

1 THE RELATIONSHIP

HISTORY OF COOPERATION

Foundation: 1967

Formal defence cooperation established. Formal defence cooperation created military training and advisory links.^{[4][5]}

Cooperation: 1970s-80s

Defence and economic ties deepen. Pakistani deployments, training and advice expanded alongside Saudi financial support.^{[4][6]}

Divergence: 2015-2020

Strategic interests diverge. Yemen non-participation, Kashmir tensions and Riyadh's India ties caused diplomatic and financial friction.^{[7][8]}

Current Posture - 2025-2026

Renewed formalisation of defence ties. The 2025 mutual-defence agreement was followed by broader collective cooperation in 2026.^{[9][10]}



Constraints

- Strategic autonomy:** Pakistan's 2015 Yemen refusal shows that cooperation does not guarantee alignment.^{[7][8]}
- Competing priorities:** Riyadh's India ties and Pakistan's India-focused security priorities constrain alignment.^{[7][11]}
- Asymmetry:** Pakistan relies on Saudi economic support; Saudi Arabia gains Pakistani military expertise.^{[7][11]}



Interpretation / Contested Claims

- Nuclear assistance:** Claims that Saudi funding supported Pakistan's nuclear programme for a future guarantee remain unsubstantiated by public evidence.^{[6][12]}
- Nuclear guarantee:** The 2025 agreement prompted extended-deterrence speculation but contains no explicit nuclear guarantee; officials gave conflicting signals.^{[9][13]}
- Evidence boundary:** Conventional cooperation and mutual defence are established; Saudi access to Pakistan's arsenal or weapons commitments are not.^{[9][13]}

2 THE CONTEXT

REGIONAL SECURITY DILEMMA

IRAN

- Nuclear programme.^[21]
- Missile capabilities.^[22]
- Proxy links.^[24]
- Regional behaviour: major competition with Saudi Arabia for influence persists despite diplomatic engagement and restored ties in 2023.^{[20][25]}

REGIONAL SECURITY TENSION

- Deterrence shifts + regional instability as Iranian capabilities and proxies alter security calculations and increase escalation risks.^{[20][21][22][24]}
- Israel's nuclear ambiguity and presumed arsenal further shape the regional balance.^[23]

SAUDI ARABIA

- Strategic partnerships + nuclear hedging.^{[11][12][16]}
- Regional instability heightens Saudi security concerns; future nuclear cooperation could reshape deterrence, proliferation and stability.^{[11][12][16]}



KEY CONCEPT - NUCLEAR HEDGING

Nuclear hedging: developing capabilities and strategic options that could support a future nuclear deterrent without establishing a demonstrated nuclear-weapons program.

- Saudi Arabia
- Pakistan
- Iran
- Iran-Linked
- Proxy Conflict
- Israel

3 THE NUCLEAR QUESTION

WHAT EXISTS – AND WHAT IS MISSING?



Civilian nuclear infrastructure, projects & expertise

- Saudi Arabia has a civilian nuclear regulatory framework, domestic uranium resources and a developing nuclear-energy programme that includes elements of the fuel cycle, including uranium enrichment.^{[14][15][19]}
- Public evidence does not establish an operating Saudi uranium-enrichment facility; no commercial nuclear power reactor currently operates, but a research reactor is being developed at King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology alongside plans for large-scale nuclear power reactors.^{[14][16][19]}
- Regulatory institutions, research facilities and a trained workforce provide civilian nuclear expertise, but these capabilities do not themselves demonstrate a nuclear-weapons capability.^{[14][19]}



Missile delivery systems

- Saudi Arabia possesses ballistic-missile capabilities; imagery of al-Watah indicates solid-propellant motor production and related infrastructure, suggesting indigenous development capability.^{[17][18]}
- These systems provide a potential delivery component for a future strategic deterrent, but no public evidence establishes that Saudi ballistic missiles are nuclear-armed.^{[17][18]}



Weaponisation facilities

- No publicly verified evidence establishes dedicated Saudi nuclear-weapons production, assembly or weaponisation facilities; the documented programme remains centred on civilian nuclear development.^{[14][15][19]}
- Absence of publicly identified facilities does not prove that no undeclared capability exists; it means none can currently be established from open-source evidence.

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

- Documented: extensive Saudi financial and strategic support for Pakistan.^{[2][5][12]}
- Credibly reported: claims that this support helped Pakistan sustain its nuclear programme.^{[13][26]}
- Not publicly established: a formal agreement exchanging Saudi financial support for Pakistani nuclear weapons or guaranteeing Saudi access to them.^{[12][13][26]}

CONTESTED EVIDENCE – SAUDI FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Documented: Saudi financial and oil support to Pakistan during periods of international sanctions.^{[2][5][12]}
- Contested / reported: analysts argue this support helped sustain Pakistan's nuclear programme and may have created expectations of future access to Pakistani nuclear capabilities.^{[13][26]}
- Not publicly established: no evidence establishes an explicit exchange of financial assistance for nuclear weapons or a formal Saudi-Pakistan nuclear-sharing agreement.^{[12][13][26]}

