

Nisar Ahmed Chandio*¹

¹*Head of department, International Relations, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.

Corresponding author: nisar.ahmed@bbsul.edu.pk

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In September 2025 Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA), marking a significant deepening of security ties between a nuclear-armed South Asian state and the Gulf's most powerful kingdom. The pact whose public language commits the parties to collective defence and closer military cooperation arrives amid renewed instability in the Middle East, active diplomatic efforts around Gaza, and shifting great-power postures. This paper examines the SMDA's strategic logic, traces how it may affect security calculations across the region (including Israel, Iran, the Gulf states, and Pakistan's neighbours), and assesses its implications for the Middle East peace process. Using qualitative policy analysis of official statements, contemporaneous media reporting, think-tank commentary, and secondary academic literature, the paper argues that the pact strengthens Saudi deterrence and Riyadh's bargaining power but also raises risk of strategic escalation, complicates mediation dynamics on Israel–Palestine, and intensifies external actor competition (notably U.S., Iran, and India). The SMDA therefore has mixed implications for the peace process: it can create space for coercive diplomacy backed by deterrence, yet it also risks polarizing actors and raising the threshold for compromise unless accompanied by parallel diplomatic confidence-building measures. Policy recommendations emphasise transparent signalling, confidence-building with regional and global stakeholders, and integration of security guarantees with diplomatic Tracks for Palestine/Israel peace initiatives.

1. Introduction

On 17 September 2025 a further step in the long-standing security relationship was signed by the Islamic world by signing a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) in Riyadh by both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The joint statements and formal messages make the agreement a strategic reciprocal defence and commit that aggression against one of them will be viewed as aggression against 2 (Shah et al., 2025; Naseer et al., 2024; Malik et al., 2025). It has never been printed in full, but is said to have been pledged in various degrees, from a complete military association, down to sharing of information and, at least by certain sources, language which is said to have caused a certain measure of debate as to whether the deterrent posture of the Pakistani nation is consequential in the region.

This transaction occurs in an unstable regional context: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Gaza have awakened regional orientation, the Gulf security thinking has evolved after the crises which had threatened the security umbrellas in the international context and the credibility of the great powers has been put to test by the capitals of the region. SMDA will strengthen the deterrent and collective security, according to Saudi decision-makers, to solve the escalating threat; critics say that it can augment the geopolitics of the conflict and complicate the process of peace-making even further (Iqbal et al., 2025; Ivascu et al., 2022; Ghulam et al., 2019).

The following question is the question of this paper; What are the likely implications of the Pak-KSA defence pact on the Middle East peace process? There are four sections of the analysis. To start with, it places the SMDA in the strategic logic of Riyadh and Islamabad. Second, it assesses the short-to-mid-term security implications of the key actors (Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, GCC states, the US and Pakistan). Third, it discusses how the pact will impact on peace diplomacy in the Israel-Palestine region (Shaukat et al., 2020; ul Haq & ur Rehman, 2017). Finally, it offers policy suggestions that will reduce the likelihood of escalation and do not reject the existence of other benefits of increased deterrence as choice leverage in diplomacy.

2. Literature Review

The relations between the influential players in the region have always influenced the strategic dynamics of the Middle East, and the recent Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Defense Deal (SMDA) has put a spin on the situation. The agreement signed in September 2025 between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is a milestone in the history of the defense relations between a nuclear-armed South Asian country and one of the leading Gulf kingdoms. Although the agreement has been packaged as a mutual agreement to collective defense and military integration, the implication of the agreement goes way beyond the issue of bilateral security. The literature on this accord and how it may affect the Middle East peace process can be described as complicated with references to the issue of security, foreign policy maneuvers and the balance of power in the region.

