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⇐ (Q#8) ⇒

Introduction

The signing of the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia defense pact marks a significant milestone in the evolving strategic landscape of the Muslim world. The agreement, inked in 2024, seeks to deepen military cooperation, joint training, defense production, and intelligence sharing between Islamabad and Riyadh. Rooted in decades of religious, economic, and geopolitical affinity, this pact represents a calibrated shift from traditional transactional ties to a structured strategic partnership. While the accord enhances Pakistan's defense diplomacy and Saudi Arabia's regional security posture, it also invites scrutiny in the context of regional rivalries, global power alignments, and internal policy constraints.

Causes Behind the Defense Pact

① Strategic Realignment in the Middle East :-

"According to SIPRI (2024), Saudi Arabia remains the world's third largest defense spender, allocating over \$75 billion to security modernization."

Saudi Arabia's regional security calculus has evolved amidst Iran's growing influence, the Yemen conflict, and perceived US retrenchment from the Middle East. As Riyadh diversifies its security partnerships, Pakistan — with one of the largest and most professional Muslim armies — presents a natural defense partner.

② Pakistan's Quest for Strategic and Economic Support :-

"In 2024, Saudi remittances to Pakistan exceeded \$6 billion, making the Kingdom a crucial economic lifeline."

Pakistan faces persistent economic and security challenges. Strengthening defense cooperation with

Saudi Arabia - its largest source of remittances and a key oil supplier - offers Islamabad not only defense collaboration but also potential financial relief and investment through the Saudi Vision 2030 framework.

③ Shared Threat Perception :-

Both nations confront common threats such as tensions from terrorism, cross-border militancy, and cyber vulnerabilities. The pact provides a framework for coordinated counterterrorism operations and joint defense production, aligning with Pakistan's National Security Policy (2022-26) emphasis on comprehensive security.

④ Revival of Historical Military Ties :-

Since the 1960s, Pakistan has trained thousands of Saudi soldiers and provided military advisers. The new pact institutionalizes this cooperation through mechanisms like Joint Defense Cooperation Committee (JDCC) and shared defense technology ventures.

Implications of the Defense Pact

① Strengthening Bilateral Relations :-

The pact revitalizes Pakistan-Saudi ties after years of lukewarm engagement following Pakistan's neutrality on the Yemen conflict (2015). It restores mutual trust and signals a renewed era of strategic interdependence, particularly in defense and intelligence cooperation.

② Regional Geopolitical Repercussions :-

The agreement has implications for regional balance :

- Iran's Concerns : Tehran may perceive this as a containment strategy, potentially complicating Pakistan's delicate Iran policy.
- India's Response : New Delhi may view the pact as an effort to consolidate Muslim-majority solidarity, especially as Pakistan seeks to counter India's defense diplomacy in the Gulf.
- China's Role : Beijing may quietly welcome the pact as it aligns with its broader Belt and Road security network, strengthening

Pakistan's role as a regional stabilizer

③ Boost to Pakistan's Defense Industry :-

The agreement's focus on defense production and technology transfer could accelerate Pakistan's efforts to modernize its defense industry - especially in drone technology, armored vehicles, and cybersecurity domains - consistent with the Pakistan Defense Production Policy (2023).

④ Economic and Energy Dimensions :-

The pact indirectly complements the economic agenda. Enhanced security cooperation may pave the way for Saudi investments in Pakistan's Reko Dik, Gwadar refinery, and renewable energy projects, reinforcing economic diplomacy as a tool of strategic leverage.

⑤ Challenges and Criticism :-

Despite its potential, the deal faces limitations:

- Dependency Risks: Pakistan's overreliance on Saudi support could compromise its strategic autonomy.

- **Sectarian Balancing** : Closer defense alignment with Riyadh may strain Islamabad's balancing act between Iran and Saudi Arabia.
- **Domestic Concerns** : Critics argue that Pakistan must prioritize indigenous defense innovation rather than external reliance.

Conclusion

The Pakistan-Saudi Arabia defense pact is a landmark development that symbolizes the maturation of a historically close relationship into a structured strategic alliance. While it offers immense potential in strengthening military capacity, economic cooperation, and regional stability, its long-term success will depend on Pakistan's diplomatic prudence — particularly in maintaining neutrality within the broader Middle Eastern rivalries.

Ultimately, if managed with strategic balance, the pact can transform Pakistan from a peripheral partner into a pivotal player in the emerging security architecture of the Muslim world.

