US Elevates Saudi Arabia to Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA)

Victor Growth

1. Background

In November 2025, the United States designated Saudi Arabia as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA). The announcement was made by US President Donald Trump during Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to the White House. Multiple agreements covering defence, nuclear cooperation, and investment were also signed.

2. What is Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) Status?

MNNA is a special status granted by the US to key strategic partners outside the NATO alliance. It does not provide mutual defence guarantees (unlike NATO Article 5). It does provide significant benefits:

1. Priority access to US military technology.
2. Eligibility for cooperative defence R&D programmes.
3. Capacity for long-term joint military planning.
4. Prospects for fast-tracked arms sales.

Significance

1. Symbolic upgrade of bilateral ties.
2. Enhances trust-building and long-term strategic partnership.

3. Strategic Upgrade in US–Saudi Relations (Pointwise)

(A) Defence and Security Cooperation

1. Saudi Arabia gains enhanced access to American defence systems and equipment.
2. Improved cooperation on joint military training, logistics and interoperability.
3. Strengthens US presence and influence in the Middle East, especially amid Iran–Saudi rivalry.
4. Saudi Arabia can participate in certain US defence research programmes.

(B) Political Signalling

1. The status signals US commitment to Riyadh despite earlier diplomatic tensions.

2. Strengthens Saudi Arabia's political clout in the region.
3. Positions Saudi as a reliable US partner against evolving regional security threats.

4. Advanced Defence Deals – Key Highlights

(A) F-35 Stealth Fighter Jet Sale

US approved future sale of F-35 fifth-generation stealth fighters to Saudi Arabia.

This is a major shift, as such sales were previously restricted due to:

1. Israeli security concerns,
2. Technology sensitivity,
3. Regional stability considerations.

Will transform Saudi Arabia's airpower capabilities.

(B) Strategic Defense Agreement

A new agreement was signed to strengthen regional deterrence.

Enhances:

1. Joint military planning,
2. Defence coordination,
3. Counter-air and missile defence architectures.

However, it is not a full defence treaty—no automatic defence obligations.

5. Civil Nuclear Partnership

(A) Joint Nuclear Declaration

US and Saudi Arabia formalised a long-term civil nuclear cooperation framework.

Ensures development of nuclear energy under non-proliferation safeguards.

Helps Saudi build:

1. Nuclear reactors for electricity,
2. Diversification from oil dependence,
3. Peaceful nuclear fuel cycle initiatives.

(B) Strategic Importance

US reclaims influence in nuclear markets (over Russia/China).

Victor Growth

Assures Saudi nuclear programme remains peaceful, reducing proliferation risks.

6. Economic Commitments

Saudi Arabia committed to increasing investments in the US economy.

1. Supports American energy, technology, and infrastructure sectors.
2. Deepens economic interdependence and bilateral stability.

Complements Saudi Vision-2030 goals:

1. Diversification,
2. Technology transfer,
3. International partnerships.

7. Regional & Global Implications

(A) Impact on the Middle East

Strengthens Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis Iran, altering regional power dynamics.

Could trigger shifts in defence postures of:

- UAE
- Qatar
- Israel

Raises concerns about arms race escalation.

(B) Impact on Global Geopolitics

Enhances US role in the Middle East amidst competition from:

1. China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),
2. Russia’s West Asia outreach.
3. Reinforces energy-security partnership between US–Saudi Arabia.

(C) Impact on Israel

F-35 deal may require US balancing to maintain Israel’s qualitative military edge (QME).

Could influence future diplomatic interactions between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Facebook

Instagram

Victor Growth

Youtube

Victor Growth