4 WHAT COULD CHANGE?

LIMITED COOPERATION

LIKELIHOOD ●●●

DEFENCE COOPERATION DEEPENS

No nuclear transfer

POSSIBLE REGIONAL EFFECTS

IRAN

Greater strategic concern and closer monitoring of Saudi-Pakistan defence ties.^[12, 20]

REGIONAL POWERS

Israel may reassess regional security calculations as Saudi-Pakistan defence ties deepen.^[12, 23]

PROXY GROUPS

Iran-aligned groups in Yemen and Iraq could remain channels for indirect pressure on Saudi Arabia, particularly through missile, drone or other asymmetric activity.^[20, 25]

NUCLEAR HEDGING ACCELERATES

LIKELIHOOD ●●○

PAKISTANI SUPPORT & SAUDI CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

Saudi Arabia expands its indigenous nuclear option

POSSIBLE REGIONAL EFFECTS

IRAN

Greater incentive to strengthen its own nuclear and strategic capabilities.^[20, 21, 26]

REGIONAL POWERS

Israel may face increased proliferation concerns as Saudi Arabia develops greater indigenous nuclear capabilities.^[16, 23]

PROXY GROUPS

Iran-backed groups in Yemen and Iraq could intensify indirect pressure on Saudi Arabia as nuclear deterrence limits the scope for direct confrontation.^[20, 25]

STRATEGIC NUCLEAR COOPERATION

LIKELIHOOD ●○○

EXTENDED NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Pakistan potentially provides a nuclear umbrella

POSSIBLE REGIONAL EFFECTS

IRAN

Stronger pressure to reassess its nuclear and regional security posture.^[13, 20, 21]

REGIONAL POWERS

Israel may face greater strategic uncertainty as a nuclear deterrent extends to Saudi Arabia.^[13, 23]

PROXY GROUPS

Indirect confrontation may remain a preferred avenue for regional competition below the nuclear threshold.^[20, 25]

ASSESSING THE SCENARIOS

OBSERVABLE INDICATORS

- Official agreements plus expanded joint exercises, defence coordination or technology cooperation.^[1, 10, 12]
- Public evidence of a Pakistani nuclear commitment, extended deterrence or transfer.^[13]
- New enrichment/fuel-cycle, missile-delivery or weaponisation capabilities.^[14, 16-19]
- Changes in Saudi safeguards or IAEA arrangements.^[15]
- Increased Iranian, Israeli or proxy responses to Saudi-Pakistan ties.^[20, 23, 25]

COUNTERARGUMENTS

- Pakistan's India-focused posture and the pact's lack of an explicit nuclear guarantee constrain extended deterrence.^[12, 13]
- No publicly established nuclear transfer or sharing arrangement.^[13, 26]
- Saudi nuclear development may serve civilian energy under NPT and IAEA safeguards.^[14, 15]
- Greater capability does not show a decision to weaponise; activity may remain nuclear hedging.^[14-16, 19, 21]
- U.S. guarantees, diplomacy and conventional deterrence can reduce incentives for an independent capability.^[12, 19, 20]

5 KEY FINDINGS / CONCLUSION

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SUGGEST?

- Established strategic partnership
Saudi-Pakistan defence cooperation is deepening, but evidence of substantive nuclear cooperation remains limited. The 2025 mutual defence agreement formalises a significant strategic relationship, but does not explicitly establish extended nuclear deterrence.^[1, 10, 12, 13]
- Likely regional implication
Deeper strategic or nuclear cooperation could reshape regional security calculations, increasing pressure on Iran, raising proliferation concerns among regional powers, and potentially shifting competition towards proxy and other forms of indirect conflict.^[13, 16, 20, 21, 25]
- Policy / research relevance
Saudi Arabia's developing nuclear capabilities and strengthened strategic partnerships may increase its strategic options, making the future direction of its nuclear policy an important regional security question.^[14, 16, 19, 21]

WHAT REMAINS UNCERTAIN?

- Contested assumption
Whether Pakistan's nuclear deterrence could be extended to Saudi Arabia remains uncertain. Current analysis finds that the nuclear dimension of the Saudi-Pakistan pact is "more speculative than substantive", while the agreement itself contains no explicit nuclear commitment.^[13]
- Critical evidence gap
There is no publicly established evidence of Pakistani transfer of nuclear warheads or a formal nuclear-sharing arrangement with Saudi Arabia. The precise scope of any future nuclear cooperation therefore remains unclear.^[13, 26]
- Indicator that would change the assessment
Clear evidence of a Pakistani nuclear commitment, expanded Saudi sensitive fuel-cycle capabilities, or a significant change in safeguards arrangements would strengthen the case for nuclear hedging.^[13-16, 19, 21]

Overall, Saudi Arabia's developing nuclear capabilities and strengthened strategic partnerships may increase its strategic options, but the evidence does not establish a decision to pursue nuclear weapons. The key uncertainty is not whether Saudi-Pakistan ties are strengthening, but how far their strategic and nuclear dimensions could develop - and whether Saudi Arabia ultimately moves from nuclear hedging towards weaponisation.^[13, 14, 16, 19, 21]