SITUATIONAL REPORTS

Pakistan’s Expanding Gulf Defence Network From Saudi Arabia and Türkiye to Kuwait

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EXECUTIVE BRIEF & KEY FINDINGS

Pakistan is undergoing a significant, though still incomplete, transformation in its security relationship with the Middle East. What was historically a collection of bilateral military relationships built around training, advisory support and political affinity is beginning to acquire a more institutional and potentially operational character.The immediate trigger for this assessment is the Protocol Agreement 2026 signed between Pakistan and Kuwait on 27 August. The agreement expands the Defence Cooperation Agreement originally signed in June 2023 and recently ratified by Kuwait. Under the new arrangement, Pakistan's armed forces will assist Kuwait in military training, capacity building, border management and other mutually agreed fields. The agreement follows nearly four decades of defence engagement between the two countries.Taken in isolation, the Kuwait agreement would represent a conventional military cooperation arrangement. It is not a mutual defence treaty and does not contain the collective-defence commitment found in Pakistan's agreements with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's own Foreign Ministry has explicitly distinguished the Kuwait framework from mutual-defence arrangements, describing its principal orientation as peacetime military cooperation.Its significance becomes greater when viewed alongside developments involving Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in September 2025, declaring that aggression against either state would be treated as aggression against both. On 7 August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye elevated this architecture further by signing the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement. The trilateral agreement contains a collective-defence provision under which an armed attack against one of the three states is to be regarded as an attack against all.Today, 31 August, this agreement is moving from political declaration towards institutionalisation. Foreign ministers, defence ministers and

> *senior military leadership from the three countries are scheduled to participate in the inaugural meeting of the Strategic Political and Defence Committee in Istanbul. Pakistan is represented by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Field Marshal Asim Munir.CNAWS assesses that these developments do not yet constitute a unified Middle Eastern military alliance under Pakistani leadership. Nor should the Pakistan-Kuwait agreement be interpreted as Kuwait joining the Makkah Pact. What is emerging instead is a networked security architecture in which Pakistan is becoming increasingly valuable as a provider of military manpower, training, operational experience and potentially defence equipment, while Türkiye contributes an expanding defence-industrial base and Saudi Arabia provides political weight, capital and strategic geography.The principal driver is the deterioration of the traditional Gulf security environment. The continuing Iran conflict, attacks on Gulf infrastructure, threats to shipping and declining confidence that external security guarantees alone are sufficient have encouraged Gulf states to diversify their defence relationships. Saudi Arabia has moved furthest towards formal collective deterrence. Kuwait appears to be following a more cautious hedging strategy.For Pakistan, the benefits are substantial. Deeper Gulf military integration can enhance Islamabad's strategic relevance, generate defence exports and training revenue, attract defence-industrial investment and strengthen its diplomatic leverage. It can also turn Pakistan from primarily a recipient of Gulf financial assistance into a state providing security capabilities in return.There are, however, substantial limitations. Pakistan remains committed militarily against India, faces major internal security challenges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, maintains a sensitive relationship with Iran and cannot automatically translate treaty language into unrestricted military commitments in the Gulf. Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan also do not share identical threat perceptions.The development should therefore be understood as an emerging security network rather than a consolidated alliance.For India, the most important issue is not whether a new anti-India bloc is being created. Available evidence does not support that conclusion. The more important long-term question is whether Saudi capital, Turkish technology and Pakistani military experience could gradually combine to strengthen Pakistan's defence-industrial and conventional military capacity. That possibility deserves sustained monitoring.*

1. The Immediate Development in Kuwait

On 27 August 2026, Kuwaiti Defence Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Saleem Al-Sabah travelled to Rawalpindi accompanied by Kuwait's Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Khalid Darj Saad Al-Shriaan. During the visit, Kuwait and Pakistan signed the Protocol Agreement 2026.

According to Pakistan's Ministry of Defence, the agreement significantly enhances the military cooperation framework created by the Defence Cooperation Agreement of 2023. Pakistan will provide assistance in training, capacity building, border management and other defence fields agreed between the two sides.

The sequencing is important. The original Pakistan-Kuwait Defence Cooperation Agreement was signed on 11 June 2023. Kuwait completed ratification only in July 2026. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry described the agreement at that point as an institutional framework covering military education, training, exercises and exchanges of expertise. Less than a month after ratification, the August protocol expanded the practical scope of cooperation. This suggests movement from a broad enabling agreement towards implementation. There is, however, an important analytical distinction between defence cooperation and collective defence.

