

Current Affairs

10

(INTERNATIONAL ISSUES)

Critically review Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) with Saudi Arabia and evolving Pakistan-Iran alliance.

Analyze the potential impacts of these developments on balancing Pakistan's relations with both Middle Eastern powers.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have further deepened their long-standing strategic partnership with the signing of the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) on September 17, 2025. This agreement was signed by Pakistan Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in Riyadh. Pakistan's foreign policy has entered into a delicate balancing phase in the Middle East with the signing of SMDA with Saudi Arabia on one hand and the simultaneous warming of ties with the Iran on the other. These parallel development reflect Islamabad's attempt to navigate a volatile regional order marked by declining US

Lengthy Intro

security guarantees, Iran-Israel confrontation, Saudi strategic hedging, and the emergence of multipolar world. The central challenge for Pakistan is not alliance formation, but alliance management for maintaining credibility with Riyadh while avoiding antagonism with Tehran. Pakistan's balancing strategy is thus rooted in pragmatism rather than ideological alignment.

Any system of world order, to be sustainable, must be accepted as just—not only by leaders, but also by citizens.

~ Henry Kissinger ~

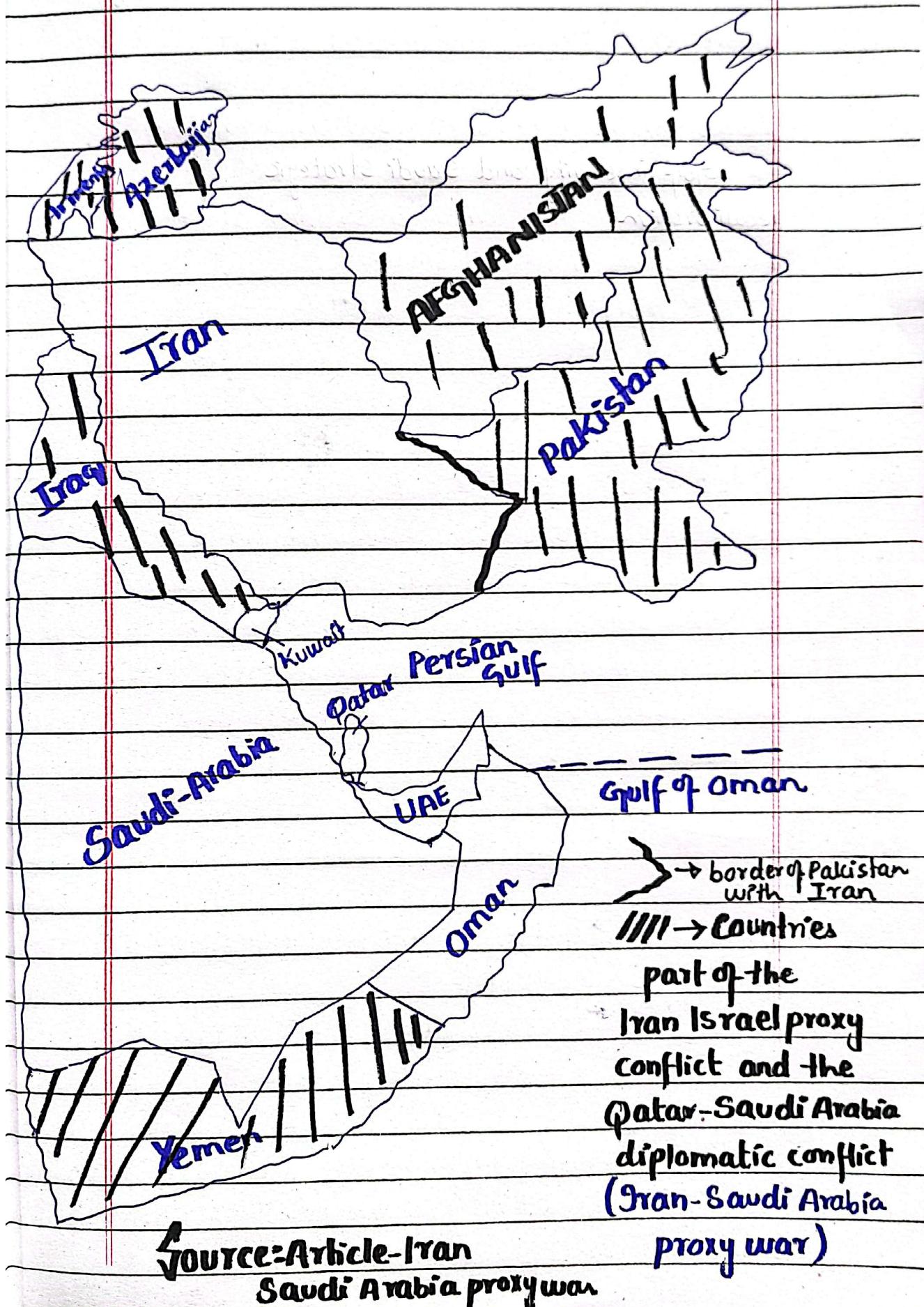
II. Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) with Saudi-Arabia: A Critical Review

