

**RESEARCH PAPER****Role of Pakistan in Middle Eastern Politics after Arab Spring: A Critical Analysis****<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Aswad Naeem, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Bilal Bin Liaqat and <sup>3</sup>Dr. Ghulam Mustafa**

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**Corresponding Author:** [bilalbinliaqat@gcuf.edu.pk](mailto:bilalbinliaqat@gcuf.edu.pk)**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research elucidated the increased strategic contribution of Pakistan in the Middle East since the Arab Spring. The paper integrates defense collaboration, the economic considerations, the diplomatic mediation, and its relationship with the regional powers to demonstrate that Pakistan has found its way to be a valuable security ally and the go-to mediator through delicate diplomacy in complicated crises like the Saudi-Iranian tensions. This qualitative research provides a historical background and elaborates how the relationship that was nurtured by factors of religious affiliation and security needs took shape in the midst of the Cold War and the Afghanistan jihad. The new policy of Pakistan in the evolving environment following the Arab spring like neutrality in the Yemen conflict, defense relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the gas pipeline problem with the Iranian nation are detailed.

**KEYWORDS** Pakistan Foreign Policy, Arab Spring, Defense Cooperation, Mediator, Balanced Diplomacy, Geopolitics, Regional Stability**Introduction**

The start of relations between Pakistan and Middle East started shortly after the establishment of Pakistan and it became a powerful background of relations based on religious affiliation, historical relations, and the unity of Islam. Initially good ties with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Gulf states assisted Pakistan to fulfil security and economic requirements as well as enhance its presence in the world. All these bonds gradually developed on the basis of emotions and religion to practical collaboration, strategic interest, and mutual dependence on each other in economic affairs. The relations were further enhanced by defense cooperation, labor export, cultural familiarity, and assistance during the wars between India and Pakistan and the presence of millions of Pakistani labors in Gulf countries became a great source of foreign exchange and establishment of long-term social connections (Youns & Muzaffar, 2025). The Arab Spring redefined the politics of the region and instilled instability, sectarian tensions and proxy wars that compelled Pakistan to observe a delicate balance in its diplomacy. Increasing Saudi-Iran tension, the Yemen war and the Syrian crisis resulted in Pakistan securing its national interests by remaining neutral and intervening (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018). The strategic location of Pakistan has grown and the CPEC has added geopolitical significance and defense partnership with the Gulf nations developed its role, and its ongoing border alignment and trade partnership and energy cooperation with Iran demonstrates a balanced foreign policy. Pakistan values today protecting its own interests as well as contributing to the stability of the region and being a neutral participant in the conflict, like in Yemen and Qatar, but not a partisan one.

## **Literature Review**

The article *India's Increasing Influence in UAE and its Implications for Pakistan*, by Faisal Mehmood, discusses the political, security based, economic, geographical and military connection that exists between Pakistan and the Gulf cooperation council (GCC) highlighting the role of Pakistan in the region. Historically, Pakistan has enjoyed very good relations with Saudi Arabia which has involved defense cooperation, economic aid and transfer of Pakistani workforce. However, some events like the conflict in Yemen and the recent Gulf crisis brought about uncertainty due to the choice made by Pakistan to be neutral. Pakistan has also been in good terms with UAE which has a high Pakistani expatriate population (Mehmood, 2024).

According to the article by Brandon J. Kinne, *Defense Cooperation Agreements and the Emergence of a Global Security Network*, states are currently entering into defense pacts in a new structure called Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs). These treaties are less emphasized on the establishment of a formal framework within which they can collaborate in the area of defense instead of undertaking a mutual defense obligation. The terrorism and other developing threats of the Cold War made countries resort to such arrangements. The states that do not have strong defense potential prefer to enter such agreements with their stronger military partners. The process will increase cooperation between states and allow sharing important information. These types of agreements (like DCAs) are significant in mitigating security threats and reacting to them (Kinne, 2018).

Based on his article *A Decade of Change in Middle Eastern Geopolitics*; authored by Katz highlights how the uprisings weakened the authoritarian regimes, mobilized the masses, and altered the power structures in the region. The Arab Spring was originally intended to be democratized but it also resulted in instability, sectarianism, and foreign participation. The article evaluates how ideological challenges such as political movements, have impacted on the way domestic security structures are constituted. The research also observes that although social media was able to help in organizing demonstrations, it eventually became a tool of government checks and balances. The Israeli-Hamas conflict, the rivalry between Iran and the region, and the normalization of the relationship with Israel are listed among the key changes in geopolitics. Finally, the paper discloses the complexity and issues of stability of the modern Middle Eastern conflict (Katz, 2025).

The politics of the Arab world has historically been shaped by the Arab-Israeli conflict and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. Scholars have examined how ideological, strategic, and economic factors have influenced Arab states' policies toward Israel and the Middle East region. Early literature largely framed Arab politics around hostility toward Israel and strong support for the Palestinian cause. However, recent studies highlight a gradual shift toward pragmatism, cooperation, and normalization between some Arab states and Israel (Yaseen, et. al., 2023; Shah, Mustafa, & Ali, 2023).

