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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relationship in the Limelight of Current Defense Deal;****Dawn of a New Era****Aisha Cheema**

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have strong historical, cultural, religious and strategic ties, which have led to the history of mutual respect and co-operation in the bilateral relationship. The two countries have over the decades established a close relationship that has taken place in the political, economic and military fronts. One of the main aspects of such relations is the mutual defense accord according to which two countries have also undertaken to defend one another in the domain of regional security and defense cooperation. This has seen a mutual military training, intelligence, and training programs and has seen an interest in common interest in stability within the region, countering terrorism and preserving Holy sites of the Islam religion. Pakistan has been historically giving military skills and manpower to help Saudi Arabia enhance its defense, whereas Saudi Arabia has given Pakistan economic and diplomatic help whenever the nation was in serious need. This long term partnership does not only enhance the security framework of the Muslim world but also highlights the strategic relevance of co-operation among Islamic states in responding to typical threats and promoting peace within the region. It has also, however, brought up a number of questions. What are the historical basis of Pak-Saudi Arabia bilateral relationship? What does either of the countries play and what is their role in case of an attack on the other country? How has Pakistan aided Saudi Arabia in defense and regional security and stability in the Middle East and South Asia under mutual defense agreement? Will Pakistan go to the extent of deploying their nuclear weapons in the interests of Riyadh and what will become of Saudi Arabia and the surrounding of Pakistan? Notably, what is the perception of the United States towards this development?

Keywords: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Bilateral Relationship, Defense Deal, Middle East, Security Framework

Introduction

Thousands of years old Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the owner of ancient cultures, trade routes, and traces of early human settlements, rock art and inscriptions can be found all over the deserts and mountains. The Thamud, Lihyanites and Nabataeans were also content in this land and archaeological remains point to a rich and a varied cultural heritage. The most important fact is that Islam originated in Saudi Arabia. Among major religions that exist in the world, Islam is not an exception (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia official website).

In 610 the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was given the initial revelation of the Islam religion in Makkah by Allah through the angel Gabriel. Following this revelation, Makkah is what became to be considered the most sacred city in Islam. Islamic community was later founded by Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in Madina. These two cities helped spread the Islam over the Arabian Peninsula and the world at large within a short period of time making the region a spiritual, cultural and historical center of the Muslim world.

To this day, Makkah and Madina still receive millions of pilgrims annually, and the two holiest cities in the Muslim faith are still under the custody of Saudi Arabia. The Arabian Peninsula was used as a crossroads of the ancient world between the two great centers of civilization, the Nile River Valley and Mesopotamia. During the seventeenth century, the whole Islamic empire was disintegrated into various other small kingdoms of Muslims. As a result, the Arabian Peninsula was slowly getting into the state of isolation, even though Makkah and Madinah did not lose their central spiritual role in the Islamic world.

Incorporation of first Saudi State

Shaikh Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab, a Muslim scholar and a reformer, championed the idea of going back to the original and pure teachings of Islam as practiced during the days of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and his companions. At this stage, the strong resistance of local religious scholars and leaders arose in opposition to what Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab introduced to them as a life danger to the power structures they had established Saudi Embassy.

Because of this resistance, Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab took refuge in the city of Diriyah which was under the rule of Muhammad Bin Saud. The two leaders also made a contract whose focus was the preservation and restoration of the true teachings of Islam. This partnership combined religious reformation and political power creating the core of the first Saudi State in 1727. The original Saudi State was formed under the religious leadership of Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab who was later referred to as Shaikh. The Saudi State had come to control the central plateau of Najd by 1788 and in the first part of the nineteenth century it extended its territories to cover much of the Arabian Peninsula including Makkah and Madinah. The increasing role of the Saudi State caused an alarm to the Ottoman Empire, which was then the overall power in the Middle East and North Africa. The Ottomans in turn sent their vassal Muhammad Ali Pasha to wipe out the Saudi troops (Ochsenwald et al., 2025).

The Second Saudi State

In 1824, the Al Saud family had once again taken its political authority in the central Arabia. The Second Saudi State was established with the help of the transfer of the capital by the Saudi ruler Turki Bin Abdullah Al Saud between Diriyah and Riyadh. As a ruler, Turki managed to reclaim the majority of the territories that belonged to the Ottomans. The citizens of the state were also able to enjoy a peaceful and prosperous life under the rule of Turki Bin Abdullah (1824-1834) and his son Faisal Bin Turki Al Saud (1834-1838 and 1843-1865) (Britannica).