- Understanding of Pakistan-Saudi-Iran triangle

Middle East Geopolitical Map: Regional Alignments and Rivalries

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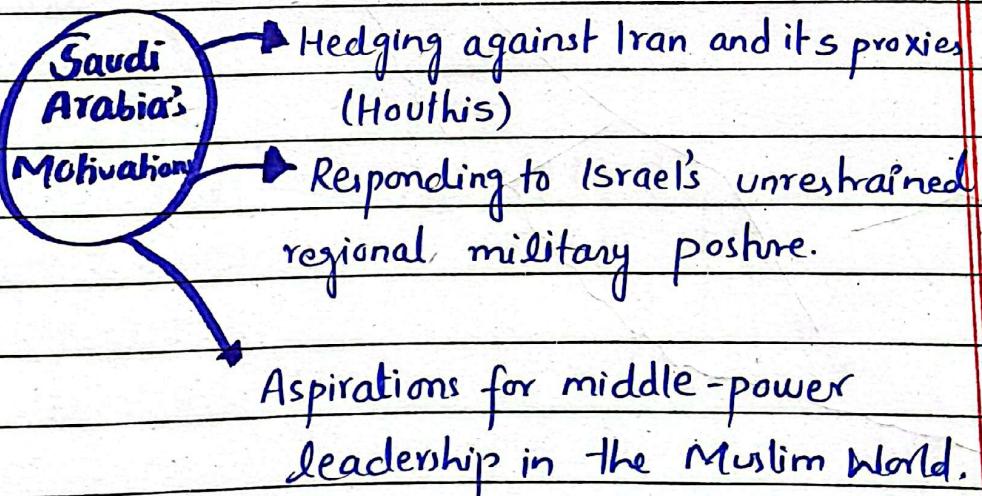
A. Rationale Behind the SMDA

The SMDA is best understood as a product of Gulf insecurity and Saudi strategic recalibration rather than a sudden shift in Pakistan's foreign policy.

1. Crisis of US-deterrence in the Gulf

The Israeli missile strike on **Doha** (September 9, 2025) critically undermined confidence in US security guarantees. This has accelerated Saudi Arabia's move towards a diversified defense partnerships. Riyadh concluded that reliance on Washington alone was no longer sufficient to deter regional threats.

2. Saudi Strategic Drivers



It institutionalizes Saudi Arabia's pursuit of

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strategic autonomy.

3. Pakistan's Calculations and SMDA

In a world defined by competition, the most connected states are the strongest.

~Joseph Nye~

For Pakistan, the agreement provides opportunities for sustained financial and energy support (deferred oil payments, deposits), protection of Saudi investments in Pakistan, enhanced geopolitical relevance beyond South Asia, counter balancing India's expanding Gulf footprint

B. Strategic and Political Implications of the SMDA

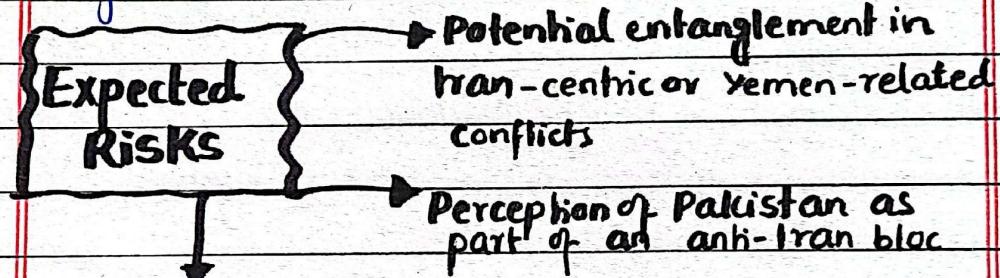
1 (g) Nuclear Ambiguity and Deterrence Signalling:

The clause committing both parties to use "all defensive and military means deemed necessary" introduces deliberate nuclear ambiguity. While

experts agree this does not constitute a formal nuclear umbrella due to Pakistan's India centric Credible Minimum deterrence rather it serves as a psychological deterrent for Saudi Arabia and a strategic signal to Iran and Israel.

