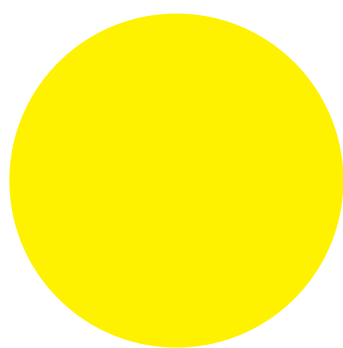


National interests
determine approach
to US engagement: *SpoX*

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Pakistan-Kuwait defense pact signals Islamabad's bid for bigger Mideast role



By Mohsen Farkhani
International affairs analyst

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

The memorandum signed by the defense ministers of Pakistan and Kuwait cannot be viewed merely as a technical agreement on training and capacity building. In fact, the document comes against the backdrop of deeper shifts in the Middle East's security equations following the Iran-US war and forms part of Pakistan's structured efforts to redefine its position in the region. The development can be analyzed in three parts: the context and significance of the memorandum within the framework of Iran's relative victory; Pakistan's expansionist strategy in the region; and, finally, the likelihood of a confrontation with Iran and Pakistan's structural vulnerabilities. The Iran-US war, which has seen active mediation by Pakistan, has so far produced two simultaneous outcomes. On the one hand, by ensuring its survival, maintaining control over the Strait of Hormuz and preserving its regional network of influence, Iran has consolidated its deterrent position and achieved relative hegemony, in the sense of being able to impose heavy costs on the US, any other hostile country and its rivals, which are seeking to consolidate their power advantage in the region. On the other hand, Persian Gulf states have largely lost confidence in unilateral US security guarantees and are moving toward diversifying their security partnerships.

Against this backdrop, Kuwait, having found itself unable to rely on US protection, has sought to diversify its military and security relations and build up its capabilities rapidly.

In recent years, Pakistan has pursued its objectives in exchange for providing training, logistical support and collective deterrence, driven by its energy shortages, need for foreign investment and desire to expand its political influence. Islamabad has followed a clear pattern in line with these objectives, seeking to turn its military capabilities and geographical position into economic and political leverage. In this regard, the expansion of the 2025 mutual defense agreement with Saudi Arabia to a trilateral agreement with Turkey, and now the defense protocol with Kuwait can be seen as links in a single chain. Together, they will broaden Islamabad's deterrence-building efforts, not against Iran but against India, open up access to the markets of Persian Gulf countries for Pakistan, and make any Indian military action against Pakistan subject to deeper calculations in advance.

This strategy has two important implications for the Middle East's security equations. First, Pakistan has evolved from a peripheral player into an active diplomatic-military actor capable of mediating for Iran while simultaneously signing defense agreements with Persian Gulf states. Second, new security alignments are taking shape that are no longer solely dependent on the US. However, without Iran's cooperation, as a balancing element in the region, these alignments will lack sufficient credibility to fully achieve their stated objectives.

Given Pakistan's deep domestic and regional vulnerabilities, including its long shared border with Iran, common interests in containing Baloch separatism, Islamabad's recent role as a mediator, and mutual economic interdependence, the likelihood of a direct military confrontation between Pakistan and Iran in the short term is very low. However, Pakistan's growing proximity to Saudi Arabia and Turkey could be interpreted as an indirect effort to contain Iran's influence, which could, at later stages, lead to proxy or border tensions.

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Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during the 26th Summit of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on September 1, 2026.
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