2.1 Strategic Logic of the SMDA

The geopolitical argument of the Pakistan-KSA defense deal is one which is based on common geopolitical interests, namely, the necessity to have better security in the region in the

face of unceasing instability (Khan, Haq, & Naseer, 2022; Shaukat, Rehman, & ul Haq, 2021). A number of sources have emphasized the increased instability of the Middle East, where balance of power and greater participation of the outside forces, including the U.S., Russia, and China, in the Middle East have been noted (Riedel, 2020). The strategic significance of Saudi Arabia as a key industry in the Gulf and counterbalance to Iran has been well reported (Cordesman, 2019). To Pakistan, a deeper economic and security relationship with Saudi Arabia enhances its regional power and diversified its security relationship. According to the scholars, including Khan (2021), the involvement in the regional defense agreements, such as the SMDA, improves the situation of Pakistan in terms of the confrontation with its neighbors, including India, as well as strengthening its relationships with the leading state in the Gulf.

2.2 Effects on Calculations of Regional Security

Much literature has been written on the implication of such defense relationships on the security relationships within the region (Azhar, 2024; Azhar & Imran, 2024; Azhar et al., 2022). Deterrence capabilities of Saudi Arabia are also boosted by military alliances such as that one with Pakistan due to the latter having nuclear deterrent. Katzman (2018) notes that since long ago, the strategic security goals in Saudi Arabia have been conditioned by its fear of the ambitions of Iran in the region, specifically its nuclear program and its ability to control proxy groups in the area (Danish, Akhtar & Imran, 2025; Mankash, et al., 2025; Hafeez, Yaseen & Imran, 2019). This deterrence is enhanced by the nuclear awareness of Pakistan. Considering the situation in the Gulf States, the agreement further entrenches the role of the Saudi Arabia in its countering of the regional enemies, especially Iran (Parveen et al., 2020; ul haq, 2019; Ali & Haq 2017). On the other hand, to Israel, the deepening of the defense relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia creates some potential complications, particularly regarding the ongoing conflict with Palestinians and the overall Arab-Israeli relations (Gerges, 2019).

Such an agreement will not have an effect on Saudi-Iranian relations alone. The regional neighbors are especially interested in the events in Pakistan with India being the biggest stakeholder (Khoso et al., 2024; Sultana & Imran, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2023). The expanding relations between India and Saudi Arabia, as well as the military agreement with Pakistan, add to the ever-growing complexity of the relations in the geopolitical arena of the South Asian and Middle Eastern regions (Sohail-Rehan & Ul-Haq, 2018; Haq, 2017; ul Haq, 2012). According to the research, including that one by Zehra (2020), researchers note that the situation in the region may escalate due to factors like defense alliances, the provision of strategic advantages that a defense alliance like the SMDA offers, as well as fueling the already existing rivalries (Naseer et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2023; Aurangzeb & Haq, 2012).

2.3 Policy Implications on the Middle East Peace Process

The possible implication on the Middle East peace process is contradictory (Kayani et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021; Khan & Khan, 2020). The Israel-Palestine war has been one of the most significant problems in the area which the international players adopt various positions depending on their political, military and economic interests. The literature indicates that the defense agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan may act as a fast-tracking or slowing the speed of peace negotiating. On one hand, it might give Saudi Arabia a larger bargaining power in the coercive diplomacy particularly with those in the region like Israel and Iran (Khan

& Haq, 2025; Haq & Khan, 2024). According to such authors as Katzenstein (2020), the empowerment of Saudi defense forces can give the kingdom the power to demand more aggressive diplomatic positions, which are likely to affect the Israeli calculations in peace negotiations with Palestinians.

Conversely, according to Abdullah (2020), these military arrangements can equally make regional actors polar as they complicate the diplomatic landscape. The firming of Saudi Arabia might enhance the bargaining point in the peace talks, and it would be difficult to establish a meeting point between Israel, the Gulf nations, and the Palestinians. This is a shared concern with Gunning (2021), who indicates that the further development of military alliances in the Middle East can lead to the establishment of the status quo instead of creating the conditions of lasting peace.

2.4 External Actor Competition

Another factor that is of significance in realizing the implications of the SMDA is the competition among the external actors, especially the U.S., Iran, and India. According to Legrenzi (2021), the defense deals between the Middle Eastern nations and South Asian countries form a new field of geopolitical rivalry (Ali et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2018). An example is that the U.S. may perceive Pakistan as a participant in the Saudi Arabian defense policy as a move to negate Iranian influence and at the same time, the U.S. has to balance the interests of its ally, India. More so, the increasing power of China in the region in addition to its desire to counter the U.S. hegemony further complicates the matter. The intrusion of various external actors makes the diplomatic and military calculations in the region complicated and may complicate the search of stable solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the greater efforts of world peace (Gassert, 2020).