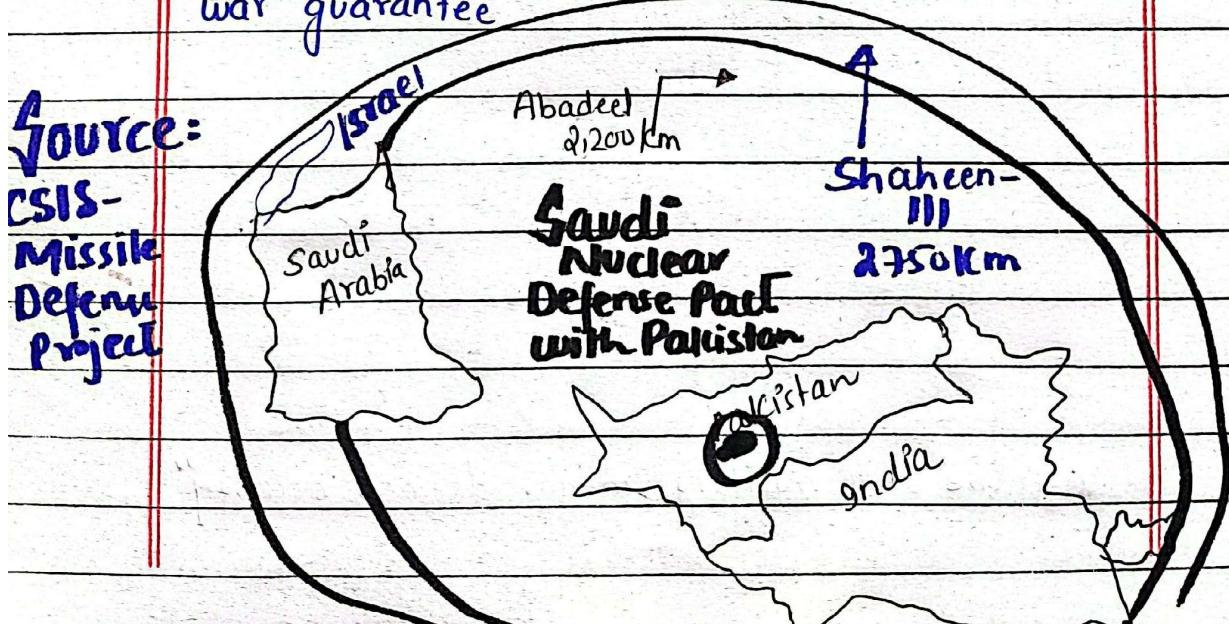
2. Risks of Strategic Entanglement

Despite its symbolic value, the SMDA is asymmetrical and carries risks:



Diplomatic strain on Pakistan's western border.

Thus, the agreement is best viewed as a political signal rather than an unconditional war guarantee



Source:
CSIS-
Missile
Defense
Project

III. Evolving Pakistan-Iran Relations: Strategic Convergence

I. Drivers of Pakistan-Iran Rapprochement

Key Drivers

- Shared 900km border and cross border militancy threat.
- Need to stabilize Balochistan and Iran's Sistan Baluchestan
- Convergence on opposition to Israeli regional militarism
- Desire to prevent regional polarization spilling into Pakistan.

2. Strategic Logic of Engagement with Iran

- Pakistan's outreach is guided by security realism, not ideological alignment.
- Diplomatic engagement seeks to reassure Tehran that SMDA is not Iran-centric
- Pakistan positions itself as a bridge rather than a partisan actor in Middle Eastern rivalries

IV. Managing the Saudi-Iran Rivalry: Pakistan's Balancing Act

1. Strategic Autonomy Through Multi-Alignment

Pakistan's dual engagement exemplifies hedging behavior in multipolar world.

