

Introduction:

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations remains tense in 2028 despite China's mediation, primarily due to cross-border militancy, border clashes, broken trust, and geopolitical competition, necessitating stronger cooperation and sustained diplomatic engagement.

Major factors keeping Pak-Afghan relations tense

Cross-border militancy and blame over sheltering militants:
Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of harboring militants from Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), whom Islamabad says carry out attacks across the border. Afghan side's inability or unwillingness to provide full guarantees has bred distrust.

2. Frequent border clashes and violence:

Recently deadly clashes at border areas including large exchanges of fire, civilian casualties and ~~the~~ military ~~casualties~~ have deepened animosity

3. Pakistan's president says 'no compromise on national sovereignty.'

In statement, Zardari said Pakistan will continue to support the educational and humanitarian needs of the Afghan people but stressed: "No ~~in~~ compromise will ever be made on Pakistan's national sovereignty. (Aljazeera) report.

4. Broken trust and lack of reliable ~~guarantees~~ guarantees.

Even after agreement, Pakistan remains skeptical about Afghanistan's commitment. Ceasefires and dialogue attempts have repeatedly been undermined by subsequent violence or perceptions of betrayal.

5 Competing geopolitical influences / regional power games
The ~~in~~ involvement of third-party countries and external interests (e.g. via infrastructure or strategic alignments) complicates bilateral ties, creating pressure and suspicion on both sides.

6 Economic ~~deve~~ and humanitarian pressure + border closures.

Border closures, trade disruptions, and the ~~in~~ refugees/migrant tensions have exacerbated socioeconomic strains, increasing pressure and mistrust between population and governments.

What has been done so far (with China's mediation) → Some positive steps.

a Pakistan and Afghanistan recently agreed, in principle, to exchange ambassadors a significant diplomatic upgrade after years of strained relations.

b In a trilateral meeting with China, both agreed to deepen cooperation on security. Counterterrorism

trade, transit, and even extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan.

- Agreement for ceasefire and periodic peace talk for example, following broader clashes in October 2025 a ceasefire was mediated by Qatar and Turkiye, both Afghan and Pakistan side reaffirmed commitments to tackle terrorism together.

How can relationship be improved further

- 9) Concrete action on militant-harboring accusations: Afghanistan must show verifiable action against TTP and other militant groups reportedly operating from its soil - arrests, handing over suspects, joint broader patrols, or transparent monitoring. This would build trust.

- Institutionalised security cooperation and broader management.

Establish permanent joint border-security mechanism (shared intelligence, joint patrols, hotlines for real-time alerts) rather than ad-hoc ceasefire.

Economic Integration and trade incentives: Reopen border crossings, resume trade, facilities transit (e.g. Via CPEC extension), and promoting economic independence which can create shared stakes in peace.

Regular diplomatic engagement and dialogue for:
Maintain frequent high-level diplomatic exchanges under neutral mediation (China or other trusted partners), to build confidence and resolve disputes before escalation.

Address humanitarian and people-to-people issues:
Manage refugee flows, migration, and minority rights through shared protocols. Alleviating human suffering and economic hardships can reduce social tensions and radicalization pressures.

Outlook and Challenges:

The deep mistrust built over years, including repeated cycles of violence and broken guarantees, durable normalization between Pakistan and Afghanistan will remain fragile unless the core issue — militant shelter and cross-border terrorism — is addressed seriously and transparently.

Mediation by China and other regional actors can help, but ultimately sustainable peace depends on consistent actions, not just diplomatic gestures.

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Introduction:

Pakistan's recent re-engagement with the United States alongside its long-standing Strategic Partnership with China presents both opportunity and risk. To preserve strategic autonomy and national interests, Islamabad must also adopt a calibrated policy of diversified engagement, transactional cooperation, and institutional safeguards.

Background

2025 witnessed a visible ~~up~~ upswing in Pakistan-US contacts — driven by mutual interests in counter-terrorism, trade and rare-earth/mineral cooperation — at the same time that Islamabad combined to consolidate CPEC and broader China ties. These parallel developments make balancing imperative rather than optional.

Major challenges of balancing

1. Asymmetric dependencies:

China remains Pakistan's largest strategic and infrastructure partner (CPEC, defense supplies), while US engagement is transactional and politically conditional; asymmetric raises risks of leverage by either side.

2. Signalling dilemmas:

Deepening ties with one power can be perceived by the other as alignment, reducing Islamabad's strategic space and inviting diplomatic pressure.

Domestic institutional fragmentation:

Foreign policy coordination gaps between civil leadership, the military, and economic ministries produce inconsistent messaging and vulnerability to external demands.

