

Q1

Q6: How do you see chances of the end of Ukrainian war when the demands of Russia and NATO are conflicting and poles apart? Elaborate?

10/12/2025

1. INTRODUCTION: A DEEP DIVE OVER PEACE

The war in Ukraine has entered its fourth year with no clear end in sight, primarily because Russia's demands and NATO (and Ukraine's) demands remain fundamentally at odds. Moscow insists on a neutral Ukraine, recognition of its territorial gains, demilitarization and revoking NATO guarantees, while Kyiv and its Western allies demand the right to defend itself, retain NATO aspirations and reject annexation. These irreconcilable positions make a negotiated settlement exceptionally difficult, raising serious doubts about whether a durable, fair peace is feasible without major compromises - or a shift in geopolitical leverage.

2. RUSSIA'S CORE DEMANDS FOR PEACE:

i) Neutrality and NATO exclusion: Russia demands Ukraine formally renounce NATO

membership and stop any expansion by NATO in Eastern Europe.

2) Territorial Recognition: Moscow wants legal recognition of its control over Crimea and the four partially or fully occupied regions (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia)

3) Demilitarization: Russia insists on limiting the size of Ukraine's military and banning foreign military alliances and foreign forces on Ukraine's soil.

4) Sanctions Relief and Economic Peace: Moscow calls for lifting Western economic sanctions, ending mutual claims for wartime damages, and restoring trade and diplomatic relations.

5) Cultural and Political Concessions: Russia demands language rights for Russian speakers, banning of certain nationalist groups and constitutional bans on "Nazi ideology".

3. NATO / UKRAINE'S CORE DEMANDS FOR PEACE:

i) Security Guarantee and NATO Aspirations: Ukraine insist on credible security assurances - potentially NATO style guarantees - but rejects any deal that permanently bars it from joining NATO.

Add concrete peace attempts - Istanbul talks March 2022, Turkey/Saudi mediation, also why they collapsed? Quantify military reality - Russia holds 18% Ukraine, casualty numbers, weapon systems impact. Also Name specific blockers - Which NATO states (Poland/Baltics) reject peace? Russian hardliners opposing deals?

2) **Territorial Integrity:** Kyiv demands that any peace deal begins from the current front lines and rejects legally recognizing Russian annexed territories as a part of Russia.

3) **Unconditional Ceasefire:** Ukraine calls for a full ceasefire of at least 30 days, monitored by the 3rd parties before meaningful peace talks.

4) **Reparation and Reconstruction Funding:** Kyiv demands that frozen Russian assets be used to pay for reconstruction and that Moscow accept responsibility for war damages.

5) **Political Freedom:** Ukraine wants to keep its sovereign rights to choose alliance, maintain a robust military and protect its democratic institutions.

4. WHY DEMANDS ARE POLES APART:

1. **Fundamental Incompatibility:** Russia's demands for NATO exclusion clashes directly with Ukraine's security model, which rests on alliance membership.

2. **Territorial Redlines:** Accepting Russia's claims would undermine Ukraine's sovereignty

and set a precedent for future annexations.

3. **Mutual Trust Defects:** Years of war, broken promises and propaganda have eroded trust, making verifications and guarantees difficult.

4. **Asymmetric Power Leverages:** Russia holds military advantage on many fronts, Ukraine depends heavily on Western military aid.

5. **Geopolitical Stakes:** NATO vs Russia is not just about Ukraine but about influence in Eastern Europe - a much broader strategic contest.

RECENT NEGOTIATIONS DEVELOPMENTS (2023) AND CURRENT MOMENTUM:

1) In March 2023, the US brokered plan proposed a 30 day ceasefire, which Ukraine accepted.

2) Putin expressed conditional support but insisted on long term guarantees, including halting

Western military aid and future Ukraine

3) Russia's foreign ministry has claimed that key Western proposals do not sufficiently address its "root cause" demands, especially pertaining to NATO.

4) At a 2023 Istanbul meeting, Moscow laid out

a detailed memorandum with maximalist demands, raising fears that negotiations are more about legitimization than peace.