Dimension	Saudi Track (CSMDA)	Iran Track
Security	Defense institutionalization	Border stability
Economy	Investments, energy	Trade, transit potential
Diplomacy	Gulf relevance	Regional de-escalation

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Conclusion

Pakistan's SMDA with Saudi Arabia and its parallel engagement with Iran illustrate a calculated balancing strategy in a fragmented Middle Eastern world. Although the SMDA strengthens Pakistan's economic security and geopolitical relevance, unchecked alignment risks entanglement in regional rivalries. However, sustained engagement with Iran remains essential for border stability and regional security. Hence, Pakistan's foreign policy survival lies not in choosing sides, but in preserving strategic autonomy amid competing powers.

QUESTION:02

Critically analyze the Gaza ceasefire.

Do you think the ceasefire can pave way for the two state solution? - - - - -

I- INTRODUCTION: Gaza Ceasefire in Region of Perpetual Conflict

“The strong do what they have the power to do, and the weak accept what they have to accept.”

~Thucydides

The present painful condition of Gaza exactly aligns with the saying of Thucydides, where military dominance substitutes for political compromise and ceasefire replace durable peace. **The Gaza ceasefire, reached** after unprecedented destruction and humanitarian catastrophe, has been projected

by some quarters as a diplomatic breakthrough capable of stabilizing the **Middle East** and reviving the long-stalled **two-state solution**.

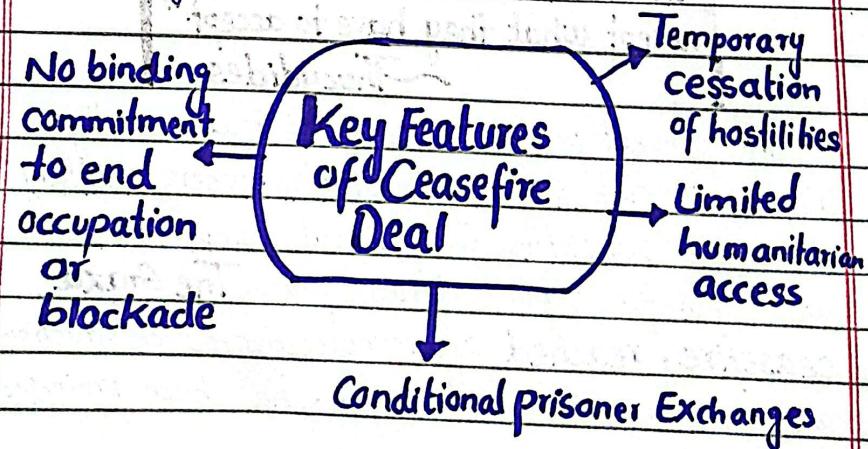
However, a closer examination of the ceasefire agreement, the political incentives of key actors, and the structural flaws embedded within

UN Security Council Resolution 2803 reveals

a far more pessimistic reality. Rather than a genuine step toward lasting peace, the ceasefire appears to be a **tactical pause in an ongoing conflict**, echoing the failures of the **Oslo Accords** and reinforcing the asymmetry between the occupation and resistance.

II- The Gaza Ceasefire Deal: Nature and Scope

The Gaza ceasefire is **limited, conditional, and phased**, lacking the characteristics of a permanent settlement. It is structured in **three phases**, with only the first phase guaranteed and subsequent phases dependent on negotiations that may never materialize.



This design reflects conflict management, not conflict resolution.

III. Why the Parties Agreed to the Ceasefire

A. Why Israel Agreed: Strategic Pause, Not Peace

Israel's acceptance of the ceasefire does not represent a shift towards reconciliation. According to the Israeli leadership motives, ceasefire framed as "not a ceasefire but a strategic pause in extending genocide."

