



Navigating India's Interests Amid Saudi-Pakistan Alignment

This editorial is based on "[Why India shouldn't be worried by Saudi-Pak deal](#)," which was published in The Indian Express on 21/09/2025. The article examines the Saudi-Pakistan Mutual Defence Pact, its timing amid shifting West Asian security dynamics, and its implications for regional stability and India's strategic interests.

For Prelims: Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA), [NATO's Article 5](#), [Abraham Accords](#), [Houthis](#), [EX-SADA TANSEEQ-I](#), [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)](#), [I2U2](#)

For Mains: Key Highlights of Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA), Geopolitical Impact of SMDA.

The recent signing of a **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA)** between **Saudi Arabia** and **Pakistan** in **September 2025** marked a **watershed event** in **Middle Eastern** and **South Asian geopolitics**. This **diplomatic upgrade** not only recalibrates **regional security calculations** but also reverberates across the **global order**, confronting **India** with new **strategic challenges**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan?

- **Terms of the Agreement:** The Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) formalizes collective defence between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, stating that *"any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both."*
 - The agreement establishes mechanisms for permanent **coordination**, including a **joint military committee**, **intelligence-sharing arrangements**, and **expanded training programmes**.
 - It formalizes Pakistan's long-standing **military presence in Saudi Arabia** and reflects Saudi intent to enhance Pakistan's strategic role in **Persian Gulf security**.
 - Although **nuclear cooperation** is hinted at, the agreement does not explicitly extend Pakistan's nuclear umbrella to Saudi Arabia.
- **Timing and Strategic Context :** The SMDA was announced shortly after Israel attacked Qatar, highlighting Saudi perceptions of regional vulnerability.
 - Qatar hosts the **Al-Udeid** **airbase**, the largest **U.S. military base** in West Asia, and the attack without a strong U.S. response underscored that **Saudi Arabia cannot rely solely on U.S. security guarantees**.
 - The timing reflects the **changing Gulf security environment**, where regional threats are increasing and American involvement is perceived as diminishing.
- **Drivers Behind the Pact:**
 - **U.S. retrenchment:** The U.S. strategic shift to East Asia and past inaction during Iran-backed attacks on Saudi oil facilities (2019) signaled reduced reliability.
 - **Gaza war and Israel's actions:** The **October 2023 Hamas attack** and Israel's subsequent military response destabilized the region, undermining Saudi plans to

normalize relations with Israel under the **Abraham Accords**.

- **Houthis in Yemen:** The Houthis expanded **missile and drone capabilities**, targeting Saudi oil infrastructure and shipping, while controlling half of Yemen, including **Sanaa**, creating persistent security challenges.

How does the Saudi-Pakistan Pact Impact Regional Geopolitics and Global Strategic Order?

- **Recalibration of Gulf and West Asian Security Architecture:** The **SMDA** institutionalizes Pakistan's formal security role in West Asia, a region traditionally dependent on US security guarantees.
 - The **pact** commits both nations to treat **aggression** against one as **aggression against both**, signaling a **collective defense model** akin to **NATO's Article 5**.
 - By anchoring **security ties** with **nuclear-capable Pakistan**, **Saudi Arabia** signals a shift towards **multi-alignment security strategies**, reducing exclusive dependence on the **US**.
 - This move could create a **strategic vacuum**, potentially allowing **China** and **Russia** to deepen their **influence** in the region, as **Riyadh** diversifies **partnerships** to hedge against **uncertainties**.
- **Nuclear Proliferation Concerns and Strategic Stability Risks:** The pact reportedly includes provisions for Pakistan's nuclear umbrella to extend to Saudi Arabia, raising proliferation anxieties in an already tense region.
 - This formal linkage escalates **security dilemmas** among **rival states** and complicates global **non-proliferation efforts**.
 - Any **military conflict** involving **Pakistan** may now risk **regionalizing nuclear confrontation**, destabilizing **South Asia** and the **Middle East**.
- **Enhanced Strategic Confidence for Pakistan vis-à-vis India:** The pact emboldens Pakistan's geopolitical posture, potentially strengthening its deterrence calculus against India.
 - With **Saudi Arabia's backing**, **Islamabad** may adopt a more **assertive stance** on **Kashmir** and **cross-border terrorism**, raising **security risks** for **New Delhi**.
 - **Pakistan's Defense Minister**, affirming **Saudi support** in a hypothetical **India-Pakistan war**, underlines the altered **security parameter**.
- **Impact on India-Saudi Arabia Relations and Diplomatic Balancing:** Despite the pact, Saudi Arabia remains one of India's largest energy suppliers and economic partners.
 - **Riyadh's reassurances** to **New Delhi** emphasize continuing **strategic partnership** while managing its evolving **alliance with Islamabad**.

How have India-Saudi Arabia Relations Developed Over the Years?