6. CHANCES OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IN SHORT TERM: (6-12 Months)

- Low to Moderate: Given current military dynamics and conflicting maximalist demands, a comprehensive peace treaty appears unlikely in the near term.
- The temporary 30 day ceasefire proposal: could function as a "confidence building measure" but only if both sides agree on enforceable terms.
- Russia may use a short truce to regroup or achieve tactical gains, Ukraine may demand strict monitoring and guarantees.
- Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Already hosting negotiation format (Istanbul talks)
- United States: Critical in crafting and pushing forward ceasefire proposals.
- European Union: Can provide enormous guarantees, reconstruction, funding and peace keeping support
- International Institutions: UN, OSCE, and others may monitor ceasefire, guarantee demilitarization, and oversee reconstruction.

7. PROBABILITY OF A LONG TERM SOLUTION

- Conditional: A lasting resolution could emerge only if major compromises are made (eg. limited NATO guarantees or a phased settlement)
- External actors like the US and EU must broker a security guarantee mechanism, possibly similar to NATO but not fully NATO membership.

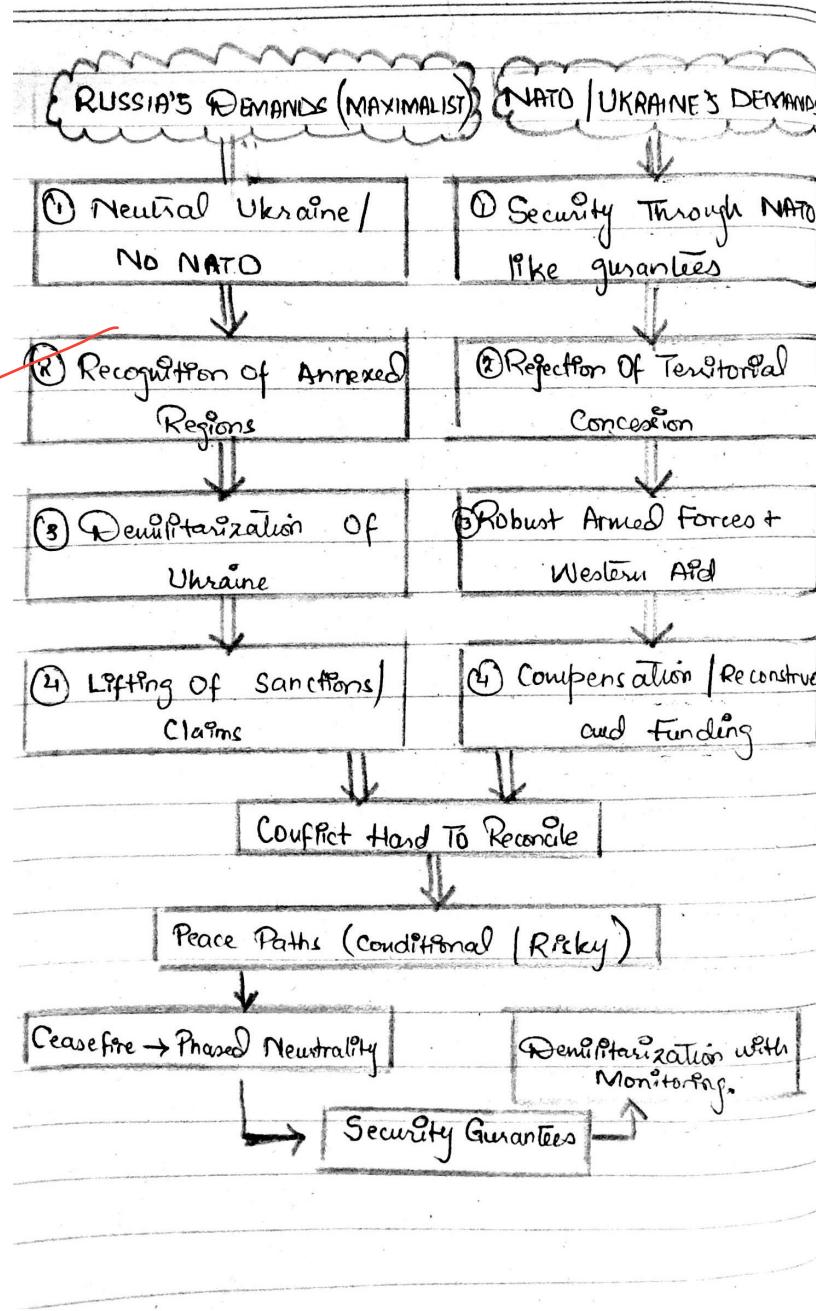
Peace requires guarantee reconstruction funding, legal frameworks, and international oversight. (eg. UN or OSCE)

8. ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS (MEDIATORS)

- 1) TURKEY AND SAUDI ARABIA: Already hosting negotiation format (Istanbul talks)
- 2) UNITED STATES: Critical in crafting and pushing forward ceasefire proposals.
- 3) EUROPEAN UNION: Can provide enormous guarantees, reconstruction, funding and peace keeping support
- 4) INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: UN, OSCE, and others may monitor ceasefire, guarantee demilitarization, and oversee reconstruction.

DIAGRAM TO ILLUSTRATE CONFLICT OF DEMANDS AND POSSIBLE PEACE PATHWAYS:

PTO



Critical Evaluation:

- Russia's demands are maximalist, suggesting it may not seek a fair peace but forced terms. This raises questions about Moscow's position to compromise.

- Ukraine's demands are non-negotiable for sovereignty particularly over NATO membership and territory, making concessions politically cost prohibitive.

- External guarantees may bridge some gaps, but enforceable guarantees without full NATO membership are untested and risky.

- Absence of trust is a major barrier. Russia may agree to conditions publicly but may sabotage them, Kyiv fears betrayals.

- Military leverage remains central; unless one side is militarily weakened or gains significantly negotiations may only produce superficial, unstable peace.

STRATEGIC SCENARIO FOR AN END GAME:

1) Maximalist Russian victory: Moscow forces Kyiv to accept most demands, leading to a heavily neutralized Ukraine.

2) Western Backed Compromise Deal: Ukraine

accepts limited security guarantees. Russia gains partial recognition and reconstruction.

CONCLUSION: The prospects for ending the Ukraine war remain slim in the near term because Russia's and NATO/Ukraine's demands are fundamentally conflicting—on territory, security and sovereignty. While limited steps such as monitored cease fire or security guarantees may provide a path forward, any durable peace requires deeply political compromises, robust external guarantees and a long term mechanism for reconciliation and reconstruction. Without these, the most likely scenario is protracted, frozen conflict—a grim outcome that risks sustained instability in Europe.

Q: How Pakistan could balance its relations after the recent engagement with US and strategic partnership with China.

PAKISTAN - NEED TO BALANCE RELATIONS AFTER ENGAGEMENT WITH US & STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH CHINA:

INTRODUCTION: BALANCING IN BIFURCATED GREAT POWER ERAS

Pakistan today faces a classic balancing problem: deeper engagement with United States in 2024-25 (security and trade talks) along side an enduring "all weather" strategic partnership with China centered on CPEC and defense cooperation. This duality requires nuanced policy that protects Pakistan's sovereignty, maximizes economic gains, and avoids entrapment in US-China rivalry. The following analysis critically examines constraints, recent evidence (2025) and pragmatic options for balance.

Question asks "HOW to balance" - you listed problems, not actual solutions

Missing Pakistan's specific available moves - SCO use? Saudi/Gulf hedging?

Turkey ties? Recent US aid details?

No cost-benefit analysis - What Pakistan gains/loses with each? Trade numbers?

Aid figures? Debt data?

you have given vague policy options - "Institutionalize cooperation" and "leverage frameworks" without specifying HOW |

RECENT US ENGAGEMENT:

Since 2024 Pakistan has resumed higher level engagement with the US - covering counter terrorism, trade talks and institutional ties; in 2025, Islamabad pursued a bilateral trade deal and defense interactions aimed at deeper military cooperation. These engagements provide economic and security dividends but also increase US expectations on Pakistan's regional posture and counter terrorism performance.