The Kuwait agreement contains no publicly disclosed provision stating that an attack on Kuwait would automatically be considered an attack on Pakistan. Pakistani officials were directly questioned about this distinction in July. The Foreign Ministry characterised agreements such as the Kuwait framework as mechanisms primarily designed for peacetime military cooperation and capability development rather than automatic wartime intervention. This considerably reduces the validity of claims that Pakistan has simply extended a Saudi-style military umbrella over Kuwait.

The agreement nevertheless expands Pakistan's institutional position inside Kuwait's security establishment. Training programmes, border-management assistance, military education, joint exercises and recurring officer-level interaction can create durable relationships that often become more strategically important than the initial text of an agreement. The Kuwait agreement should therefore be considered strategically relevant, but not overstated.

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2. The Saudi-Pakistan Relationship Provides the Foundation

Pakistan's current Gulf role cannot be understood without Saudi Arabia. Defence cooperation between Riyadh and Islamabad predates the current regional crisis by decades. Pakistani military personnel have long served in advisory and training roles inside Saudi Arabia. In 2016, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry acknowledged that a Pakistani defence contingent remained stationed in the kingdom under bilateral arrangements. Reuters reported in 2025 that between approximately 1,500 and 2,000 Pakistani personnel were providing operational, technical and training assistance to Saudi forces.

The relationship changed qualitatively on 17 September 2025. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in Riyadh. The central provision declared that aggression against either state would be considered aggression against both.

The geopolitical context was significant. Gulf states were reassessing security assumptions after regional attacks and growing doubts about whether dependence on Washington alone provided sufficient deterrence. Reuters reported that the agreement substantially deepened an already longstanding Saudi-Pakistani security relationship.

The agreement also generated immediate speculation concerning Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Pakistan is the only Muslim-majority nuclear-armed state. When Reuters asked a senior Saudi official in September 2025 whether the agreement could imply a Pakistani nuclear umbrella, the official described it as encompassing all military means. Pakistan has historically maintained that its nuclear deterrent is directed primarily towards India, and neither state has publicly disclosed a formal nuclear-sharing arrangement.

For analytical purposes, this ambiguity itself has strategic value. A formal Pakistani nuclear deployment in the Gulf is neither established nor necessary for the agreement to contribute to deterrence. The existence of a nuclear-armed treaty partner creates an additional layer of uncertainty in adversary calculations even if the circumstances under which nuclear capabilities might become relevant remain deliberately undefined. The Saudi-Pakistan agreement therefore created the political foundation upon which the larger Makkah architecture was subsequently constructed.

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3. Türkiye Changes the Equation

The addition of Türkiye transforms the arrangement from an unusually close Saudi-Pakistani security partnership into something potentially more consequential. Pakistan and Türkiye already possess extensive bilateral defence mechanisms. The twentieth round of their High-Level Military Dialogue Group was held in Rawalpindi in April 2026, covering regional security, defence-industrial cooperation, military training, capacity building and strategic partnership. A dedicated Defence Industry Working Group operates beneath this mechanism.

The relationship had already become increasingly institutionalised during 2025. Pakistan and Türkiye established a Joint Standing Committee on Security, Defence and Intelligence, while their High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council committed both sides to defence procurement from one another where feasible, joint research and development, defence joint ventures and defence-industrial indigenisation.

Türkiye brings capabilities that neither Pakistan nor Saudi Arabia possesses in the same combination. Its defence industry has expanded rapidly in unmanned systems, naval construction, missiles, sensors, electronic warfare and aerospace. Reuters reported in June that Turkish defence exports had approximately tripled since 2021 to around $10 billion, with Turkish systems increasingly competing in markets across Europe, the Gulf, Africa and Asia.

Pakistan contributes a different set of assets. These include a large professional military, extensive training infrastructure, operational experience across conventional and counterinsurgency environments, an emerging export-oriented defence sector and nuclear status.

Saudi Arabia contributes something equally important. It possesses financial resources capable of supporting procurement, industrial expansion and potentially multinational defence programmes. This creates the possibility of a complementary relationship.

State	Principal Contribution to Emerging Architecture
Saudi Arabia	Capital, political leadership, Gulf geography, procurement demand and strategic influence
Türkiye	Defence technology, drones, missiles, electronic warfare, naval systems and industrial capacity
Pakistan	Military manpower, training, operational experience, lower-cost defence production and nuclear deterrence ambiguity

This division should not be treated as a formally agreed allocation of responsibilities. It is an analytical representation of the comparative advantages each state currently brings. Nevertheless, it explains why the trilateral structure has greater potential than its predecessor agreements.