This prosperity and peace was however destroyed in 1865 when an Ottoman campaign was launched to expand its Middle East borders into the Arabian Peninsula. By the conclusion of this war, the Hail family of Al Rashid was toppled by the Ottoman troops. In 1891, Abdulrahman Bin Faisal Al Saud had to give up his resistance and sought protection in Bedouin tribes in the vast eastern Arabian desert called the Rub al Khali or the Empty Quarter. It was there that Abdulrahman and his family headed to Kuwait where they stayed until 1902. With him came his young son Abdulaziz who was already a novice leader and a ruthless warrior in the cause of Islam (Saudi Embassy Website).

The Contemporary Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Young Abdulaziz was keen on getting his family legacy back with the Al Rashid family. He recaptured Riyadh and appointed there a governor and garrison. In 1920, Abdulaziz with forty followers made a bold night raid to Riyadh to regain control of the city garrison otherwise expected to be captured by the rebels, a night raid that is usually referred to as the capture of Riyadh Fortress. The unification of warring tribes into one political unit took place between 1924 and 1925 with the help of Abdulaziz who conquered the territories of Hijaz, Makkah and Madinah. With a long struggle, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia became an official Islamic state, with Arabic as its official language on 23 September 1932 and the Holy Quran as its constitution.

King Abdulaziz (1932-1953)

The founder and first monarch of modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was King Abdulaziz. He brought the nation on a modernization pathway by integrating the various tribes, coming up with the fundamental communication networks, introducing the modern technologies, enhancing education, health and agriculture. It is also during his rule that oil was discovered and the Council of Ministers was established. His rule was founded on Islamic values, and there was no constitution, and the only law was Quran and Sunnah (Saudipedia, 2025).

King Saud (1953-1964)

The second king of Saudi Arabia known as King Saud Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was a continuation of his father by further empowering the Council of Ministers and formed the Ministries of Health, Education and Commerce. The improvement of education was one of his greatest accomplishments that was characterized by the establishment of many schools in the country. He established the first higher learning institution in the kingdom in 1957. During 1962, he funded an international Islamic conference that formed the Muslim World League which was based in Makkah, the sacred city of Islam.

King Faisal (1964-1975)

King Faisal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was the monarch of Saudi Arabia between 1964 and 1975, which can be regarded as one of the most dramatic periods in the modern history of the country. His reign was marked by extensive economic, administrative and educational changes which included introducing women education and large scale development of infrastructure in terms of roads and hospitals among other telecommunication services. King Faisal was instrumental in the 1973 oil embargo of the United States and other western nations in the Yom Kippur War on behalf of Arab states. He too advocated Islamic unity to a great extent and he played a part in the formation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 1969. He is also known worldwide as the strong personality in Arab Israeli affairs and oil diplomacy (Ochsenwald et al., 2025).

King Khalid (1975-1982)

In 1975 King Faisal was replaced by King Khalid Bin Abdulaziz. His reign was characterized with economic supremacy, religious conservatism and internal stability. In 1981, King Khalid was influential in the formation of a Gulf Cooperation Council. The founding members of the organization included Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia that wanted to further economic and security collaboration within the member states (Saudi Embassy).

King Fahd Bin Abdulaziz (1982-2005)

King Fahd Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud came up with the Basic Law of Governance, which explained the functions of the monarchy, the Majlis al Shura and other state bodies. The economic diversification, encouraged development of large scale infrastructure, such as roads, airports, the King Fahd International Airport in Dammam, the causeway connecting Saudi Arabia and

Bahrain, and large scale investment in education and healthcare were the subject of his policies.

He called himself the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madinah. Among others, this is one of his greatest accomplishments, which he used to expand the two mosques to accommodate the increased number of pilgrims who come every year. King Fahd was instrumental in dealing with the crises in the Arabian region and the world in general such as the Arab Palestinian conflict, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Lebanese civil war and conflicts in Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Somalia and Kashmir (Knauerhase, 1975).

King Abdullah (2005-2015)

King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was a King of Saudi Arabia, who reigned in the country between 2005 and his death on 23 January 2015. During his tenure, there was significant infrastructural developmental project, such as airports, roads and economic cities like King Abdullah Economic City. He spent massively on education, on healthcare and encouraged gradual diversification of the economy, to curb reliance on oil earnings. King Abdullah also embarked on massive overseas scholarship schemes that have taken hundreds of thousands of Saudi pupils to higher education institutions overseas and new universities with the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology being another one.