Israeli Motivations

Military exhaustion and international pressure

Tactical regrouping of Forces

Avoidance of deeper diplomatic isolation

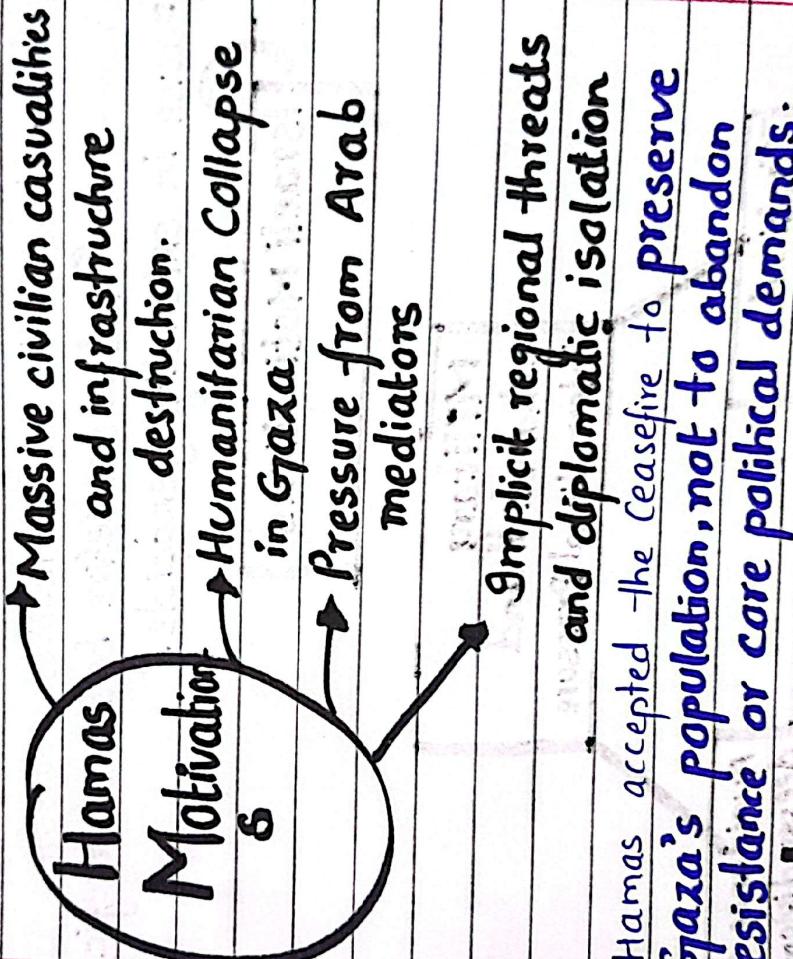
Crucially, settlement expansion and military operations in the West Bank continued during the ceasefire, exposing Israel's lack of commitment to peace.

As stated by Noam Chomsky,

“Israel’s actions in Palestine are much worse than apartheid in South Africa.”

B. Why Hamas Agreed: Survival and Humanitarian Imperatives

For Hamas, the ceasefire was a matter of survival rather than political compromise.



Hamas accepted the ceasefire to preserve Gaza's population, not to abandon resistance or core political demands.

Conflicts rain destruction, but even in devastation, resistance adopts "rather than disappears." ~UN conflict assessments

C. Role of Arab Countries

Arab states played a brokerage role, motivated primarily by fears of regional escalation rather than commitment to Palestinian statehood. Their diplomacy aimed at containing conflict, not restructuring power relations.

Percentage of Arab countries in favour of normalising relations with Israel

Sudan —	39%
Morocco —	31%
Lebanon —	17%
Tunisia —	11%
Mauritania —	8%
Libya —	7%
Palestine —	76%
Jordan —	5%
Egypt —	5%
Algeria —	4%

Source: AlJazeera and
Arab Barometer

Survey 2022

According to the Arab Barometer Survey conducted between 2021 and 2022, most Arab overwhelmingly reject normalization of relations between Arab States and Israel. This survey shows the ideological inclination of Arab world against Israeli state.

IV. UN Security Council Resolution 2803: Structural Weaknesses

A. Repetition of Oslo Accords Failures:

Resolution 2803 mirrors the Oslo framework by deferring core political issues while prioritizing security arrangements. Historically, Oslo's incrementalism allowed settlement expansion and entrenched occupation.

Universal rule, to last, needs to translate force into obligation.

~Henry Kissinger

B. Built-in Expiration Mechanism:

One of the most critical flaws is the automatic expiration of Phase 1 after six weeks if Phase 2 negotiations stall.

Implications → legal pathways to resume hostilities

→ incentives delay rather than compromise

→ favors the military

This design virtually guarantees ceasefire collapse.