⇐ (Q#7) ⇒

Introduction

Pakistan today faces the classic small-state dilemma of managing ties with two great-power partners whose strategic rivalry is the defining feature of global politics: the United States (a source of security cooperation, trade and tech) and China (Pakistan's deepest strategic partner, largest investor and defense supplier). After recent renewed engagement with Washington and an entrenched strategic partnership with Beijing, Islamabad must adopt a calibrated, interest-driven balancing strategy that preserves strategic autonomy, maximises economic gains, safeguards national security and minimises spillovers from US-China competition.

Current state - Why Balancing is Needed

China : Pakistan's relationship with China is strategic and multi-sectoral — defense, infrastructure and finance (CPEC) remain central : Chinese net FDI into Pakistan rose strongly in

FY 2024-25 (reported net inflow c. US \$1.2bn), and institutional ties continue to deepen.

United States : Islamabad has recently stepped up engagement with Washington at political and military levels (senior military and political visits in 2025), reflecting mutual interests in regional stability, counterterrorism and economic cooperation. Trade and aid links remain modest but important.

Macro context : Pakistan remains economically fragile and IMF assistance and external financing are critical (IMF staff-level deal for a \$1.2bn disbursement was reported in Oct 2025), which constrains purely strategic choices.

Political-diplomatic balancing - principles & tools

Principles :-

- ↳ Maintain strategic autonomy
- ↳ Avoid public alignment on great-power rivalry
- ↳ Pursue multi-vector diplomacy

Tools :-

① Issue-based cooperation : Pakistan should cooperate with each power where interests

overlap (e.g., counterterrorism with the US; infrastructure and defence production with China) This preserves room to manoeuvre.

(2) Differentiated messaging: ~~Pak~~ Pakistan should display public neutrality on US-China disputes, private coordination to protect core interests.

(3) Institutionalised dialogue: Pakistan must strengthen bilateral commissions (e.g., Strategic Dialogue with US; Joint Working Groups with China) to manage differences before they escalate.

Economic Balancing - Leverage and Diversification

1 Leverage Chinese finance while diversifying partners: China remains the largest strategic investor (CPEC projects, long-term loans). Pakistan should negotiate commercial terms that reduce sovereign loan burdens (more equity, PPPs) and insist on local value-addition and technology transfer.

2 Use US engagement to expand trade, investment and tech cooperation: US trade in goods with Pakistan is modest but there is scope in textiles, IT and services; targeted trade facilitation and export diversification can reduce

overdependence on any single market.

3. **Macro stability first**: Secure multilateral and bilateral financing (IMF, multilateral development banks, friendly creditors) to avoid forced strategic concessions; the IMF disbursement in Oct 2025 underscores the imperative of fiscal stability.

Security and Defence Balancing

1. **Maintain existing defence ties with China** (equipment, joint production, training) — these are core and long-term.
2. **Expand practical security cooperation with the US** in non-sensitive areas: counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, border security, humanitarian assistance and UN peacekeeping training. Avoid deep interoperability that could be seen as aligning against China.
3. **Arms procurement diplomacy** — procure across sources to avoid single-supplier dependence while ensuring transfer of maintenance and production capabilities.

Regional and Strategic Calibration

1. Iran and Gulf states — use balanced China/US ties to act as honest brokers in regional crises; maintain pragmatic ties with Iran while deepening Saudi/Gulf economic ties to broaden diplomatic room.
2. Afghanistan — engage multilaterally (China, US, Russia, regional states) to stabilise the neighbourhood without appearing to be a proxy for either great power.

Domestic Governance & Institutional Reforms

1. Strengthen civilian control and coherent foreign-policy machinery — a unified national foreign policy that coordinates MoFA, Ministry of Finance, military and provinces.
2. Economic reforms — improve ease of doing business, tax base and governance to attract diversified foreign investment beyond China.
3. Public communication — explain balancing as national interest policy, reducing domestic politicisation of ties.

Risks & trade-offs

- **Strategic signalling**: Too dense a public embrace of one power, risks retaliation (sanctions, reduced investment) from the other.
- **Dependency traps**: Overreliance on Chinese finance or narrow US security guarantees undermines autonomy.
- **Domestic politics**: Elite vs. public perceptions (e.g., sovereignty, ideology) may constrain pragmatic choices.

Conclusion

Pakistan's best course is pragmatic hedging: institutionalize deep, long-term ties with China (defense, infrastructure) while expanding targeted, issue-based engagement with the U.S. (trade, counterterrorism, capacity building). This requires macroeconomic stability, diversified economic partnerships, a coherent inter-agency foreign policy and discreet diplomacy to avoid public polarity. If Islamabad manages this mix wisely, it can convert great-power competition into opportunities for national development rather than a zero-sum strategic bind.