In 2013, the Shura Council was opened to women elected by King Abdullah and they were declared to have the right to vote and to run municipal elections. He has also re-organized the judiciary system as a part of overall modernization. His policy on foreign policy was very firm and non-compromising concerning the issue of terrorism. In February 2005, an International Counterterrorism Conference in Riyadh took place in Saudi Arabia whereby it demanded further cooperation among nations. Such diplomacy was based on Saudi Arabia being on the forefront in championing Arab Islamic interests especially the Palestine Israel issue, and its belief in world peace and stability and security.

King Salman (2015 - Present)

The rule of King Salman Bin Abdulaziz has been characterized by significant change both locally and globally. Although he is the official sovereign, since 2017 most of the policy directions in the Kingdom are propelled by his son, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. In 2016, he introduced his development plan called the Vision 2030. Vision 2030 also includes thereafter mega projects:

- NEOM smart city in the desert.
- The Line: A line smart city featuring zero cars, zero streets and zero emissions.
- Red Sea Project: Luxury tourism spot.
- Qiddiya: Riyadh-based entertainment city.

This vision is primarily meant to diversify the Saudi Arabian economy to eliminate overdependence on oil. It is also keen on development of tourism, the development of non oil industries like entertainment, technology and mining and increasing the employment of the private sector. Mohammed Bin Salman has made significant economic reforms such as Value Added Tax (FPCCI).

Alongside this, Saudi Arabia experienced vast social and cultural liberalization and legal and structural reform, such as the lifting of the ban on women driving in 2018, the reduction of gender segregation in social places, the limitation of the authority of the religious police, the prohibition of music concerts, cinemas and mixed-gender gatherings, the alteration of the system of guardianship, registration of births, marriages and divorces, and reform of labour laws and foreign investment regulations. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia improved its ties with the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Pakistan and India, and welcomed such

major international events as the G20 summit in 2020. The reign of King Salman, which was mostly influenced by Mohammed Bin Salman is generally considered a turning point in the modern history in Saudi Arabia, which has transformed extreme conservatism into ambitious economic and social reforms as well as a more authoritarian form of governance (Knauerhase, 1975).

Up to the year 1947, the whole part was under British colonization. Introduction of Pakistan is something extraordinary in the contemporary history. The scholars state that Pakistan was born conceptually when Muhammad Bin Qasim arrived in the subcontinent in 712 and the first native populations converted to Islam. Nevertheless, the movement that started an intellectual process to protect the rights of the Muslims in British India was the War of Independence of 1857 (Khattak, 2020). Firstly, the Two Nation Theory was developed by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and then violently expressed by Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Jawad et al., 2025).

Faith, discipline and determination helped the Muslim community in the face of difficult conditions and a lack of finances. All India Muslim League was started in 1906 in order to safeguard the political rights of Muslims. On 1 October 1906, a Muslim group of thirty six leaders came face to face with the Viceroy of India at Simla and demanded constitutional protection of Muslims (Burki and Ziring, 2025).

The concept of a separate Muslim state was introduced by Allama Muhammad Iqbal in one of his presidential speeches in Allahabad on 29 December 1930. Pakistan was proposed in 1933 by a pamphlet by Choudhry Rahmat Ali called Now or Never (Firstpost, 2025). The Muslim League adopted the Lahore Resolution (today called the Pakistan Resolution), on 23 March 1940. The resolution required the independent Muslim states to be constituted of Punjab, Sindh, Sarhad, Balochistan, Kashmir and Bengal (Khattak, 2020). The Second World War became conclusive as British rulers were pressurized to exit India. Lord Mountbatten declared the June Plan after consultation with Congress and leadership of Muslim League. Having been recognised by both sides, Pakistan became an independent Muslim state on 14 August 1947, and the first nation to have been established specifically in the name of Islam (Khattak, 2020).

Saudi Arabia is a country that is the ninth largest entity located in the globe, with Jordan and Iraq at the north, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates at its east, Oman and Yemen respectively, at its south and southeast respectively. It boasts of a population of about 32.4 million, a nominal GDP of about US dollars 770 billion and per capita income of about US dollars 23,186. Saudi Arabia is a participant in the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, G20, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. It has the largest oil deposits in the world and one of the most prolific sources and exporters of crude oil (FPCCI).

The Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have been engaging in religious, economic, social and security relationships over the last 70 years. The relations were made through diplomatic relations soon after the independence of Pakistan and they have been mostly friendly. The economic and strategic collaboration intensified with Saudi Arabia having to need skilled labor and Pakistan needing economic aid. The two countries also find it regular to consult on matters of regional security and global security. The two states have a common historical trade connection, similar geographic location, and religious affiliation as well as being major members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation under the umbrella of United Nations and World Trade Organization. Saudi Arabia has been involved in providing financial aid to Pakistan such as oil, building of schools and mosques and other aids during the wars of 1965 and 1971, nuclear tests of 1998, earthquake of 2005 and floods in 2010 and 2011.

Saudi Arabia is the biggest petroleum source to Pakistan and has supplied free or subsidized oil at the most crucial times. The two nations engage in close military integration in terms of training, sharing of expertise as well as defence cooperation. Saudi Arabia has also defended the Pakistani position regarding the Kashmir problem in other international bodies like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations. In 1951, it became a formal bilateral relationship as the Treaty of Friendship was signed (Embassy of Pakistan). Long term strategic, political, military and economic cooperation were the foundation on which this treaty was based. The relations were also enhanced when King Saud visited Pakistan in 1954 where he revealed his appreciation of the feelings of the Pakistani people towards Saudi Arabia. Although Pakistan had joined the Baghdad Pact that upset many Muslim states, King Saud promised that Pakistan leadership of his unwavering support (Burke, 1973). At a later time, Saudi Arabia pressured Pakistan to exit the agreement because of its connotations to the Arab interests (Ahmad and Faisal, 2014).

Saudi Arabia has always been interested in the internal and foreign affairs of Pakistan. In 1954, it helped in the diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and in the early 1960s, it requested the help of Pakistan in the time of crisis in the region in Egypt and Yemen. Another area of protection of Saudi interests is in the United Kingdom and France when Saudi Arabia cut off its relationship with both nations during the Suez Crisis. The ties were also increased with the rise of King Faisal to the throne in 1965. Saudi Arabia has strongly stood with Pakistan in the wars of 1965 and 1971 providing both moral and material support (Pakistan Horizon). In April 1966, King Faisal again gave his backing to Pakistan and Kashmir by visiting Pakistan and they came up with a joint statement that supported the right of self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir (Aware Pakistan, 2022). In 1973, the foreign policy of Pakistan was later rejuvenated by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Rizvi, 2014).

In the Arab Israeli war of 1973, Pakistan announced its support to the Arab nations and worked hand in hand with Saudi Arabia in international conferences to free the Muslim lands, such as Al Quds (Makhdoom, 2010). Such collaborations resulted in the Third Islamic Summit that was hosted in Lahore in 1974 and was jointly hosted by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. In 1976, a bilateral friendship was established with the establishment of the Shah Faisal Mosque. The defence cooperation grew even greater under the leadership of General Zia ul Haq and Saudi Arabia also backed the Islamization policies of Pakistan (Khan et al., 2020). In 1977, Faisalabad was inaugurated in his honour in the name of King Faisal. In 1982, a defence cooperation agreement was signed and thousands of Pakistani soldiers were stationed in Saudi Arabia in the cold war to protect holy places. The Saudi Arabia also gave religious and educational support in building mosques and madrassas located in Pakistan (Aware Pakistan, 2022). When Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in the year 1998, Saudi Arabia joined hands with Pakistan in terms of diplomacy. Following the 9/11, the two states liaised on Afghanistan, counterterrorism and regional stability (Ahmad and Faisal, 2014). Military cooperation continues to be one of the pillars of bilateral relations and the Saudi defence forces train and get advice through the Pakistan Army (Ali, 2024).

In 2014, King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, who is the Crown Prince, paid a visit to Pakistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). It was a remarkable visit during the Yemen crisis. Pakistan had pledged to Saudi Arabia its assured assistance in case of any aggression practiced against the Kingdom and most importantly the Holy Mosques (Aware Pakistan, 2022). The goal of the Vision 2030 by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is to diversify the economy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is based on oil, and Pakistan can be instrumental in this process. In the past, the labour force in Pakistan has been instrumental in developing Saudi

Arabia and in the future, higher inflows of skilled labour and technical skills in Pakistan could help the Kingdom to attain the ambitious objectives in infrastructure, technology and renewable energy.