ONGOING CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP:

China remains Pakistan's strategic partner - investor, infrastructure partner and defense supplier - with CPEC Phase II planning active on the official portal and high level meetings continuing in 2025. Beijing expects Pakistan to secure Chinese projects and personnel, and to act as reliable BRI partner; these ~~not~~ expectations constrains Pakistani policy options.

KEY CONSTRAINTS:

A) SECURITY OF CHINESE NATIONALS AND PROJECTS: Attacks on Chinese Nationals

and profits (notably late 2024 incidents including ~~Quetta~~ and Karachi convoy attacks) highlighted security gaps; Islamabad faced pressure from Beijing in 2025 to demonstrate stronger protection measures. Arrest and counter-terror operations in 2025 underline Islamabad's urgency to reassure China while cooperating with the US CT priorities.

B) ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES & IMF / FINANCE

TIES: Pakistan's macroeconomic stability hinges on IMF disbursements and access to global capital; the IMF Extended Fund Facility approved in 2024 continued in 2025 with reviews and disbursements that underpins Islamabad's economic room for manoeuvre. This makes constructive US relations (and broader Western engagement) politically and economically important.

STRATEGIC DIFFICULTY: US-CHINA RIVALRY COMPRESSING POLICY SPACE:

The accelerating US-China strategic competition compresses Pakistan's diplomatic choices; deeper US ties may be perceived by Beijing

as drift, whereas closer alignment with China raises US concerns (technology, defense). Pakistan must craft policies that extract benefits without provoking punitive measures or strategic distrust from either side.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: Pakistan's ^{optimal} strategic posture is strategic equidistance; avoid block alignment, pursue issue based partnerships (security with US; infrastructure with China) and make each relationship transactional and transparent. Equidistance preserves autonomy, reduces pressure to choose, and enable Pakistan to leverage competition for economic and security gains. ^{good}

POLICY OPTIONS:

1) INSTITUTIONALIZE ISSUE BASED COOPERATION (SECURITY v/s ECONOMIC):

Trust each domain separately, deepen counter-terrorism and information sharing with the US while confining Chinese ties to economic, infrastructure and defense procurement areas. This prevents zero-sum trade off and allows

Islamabad to meet both partners' core interests without promising strategic alignment to either.

B) ENHANCE CPEC GOVERNANCE, TRANSPARENCY AND SECURITY GUARANTEES:

To reassure both China and western stakeholders, Pakistan should improve CPEC transparency, local employment and security provisions for Chinese personnel. Recent 2025 counter-terrors operation and public commitments on CPEC security must be showcased as proof of capability to protect investments.

C) DEEPEN ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION & TRADE DIPLOMACY:

Use recent 2025 trade talks with the US (ministerial visits) to expand exports and technology ties with simultaneously courting Gulf, Central Asian, EU, ASEAN partners to lower over-reliance

on any single partner. Economic diversification strengthens bargaining power and reduces vulnerability to geopolitical pressure.

D) SYNCHRONIZE COUNTERTERRORISM AND SECURITY MESSAGING:

Coordinate CT

operations and Public diplomacy to satisfy US concerns while delivering tangible security outcomes for China (protecting workers, infrastructure).

Recent joint counter-terrorist dialogues and arrests in 2025 provide leverage to show both partners Pakistan is a responsible security partner.

