



Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Partnership: What Are Both Sides Seeking?

By

Ziaulhaq Tanin

The recent agreement between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, goes beyond military exercises and intelligence sharing; it paints a picture of complex regional realities and the two countries' divergent priorities. Saudi Arabia seeks to strengthen strategic independence, enhance intelligence capabilities, and manage threats without relying on others, while Pakistan seeks political influence, economic opportunities, and military weight.

While the pact is not directly aimed at confronting other regional players such as Iran, Turkey, or Israel, calculating their responses and creating leverage in engaging with rivals forms the heart of both sides' strategic decision-making. The partnership is not just a response to immediate threats, but also a tool for redefining the balance of power.

Strategic Imperatives of Both Parties

Saudi Arabia entered this partnership at a time when the need for strategic autonomy and effective deterrence is felt more than ever. The growing threat from regional competitors, the Yemen crisis, the historic dependence on the United States, and the threat of a nuclear Iran, are all concerns for the regime. Saudi Arabia seeks an independent deterrence umbrella, and Pakistan, with its nuclear capabilities, operational experience in high-tension environments, and ties in the Gulf, serves as a reliable partner. This cooperation also sends a clear signal to regional rivals and global powers: Riyadh is determined to preserve and assert its strategic autonomy.

Pakistan seeks this agreement to "strengthen regional influence and increase strategic leverage." Islamabad faces a persistent security competition with India, internal armed groups, and economic and political constraints. Collaboration with Saudi Arabia provides access to economic resources, advanced technologies, and strategic positioning. Beyond short-term benefits, this partnership solidifies Pakistan's position as a key player in Gulf and South Asian security and enables the use of nuclear and conventional capabilities as instruments of strategic negotiation.

Strategic Calculations behind the Pakistan-Saudi Agreement

At the core of this agreement are reciprocal strategic calculations. Through this partnership, Saudi Arabia seeks to establish an implicit nuclear deterrent and enhance its ability to manage regional threats without developing domestic weapons. Simultaneously, this partnership strengthens Riyadh's strategic independence and sends a clear message to regional rivals and global powers: the kingdom is capable of independent and calculated action.

On the other hand, Pakistan's calculations are equally deliberate: the deal allows Islamabad to consolidate its regional influence, gain access to strategic resources and technology, and create leverage against rivals such as India and Israel. The deal reflects a carefully balanced interplay between opportunities and risks, which both countries calculated with prudence.



Strategic and Hidden Objectives of the Partnership

On the eve of the formation of a new Middle East order and in an environment where global developments unfold rapidly and with complexity, this agreement goes beyond overt military cooperation and carries strategic and hidden objectives, reflecting the precise and calculated considerations of both countries. With this action, Saudi Arabia is trying to establish a controlled deterrence that manages threats and strengthens its strategic independence without provoking an international or regional reaction; this action consolidates Riyadh's power in the Persian Gulf and enhances its position in global negotiations.

Pakistan also benefits from this cooperation by consolidating its geopolitical standing, securing access to strategic resources and technologies, and expanding its influence in South Asia and the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the investments and economic opportunities arising from the agreement alleviate domestic economic pressures in Pakistan and enhance the government's financial capacity to manage security and political challenges.

Regional and Global Implications of This Partnership

The Pakistan-Saudi security agreement is, above all, a complementary deal for both parties; Riyadh seeks to diversify its security guarantors beyond Washington. Relying on Pakistan's military capabilities, especially its potential nuclear capacity, strengthens its deterrence against Iran. Islamabad, under economic pressure, consolidates its regional standing and signals its return to Persian Gulf security equations by receiving financial and political support from Riyadh. This interdependence is a "mutual insurance policy" that goes beyond a symbolic pact.

At the regional level, the implications of the agreement are multi-layered. First, it serves as a direct warning to Iran and India. Iran, despite relatively improved ties with Riyadh, becomes concerned, while India worries about Saudi alignment with its traditional rival, Pakistan.

Second, the UAE, which maintains both economic partnership and geopolitical rivalry with Riyadh, views the pact as a factor that diminishes its independent security role. Turkey also views it with sensitivity, as it risks losing its potential leadership position in the Sunni world to the emerging Riyadh-Islamabad partnership. In addition, Western projects such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor face the challenge of compliance, as Riyadh shows that it does not tie its security solely to Western frameworks.

At the global level, the agreement draws the attention of major powers to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's role in the world. The United States is somewhat concerned that Riyadh's pursuit of diversified security guarantors could reduce its direct influence. Washington approaches this closeness cautiously, as it signals that Riyadh's effort to diversify partners and reduce relative dependence on the US, a move that could limit traditional American influence in the Persian Gulf and South Asia, is a challenge. In contrast, China sees the agreement as an opportunity for economic development and strategic ties through the Belt and Road Initiative. Other global players are forced to factor the new regional power position into their geopolitical calculations.



Risks and Challenges of the Agreement in Practice

Despite its strategic significance, the implementation of the Pakistan-Saudi agreement faces inherent challenges. The potential sensitivity of the nuclear dimension, even indirectly, could be misinterpreted and increase regional tensions. Political and economic instability in Pakistan, along with changes in Saudi decision-making structures, threatens the stability and continuity of cooperation. Simultaneously, reactions from rivals and neighboring states may further complicate the security environment.

However, the emphasis by both parties on the defensive dimension and commitments such as “an attack on one is an attack on both” indicate that the agreement establishes a joint deterrence mechanism, aiming to limit risks and consolidate security opportunities. Consequently, this pact serves as a strategic example, demonstrating that in regional alliances, opportunities and risks always exist simultaneously, and any thorough analysis must take both aspects into account.

Conclusion and Possible Scenarios

The future of the Pakistan-Saudi strategic agreement follows several possible paths. In the most favorable scenario, expanded operational, economic, and energy cooperation could establish a regional balance of relative deterrence, consolidating the position of both countries, while China gains opportunities for economic influence and the US and Europe are compelled to recalibrate their geopolitical calculations.

In a tension-prone scenario, a reaction from India or other regional actors could exacerbate pressure and instability, complicating extra-regional rivalries. However, the most likely path, based on historical patterns and the cautious approach of Riyadh and Islamabad, would be limited to military exercises, intelligence sharing, and cautious deterrence; a level that maintains relative security and regional influence while leaving open the capacity for deepening strategic cooperation and global calculations for the future.

Ziaulhaq Tanin is a university lecturer and researcher based in Afghanistan. Views expressed are the author's own.