## **Material and Methods**

This paper followed the approach of qualitative research. This paper has discussed the role of Pakistan in the Middle East politics, particularly after Arab Spring. It has tried to analyze the foreign and security policy of Pakistan and the evolving international relations in the face of the emerging realities in the region. The secondary data sources employed in this study were scholarly articles and book publications in the area of international relations of Pakistan, geopolitics of the Middle East, and Arab Spring. Moreover, the direct sources of data including the government policy documents and reports were utilized too.

An analytical approach was adopted in this study. The method of analysis was used to deconstruct complicated information, proposals or problems into manageable components in order to understand them in a better manner. It was also characterized by

the identification of important aspects. This analytical strategy assisted in making cognizance of the position of Pakistan in the Middle East. This paper gave a detailed discussion of the diplomatic and defence policies of Pakistan using books, and policy reports that assisted in the answers to the fundamental research questions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper constructs the theoretical framework of the study on a hybrid of two fundamental theories realism and rationalism in order to comprehend the Pakistan Middle East policy. This structure explains that states determine their choices depending on their security, interests, the relationship and the political dynamics in the region. Within the framework of Pakistan, this twofold theoretical framework justifies the reason why Pakistan is patient and moderate in its foreign policy making by avoiding the involvement in foreign wars, yet it is simultaneously attempting to increase economic, defense and diplomatic cohesion with the nations of the Gulf region. The post-Arab Spring scenario, shifting geopolitical relations and the energy markets and developing diplomatic patterns all lead to the necessity of this framework to develop a more profound insight into the role of Pakistan.

### **Pakistan Defense Relation with Middle East Countries**

#### **Historical Background**

The basis of the relations was founded in the near after the formation of Pakistan, when the newly-formed Islamic state had developed very strong relations with Saudi Arabia, the states of the Gulf, Oman and Qatar. These relations were not founded only on the religious harmony but also on the basis of defense collaboration and the strategy requirements. The geographical position, the highly trained military and the Islamic identity of Pakistan was a natural one of ally to the Gulf states and the Arab states sought a partner to offer them practical support against any outside aggressions (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017). Of these relations, defense relationships between the Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are regarded as the best. Since the inception, Pakistan was a major contributor of military building of the Arab states. The services of Pakistani pilots in the Saudi Air Force, military training in the United Arab Emirates (formerly the Trusteeship States), and Pakistan's assistance in Oman's defense infrastructure are prominent manifestations of this partnership. Pakistan strengthened Oman's defense capabilities, and in return for this cooperation, Oman provided Pakistan with access to Gulf waters (Nasim, Shamim, & Ali, 2023).

The involvement of the Pakistani Air Force in the Arab-Israeli wars is also an important aspect of this defense commitment. Pakistani pilots assisted Jordan and Syria in the Arab-Israeli wars and participated in practical air operations, which the Arab world still values (Yaseen, et. al., 2019). Later, the Soviet-Afghan War further changed the nature of the defense relationship between Pakistan and the Gulf states, when Pakistan, the United States and Saudi Arabia provided training and weapons to the mujahideen. Similarly, Pakistan's provision of defense assistance to Saudi Arabia in the Gulf War proved to be an important stage in these relations, which further deepened Pakistan's military commitment to the Gulf Coop

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Saudi Arabia**

The Pakistani and Saudi relations in defense have formed a complex and involved strategic alliance that has been developed over decades. Even though the religious and cultural affiliations constitute a significant background, the essence of this relationship can be attributed to commonality of interests in security as well as a history of co-operation in the context of stability in the region. The economic and energy resources of Saudi Arabia and

the professional military of Pakistan go hand in hand, that is why their cooperation has always been pragmatic and helpful. They have signed a Joint Strategic Defense Agreement according to which any open aggression of one of the countries will be viewed as an aggression of both states (BBC Urdu, 2025). This accord turns their former working relationship into a more formal and entrenched security agreement. The timing is important, since the Middle East has been becoming in an even more turbulent situation following the attack of Israel to Qatar. During a raid by Israel on the Hamas leadership in Qatar. Israel unleashed missiles against the Qatari capital Doha hitting top leaders of Hamas and Palestinian negotiators who were involved in ceasefire negotiations (Al Jazeera Staff, 2025) This event has also boosted the strategic worth of the Pakistan-Saudi deal to indicate that the two nations are determined to safeguard the sovereignty of the other in case of any outside threat. Another necessary pillar of this alliance is the defense training and combined military exercises. Such operations include counterterrorism operations, desert and mountain warfare, air defense, as well as enhancement of command-and-control systems. The armed forces of Pakistan with a high level of field experience have long been able to help build the Saudi military strength. Over 8,200 Saudi Armed Forces officers and soldiers have been trained in Pakistan after 1962. This education is offered in the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul, in Islamabad, at the National Defense University, and in other military service schools (Shaffan, 2025). A critical element is also the intelligence sharing. Pakistani intelligence agencies are closely cooperating with Saudi intelligence agencies to address the issues of terrorism, drug trafficking, and other cross-border threats (Khan H. U., 2024).