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4. The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement

On 7 August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement at Al-Safa Palace. The official text is unusually important because it moves beyond vague declarations of cooperation. It states that an armed attack against one of the three states will be treated as an attack against all three and calls for enhancement of defence cooperation across the relationship.

The language resembles the logic of collective defence, though its implementation remains dependent on political decisions. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan subsequently compared the mechanism technically with NATO's Article 5 but emphasised that the parties would still consult concerning what assistance should actually be provided to an attacked state. Reuters similarly noted that the practical responsibilities of each signatory remain less clearly defined than the political commitment.

That distinction is essential. Collective-defence treaties do not automatically create interoperable armed forces. Effective military alliances require command arrangements, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, exercises, contingency planning, communications integration, logistics agreements, basing access and clear rules concerning when commitments become active. The Makkah Pact currently possesses the political commitment. The next phase will determine whether it develops the military machinery required to make that commitment credible.

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5. Why the Istanbul Meeting Matters

The inaugural meeting of the Strategic Political and Defence Committee in Istanbul on 31 August is therefore more important than another ceremonial summit. Türkiye's Foreign Ministry has confirmed that its foreign minister, defence minister and chief of general staff will participate alongside Pakistani and Saudi officials. Pakistan is sending Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Field Marshal Asim Munir.

The composition reveals the intended character of the committee. This is not merely a foreign-ministry dialogue. Political decision-makers and senior military leadership are being brought together within the same mechanism. Reuters reported ahead of the meeting that future cooperation is expected to address interoperability, defence capabilities, defence technology and production.

As of the information cut-off for this SITREP, no authoritative post-meeting communiqué setting out final decisions had yet been identified. Consequently, claims concerning permanent command structures, basing arrangements or specific weapons programmes would be premature. The key indicator now is whether Istanbul produces working-level implementation mechanisms rather than another broad political declaration.

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6. The Iran War Is Accelerating the Architecture

These agreements are occurring during an extraordinary deterioration in Gulf security. The US-Iran war that began on 28 February 2026 has disrupted shipping, exposed Gulf infrastructure to missile and drone attack and created repeated uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz. Saudi Arabia has faced attacks originating from Iran-aligned actors in Yemen and Iraq while seeking to avoid becoming fully absorbed into the conflict.

Reuters assessed in August that Saudi Arabia was increasingly seeking regional defensive alliances as part of an attempt to deter further attacks while avoiding uncontrolled escalation. The Makkah Pact forms one component of this broader strategy alongside proposed maritime-security cooperation in the Red Sea.

This helps explain both the timing and the urgency. Gulf states are not necessarily abandoning their relationships with Washington. The United States remains deeply embedded in Gulf security through bases, weapons systems, intelligence arrangements and bilateral partnerships.

The change is subtler. Regional governments increasingly appear unwilling to depend on one external security provider. The result is security diversification. Saudi Arabia is constructing regional deterrence mechanisms. Türkiye is expanding its defence-industrial and political reach. Pakistan is positioning itself as a military partner capable of providing capabilities that Gulf states cannot necessarily generate domestically at short notice.

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7. Kuwait Is Hedging, Not Choosing Sides

Kuwait provides perhaps the clearest demonstration of how this process should be interpreted. Only one day after the Pakistan-Kuwait protocol was signed, Kuwait participated in the inaugural India-Kuwait Joint Defence Committee meeting in New Delhi on 28 August.

India's Ministry of Defence stated that the two countries agreed to expand cooperation in military training, exercises, military medicine, staff talks, defence industry and research and development. The committee operationalises the defence cooperation MoU signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's December 2024 visit to Kuwait.

This is strategically significant. If Kuwait were moving into an exclusive Pakistan-centred military alignment, simultaneous institutionalisation of defence cooperation with India would be difficult to explain. The more convincing interpretation is that Kuwait is diversifying its security partnerships. Pakistan offers established military training relationships, geographic proximity and relatively inexpensive capacity-building support. India offers a rapidly expanding defence industry, advanced technical capabilities, strategic weight and extensive economic ties with the Gulf. Kuwait can pursue both.

This is a reminder that Gulf foreign policy increasingly operates through multiple overlapping relationships rather than binary alliances. For India, this distinction is important because an alarmist response to every Pakistan-Gulf agreement could inadvertently undermine India's own expanding relationships in the region.