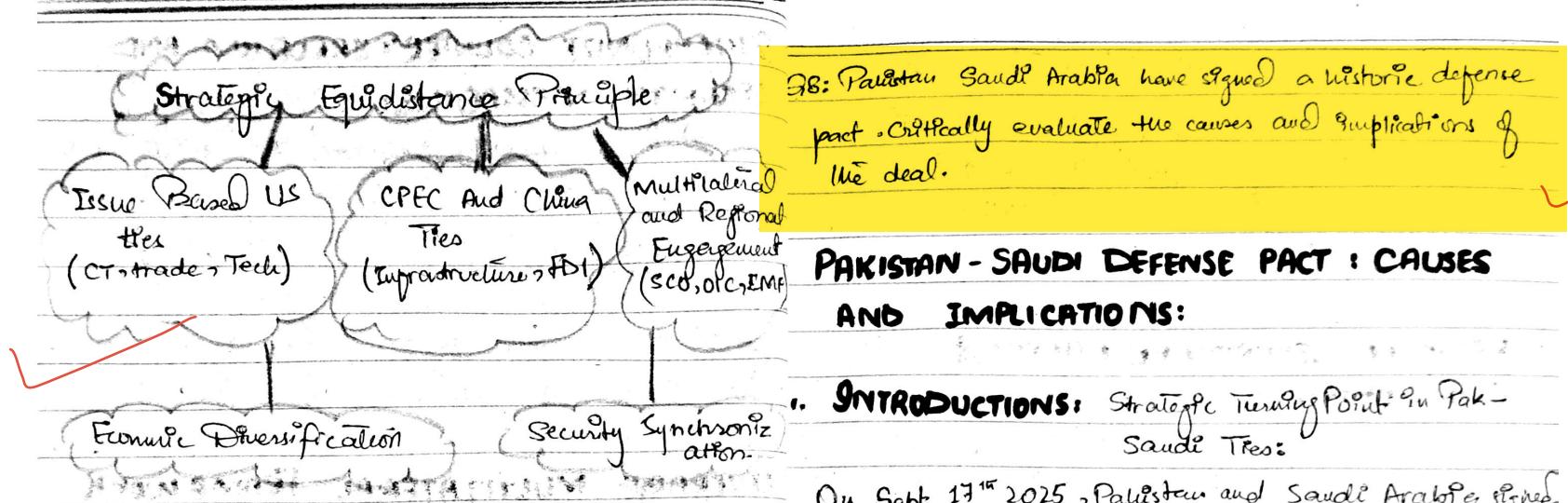
E) LEVERAGE MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK AND REGIONALISM:

Use multilateral platforms (SCO, ECO, OIC, FATF compliance) and regional initiatives (China led BRI, Gulf investments) to diffuse bilateral pressure and secure third party guarantees for major projects and trade arrangements. Multilateralization reduces the perception of binary alignments.

F) STRENGTHEN DOMESTIC RESILIENCE:

Ultimately, balance depends on domestic strength, credible governance, anti-corruption, fiscal stability and social cohesion make Pakistan less susceptible to external coercion.

IMF built this resilience and reduce strategic dependency.



Q8: Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have signed a historic defense pact. Critically evaluate the causes and implications of the deal.



PAKISTAN - SAUDI DEFENSE PACT : CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS:

1. INTRODUCTIONS: Strategic Turning Point in Pak-Saudi Ties:

On Sept 17th 2025, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) pledging that any aggression against one will be treated as an aggression against both. This formalizes decades of bilateral cooperation into binding security commitments. Given rising Gulf tensions, diminishing US reliability, and Pakistan's economic vulnerability, this pact is not just symbolic. It defines regional powers' dynamic role in Middle Eastern security.

CONCLUSION: Pakistan can balance its US engagement and China partnership if it

- persue strategic equidistance
- institutionalizes issue based partnerships
- secure CPEC through transparency and security
- diversify the economy
- strengthen domestic resilience

Recent 2024-25 events: trade talks with US-IMF

reviews | disbursements | counterterrorism arrests | India's attack on Chinese workers, and continued China-Pakistan high level exchanges underscore both the urgency and opportunity for careful balancing. If Islamabad demonstrates capacity and transparency, it can use great power competition to its advantage rather than being trapped between them.

don't add
bullets in
conclusion

2 CAUSES OF DEFENSE PACT:

a) SHARED STRATEGIC INTEREST & HISTORIC TIES

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have long-standing defense cooperation, training, joint exercises and

informal security understandings. The new pact builds on that legacy, institutionalizing what was once an implicit brotherhood rooted in Islamic solidarity and geopolitical interdependence.