C. No Permanent Political Settlement

The agreement explicitly postpones final political questions - statehood, borders, refugees, Jerusalem - to Phase 3 (18+ months away), creating indefinite uncertainty.

D. Governance Vacuum in Gaza

The proposal for a 'technocratic' committee to govern Gaza suffers from:

- Lack of democratic legitimacy
- Absence of political mandate
- Rejection by local population
- Without representative governance, stability remains elusive.

V-Netanyahu's Political Incentives Against Peace

A. Far-Right Coalition Dependency:

Prime Minister Netanyahu's survival depends on far-right coalition partners such as Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, who openly reject Palestinian

Statehood

- Smotrich declared settlement expansion would "bury Palestinian statehood."
- Active settlement construction continued during ceasefire.

B. Political Survival vs Peace:

According to Political Conflict Theory:

leaders rarely choose peace when war ensures political survival

Accepting a two state solution would likely collapse Netanyahu's government, creating a **structural incentive for perpetual conflict**.

Vi. Irreconcilable Fundamental Positions

The ceasefire fails to bridge core incompatibilities between Israeli and Palestinian positions.

Issue	Israeli Position	Palestinian/ Hamas Position	Outcome
Statehood	Rejects	Pre-requisite	Irreconcilable
Settlements	Expansion	Freeze/ Withdraw	Irreconcilable
Security	Indefinite Control	Full Sovereignty	Irreconcilable
Weapons	Hamas Disarmament	Disarm after state	Irreconcilable
Refugees	Rejects return	Insists on right	Irreconcilable
Jerusalem	Annexed	Shared capital	Irreconcilable

Vii. Why the Ceasefire Is Doomed to Fail

The ceasefire is doomed to fail because:

- 1- Structural repetition of Oslo's failures
- 2- Automatic expiration mechanism

3. Absence of enforcement-tools
4. No pathway to permanent peace
5. Governance vacuum in Gaza
6. Documented violations (1500+ buildings destroyed;

76% aid blocked)

1. Netanyahu's coalition constraints.
2. Greater Israel expansion strategy (Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria)

VIII. Can the Ceasefire Pave the Way for a Two-State Solution?

Critical Assessment:

The ceasefire fails to pave the way for a two state solution because The ceasefire lacks:

Commitment to Palestinian Sovereignty

Settlement freeze

Binding international guarantees

→ Political will from Israel's leadership

Any system of order must be accepted as just by both rulers and the ruled.

~ Henry Kissinger

Instead of enabling two states, the ceasefire manages occupation while deferring justice.

Policy Framework for Pakistan: A Comprehensive Response

A. Normative and Diplomatic Positioning:

Pakistan needs to reject unilateral peace plans that violate international law. In addition to it, Pakistan should consistently raise the issue at the UN and other multi-lateral forums.

B. Multi-lateral Engagement:

Pakistan is required to strengthen coordination within the OIC. It should also support international accountability and ceasefire mechanisms. This will help in aligning with states advocating for the revival of genuine two-state negotiations.

C. Strategic Communication and

Soft Power:

Force can secure territory,
but only ideas can secure
peace.

~Joseph Nye~

Pakistan should promote a people-centric peace discourse. Moreover, it should also counter narratives that frame occupation as a 'security' necessity. In addition to it, we should utilize diplomatic and media platforms to highlight humanitarian realities.

D. Balanced Regional Diplomacy

In a fragmented world, strategic autonomy is the key to survival.

~ Strategic Realism ~

Requirement → To maintain constructive & balanced realities with Gulf states

Regional without compromising **Diplomacy** Palestinian cause.

~

Avoid entanglement in polarizing regional alignments.

↑

Position Pakistan as a **bridge builder**, not a **partisan actor**.

Conclusion:

Conflicts rain destruction. And yet, even in this turbulent moment, the choice between justice and force remains decisive.

—Antonia Guterres

The Gaza ceasefire represents conflict containment, not conflict transformation. Its design flaws, absence of enforcement, political incentives against Peace, and irreconcilable core positions render it incapable of paving the way toward a two-state solution. History from Oslo to the present demonstrates that temporary ceasefires without structural change only entrench asymmetry and delay justice. Unless the ceasefire is embedded within a binding international framework guaranteeing Pakistan Palestinian statehood, ending occupation and enforcing accountability, it will remain yet another pause in violence rather than a bridge to peace.