The other significant aspect of their defense relationship is the existence of the Pakistani troops in Saudi Arabia. Pakistan deployed more than 11,000 forces during the Gulf war to guard strategic installations and border. In 1990, Pakistan deployed 11,000 soldiers in Saudi Arabia in response to Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and it has since then maintained a military presence in the country over the last decades, including the signing of defense and military training agreements in 1967 and 1982 (Gause, 2025). Pakistani forces were used in the case of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and in the case of the Grand Mosque. (Yusuf, 2017). These advances show that the security of Saudi Arabia is an area of concern to Pakistan, and this defense alliance that has existed over the years is only bound to be strengthened as the years go.

### **United Arab Emirates**

Defense and security cooperation between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan is growing rapidly compared to previous years. In the past, the scope of Pakistani defense relations was limited to the West and the region, but the current situation has gone beyond that. Now, personnel of the UAE armed forces regularly come to Pakistani military educational institutions for training, and at the same time, avenues for purchasing defense equipment are opening up. For example, in November 2025, the two countries successfully completed the two-week joint training exercise. Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates concluded a two-week joint counterterrorism exercise aimed at bolstering cooperation in hostage-rescue and elite operations. The drill, known as Exercise Jalmoed-I, took place at the Special Services Group (SSG) training center near Tarbela and involved elite troops from the Pakistani Army and the UAE Presidential Guards (Abbasi, Pakistan, UAE conclude joint counterterrorism drill to boost defense cooperation, 2025).

In addition, the two countries, at the Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) meeting held on June 24, 2025, set a comprehensive roadmap to enhance cooperation in defense, trade, energy, infrastructure, education and other sectors. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Pakistan, 2025). Although the UAE's major defense purchases in recent years have involved Western and other international countries and it has now built up its own domestic defense industry Pakistan offers an alternative and economical choice in the supply of certain defense items and support services. Cooperation is also growing in the area of peace and security. In past the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed

between the UAE's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) and Pakistan's Financial Monitoring Unit, aimed at combating illicit activities such as terrorist financing and money laundering. Overall, the UAE-Pakistan defense relationship is developing on a pragmatic and mutually beneficial basis: the UAE is receiving reliable training and equipment in terms of cost and functionality, and Pakistan is increasing its defense industry and regional importance. This cooperation could prove to be an important pillar in the future for the security and stability of the region.

## **Qatar**

The defense relations between Pakistan and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries particularly Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman although not as extensive as those between Saudi Arabia, are nevertheless very important in their nature. The defense relations between Pakistan and GCC countries. Pakistan and several GCC countries have cooperation in areas such as military training, defense cooperation and maritime security. Pakistan provides training to military personnel of these countries in its training institutions, which increases their professional capacity" (Siddiq, 2021). Pakistan provides training to military officers from these countries in its training institutions, which enhances their professional capabilities. As a result of this cooperation, Pakistan and the GCC countries not only exchange military experiences but also increase practical cooperation through various defense agreements. Similarly, Pakistan's role is also important in terms of maritime security, where it works with other countries to maintain peace and stability in the Gulf waters.

Misbah Muhammad Nasim, Syed Jabez and other authors, in their paper Political and security alliances between GCC and Pakistan: a case study of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar, explain that Pakistan has set up distinct training programs with each GCC country??? (Nasim, Shamim, & Ali, 2023). Qatar is the most prominent example in this regard, where military officers receive basic, intermediate and advanced professional training in Pakistan's military institutions. This bilateral cooperation provides GCC countries with an opportunity to benefit from Pakistan's military experience while strengthening diplomatic relations for Pakistan. The GCC countries have their own joint force called the Peninsula Shield Force. The Peninsula Shield Force is a joint military force of the GCC. The force was established in 1984 and includes soldiers from all GCC member states. The force participated in regional security operations during the 1991 Gulf War and

Cooperation between Pakistan and GCC countries in the field of maritime security is growing rapidly. These joint exercises include counter-piracy, search and rescue, and security of trade routes. This cooperation is not limited to exercises but also extends to access to ports and exchange of information. Pakistani ships regularly visit ports of GCC countries, and similarly, GCC ships visit Pakistani ports. By so doing, both parties can be familiar with the systems of each other and offer urgent help where necessary (Shabbir, 2025). The Pakistani and the Gulf ships constantly pay each other the visits to ports and this enhances coordination of operations and trust. Information sharing on smuggling, suspicious maritime and threats is significant in the protection of sea lanes. Therefore, the closer alliance in the area of defense cooperation, military training, and maritime security enhances the relations between the countries of the GCC and Pakistan and makes them more efficient.

