



Saudi-Pakistan Defence Pact

For Prelims: [Gulf region](#), [Gaza](#), [Red Sea](#), [I2U2](#), [West Coast Refinery project](#).

For Mains: Implications of the Saudi-Pakistan defence pact for India and suggested measures to navigate its challenges.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Saudi Arabia and **Pakistan** have formalized decades of informal **military cooperation** by signing a **Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA)**, a pact that could notably affect **India's national interests** in **South Asia** and the [Gulf region](#).

- The pact includes a **collective defence clause**, **joint military mechanisms**, and **intelligence-sharing**.
- For **Pakistan**, it offers financial lifelines and strategic relevance, while for **Saudi Arabia**, it provides a hedge against regional threats like **Iran**, **Houthis**, and **Israel's aggression**.



What are the Implications of the Saudi-Pakistan Pact on India?

- **Geopolitical Setback in the Middle East:** The **Saudi-Pakistan defence pact** revives historical ties between the two countries, posing a **geopolitical challenge to India's Gulf diplomacy**.
 - It may enable **Pakistan** to leverage its strengthened position with **Riyadh** to push **anti-India narratives** on **Kashmir** within the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation**, complicating India's influence in the Islamic world.
- **Impact on Energy Security and Diaspora:** India's **energy security** and reliance on **Saudi crude oil** could face challenges due to a deeper **Saudi-Pakistan strategic alignment**, which may complicate commercial and geopolitical ties.
 - Additionally, India's **2.6 million-strong diaspora** in Saudi Arabia, a key source of **remittances**, could be affected by shifts in the regional political landscape.
- **Pressure on Counter-Terrorism Efforts:** India's efforts to **isolate Pakistan internationally** over terrorism could be affected, as Saudi Arabia's **deepened strategic partnership with Pakistan** may temper its otherwise growing **cooperation with India on counter-terrorism**, potentially limiting Riyadh's support for India's diplomatic initiatives.
- **Fueling a Destabilizing Arms Race in Advanced Technologies:** **Saudi financial support** could allow Pakistan to rapidly modernize its military, investing in **combat drones, hypersonic missiles, and cyber warfare** with backing from partners like **Turkey and China**, over which India has limited influence.
 - This pressures **New Delhi** into an accelerated, costly **arms race in AI, space, and electronic warfare** to counter a technologically advanced adversary on its western border.

Significance of Saudi Arabia for India

- **Energy Security:** **Saudi Arabia** is a **strategic energy partner**, ranking among the **one of the largest suppliers of crude oil**, vital for **India's energy requirements**.
- **Economic Partnership:** India is **Saudi Arabia's 2nd largest trade partner**, while Saudi Arabia ranks **5th for India**.
 - With **USD 3 billion in Indian investments (as of August 2023)** in Saudi Arabia, this relationship is a **key pillar of India's economic growth and diversification**.
- **Strategic & Defence Cooperation:** India and Saudi are strengthening defence ties through **joint exercises** like **EX-SADA TANSEEO** (land) and **Al Mohed Al Hindi** (naval) with enhanced **interoperability, trust, and regional security cooperation**.
- **Geopolitical Leverage & Connectivity:** **Saudi support** is vital for the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**, a key initiative to **counter Chinese influence** and enhance **regional connectivity**.
- **Diaspora & Soft Power:** The **2.6 million-strong Indian community** provides significant **soft power and remittances**, while **cultural exchanges** like **Yoga** strengthen **people-to-people ties**.
- **Future-Oriented Collaboration:** India's initiatives in **green energy** (solar, hydrogen) and **technology** (AI, FinTech) align with **Saudi Vision 2030**, laying the foundation for **long-term, sustainable cooperation beyond hydrocarbons**.

How Could India Navigate the Impact of the Saudi-Pakistan Pact?

- **Double Down on Diplomacy:** India must ensure its **relationship with Saudi Arabia** is defined by **economic interests**, not the **Pakistan prism**, emphasizing its role in **energy security, investment ties** (like the **West Coast Refinery project**), and **future-oriented projects in renewables, technology, and finance**.
- **Execute a Pragmatic Re-engagement with Iran:** The **Saudi-Pakistan pact** positions Iran as a strategic partner for India, prompting **New Delhi** to fully leverage **Chabahar Port** and accelerate the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, securing a direct, secure route to **Afghanistan and Central Asia** while countering

Pakistan's western flank.

- **Strengthen the Look West Policy:** India must **diversify its Gulf strategy** by deepening **ties with the UAE and Qatar**, through **trade deals, LNG supply, and defence cooperation** and maintaining a **pragmatic relationship with Iran** to ensure **regional balance**.
 - Additionally, leverage **minilateral frameworks** like **I2U2** reinforces India's role as a **stabilising, non-threatening partner**.

Conclusion

The **Saudi-Pakistan pact** signifies a pivotal shift towards **multipolarity** in **West Asia**, driven by hedging against unreliable **US guarantees**. For **India**, it necessitates astute **diplomacy, economic engagement** with **Riyadh**, and a diversified **regional strategy** to safeguard its vital **interests** and navigate the new strategic **landscape**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. How does the Saudi-Pakistan pact affect India's interests and influence in the Gulf?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following is not a member of 'Gulf Cooperation Council'? (2016)

- (a) Iran
- (b) Saudi Arabia
- (c) Oman
- (d) Kuwait

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyse India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian countries. (2017)