SITUATIONAL REPORTS

Pakistan Warns Iran as Houthi Attacks Test Its Saudi Defence Commitment

Author: CNAWS Research Team • **Published:** September 10, 2026 • **Source:** Centre for New Age Warfare Studies



EXECUTIVE BRIEF & KEY FINDINGS

Pakistan faces growing pressure to translate its Saudi defence commitments into a more demanding military role. CNAWS assesses that Islamabad will initially favour reinforcing Saudi protection while keeping diplomatic channels with Tehran open. The principal escalation risk is a gradual expansion of that mission if attacks persist or Pakistani personnel become casualties. Sustained involvement would place additional demands on Pakistan's military and complicate its relations with Iran. For India, the immediate concerns are energy transport, commercial shipping and the safety of its citizens in the Gulf.

Reuters reported on 9 September that Pakistan had conveyed a Saudi warning to Iran to restrain the Houthis. Pakistani sources said any expanded role would focus on defending Saudi territory. One said no decision had been taken to join retaliatory strikes. Tehran maintained that it did not control the Houthis. The scope of further involvement remains unsettled.[1]

The Saudi-led coalition reported at least 73 people wounded in Houthi attacks on 8 September. On 10 September, Reuters cited four Yemeni government military sources reporting Houthi advances towards Mocha and Dhubab, near Bab el-Mandeb. Those battlefield reports indicate mounting pressure on the approaches to the strait. They do not

establish that commercial passage has been completely blocked. The maritime threat nevertheless broadens the crisis beyond the defence of Saudi installations.[2]

The confrontation is unfolding alongside the wider US and Israeli war with Iran.1 That context increases the risk that decisions in one theatre will reshape calculations in another. Pakistan could find its Saudi mission affected by attacks on shipping or a breakdown in wider diplomacy, even while trying to keep its contribution limited. Managing those connections will require sustained communication with both partners and other regional governments.

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye signed the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement on 7 August. Its public announcement treated an armed attack against one signatory as an attack against all, but left the specific military obligations unclear. Reuters also reported that Pakistan had deployed approximately 8,000 troops, fighter aircraft, drones and an air-defence system to Saudi Arabia. The present question therefore concerns the expansion and employment of an existing military presence.[3]

The arrangement has also begun acquiring institutions. At their 31 August meeting in Istanbul, the three countries agreed to establish a secretariat in Saudi Arabia, initially headed by a Pakistani secretary general for three years. They also endorsed closer military cooperation and joint defence development and production. These decisions provide a mechanism for sustained consultation, although an administrative secretariat alone does not demonstrate an integrated wartime command or agreed rules for employing force.[4]

That distinction matters for assessing what Pakistan might do next. A collective commitment leaves governments choices over the scale, timing and purpose of assistance. Reinforcing protection of Saudi facilities would create different demands from conducting a prolonged campaign against targets in Yemen. Each additional task would require decisions about command authority, logistics, replenishment and acceptable risk. Political statements expressing solidarity provide limited evidence of how those decisions have been resolved.

Pakistan has confronted this dilemma before. On 10 April 2015, its parliament unanimously supported neutrality in the Yemen conflict while affirming support for Saudi Arabia if its territorial integrity or the holy sites were threatened. The resolution also warned that regional conflict could acquire a sectarian character with consequences for Pakistan. This precedent helps explain Islamabad's current emphasis on defending Saudi territory while trying to preserve room for mediation. The newer defence agreement increases expectations without removing those underlying concerns.[5]

Domestic security operations continue to impose demands. On 4 September, Pakistan's military said it had killed 48 militants during raids in Balochistan over the preceding 72 hours. The announcement followed another military claim that 15 militants had been killed while attempting to cross from Afghanistan. These remain military accounts, but they illustrate the continuing operational commitments in Pakistan's western regions.[6]

A larger Saudi mission would need to be assessed against those commitments. Specialist crews, maintenance capacity, surveillance support and transport assets cannot be allocated indefinitely without trade-offs. Even a deployment financed partly by a partner can consume readiness and command attention. However, the available reporting does not establish that Pakistan has withdrawn particular formations from domestic operations or reduced deployments facing India. Any assessment of overstretch must examine the forces actually committed and the duration of their employment.