## **Iran**

Pakistan-Iran Relations: What has Worked, what has Not and Future Prospects of the Past Cooperation. The relations between Pakistan and Iran started shortly after the independence of Pakistan in 1947 when Iran became the first sovereign state to give Pakistan recognition. Both nations belonged to the Western block during the Cold War and were the founders of such alliances like SETU. In the wars of 1965 and 1971 between India

and Pakistan, Iran was not only helping Pakistan politically but also enjoyed the advantages of petroleum and military equipment supply (Hassan, 2024). Distinct ties were at a height during the Shah of Iran, when Iran supplied Pakistan with military equipment, monetary support, and intelligence support against the Baloch separatist movement, and based on common security issues between the two nations. The revolution in Iran in 1979 initiated a historic shift in the relationship but soon Pakistan officially acknowledged the new regime. Iran has consistently supported Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir issue, while Pakistan has sought to play a positive role in Iran-Saudi tensions. The two countries strengthened joint cooperation on border security and counter-terrorism, although mutual trust issues also emerged from time to time. The Saudi-Iranian agreement brokered by China in 2023 created a new diplomatic atmosphere in the region, which also had an impact on Pakistan-Iran relations, as it is important for Pakistan to maintain a balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

During the Iran-Israel war in 2025, Pakistan strongly condemned Israeli aggression against Iran and submitted a resolution to the United Nations Security Council for an immediate ceasefire. The official statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, is that Pakistan strongly condemns unjustified and illegitimate aggression by Israel against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Israeli military strikes violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran and clearly contravene the UN Charter and fundamental principles of international law. Iran has the right to self-defenses under Article 51 of the UN Charter (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2025). However, Pakistan avoided any new military cooperation or joint military operations, and kept its strategic assets out of the conflict. Addressing the matter during Senate session FM Dar said "there is a video on social media where an Iranian general was quoted as saying: 'if Israel nukes attack Iran, then Pakistan will attack (Israel) with nuclear weapons.'" "This is irresponsible and false news" he said, adding That the claims had become viral on the internet, He also said from our side, there has been no such statement (Khan, et. al., 2019). It was fabricated." Dar also said we have checked that it was an AI-generated clip and it was fake (Dawn, 2025). Pakistan reduced security concerns by closing border crossings, but at the same time-maintained relations with the United States, reflecting its balanced foreign policy.

In the future, Pakistan and Iran are focusing on economic cooperation and regional connectivity. During Iranian President Masoud Pezishkian's visit to Pakistan in August 2025, the two countries set a target of increasing annual trade to \$10 billion and signed 12 agreements related to trade, energy, connectivity and infrastructure (Al Jazeera, 2025). The Gwadar and Chabahar ports are being seen as a means of mutual cooperation, and joint efforts against terrorism and smuggling in border areas are being stepped up. This collaboration is significant to the economic growth and stability of the region to both nations and can form the foundation of a long-term partnership.

## **Turkey**

The nature of the relationship between Turkey and Pakistan has changed the historical relationship into a full-scale and defense-based relationship. The developments of the Arab Spring in the region have given a new dimension to the relationship, and the historical background of the partnership is still echoed in the Baghdad Pact of the Cold War era. Proactive foreign policy and intentions of President Erdogan and the interest of Pakistan in developing multiple-faceted relations in the field of diplomacy and defense have provided new impetus to developing bilateral relations.

The synergy was seen in the Gulf crisis in 2017 and since then the relationship has turned into a robust security alliance between the South Asia region to the South Caucasus. One of the most notable pieces of evidence was the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war during which Turkish military technology, especially the Bayraktar TB2 drone and political backing

of Pakistan and Turkey were decisive to Azerbaijan. This collaboration was further extended to the trilateral military drills like Three Brothers 2021 that sought to redefine the security framework in the region (Guliyeva, 2024).

At that stressful moment between Pakistan and India, the Turkish-Pakistani partnership was concerned with strategic planning and not interference. High level consultations, information sharing and the long-term security structure were the stressed points by the two countries. The two leaders termed intelligence sharing and technical cooperation as highly valuable not only in the present scenario but also in the future security plans in the terrorism and escalating security concerns in the region (Al Jazeera, 2025). Turkish officials also dismissed rumors of alleged arms shipments to Pakistan in the wake of the May 2025 Indo-Pakistan clash, According to Turkish media, Turkey sent six aircraft loaded with arms to Pakistan, which was reported in some media outlets, is not true. The transport plane departing from Turkey had landed in Pakistan to refuel. After that, it continued its flight on its scheduled route (Turkish Minute, 2025).

