

presence of Pakistani military personnel in Saudi Arabia has a long history. Meanwhile, Pakistan's relations with the United States are also of political, economic, and security significance. The United Arab Emirates likewise occupies an important position in Pakistan's economic and regional calculations. Consequently, Islamabad must balance these multiple considerations in its foreign relations. This situation affects Pakistan's economic and political decision-making and, in certain cases, constrains its ability to advance cooperation with Iran fully.

For example, the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, known as the Peace Pipeline, is among the initiatives that, despite their potential importance for meeting Pakistan's energy needs, have been affected by external considerations and pressures. To implement such projects, Pakistan must also calculate the costs and consequences for its relations with the United States and other foreign partners. On the other hand, the Iran-Pakistan border possesses considerable economic potential. Segments of Pakistani Balochistan's population benefit from economic exchanges with Iran, and these connections are important to their livelihoods. In my view, transforming the border from an exclusively security-related issue into an economic opportunity would benefit both countries.

Nevertheless, realizing this objective depends on more than economic potential alone. Political will, regional stability, infrastructure development, and governments' capacity to manage external pressures are also important. Unless these factors converge, the existing potential will continue to be utilized suboptimally.

Pakistan has sought to reduce tensions and facilitate negotiations during the recent confrontation between Iran and the United States. What factors have enabled Islamabad to play such a role, and to what extent can this mediation contribute to safeguarding Iran's interests?

In my view, Pakistan is among the few countries with tangible and direct interests in reducing regional tensions. This stems from its geographical position and the nature of its foreign relations. Pakistan borders Iran on one side and maintains extensive economic and security relations with Saudi Arabia and Arab countries on the other. Consequently, any escalation of tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia or any expansion of warfare in the region could impose costs on Islamabad. Furthermore, Pakistan maintains good relations with the United States, and these connections can enable it to transmit messages and facilitate communication between the parties. From this perspective, Pakistan's mediation is connected to its national interests and can also help reduce regional tensions.

Nevertheless, Pakistan should not be assumed to be pursuing exclusively one side's interests in this process or to be free of its own particular considerations. Every country takes its national interests into account in its foreign policy. The important point is that, in this case, Pakistan's interest in reducing tensions and preventing the expansion of hostilities aligns with Iran's policy of establishing regional security and preventing further escalation.

In my view, Iran can utilize Pakistan's mediating capacity while simultaneously relying on its own independent interests and positions. The fundamental point is that the Islamic Republic of Iran, alongside the capabilities it has demonstrated in the military arena, must also act with authority and confidence in the diplomatic arena. Resorting to mediation does not mean relinquishing national rights and interests.

It should also be recognized that reducing regional tensions benefits Pakistan since every new crisis could make it more difficult for the country to maintain equilibrium in its relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Accordingly, Islamabad's mediation should be assessed within the context of a constellation of regional interests and considerations.



A Pakistani checks morning newspapers covering front page story of Iran's strike on a separatist group hiding in Pakistan's Balochistan region, at a stall in Islamabad on January 18, 2024.
● ANJUM NAVEED/AP

Given Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States, as well as competition among regional and extra-regional powers, could third countries' interests create circumstances in which Iran and Pakistan find themselves opposed to one another, contrary to their long-term interests?

In the world of politics, no possibility can theoretically be ruled out categorically. However, as someone who has followed developments in this region for many years, I consider the likelihood of a sustained confrontation between Iran and Pakistan to be extremely low. The principal reason for this assessment is that confrontation with Iran has no place in Pakistan's defense doctrine, and a conflict with Iran is also incompatible with Pakistan's national interests.

At present, India is Pakistan's principal rival and primary concern. Furthermore, Pakistan faces the issue of Afghanistan and the Taliban along its northern borders. Therefore, maintaining friendly relations with Iran is important to Pakistan from multiple perspectives, including trade and economic affairs. Despite occasional disagreements, Iran and Pakistan are interconnected geographically, culturally, and politically, and both benefit from the continuation of friendly relations.

What changes will the joint mutual defense pact among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey bring to the security calculations of South and West Asia? Should this agreement be regarded as an initiative directed against Iran, and

Senior delegations from Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia meet top Iranian officials in Tehran on October 26, 2026, for the first four-country regional meeting.
● TASNIM



what approach should Tehran adopt toward it?