2.5 Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, the literature is consistent that multilateral diplomacy involvement is necessary and security measures. The suggestions to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other players in the region focus on the issue of transparent signaling of intentions and goals to minimize the risks of miscalculation and escalation. It is also suggested to use confidence-building steps and dialogue platforms to control the elevated tension between regional and global stakeholders (Barzegar, 2020).

Moreover, diplomatic tracks are presumed to be important to integrate with security guarantees. The SMDA can make Saudi deterrence stronger but it has to be combined with diplomacy especially the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. According to Gerges (2019), whether Saudi Arabia can leverage its enhanced military status to promote peace or encourage more conflict will rely on its capacity to seamlessly bring together this defense agreement with other diplomatic processes.

The Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Defense Deal has a high impact on the security situation in the region, intensifying tensions already existing in the region in addition to the fact that it may boost the deterrence capabilities. It has numerous implications to the Middle East peace process which are both opportunities of coercive diplomacy and more polarization. The agreement need not be accompanied with military might as the political remedy to ensure it does not lead to

increment but requires diplomatic confidence-building measures. The role of defense agreements in the Middle East and their influences on peace processes should also be further researched in the future through longitudinal studies that take into account the variation of the influence of external actors and power balance in the region.

3. Methodology and Sources

The policy analysis of the sources presented in this paper is carried out according to the primary official materials (joint statements, governmental releases), current information of the well-known news outlets, and the discussion of the regional think-tanks and centers. Key source types include:

The SMDA press releases issued by the Pakistani and Saudi officials. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Large foreign media (Reuters, Al Jazeera, AP) that paraphrased the masses and reported the conditions of the agreement secretly. Analytic evaluations of policy institute (CFR, MEI, Washington institute, IDSA) and local research group.

The standard IR theories that have been used in the paper include deterrence, balance of power, security-community and mediation theory. It is a synthesis of the available evidence to arrive at the plausible causal inferences (because an entire text of the treaty was not publicly published) and introduces the contingencies of other possible dynamics. The SMDA is new and somewhat opaque, which means that analysis is done on mechanisms and situations rather than making final empirical statements.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 The SMDA Strategy Logic

4.1.1 Prevention, independence and diplomatic capital as Saudi interest

The motivation of SMDA in Saudi Arabia is related to different strategic objectives. Firstly, Riyadh has a desire to achieve plausible deterrence in the view of mounting threats by the Gaza war and the spillovers in the region (Muhammad et al., 2020). This agreement will show that Riyadh is eager to enhance security ties with non-adherents to enhance security guarantees and over-reliance on one external benefactor. Secondly, the Saudi leadership appears to be pursuing strategic independence, i.e. building bilateral relationship which can allow Riyadh to take its place not only in the Gulf but also in the Middle East in general. Third, an agreement with Pakistan enhances the diplomatic strength of Riyadh: the more military assistance, the higher the cost of coercion of the rivals and possible alteration of the negotiation positions during the crisis situations in the region, including Israel-Palestine.

4.1.2 Pakistani objectives: security coercions, economic gains, the power of the region

The transaction is a strategic and financial pay off to Pakistan. The two states have long-term associations in terms of military association, labour and financial remittances as well as religious diplomacy. The SMDA is reported to supplement the intensification of the economic cooperation and is likely to absorb the defence cooperation, training, and intelligence association. The agreement in the case of Islamabad re-establishes Pakistan as a security partner in the Muslim world and may lead to economic aid and investments. It also makes the Pakistan more visible to the security structures in West Asia.