Cooperation in the defense industry has become the backbone of this partnership, which has expanded beyond a simple procurement model to joint development and production. Pakistan's involvement in Turkey's KAAN fifth-generation fighter jet program includes not only financial investment but also work sharing and technology transfer, which is giving new impetus to Pakistan's aerospace capabilities. Equally, Turkish defense company ASFAT is contributing to the modernization of the Pakistan Navy such as the refurbishment of the Agosta 90B submarines as well as the fabrication of MILGEM-class corvettes in Karachi Shipyard. This is also boosting the domestic ship building industry in Pakistan.

Moreover, the defense self-sufficiency and the strategic interoperability is a common objective in both countries as evidenced in projects like the Repcon Artillery Shell Factory in Pakistan. All these measures are making the Pakistan-Turkey partnership a unified and progressive defence alliance.

### **Pakistan Economic Relations with Middle East Countries**

The great Pakistani migration to the Gulf countries was the basis of the Pakistani economic relationship with the Middle East. The projects initiated post the oil boom raised the demand of the labor which was filled by Pakistan and the remittance of the workers enabled the economy to stay fine, assist with the foreign payment and contribute to the welfare of the poor. The concessional or deferred oil supplies carried by Saudi Arabia in the energy sector were a key point of concern, and the Saudi support was still eminent even after the nuclear test. The OIC as well as the Islamic Development Bank institutionalized the economic and technical cooperation. Experts have described this relationship as built on three pillars: labor exports, energy dependence, and institutional cooperation, which created mutual dependence for both sides. According to the latest data, remittances sent by Pakistanis abroad reached a record \$38.3 billion in the fiscal year 2024-25, supporting the economy (Dawn, 2025). This commitment has brought risks along with growth.

### **Saudi Arabia and Pakistan: Economic Relations**

Saudi Arabia has been a long-standing financial supporter of Pakistan through balance of payments and concessional loans. The Kingdom of Saudia Arabia has also supported Pakistan with a \$3 billion State Bank deposit, repeatedly rolled over, most recently in December 2024, and deferred oil payments of about \$1.2 billion under a facility agreed in February 2025 to ease near-term pressures (Pakistan, 2025). This financial support has been instrumental in securing foreign exchange for external payments and stabilizing the economy Through a financing agreement "Saudi Fund for Development" Chief Executive Sultan Al-Marshad sealed together with Pakistani Secretary for Ministry of

Economic Affairs Dr. Kazim Niaz to import oil derivatives valued at \$1.2 billion. (Al Helou, 2025)

The deals are no longer limited to financial assistance but are shifting towards investment and long-term partnerships: Saudi delegations and SIFC are concluding G2G and B2B agreements in sectors such as energy, agriculture, IT and mining. These include the sale of stakes in the Karachi power sector, cooperation between K-Electric and Trident Energy, and 27 Memoranda of Understanding MoUs that outline investment opportunities worth over \$2.2 billion. A major element in energy cooperation is the Brownfield Refinery Upgrade Project (approximately \$6 billion) in which Saudi partners are key, and which is expected to increase the country's fuel cleanliness and sustainable energy capacity.

Labor and remittances have been the main pillars of this relationship. The total number of workers sent to Saudi Arabia increased during 2020-2024, with 121,970 Pakistani workers sent in the first three months of 2025. (Abbasi, Pakistan plans to double manpower exports to Saudi Arabia after landmark defense deal, 2025). Through a combination of these investments and labor exports, Pakistan has eased short-term fiscal pressures and opened up avenues for long-term economic partnerships, although this dependence requires internal reforms and skills upgrading.

### **United Arab Emirates and Pakistan: Economic Relations**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a vital and growing partner for Pakistan's economy; trade ties, investment and a large Pakistani community between the two countries have strengthened the relationship. Bilateral trade reached \$10.1 billion in the fiscal year 2024–25, a 20.24% increase over the previous year. but a trade imbalance remains: Pakistan's exports stood at around \$2.1 billion while imports were set at \$8 billion.

The UAE has been providing strong investment and technical assistance in the infrastructure and transport sector. Several major agreements have been signed since 2023, including partnerships with UAE companies and institutions in railways and logistics, a memorandum of understanding with Etihad Rail, and projects to improve inland connectivity from Karachi, aimed at modernizing the track, upgrading signaling and reducing logistics costs. DP World has long operated the Qasim International Container Terminal (QICT) and is looking to invest further to expand port capacity and introduce advanced smart port technology (Smith, 2025).

The UAE has made partnerships in energy, mining and industrial investment a long-term strategy; including a trade and investment memorandum of understanding (MOU) and a 2023 renewable energy cooperation agreement that includes large-scale solar projects and technical collaborations all in line with the UAE's energy diversification goal and Pakistan's energy crisis mitigation efforts. Similarly, international partnerships are being revived in natural resource projects such as the Reko Diq, opening up potential long-term investment opportunities. "According to Reuters news, The UAE has made direct financial assistance and investment offers to strengthen financial inclusion and trade linkages; in 2023, the UAE deposited \$1 billion with the central bank, which helped support Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves and advance the IMF's \$3 billion standby arrangement. Also, the nearly 1.8 million Pakistani community continues to send strong remittances from the UAE recorded \$717.2 million in June 2025, improving the overall remittance situation (Reuters, 2023).