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8. What Pakistan Gains

Pakistan's immediate gain is strategic relevance. For decades, its Gulf relationships were characterised partly by dependence. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf partners provided investment, energy support, remittances and financial assistance to Islamabad.

Security cooperation offers Pakistan the opportunity to reverse part of that dependency. Pakistan can increasingly market itself as a provider rather than merely a recipient. Its offerings include military training, advisory personnel, counterterrorism expertise, conventional military experience, border-management knowledge and an expanding portfolio of comparatively low-cost defence equipment.

This commercial dimension should not be underestimated. Following Pakistan's 2025 conflict with India, Reuters reported growing international interest in Pakistani defence products, particularly the JF-17, trainer aircraft, drones, air-defence systems and armoured vehicles. Saudi Arabia was among the states linked to prospective defence discussions. A Gulf security network could therefore provide both political and commercial opportunities for Pakistan's defence industry.

The second gain is diplomatic. A Pakistan embedded inside Gulf security structures becomes more difficult to isolate diplomatically during future crises. This does not mean Riyadh or Kuwait would automatically support Pakistan against India. Saudi officials have repeatedly emphasised the importance of maintaining strong relations with New Delhi. It does, however, increase Pakistan's access to senior decision-makers and gives its military establishment additional institutional channels through which to shape regional perceptions.

The third gain is defence-industrial. Pakistan's defence sector faces financial and technological limitations. A framework involving Turkish technological expertise and Saudi investment could potentially overcome some of these constraints if joint production projects begin to emerge. This is the dimension India should monitor most closely.

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9. What Pakistan Risks

The architecture also creates obligations. Pakistan's military planning remains heavily oriented towards India while simultaneously managing militant violence in western Pakistan. Any sustained external deployment would therefore compete for finite manpower, air-defence systems, logistics and political attention.

There is also the Iran problem. Pakistan shares a long and sensitive border with Iran and has repeatedly attempted to preserve functional relations with Tehran despite tensions involving cross-border militancy. Islamabad has also positioned itself as a potential intermediary during the present Iran crisis. Field Marshal Asim Munir travelled to Tehran in August following contact with US President Donald Trump as part of renewed attempts to encourage negotiations.

Pakistan therefore has little interest in allowing the Makkah Pact to become explicitly anti-Iranian. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye share concerns about regional instability but do not necessarily share identical policies towards Tehran. Pakistan's optimal strategy is to derive deterrence, economic and diplomatic benefits from Gulf partnerships without becoming a frontline combatant in Gulf conflicts. Whether it can maintain that balance during an actual collective-defence crisis remains untested.

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10. Is This an Islamic NATO

At present, no. The phrase is attractive but analytically misleading.

NATO possesses decades of integrated command planning, standing headquarters, common operating procedures, standardisation agreements, joint exercises, intelligence structures and detailed military planning. The Makkah Pact currently possesses a strong political commitment and is beginning to construct supporting institutions. That is significant, but it is not equivalent. The correct analytical category is an emerging collective-defence framework.

Its future relevance will depend on whether the parties develop permanent working groups, combined planning staffs, integrated air and missile defence procedures, intelligence-sharing systems, pre-negotiated logistics agreements and regular multi-domain exercises. Without these, the agreement will remain primarily a strategic signal. With them, it could evolve into something considerably more consequential.

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11. Expansion Could Change the Strategic Equation

The agreement may not remain trilateral. Bangladesh has already indicated that it could consider joining the Makkah Pact. Reuters reported on 25 August that Dhaka was viewing the prospect positively, though membership would create difficult questions concerning Bangladesh's non-alignment tradition and relations with India, China, Iran and Western partners.

This is potentially more important for India than Kuwait's agreement with Pakistan. Kuwait is geographically distant and remains closely engaged with New Delhi. Bangladesh lies directly on India's eastern frontier. If the Makkah framework begins expanding into South Asia, the strategic implications would become substantially greater.

The evolution of membership should consequently become one of the principal indicators used to assess whether the pact remains a Gulf-focused deterrence arrangement or develops into a broader geopolitical grouping.

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12. Implications for India

India should distinguish between immediate military risk and long-term structural change. There is currently no evidence that Kuwait's agreement with Pakistan is directed against India. The India-Kuwait Joint Defence Committee meeting held immediately afterwards strongly argues against such an interpretation. Saudi Arabia has similarly sought to deepen its economic and political relationship with India even while expanding its defence relationship with Pakistan.