Further, Saudi Arabia has shown interests in investing in the Pakistani energy sector and infrastructure which is a much needed foreign direct investment in order to promote the economic growth of Pakistan. Some projects like the construction of an oil refinery in Gwadar through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor may be used to mark a new era in economic cooperation between the two nations. Pakistan Saudi Arabia relationship is defined as a long-standing siblinghood which is nourished by the same religious principles, strategic alliance and reciprocal economic benefits. Throughout decades, Saudi Arabia has provided economic assistance and diplomatic support to Pakistan and Pakistan has made its military services to enhance the security of Saudi Arabia. With new geopolitical and economic issues facing the two countries, their relations will continue to intensify with increased collaborative efforts in investment, trade and technology. This relationship is a foundation of the foreign policies of the two countries along with their future courses since it is built on trust and respect.

Mutual Defense agreement signed between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on September 17 came as a surprise to many people in the South Asian region and the Arab Gulf. The accord was close on the heels of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit in Qatar which was conducted weeks after Israel attacked the Hamas leadership in a military onslaught in Doha. At the same time, the summit criticized the actions of Israel (Firdous et al., 2025). Excitement, and concern were created on the part of the region concerning the Saudi Pakistani Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement. The issue of concerns over area of duties during the case of an attack became questionable as well as the intended targets of deterrence and larger impact on the security of the region. There was a question of whether Pakistan would consider using its nuclear deterrent on Saudi Arabia and the reaction of the United States to such an arrangement.

Over decades, the Pakistani and Saudi Arabian countries have had military relations. Pakistan has been providing training to thousands of Saudi military since 1962. In 1982, military collaboration was institutionalized through a protocol accord due to developments like the Siege of the Grand Mosque in Makkah in 1979, the Iran Iraq War and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The role of Pakistan in defense increased further in the First Gulf War when thousands of Pakistani soldiers were sent in Saudi Arabia to protect the strategic zones and sacred places. A defense alliance had been in play a few years prior. Israeli attacks on Doha are said to have spurred the completion of the deal. The agreement views an attack on either state as an attack on both countries and this raises the question of how it affects the South Asian security. Criticism was made by some Indian officials and others, Saudi Arabia has recently preferred to mediate India Pakistan crises, instead of siding. In the case of Pakistan the deal has promise of financial and military assistance at Riyadh but also poses the potential of deeper involvement in Gulf politics.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, the agreement assists in creating a safe environment that is needed in the diversification of the economy as per the Vision 2030. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia will tend to increase military cooperation by increasing the number of joint exercises, training programs, exchanging of intelligence and deployment of more Pakistani defence personnel. Yet, it is not clear what the agreement would mean in fact an extended nuclear deterrence, which is based on historical speculation and latest political signaling (Dossani, 2025). During decades, there has been speculation about a Pakistani Saudi nuclear relationship. These were supported by references to an Islamic bomb in the 1970s and Saudi financial aid following nuclear tests by

Pakistan in 1998. Despite years of being regarded as a mere speculation, the uncertainty involving the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement has once again brought up the debate on whether the partnership has a nuclear facet. Lack of consistency in rhetoric will jeopardize the well-established nuclear posture of Pakistan, which is based on deterrence of India only. Any impression of nuclear assurances to Saudi Arabia would become open to international criticism. Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly, the Iranian President Pezeshkian defined the Saudi Pakistan defence arrangement as a framework of wider regional security.

Conclusion

The multidimensional and age old relationship of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is a pillar of regional Muslim world diplomacy. This alliance has been based on the mutual interests and shared religious values, cultural relations, and strategic interests. The Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement offers a platform of greater military collaboration which comprises training, joint training, sharing and coordination of intelligence and security. Military skills of Pakistan and economic/diplomatic assistance of Saudi Arabia have also strengthened this alliance. As the two nations continue to work in a more complicated geopolitical situation, bilateral defense cooperation will continue to be the key to stability in South Asia and the Middle East. To enhance this collaboration, the two nations are advised to work on strengthening the institutional mechanisms by various means through frequent and regular defense discussions and joint committees, increasing joint military training and exercises, enhancing intelligence sharing, promoting collaboration in defense technology, diversifying strategic engagement to economic and educational sphere, and aligning their positions in the multilateral forums, including Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United Nations. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia can remain as stabilizers and participants of strategic cooperation in the Islamic world and the wider world by developing their current security cooperation and expanding their strategic interaction.

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