Recent diplomatic and economic dialogues have further strengthened the relationship; key decisions such as the formation of a joint task force to promote visa rationalization and UAE investment were taken at the 12th Joint Ministerial Commission held on 24 June 2025, which signal a more balanced, sustainable and diversified economic partnership in the future.

## **Pakistan and Qatar Economic Ties**

The economic ties between Pakistan and Qatar are based on a deep partnership based on energy, infrastructure, financial cooperation and human resources. Qatar has supplied gas to Pakistan since 2016 through long-term LNG contracts, which have supported our electricity system." According to DAWN news write, The Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has expressed its commitment to investing in Pakistan and has indicated a target of \$3 billion in various sectors by 2022, which has helped to strengthen the country's foreign exchange reserves. The financial assistance has enabled the government to have an immediate fiscal security as well as new possibilities in investing both in the private and public sector (Alam, 2022).

Another benefit of Qatari investing in infrastructure is that it has enhanced the development of various infrastructures such as ports, energy and tourism; the Qatari involvement in Pakistan has enhanced its industrial and transport capacity and augmented the region connectivity. According to companies like Mawashi Company, there are big contracts in agricultural and meat industry which involve land leasing and farming companies. Such alliances are beneficial to both sides: Pakistan gets development funds and Qatar gets non-oil and gas income sources (Looney, 2014).

The greatest strength of the Qatar-Pakistan relations is human resource and labor migration; Pakistani labor force which is involved in the major development projects in Qatar and their remittances constitute the major external sources of Pakistan. According to the latest official data, remittances recorded in fiscal year 2025 reached \$38.3 billion, which is key to strengthening the country's foreign exchange reserves. The two countries have moved labor cooperation towards a more orderly, secure, and legal framework a topic discussed in recent meetings and agreements signed to increase new employment opportunities.

However, in recent years, Pakistan has negotiated modifications or delays to some LNG supply schedules with Qatar due to changes in energy supply and demand, and the government has looked into the possibility of renegotiating contracts in light of inflation and demand fluctuations. Overall, Qatar-Pakistan relations have evolved into a diverse and long-term partnership through stable energy supplies, major infrastructure investments, financial assistance (QIA), and remittances from millions of Pakistani workers; but future contractual flexibility, local demand, and joint policymaking on global energy market prices will remain essential.

## **Iran and Pakistan: Economic Relations**

The economic relations between Iran and Pakistan are based on energy, connectivity and cross-border trade, but in practice geopolitical constraints, security threats and infrastructure deficiencies have created major gaps. The biggest controversy in the energy sector is the gas pipeline the gas pipeline project between Iran and Pakistan, known as "Peace Pipeline" was proposed in the 1990s when it was considered part of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) project (Rafique & Zafar, 2024). The technical and political aspects of this project are prominent: "According to the author Muhammad Saleem Mazhar and Naheed S. Goraya, write in his article *Challenges in Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline*; In 2009, the two countries signed a gas purchase and sale agreement, according to which the total length of the pipeline was fixed at about 1,953 kilometers. Of this, 1,172 kilometers were to be built on Iranian soil and the remaining 781 kilometers were to be built in Pakistan. Iran completed its part by 2012, but Pakistan repeatedly delayed it, citing US sanctions. The project was originally scheduled to be completed by 2014 but has not yet been completed (Mazhar & Goraya, 2014). Pakistan's energy needs are growing, and the pipeline's stalling has posed economic and legal risks for both sides. In August 2024, Iran served the final notice on Pakistan informing Tehran is left with no option but to move the Paris Arbitration Court in

September 2024 against Pakistan for not constructing the pipeline under the IP gas project during the extended 180-day deadline. Under the original agreement, Pakistan is bound to pay \$1 million per day to Iran from January 1, 2015, under the penalty clause (Mustafa, 2024).

Focus is being placed on land, rail and sea routes to improve connectivity: the Zahedan-Taftan-Quetta railway, shipping links from Karachi/Qasim and Gwadar to Chahbar and Bandar Abbas, and the decision to operate at least monthly trains on the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) corridor are efforts to increase bilateral trade, but infrastructure, logistics and political barriers are hindering this. Border trade has both formal and informal channels; trade imbalances, banking sanctions and smuggling, especially of Iranian diesel, have fuelled the informal economy, which is also a source of employment in border areas. In the security context, internal extremism and border violence make the process of containment difficult and Iran has launched airstrikes on Pakistan territory, apparently aimed at a Sunni militant group, in the latest sign of a wave of violence rolling across the Middle East and beyond. Pakistan's foreign ministry said two children were killed and three others were injured ( Borger, 2024).