3) REGIONAL SECURITY VOLATILITY & GULF ANXIETY:

Escalating tensions in the Middle East - Israel strikes (e.g. Doha, Gaza), Houthi activity and Iranian nuclear uncertainty have unsettled Gulf states. Saudi Arabia's wary of over-reliance on US guarantees, sees Pakistan as a reliable partner to bolster its deterrence.

c) DECLINING PERCEIVED RELIABILITY OF US SECURITY GUARANTEES:

Gulf States including Saudi Arabia, are increasingly questioning US commitments to their security. Amid this strategic shift, Saudi Arabia ~~realigns~~ formalizes its defense ties with Pakistan to reduce dependence on the unpredictable external partners of power.

d) PAKISTAN'S ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC INCENTIVES:

Pakistan gains from this agreement through financial, defence, and political pathways. The pact paves the way for deeper Saudi investment, and after signing, Islamabad formed an ~~18~~ member committee for broader economic talks (energy, industry, labor). Moreover, Pakistan bolsters its strategic relevance by offering its military and possibly nuclear deterrence.

E) NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND EXTENDED SECURITY AMBIGUITY:

According to Pakistan's Defense Minister Khwaja Asif, nuclear capabilities can be made available to Saudi Arabia in some manner. While Islamabad denies a formal nuclear transfer, analysts interpret the pact as an important de facto nuclear umbrella for the Kingdom. The ambiguity serves both as a deterrent and a diplomatic signal.

F) INSTITUTIONALIZING DEFENSE COOPERATION (JOINT EXERCISE, TECHNOLOGY, INTELLIGENCE)

The agreement explicitly covers a "comprehensive spectrum" of cooperation: force training, intelligence sharing, joint exercises, technology transfer. This institutional depth reflects confidence in each other's capabilities and a long-term commitment to mutual defense.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEAL:

A) STRATEGIC DETERRENCE AND REGIONAL POWER PROJECTIONS:

The pact strengthens Pakistan's role as a key military actor in the Gulf. For Saudi Arabia, this means enhanced deterrence in a volatile region, especially against near-peer threats like Iran and non-state actors such as Houthis. The deal shifts Riyadh's shift towards regional burden sharing.

B) NUCLEAR AND PROLIFERATION CONCERN

While Pakistan claims the pact does not equate to formal nuclear sharing, the

strategic ambiguity of "extended deterrent" raises concerns. This could spark anxiety in the region (Israel, Iran) and prompt calls for arm control or proliferation risk assessments.

C) ESCALATION RISKS & ENTANGLEMENT IN REGIONAL CONFLICTS:

By aligning its security with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan risks deeper entanglement in Middle Eastern rivalries. Analysts warn that Islamabad may be drawn into Gulf conflicts (e.g. proxy wars, Israel-Iran rivalry) under the guise of mutual defense. Moreover, joint commitments may force Pakistan to take sides in future regional crises.

IMPACTS ON INDIA & SOUTH ASIAN STRATEGIC LANDSCAPES:

The pact is likely to send ripples through South Asia. India already concerned about Pakistan's nuclear posture, will closely watch this defense arrangement. The agreement could recalibrate Pakistan's deterrence strategy vis-a-vis India and reinforce Islamabad's role in Islamic and