The short-term military impact on India is therefore limited. The long-term implications are more important. The most consequential scenario would involve Saudi financing, Turkish defence technology and Pakistani manufacturing or operational expertise becoming integrated through joint ventures. Pakistan-Türkiye agreements already explicitly encourage defence-industrial joint research, procurement and indigenisation. The new trilateral framework potentially introduces Saudi capital and demand into an existing industrial relationship.

Such cooperation could accelerate capabilities in areas including unmanned systems, electronic warfare, sensors, missiles, air defence and precision weapons. The concern is therefore not that Saudi Arabia will suddenly become Pakistan's military ally against India. The concern is that Pakistan may gain greater technological depth, production capacity, financing and strategic resilience through a wider security ecosystem. That would affect the South Asian military balance gradually rather than dramatically.

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13. CNAWS Strategic Assessment

Assessment	Probability	Confidence
Pakistan will deepen its role as a Gulf military training and capacity-building provider	High	High
Makkah Pact will become increasingly institutionalised	High	High
Saudi capital will eventually support trilateral defence-industrial projects	Moderate to High	Moderate
Kuwait will join the Makkah collective-defence structure in the near term	Low to Moderate	Moderate
Pakistan will permanently deploy major combat formations to Gulf states	Low	Moderate
The pact will become explicitly directed against India	Low	Moderate to High
The framework will expand to additional Muslim-majority states	Moderate to High	Moderate
Pakistani nuclear capabilities will become formally incorporated into Gulf deterrence	Low to Moderate	Low
Defence-industrial cooperation will indirectly improve Pakistani capability against India	Moderate to High	Moderate

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14. Indicators to Watch

Over the next six to twelve months, the most important indicators will be whether Istanbul and subsequent meetings create permanent military planning mechanisms, whether Saudi investment begins appearing in Pakistan-Türkiye defence ventures, whether joint air and missile defence exercises are announced, whether Pakistani military personnel deployments to Gulf states increase, whether Pakistan begins supplying Gulf states with drones, aircraft or other weapons under government-to-government arrangements, whether Kuwait's cooperation moves beyond training into intelligence or operational integration, and whether Bangladesh or another state formally begins accession negotiations with the Makkah Pact.

Particular attention should also be paid to any agreement dealing with air defence, electronic warfare, unmanned systems, missile technology, intelligence sharing or joint production. These sectors would provide the strongest evidence that the emerging architecture is moving beyond political deterrence towards operational capability.

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15. Outlook

Pakistan's Gulf role is entering a new phase. The older model consisted largely of close relationships, Pakistani trainers, occasional deployments, military education and political solidarity. The emerging model is becoming more institutional, more defence-industrial and potentially more multilateral.

Saudi Arabia remains the centre of gravity. Türkiye provides the industrial and technological component that makes the new architecture different from earlier Pakistan-Gulf arrangements. Pakistan provides military depth, manpower, training

expertise and strategic deterrence.

Kuwait's new agreement demonstrates the attractiveness of Pakistani military capacity beyond Riyadh, but it also illustrates the limits of interpreting these developments as bloc politics. Kuwait is simultaneously strengthening defence cooperation with India.

The developing system is therefore best understood not as an alliance stretching automatically from Pakistan across the Gulf, but as a layered network of overlapping security relationships.

Some layers involve collective defence. Others involve training. Others involve defence industry. Others provide diplomatic insurance. Pakistan is positioning itself at the intersection of several of them.

> *The Kuwait agreement is not the story by itself. The larger story is the emergence of Pakistan as an increasingly institutionalised security provider inside a Gulf region searching for additional layers of deterrence and military resilience.*
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> *The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement gives this evolution political architecture. Today's Istanbul meeting begins the process of giving it institutional machinery. The Kuwait protocol demonstrates that Pakistan's military relationships can expand outside the formal pact.*
>
> *The architecture remains immature, and its cohesion should not be exaggerated. Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Pakistan and Kuwait have different threat perceptions, different external partnerships and different strategic priorities.*
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> *Yet the direction of travel is becoming clearer. Pakistan is attempting to convert military capability into geopolitical influence, defence-industrial opportunity and economic leverage in the Middle East.*
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> *For India, the appropriate response is not to treat every Gulf-Pakistan agreement as an emerging anti-India alliance. It is to monitor the deeper structural question.*
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> *Can Pakistan use Gulf capital and Turkish technology to expand the capabilities it eventually brings back to the South Asian theatre? That is where the long-term strategic consequence may lie.*