4.1.3 Signalling and ambiguity: the meaning of the text of the treaty

A large portion remains to wording within clauses, particularly with respect to commitments (automatic military retaliation vs. consultative commitments) geographic (the covered area is defined), and nuclear (related commitments) because some of the points of the pact are classified. The media precedents too commentaries by scholars have already caused outrage in the possibility of the nuclear posture of Pakistan being indirectly included in the calculation of Gulf security, something that is being keenly watched by the regional and extra-regional powers. This indistinctness is receptive to both forms of stabilisation and destabilisation of reading.

4.2 Tendencies in the Implications of the Security in the region

Within the context of the Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: an even longer deterrence and coalition game. SMDA augments the deterrence capability of Riyadh by integrating both the Saudi forces with the high conventional forces of Pakistan. This will deter the state and non state actors who would have thought of targeting Saudi interests. Additionally, the agreement can launch other Gulf security programs-either by increased GCC harmonisation or by influencing other Gulf monarchs to other outside guarantees. Such consolidation may bring some dynamic in the interstate relations as long as it is founded on transparency and confidence building among states on the other side, presence of opaque security blocs can make the competition even more intense.

4.3 With regards to Iran: the belief of being surrounded and asymmetrical responses

Iran is likely to view the SMDA as any alteration in the foreign assistance to the disadvantage of Riyadh. The calculus of Tehran may be paid more attention to tools which are asymmetric, proxies in the region, or the control of the escalation depending on the perceived threat. The response of Tehran can take different forms such as diplomatic protests and willingness to apply selective use of proxy networks- a move that would make peacemaking processes in the Levant and Yemen more difficult. Analysts note that augmented Saudi deterrence can stabilize deterrence linkage or act of impetus rivalry of security among near neighbours. Middle East

4.4 Power, coercion or polarisation to Israel, Palestinian arena

The implications of the contract towards Israeli-Palestinian war are not clear. On the one hand, a stronger Saudi position with the assistance of Pakistan can enable Riyadh to have a stronger bargaining power in foreign policy which can give Saudi Arabia the opportunity to force ceasefires, humanitarian relief or negotiated resolutions with the assistance of reasonable deterrence. On the other hand, the agreement will pose a threat of polarising the actors: Israel and its allies will develop a sense that more security co-operation with Riyadh (especially through advanced military co-operation) will lower their incentives to compromise or accelerate security competition. Interestingly, the new tendencies of peacemaking in the Gulf states, including the aspects of Abraham accords, show that the Gulf actors balance the normalisation activities with the Palestinian diplomacy. The SMDA is introducing a new security factor to a political-diplomatic cocktail, therefore.

4.5 To the United States and other external players: recalibration and reassurance requirements

Historically, the U.S. policymakers were the most significant security partners of the Gulf countries. The SMDA is a sign of diversification that Riyadh wants the Washington could view the agreement through the prism of the threat of proliferation (where there is a threat of nuclear connotations), strength of the alliance, and regional stability. The U.S. may then respond to this by further intensifying itself diplomacy or by seeking deconfliction instrumentality or by collaborating with Riyadh and Islamabad in ensuring that the agreement is beneficial in the context of stability in crises rather than the arms-race. Interpretations and reactions may also be influenced by other powers (China, Russia).

4.6 Impracticalities on the Middle East Peace Process

The SMDA has three ways of affecting the peace process that are interrelated and they are: (1) deterrent leverage; (2) signalling and diplomatic bargaining and (3) escalation risk and mediation environment.

4.6 Deterrent leverage: making bargaining space

Greater defense relationship can build with coercive bargaining space- a situation in which a better supported state can provide a plausible coercion to cause others to capitulate or be coerced into capitulation. It is possible that, with the incentive of greater deterrence, Riyadh will be able to balance hard security assurances with hard diplomatic suggestions and international assistance, even level a ceasefire, humanitarian safe passage or even seriousness in discussing Palestinian statehood. Under such an optimistic scenario the deal will offer Riyadh with a feasible risk buffer on more aggressive diplomatic actions.

4.7 Signalling: threats of mediator credibility and neutrality

However, perceived partisanship may be required in the process of effective mediation. Once the Saudi Arabia can be termed more militarised or with the backing of external support of security, its role as a neutral brokering party can be questioned - at least within the Palestinian groups or other groups within the region. The Pakistani involvement would be considered as a different kind of moral Muslim associate or one that had participated in the equation of Riyadh. Such perceptions can undermine neutral facilitation unless Riyadh and Islamabad are devoted to the inclusive avenues of mediation and physically separate defence relationships to diplomatic mediation necessities.