I have conducted research on this subject, and I believe that the pact must be analyzed within the broader context of regional security developments. In my view, we are witnessing a form of security realignment in South and West Asia. In recent years, some regional countries have incurred enormous expenditures on arms purchases and reliance on the United States' security umbrella, yet they continue to face security concerns. During recent events and military confrontations, these countries realized that the United States cannot guarantee their defensive security. Consequently, this situation has prompted them to examine regional defense arrangements. This does not, of course, mean the end of these countries' security relations with the United States. The continuation of American influence and presence in the region remains foreseeable, given its considerable depth and breadth, established over many years, and its connection with American interests.

Furthermore, each of the three countries participating in the joint defense pact pursues particular objectives through the agreement. Saudi Arabia possesses financial and energy resources and seeks to strengthen its defense frameworks. Pakistan benefits from military strength, operational experience, and defense and nuclear industrial capabilities, and seeks to strengthen its geopolitical position. Turkey, meanwhile, seeks to expand its role and standing in regional affairs and the Islamic world.

Therefore, it should not be assumed that the strategic interests of these three countries are entirely identical. Their co-operation within a defense framework may be founded on shared interests alongside differing considerations.

Regarding Iran, I also believe that the pact should not be characterized as anti-Iranian from the outset. Such an assessment requires consideration of the agreement's nature, provisions, and implementation. Until sufficient evidence emerges that this structure is operationally directed

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against a particular country, the mere establishment of a defense pact cannot be interpreted as an indication that a specific country is being targeted.

Nevertheless, Iran should monitor developments concerning the pact carefully. There is an important distinction between an agreement that remains confined to political declarations and general coordination and a structure equipped with an operational headquarters, joint command, coordination among armed forces, and joint military planning. In the latter case, its strategic implications for Iran become more significant.

In my view, Iran's initial approach to the pact should not be hostile. First, its nature and actual operations should be examined, and hasty positions should be avoided. Subsequently, the costs and benefits of any potential engagement should be assessed in accordance with national interests. If the pact expands in the future and develops into an operational structure with direct effects on the regional security balance, the need to reconsider Iran's approach will also arise, and the question of membership should be considered more seriously.

Given Iran's regional position and the close relations between Tehran and Islamabad, is Iranian participation in the joint defense pact possible? What consequences would such participation entail, and could it help reduce the presence of extra-regional powers in regional security arrangements?

In my view, this issue should be examined incrementally and on the basis of Iran's national interests. Under current circumstances, joining the pact is not necessarily a foreign policy priority for Iran, and membership should not be decided upon merely because certain friendly countries have extended an invitation or participate in the agreement.

Nevertheless, the principle of establishing regional security mechanisms based on the participation of regional countries merits consideration as it is consistent with Iran's repeatedly stated position that regional countries should ensure regional security themselves. Regional security should not be regarded as a commodity for which regional countries must depend on foreign powers.

If the pact develops into a broader and more cohesive structure in the future, with the participation of additional countries, Iran should carefully evaluate the costs and benefits of its involvement. Given its geographical position, military capabilities, and strategic standing in South and West Asia, Iran is an important player in regional security calculations, and its participation could influence the nature and weight of such a structure.

However, this participation can be seriously considered only if the objectives, obligations, decision-making mechanisms, and scope of military cooperation are clearly defined and do not conflict with Iran's national interests. It must also be established to what extent such a structure could operate independently of competition among extra-regional powers.

On the other hand, it cannot be assumed in advance that all pact members share identical views regarding the role of the United States or other powers. Turkey, for example, has considerations arising from its relations and security commitments within NATO that may influence its decisions. This demonstrates that the establishment of a regional pact does not necessarily imply its complete independence from existing security arrangements.

Overall, my recommendation is that Iran, at the present stage, should monitor developments concerning the pact without adopting a hostile position or acting precipitously. If its nature and scope of activities change in the future, Tehran should decide how to engage with it on the basis of a careful assessment of its national interests.

What matters in all these discussions is the preservation of friendly relations between Iran and Pakistan. The two countries share numerous interests and should not allow temporary disagreements or regional rivalries to divert their relations from the path of cooperation and coexistence.