Policy options (with trade off)

1. Hedging (preferred core approach)
Pursue Substantive Cooperation with both powers
While avoiding formal security entanglements.
Benefits ~~maximises~~ maximises options; Cost Requires
skillful diplomacy.
2. Bandwagging with China:
Deepen infrastructure / defense alignment. Benefits.
Secured long-term investment; cost estrangement
from western markets and technologies.
3. Rebalancing toward the U.S.
Seek expanded trade, investment and security
guarantees. Benefit: access to diversified capital
and tech; cost risks Beijing's displeasure and
reduced leverage with China.

Practical measures Islamabad should adopt.

1. Institutionalize "Strategic Pluralism"
Create an inter-agency Strategic ~~Conf~~ Council (PMO, Finance, Defence, military reps) to coordinate deals, vet security clauses, and manage signalling. This lowest ad-hoc policy costs.

2. Economic diversification and transparency:
Use CPKC-plus projects for domestic reforms (public-private partnerships, transparent bidding) while counting US investment in technology, energy and rare-earth processing to reduce overreliance on one source of capital.

3. Active regional diplomacy:
Strengthen ties with neighbours (Iran, Turkey, Gulf States, Central Asia) and multilateral fora to build alternative buffers and ~~to~~ reduce bilateral pressure from either superpower.

Transaction-based security cooperation: Pursue limited, time-bounded security arrangements with US (intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism support) that stop short of permanent basing or alliance commitments, simultaneously deepen China-Pakistan cooperation in infrastructure and maritime logistics.

Public diplomacy and clean messaging:

Communication policy aims domestically and internationally: Pakistan seeks economic development, stability and strategic ~~auton~~ autonomy — not bloc alignment.

Conclusion:

Balancing the US and China is a longterm, management-intensive task, Islamabad's best path is pragmatic hedging — institutional coordination, economic diversification, transactional security ties, and proactive regional diplomacy — so that engagement with Washington complements, rather than contradicts, the foundational China partnership.

Introduction:

The signing of the Pakistan - Saudi Arabia Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) in 2025 marks a major shift in regional geopolitics. It formalises long-standing security cooperation between Islamabad and Riyadh at a time of rising insecurity in the Gulf and changing global alignments. While the pact offers strategic and economic opportunities, it also introduces complex regional and diplomatic challenges for Pakistan.

Causes Behind the Defence Pact

1. Evolving Security Environment in the Middle East

Escalating regional tensions, including attacks on Gulf territories and uncertainty over US security guarantees, pushed Saudi Arabia to seek reliable regional partners. Pakistan, with a professional military and nuclear capability, emerged as a natural choice.

2. Historical Military Cooperation

Pakistan has long provided military training, advisory roles, and ~~develop~~ deployment support to the kingdom. The pact effectively institutionalises this decades-old cooperation into a formal collective-defense framework.

3. Strategic Convergence and Mutual Dependence

Saudi Arabia seeks credible deterrence and military support, while Pakistan needs economic investment, energy security, and regional political backing. The pact reflects a mutually beneficial alignment of interests.

1. Pakistan's Search for Regional Relevance

In a shifting global order, Islamabad aims to diversify foreign policy, reduce strategic over-reliance on major powers, and gain leverage through deeper Gulf partnerships.

Implications of the Defense Pact.

1. Enhanced Strategic Deterrence
The pact boosts Saudi defence confidence and strengthens Pakistan's strategic profile in the broader Middle East. It signals a unified response to external aggression, contributing to deterrence.
2. Economic and Diplomatic Gains for Pakistan
Pakistan has long provided military training, advisory roles, and deployment support to the Kingdom. The pact effectively institutionalises this decades-old cooperation into a formal collective-defence framework.
3. Greater Role in Regional Security Architecture
Saudi Arabia seeks credible deterrence and military support, while Pakistan needs economic investment, energy security, and regional political backing. The pact reflects a mutually beneficial alignment of interests.

1. Risk of Entrapment into Middle Eastern Conflicts

A collective-defence clause could draw Pakistan into regional confrontations that do not directly serve its national interests. This may ~~over~~ overstretch Pakistan's military and finances.

2. Complications with Neighbouring States.

Deep military alignment with Riyadh may strain ties with Iran - a critical neighbour for border security, energy routes, and regional stability.

3. Ambiguity over Nuclear Commitments

Although officials deny a nuclear umbrella the lack of clarity may lead to misperceptions strategic anxiety, and pushback from rival states.

4. Domestic Policy Pressures.

Greater military commitment abroad may divert focus from Pakistan's pressing internal challenges terrorism, economic instability and political fragmentation.

Conclusion:

The Pakistan-Saudi Arabia defence pact represents a landmark institutionalisation of bilateral security ties, driven by converging strategic needs and regional volatility. While it offers Pakistan economic relief and enhanced geopolitical relevance, it also brings risks of regional entanglement, diplomatic frictions, and commitment overload. A balanced, interest-based approach—guided by careful threat assessment and diplomatic neutrality—will be essential to ensure that the pact strengthens Pakistan's security without compromising its regional relationships.