Relations with Iran present a separate constraint. If Tehran perceives Pakistani assistance as enabling a wider campaign against Iranian interests, cooperation along their shared border could become harder to sustain. Islamabad would also have to manage domestic political reactions to a conflict portrayed in sectarian terms. Its diplomatic messages therefore have two audiences. Riyadh needs evidence that Pakistan will honour its commitments, while Tehran needs reasons to keep communication open. Maintaining both relationships becomes more difficult as military

involvement deepens.

Saudi Arabia will judge the partnership by its practical contribution to security. Persistent attacks could increase pressure for additional assistance even if Islamabad initially defines its mission narrowly. This creates a risk of incremental expansion, with successive requests appearing manageable individually while producing a substantially larger commitment over time. Pakistani casualties would sharpen that pressure by adding domestic demands for a response to the existing expectations of an ally.

Shipping provides another possible trigger. On 22 July, Pakistan's Foreign Office warned that hostile action against Pakistani-flagged vessels or its maritime interests could prompt measures including force in self-defence. This position predates the latest escalation and gives Islamabad a separate national rationale for responding at sea. An incident involving Pakistani shipping could therefore change its calculations even without a formal Saudi request for expanded assistance.[7]

For India, disruption around Bab el-Mandeb carries consequences across different sources of energy. The US Energy Information Administration recorded approximately 4.2 million barrels per day of oil passing through the strait in the first half of 2025, a historical baseline rather than a measure of present traffic. Its analysis also identifies the route's importance to Russian crude moving towards Asian markets, particularly India. Diversifying suppliers consequently does not guarantee diversification of maritime exposure.[8]

Further disruption could raise freight and insurance costs, lengthen voyages and complicate refinery scheduling. Indian assessments should distinguish these commercial effects from a complete physical interruption of supply. There is also a substantial human exposure. An April 2025 Ministry of External Affairs brief placed the Indian community in Saudi Arabia at approximately 2.7 million. That dated estimate indicates the scale of potential consular requirements without establishing how many people currently live near affected locations.[8,9]

New Delhi should keep its response focused on those interests while monitoring the military relationship taking shape among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. The most relevant changes would be durable improvements in coordination, training and access to equipment. Their implications for South Asian security would depend on what is actually implemented. Stronger Pakistani ties with Riyadh also coexist with India's own Saudi relationship, creating a continuing need for direct engagement rather than assumptions about exclusive alignments.

Over the coming weeks, the clearest indicators will be announced changes to Pakistan's mission, verified additional deployments, confirmed combat participation and casualties involving its personnel. Maritime incidents and changes in commercial routing will show whether the shipping threat is becoming more disruptive. Official attribution of responsibility will also matter, particularly if Islamabad begins publicly treating attacks by the Houthis as attacks directed by Iran.

CNAWS assesses that limited reinforcement combined with diplomacy remains the more likely near-term course. Confidence in that judgement would weaken following a major attack on Pakistani personnel or assets, or an explicit decision to broaden the mission. The central test is whether Islamabad can define and sustain a bounded contribution while its partners face continuing attacks. Its ability to do so will shape both the credibility of the defence arrangement and Pakistan's freedom to manage its other security priorities.

References

1. Samia Nakhoul, Mubasher Bukhari, and Parisa Hafezi, “Pakistan Warns Iran to Rein in Houthis as Riyadh Strikes Back,” *Reuters*, September 9, 2026.

2. Mohammed Ghobari and Nayera Abdallah, “Yemen's Houthis Close In on Stranglehold over Strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait,” *Reuters*, September 10, 2026.

3. Timour Azhari, Ariba Shahid, and Tuvan Gumrukcu, “Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan Pledge Mutual Defence as Middle East Turmoil Escalates,” *Reuters*, August 7, 2026.

4. Seyit Kurt, “Türkiye, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia Agree to Further Institutionalize Cooperation under Mecca Defense Pact: Joint Statement,” *Anadolu Agency*, August 31, 2026.

5. National Assembly of Pakistan, *The National Assembly of Pakistan Gazette* 2, no. 8 (May 2015), 2.

6. Associated Press, “Pakistan Military Says 48 Militants Killed in Multiple Raids in Southwest,” *ABC News*, September 4, 2026.

7. Radio Pakistan, “Pakistan Condemns Houthi Threats against Saudi Arabia, Red Sea Shipping,” July 22, 2026.

8. US Energy Information Administration, “World Oil Transit Chokepoints,” last modified March 3, 2026.

9. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, *India-Saudi Arabia Bilateral Brief (April 2025)*, 2–4.