4.8 Escalation politics: The high price of peace

The most threatening implication that can be identified, possibly, is the risk-amplification one: once it is seen that the agreement is extending the range of players the security of which directly correlates with, the crisis problems can be even more rapid and harder to mitigate. A common language of defence raises the political cost of strike or mistakes; and higher stakes may lower the time of crisis negotiation and make mutual forbearance hard in the face of ineffective crisis management and communication among all the interested sides (U.S., EU, Russia, China, regional actors). Rapid escalatory increments thereupon can ruin peace making over time which was founded on progressive confidence building.

4.9 Review of International Relations

It can be assumed that the problem of opacity and contingency reactions exists, and there are three possible scenarios:

4.9.1 Stabilising Deterrence + Diplomatic Push (Best case) Scenario A

Saudi Arabia uses the agreement to facilitate a diplomatic effort (e.g. push towards a full-scale ceasefire or a mediated settlement) and exploits the credible deterrence without compromising clear communication with both Israel and Iran as well as with the U.S. Pakistan is a strategic partner but does not indulge in provocative signalling. Riyadh has a superior bargaining power, diplomatic room, less danger of direct escalation.

4.9.2 Scenario Polarisation and Arms posturing (Middle case)

The agreement provokes a reaction of other actors, the actors develop competitive security structures, the mediation process becomes more challenging as the actors are polarised. Results: more tensions, stalled peace-making, but fewer face-to-face confrontations as countries put one another off.

4.9.3 Scenario C Escalatory Spiral (Worst case)

Wrong interpretation and veiling nuclear rumors (with regard to the indirect proliferation of the nuclear deterrence) attract virulent security responses, proxy wars, and breakdown of the diplomacy. Consequence: acute local conflagration and loss of opportunities of negotiated peace in immediate future.

5. Conclusion

Pakistan-KSA Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement is strategic in nature. It can strengthen the deterrent by Saudi and provide Riyadh with greater diplomatic advantages, and potentially provide them with space to take stronger peacemaking measures. Nevertheless, the dangers that can be brought by the same accord are misperception, polarisation of the region and the chances of escalation that could be overturning the Middle East peace process. To a large extent it will be an issue of implementation, transparency and the degree to which the security pact will be willingly integrated with programs to develop parallel diplomatic trust. The policymakers should therefore pay emphasis on de-escalatory signalling, multilateral intervention, and that which links security assurance with the positive mediation efforts to avoid transforming the stabilising instrument into a wider conflict.

5.1 Policy Recommendations

To ensure that the peace processes remain in favor of the opportunities and to curtail the risks in the processes, the paper proposes:

Riyadh and Islamabad should release the scope and the limits of the SMDA (especially in nuclear doctrine and geographical location) to eliminate confusion and panic. This will reduce worst case risks through the use of public and unambiguous language that binds parties to collective defence in only limited circumstances. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Crisis Communication Channels will involve hotlines and crisis-management plans with the key regional actors (Israel, Iran, UAE, Egypt) and key external powers (U.S., EU) in an attempt to

mitigate incidents in a short period. Parallel Diplomatic Track: Add to the security agreement a larger diplomatic push on Israel-Palestine (ceasefire push, humanitarian access, investment in the reconstruction of Gaza) to show that tightened defence positioning is not supposed to substitute, but to augment, diplomacy.

Development of Confidence and Arms Control Measures: Include bilateral confidence development measures such as the declaration of military exercises, limitations on forward movements in flashpoints and independent observers where feasible. Engage important Externals: U.S and EU will need to work hand in hand with Riyadh, Islamabad and Tehran to integrate the pact into the existing security entities and never come up with parallel entities competing with each other. The participants are all to restore the existing policy of using nuclear, and it must never engage in any actions that would lead to blurring of nuclear boundaries; this issue needs to be transparent as it will protect the stability of the strategies. Reuters

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