Overall, Iran-Pakistan economic relations have potential, but implementation requires political will, a resolution of international sanctions, strong border management, and investment in basic infrastructure to enable equitable and lasting improvements in energy, trade corridors, and the border economy.

## **Geopolitics of the Middle East and Pakistan's Role as a Mediator**

### **Historical Background and Cold War Politics**

After the demise of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the World War I, Britain and France tried to divide the region in such a manner that they created and reunited, or divided, nations, sects, and languages within one state structure. This border-making encouraged weak states and civil war, with the Saxe-Picot Agreement being one of the high profiles (Khalidi, 2016). Following the exit of European powers, there rose Arab nationalism and secular popular movements that changed the government structure in certain states and reformed regional political conflicts. This trend turned out to be symbolic in terms of the 1952 revolution in Egypt, along with other national movements, and influenced the balance of power in the region (Panta, 2022). The Arab Spring led to the popular demands in an unprecedented manner, yet demonstrations against economic pressure, employment, and corruption frequently resulted in armed confrontation and sectarian warfare. This has been the source of civil wars that have taken a long time in certain nations due to secular and religious authority. The competition that had always existed between Saudi Arabia and Iran has turned the region into a proxy war and blockade battleground, and the Revolution across Iran has additional complicated the situation by making Shiite more influential. The resulting backlash has further influenced the interests of the world and nations. Chinese mediation approach and New Diplomacy, in the framework of mediation activities of the world and new powers, have created new opportunities to reconcile. Against this overall backdrop, the geographical, religious, and historical connections of Pakistan and Central Asia make them capable of regional mediation and confidence-building; the Saudi-Iranian conflict and the Gulf strategic competition are also affecting regional stability (Albarasneh, 2025). Consequently, Pakistan's geographical and diplomatic position gives it a responsibility to reduce conflicts through peaceful mediation and dialogue, and Pakistan's mediation is undoubtedly very important.

### **Regional Power Players and Sectarian Divides**

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, sectarian and ideological elements gained ground in regional politics. Its roots lie in the Iranian Islamic Revolution of the late 20th century. The government that emerged from the revolution was determined to spread its revolutionary ideology to other countries. It directly challenged the existing political order in the region particularly the Sunni-led monarchies of the Gulf. (Seliktar, 2021). Islamic Iran also attempted to extend its revolution to other countries and this raised an apprehension among the Sunni rulers of the Gulf. Saudi Arabia in its turn strengthened its propaganda and financial capabilities in response, and this led to more sectarian tensions. These divisions were further reinforced by the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 with the majority of Sunni Arab nations taking sides with Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi against Iran. Thus, this sectarian division became a permanent geographical and political reality in the region ( Eisenstadt, 2021). The 1980-88 war between Iran and Iraq perpetuated sectarian divisions, the effects of which are still felt today in the wars in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq (Yaseenet, al., 2018)

After 2016, Saudi Arabia began economic and social reforms under Vision 2030 and reshaped its foreign policy. Saudi Arabia's current foreign and domestic policies are largely based on "Vision 2030", a comprehensive plan introduced in 2016 to diversify the country's economy and achieve social development (Çinkara, 2025). Under Vision 2030, the focus of Saudi strategy was made on economic diversification, regional stability, and domestic development. Under the leadership of Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia focused on diplomacy and soft power rather than aggressive behavior. According to a study: Saudi Arabia adopts various methods to increase its global influence, including mediating conflicts, religious diplomacy, providing humanitarian aid, taking leadership in the energy sector, and improving relations with the world through sports." (Abdullah, 2024) under this, Saudi Arabia increased its global influence on several fronts, such as conflict mediation, religious diplomacy, and humanitarian service etc.

At the same time, Turkey also adopted a new strategy in the region. Turkey tried to associate itself with the position of the leader of the Muslim world by using the legacy of its Ottoman past. According to Sıyat Abdi Maalim. In Libya, Turkey provided military support to the Tripoli government against Khalifa Haftar's army (Abdi Maalim , 2023). According to this study, Turkey weakened Khalifa Haftar's front by providing military support to the Tripoli government in Libya. Furthermore, in July 2023, Turkey and Egypt announced the restoration of diplomatic relations, which increased regional cooperation (Uras, 2023).

### **Pakistan's Growing Strategic Role**

Pakistan's role in the Middle East has significantly increased since the Arab Spring. After the Israeli attack on Qatar, Pakistan established itself as an active player in regional defense affairs. In this context, a historic defense agreement was signed between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on September 17, 2025. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Wednesday signed a "Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement" in Riyadh, pledging that any attack on either nation would be treated as an act of aggression against both. (Momand, 2025). Under this agreement, both countries have expressed their commitment to mutual defense. According to renowned analyst Nad Ali Weinbaum, this agreement is a "significant regional development", which reflects Pakistan's growing strategic role.