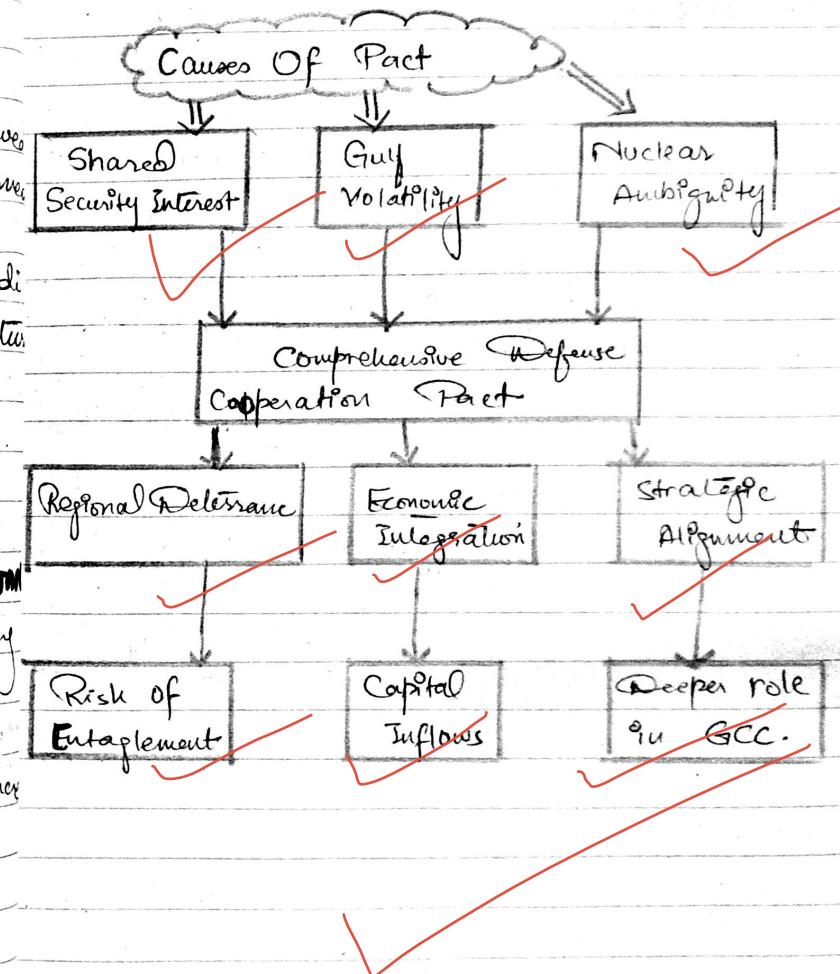
Gulf strategic circles-

ECONOMIC PAYOFF AND DEEPENED BILATERAL COOPERATION:

Beyond defense that pact catalyzes renewed Saudi economic engagement. Pakistan has formed a high-level 18-members committee to negotiate investments under the Pakistan-Saudi Economic framework covering energy, infrastructure and green technology. This may translate into long term capital inflow and strategic economic alignment.

DOMESTIC & GEOPOLITICAL RISK FOR PAKISTAN

Pakistan must manage several risks: financing and implementing the defense commitments, maintaining autonomy (especially regarding nuclear power) and avoiding over dependence. This agreement also complicates Pakistan's diplomacy with Iran and other regional actors. If Saudi relations with Iran or Israel worsens, Pakistan may be forced to navigate a difficult path.



CONCLUSION: The Pakistan-Saudi Arabia

Mutual Defense Agreement 2025 marks a watershed in Middle East security cooperation. It institutionalizes decades of bilateral ties under a formal collective security umbrella, providing both nations with enhanced deterrence ~~creativity~~ and ~~economic~~ leverage. However, the pact also brings complex implications, potential nuclear ambiguity, entanglement in Middle Eastern rivalries and strategic risk for Pakistan. To maximize benefits and mitigate risks, Islamabad must carefully operationalize the agreement, maintain diplomatic autonomy and deepen economic frameworks. If managed judiciously, this defense pact could bolster Pakistan's regional influence and contribute to greater gulf stability but misuse or overreach could drag into wider geopolitical conflicts.

overall v good attempt

however the causes are Generic - "Shared interests" without specifics:

Also Why ksa choosing Pakistan? Military manpower? Nuclear umbrella? Anti-Iran alliance?

Regional impact absent - India/Iran reactions? Impact on Pakistan-Iran ties? China's view of Saudi-US triangle?

mention public opposition to sending soldiers to fight in Yemen (Pakistan Parliament rejected Saudi request in 2015 -No mention of political parties' positions or domestic debate