- **Historic and Evolving Diplomatic Relations:**
 - **India** and **Saudi Arabia** established **diplomatic relations** in **1947**. The relationship witnessed a significant upgrade with the **Delhi Declaration (2006)** and **Riyadh Declaration (2010)**, elevating ties to a **Strategic Partnership**.
 - **High-level visits**, including **PM Narendra Modi's state visits** to Saudi Arabia in **2016, 2019, 2025**, and **Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visits** to India in **2019, 2023, 2025**, further cemented **bilateral relations**.
- **Economic and Trade Dimensions:**
 - **Bilateral trade** reached approximately **\$42 billion** in **FY 2024-25**, with **Indian exports** of **\$11.75 billion** and **imports** of **\$30.12 billion** from Saudi Arabia.
 - Key **Indian exports** include **rice, aircraft, motor vehicles and chemicals**.
 - **Saudi investments** (including **Public Investment Fund**) are valued at around **\$10 billion** in **telecom, retail, renewable energy**, while **Indian investments** in Saudi Arabia amount to roughly **\$3 billion**.
- **Energy Security Partnership:**
 - **Saudi Arabia** is **India's third-largest crude oil and LPG supplier**, underpinning **energy security**.

- The **\$44 billion West Coast Refinery and Petrochemicals Project** in **Maharashtra**, a joint venture with **Saudi Aramco**, advances cooperation.
- India and Saudi Arabia have also expanded collaboration to include **renewable energy** and **strategic petroleum reserves**.
- **Growing Defence and Strategic Cooperation:**
 - **Defence ties** have expanded rapidly since **2020** with **joint naval exercises (Al Mohed Al Hindi series)** and the first-ever **joint land force exercise (EX-SADA TANSEEQ-I)** in **2023**.
 - The **India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council** was broadened in **2025** to include a **Defence Cooperation Committee**, reflecting accelerated **military collaboration** and a shared interest in **regional security**.
- **Socio-Cultural and People-to-People Connect:**
 - **India's expatriate community** in Saudi Arabia, estimated at **2.7 million**, fosters strong **socio-cultural bonds**.
 - **Religious ties** remain significant with increased **Hajj quotas** and enhanced **pilgrim arrangements**. **Cultural cooperation** continues to expand, cementing **people-to-people relations** as a pillar of the **bilateral partnership**.



What Policy Measures can India Adopt to Uphold Its Strategic Interests Amidst the Saudi-Pakistan Defence Pact?

- **Deepen Strategic and Defence Cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Gulf States:** India must intensify its defence and strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia by expanding joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and defence technology collaboration.
 - The **2025 expansion** of the **India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council** to include a **Defence Cooperation Committee** is a step forward.
 - India should also strengthen ties with other **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** members like the **UAE, Oman, and Qatar** to create a **network of security partners** that offsets

the **Saudi-Pakistan axis**.

- **Enhance Diplomatic Engagement and Multilateral Outreach:** India should leverage multilateral platforms such as the United Nations, G20, and [I2U2](#) to raise awareness about regional security threats, including nuclear proliferation risks posed by the pact.
 - Active **diplomacy** with the **US**, **EU**, and **Middle Eastern partners**, including **Iran**, can ensure India's concerns over the pact's **destabilizing effects** are acknowledged internationally.
- **Accelerate Military Modernization and Intelligence Capabilities:** Given the enhanced strategic confidence Pakistan gains through the pact and Saudi backing, India must expedite the modernization of its armed forces, particularly in countering conventional threats and cross-border terrorism.
 - Strengthening **early warning systems**, **cybersecurity**, and **surveillance** along the **western frontiers** will be critical.
 - Increasing resources for **intelligence gathering** and **rapid response forces** will ensure India maintains **credible deterrence**, considering any **conflict with Pakistan** may have broader **regional implications**.
- **Diversify Energy and Economic Partnerships in the Gulf and Beyond:** Saudi Arabia is a vital energy supplier and economic partner for India.
 - While safeguarding these ties, India must diversify energy sources by strengthening relationships with other Gulf countries and investing in renewable energy projects linked to Gulf economies.
 - Strategic investments in initiatives such as the [India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor \(IMEC\)](#) will reduce dependency on **vulnerable supply chains** and enhance India's **geopolitical leverage**.
 - To **balance its interests in West Asia**, India can strategically **strengthen ties with Iran** by **revitalising the Chabahar project**, which is currently under strain due to the **US sanction waiver**, while ensuring that its approach does not **undermine its relationship with Israel**.
 - Deepening **trade** and **technology partnerships** will balance **economic relations** even as **security alliances** shift.

Conclusion:

As External Affairs Minister **Dr. S. Jaishankar** often remarked, ***"The India way would be to be more of a decider or a shaper rather than an abstainer... not a disruptionist but a stabilising power that uses its capacities for global good."*** The Saudi-Pakistan defence pact reinforces this imperative, urging India to move beyond a reactive posture towards a **proactive, strategically autonomous, and diplomatically agile role**.

By strengthening defence preparedness, diversifying partnerships, and shaping regional security discourses, India can not only **safeguard its national interests** but also consolidate its position as a **stabilising force in an evolving multipolar order**.

Drishti Mains Question:

"The Saudi-Pakistan defence pact highlights the shifting security landscape of West Asia with implications for South Asia." In this context, discuss how India can safeguard its interests and reinforce its role as a stabilising force in a multipolar world.

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)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-editorials/22-09-2025/print>