In addition, according to Naade Ali and Marvin Weinbaum, immediately after the Qatar attack, Pakistan began an unprecedented diplomatic activity in foreign policy. It highlighted its position in regional forums and presented new concepts of collective defense. Overall, this chapter shows that Pakistan has changed its foreign policy in a cautious but effective manner after the Arab Spring. It gives equal importance to security and economic benefits and keeps itself away from regional conflicts. An internally weak economy and a

debt burden are major challenges for Pakistan, so solving these problems in the future strategy will be inevitable.

## **Pakistan's Role as a Mediator in The Middle East**

### **The balanced position and diplomatic policy of Pakistan**

The foreign policy of Pakistan has never been aggressive in terms of Saudi Arabia or Iran. Being a Sunni-majority nation, Pakistan, too, has a large Shia minority, and borders Iran, whereas it is also closely associated with Saudi Arabia both historically and economically. Those conflicting realities compelled Pakistan to have a moderate stance: at the time when the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen commenced in 2015, the Pakistani government refused to join in. That same year, Islamabad withdrew from the military alliance (Majid Fauji Ittehad) established under the Pak-Saudi alliance. The Pakistani parliament also endorsed this approach, passing a unanimous resolution supporting the country's neutrality in the Yemen conflict (Hashim, 2015).

Furthermore, Pakistan has given equal importance to its Saudi, Iranian, and Chinese relations for its own benefit. According to the American policy journal *Foreign Policy*, in recent months Islamabad has established new milestones in its relations with the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, which are evidence of the country's balanced and effective foreign policy. At present, Pakistan hopes that as Saudi-Iranian tensions subside, it will be able to maintain close ties with both sides. Pakistan has welcomed the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries after the Taj Mahal disaster as it will give Islamabad an opportunity to build moderate relations with both its traditional friends Saudi Arabia and Iran.

### **Difficulties in the mediation process and future paths**

Pakistan has supported peace efforts in several Middle East conflicts. Pakistan has repeatedly called for a political settlement and a negotiated solution in Yemen at the United Nations forum. This policy has been Pakistan's consistent support: in September 2023, Pakistan called for talks for a political solution to the Yemeni crisis and has appealed to the parties on various occasions until 2025 for a ceasefire and peace talks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Pakistan, 2023). In 2016, Islamabad signs a 15-year long-term LNG import agreement with Qatar, under which 3.75 million tons of gas will be imported about 85 percent of Pakistan's LNG imports (Khuldune Shahid, 2017). The deal diversified Pakistan's energy supply, and prevented Pakistan from feeling isolated by Saudi Arabia and the UAE during the Qatar crisis.

However, the presence of third powers and regional complexities limited Pakistan's mediation role. The US, European and Russian conflicting interests in the Middle East are a challenge to Islamabad. However, the Saudi-Iranian relations may improve in 2023 due to the intervention of China, and this might be a good news to Pakistan. Pakistan regards this development as a significant move towards a peaceful region. In the future, Pakistan ought to consolidate its strategy of traditional mediation and balancing and intervene in conflicts in the region. More training of the parliament and foreign policy institutions and development of an elaborate mediation systems can boost the mediation capacity of Pakistan that will boost its role of promoting peace and stability in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Following the Arab Spring, Pakistan has restored its defense, economic and diplomatic ties and they have assumed a moderate and productive role in the politics of the Middle East. Although there have been tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the war in Yemen, and the balance of power in the region, Pakistan has been able to protect its national

interests due to non-partisan diplomacy, defense-related relations and economic relations. The increasing geo-political significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the old defense alliance with Saudi Arabia, and the emphasis on the energy and economic passageway with Iran point to the increasing power of Pakistan in the region. Pakistan will have to maximize its mediatory role in the Middle East to improve its domestic economy issues in an effort to be a major and credible player in the stability of the region.

### **Recommendations**

To retain the good relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, Pakistan must remain in the strategy of maintaining a balanced and neutral diplomatic policy in the Middle East.

By intensifying its mediation efforts, it would allow Pakistan to attain international credibility and play a part in keeping the region stable.

The government must also aim at increasing economic diplomacy, especially the exploitation of opportunities through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the maximization of trade, energy, and investment with the Middle Eastern states.

Moreover, to achieve energy security, Pakistan ought to increase its economic association with various other countries in the region to make sure that it is not totally reliant on one nation.

The policies of defense cooperation with friendly states should be increased with the avoidance of participating in conflicts on the regional level.

Lastly, the connection of the Middle East policy with the internal economy development has to be established in Pakistan, and remittances, trade routes, and investment opportunities have to be applied in order to boost its economy. Through strategic neutrality, economic collaboration and diplomatic relations, Pakistan will be able to cement the fact that it is a credible and stabilizing force on the Middle East politics.

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