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Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

Pakistan's Emerging Strategic Partnerships: From Diplomatic Influence to Defense and Industrial Strength

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Pakistan has adopted a more proactive and diversified foreign policy. It is combining diplomatic mediation with defense cooperation, maritime security and regional partnerships. The central question is whether these initiatives can be translated into lasting strategic advantages: a more secure Pakistan, a stronger defense-industrial base and greater freedom of action in an increasingly polarized world.

The opportunity is significant, however the real measure of success will not be the number of agreements signed or forums joined. It will be Pakistan's ability to turn political goodwill into operational military cooperation, technology transfer, industrial investment and a more resilient national defense capability.

A New Architecture of Partnerships

Pakistan–Saudi Arabia Bilateral Defense Cooperation

This relationship can strengthen deterrence through strategic consultation, training, interoperability, defense production and potentially coordinated responses to threats. Its value will depend on the specific commitments outlined in the agreement and the arrangements established to implement them.

The Trilateral Makkah Joint Defense Agreement

Cooperation among Pakistan, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia could bring together Pakistan's military experience, Türkiye's expanding defense-technology sector and Saudi Arabia's financial resources and industrial ambitions. The most important test will be whether this complementarity translates into joint



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projects rather than remaining confined to the political level.

Saudi-Led Multinational Maritime Defense Initiative

Participation could improve maritime domain awareness, information-sharing, naval coordination and the protection of shipping. For Pakistan, whose economy depends on seaborne trade and energy imports, maritime security has direct national-security implications.

The Badr Accord: An Important Industrial Dimension

Another important development is the Badr Memorandum of Understanding, signed on 21 October 2026 by Pakistan, Türkiye, Qatar

and Indonesia. Its stated objectives include defense production, joint research and development, technology transfer, training and industrial capability-building. This is a separate four-country initiative, and should not be confused with the trilateral Makkah Joint Defense Agreement.

The Badr framework has the potential to broaden Pakistan's industrial partnerships beyond traditional supplier-customer relationship. Türkiye brings an expanding defense manufacturing and design base; Qatar can contribute investment and procurement opportunities; Indonesia offers a substantial market and a wider Southeast Asian industrial connection; and Pakistan brings established military-industrial capabilities and operational experience.



The R4 Regional Forum

Pakistan has become a member of the R4 group, comprising Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Türkiye. The forum provides a platform for sustained consultation on regional security, political coordination, de-escalation and economic cooperation. Its engagement could also create opportunities in Defense-Industrial cooperation and dialogue with other regional and international groupings, such as E3 (France, Germany and the United Kingdom).

These initiatives have the potential to reinforce one another. Bilateral

agreements can establish trust, trilateral defense cooperation can develop practical capabilities, maritime arrangements can address shared operational risks, and a wider regional forum can provide political support.

One qualification is important: the precise legal status, membership, mandates and implementation arrangements of the recently reported frameworks should be verified against official announcements. Participation in a forum does not, by itself, establish a mutual-defense guarantee or an obligation to enter a conflict.



From Diplomatic Influence to Strategic Leverage

Pakistan's international standing increased when it facilitated US–Iran negotiations in Islamabad earlier in 2026. This demonstrated the potential value of maintaining relationships across competing geopolitical camps. Diplomacy of this kind can raise Pakistan's international standing, create channels for crisis communication and help reduce the risk of a regional conflict that would threaten its economy and security.

The same principle applies to Pakistan's defense partnerships. Pakistan can use its relationships to become a bridge between South Asia, the Gulf and the wider Muslim world.

Three benefits stand out:

- Strategic depth through relationships, not territory. Political support and security cooperation with several partners can reduce Pakistan's dependence on any single external power.
- Greater deterrence. A potential adversary must consider whether an attack could trigger diplomatic, intelligence, logistical or military support from partner states.
- More room for diplomatic maneuver. Pakistan can pursue constructive relations with China, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and other countries without necessarily becoming subordinate to a single geopolitical bloc.

However, the deterrent value of a partnership depends on its credibility. A written commitment must be supported by agreed procedures, political consensus, military planning and the capability to respond in a crisis.

How the Partnerships Can Become Self-Sustaining

The challenge is to convert broad diplomatic commitments into a practical industrial program.

Priority	Recommended Action	Strategic Benefit
Technology transfer	Negotiate production rights, technical training and local engineering participation	Greater self-reliance
Joint manufacturing	Select commercially viable projects with clear partners and funding	Economies of scale
Defense exports	Develop joint marketing and after-sales support for approved third-country markets	Foreign exchange earnings
Research and development	Fund joint laboratories, testing facilities and university partnerships	Indigenous innovation
Supply-chain resilience	Diversify suppliers and develop local replacement components	Reduced vulnerability to embargoes or disruption
Governance	Require transparent costing, milestones and independent technical assessment	Better value for money

