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The Emergence of the “Islamic Quad”

By

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Geopolitics After the Collapse of the Security Order

- ✦ A new informal “Islamic Quad” comprising Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey is emerging as a crisis-driven coordination mechanism rather than a formal alliance, focused on diplomatic consultation and regional stabilisation.
- ✦ The grouping is primarily a response to the destabilising effects of the U.S.–Israel–Iran conflict and reflects growing concerns among regional states about escalation, spillover, and maritime insecurity.
- ✦ A broader loss of confidence in U.S. security guarantees is a key structural driver, shaped by long-term grievances and intensified by recent American alignment with Israeli military actions against Iran.

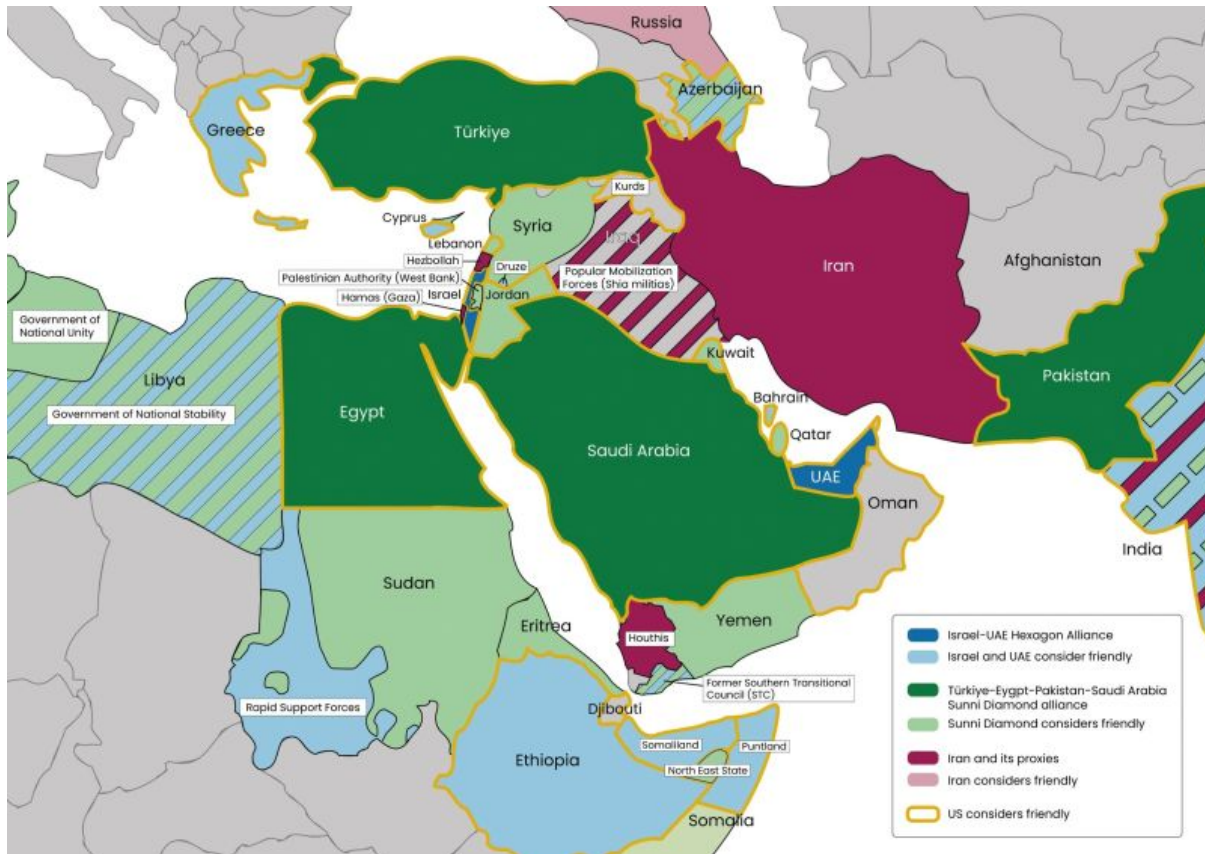
The Emergence of the Islamic Quad and Strategic Drivers

- ✦ The “Islamic Quad” reflects a shift toward regional ownership of security management, as states increasingly seek to manage crises through intra-regional coordination rather than external intervention.
- ✦ Despite increased coordination, the framework remains non-binding, with no mutual defence commitment or integrated military structure, preserving state autonomy and flexibility.
- ✦ Each member contributes distinct but uneven capabilities: Saudi Arabia provides financial and energy power, Turkey offers military-industrial and diplomatic leverage, Pakistan brings military and nuclear deterrence plus mediation capacity, and Egypt contributes geopolitical position and control of the Suez Canal.
- ✦ The war has exposed significant economic vulnerabilities across all four states, including energy price shocks, disrupted trade routes, fiscal pressures, and heightened insurance and investment risk.
- ✦ Security concerns are highly differentiated: Egypt focuses on maritime and Red Sea instability, Saudi Arabia on energy exports and Vision 2030 risks, Pakistan on border and internal sectarian fragility, and Turkey on systemic regional spillover and strategic autonomy.

Cooperation Mechanisms and Implications

- ✦ Early institutionalisation is visible through regular ministerial meetings, deputy-level consultations, and growing defence cooperation, but integration remains deliberately limited to avoid escalation entanglement.
- ✦ The most likely trajectory is selective and gradual institutionalisation rather than full alliance formation, reflecting a broader global trend toward flexible, issue-based coalitions in a multipolar international system.

Key Picture: The New Middle East Security Architecture Based on a “New Quad”



Source: [International Relations \(IR\) and Affairs Group](#)

Introduction

One of the most consequential geopolitical developments arising from the American–Israeli war on Iran, launched on 28 February 2026, has been the gradual emergence of an informal “Islamic Quad” comprising Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Although it does not constitute a formal military alliance, this grouping is best understood as an evolving regional coordination mechanism—an embryonic “concert of powers” shaped less by institutional design than by converging strategic imperatives.

In practice, the “Islamic Quad” has begun to function as a flexible platform for sustained diplomatic engagement, with repeated high-level consultations among political and security officials indicating an increasing degree of regularisation and procedural continuity. Its primary purpose has been crisis management and diplomatic mediation in response to Israeli military actions and the wider destabilising effects of the U.S.–Israel–Iran war, with a shared emphasis on containing escalation, facilitating ceasefire arrangements, and preventing the further regionalisation of hostilities across an already volatile Middle East.

What remains uncertain in the post-war environment is whether this emergent configuration will solidify into the institutional foundation of a new security architecture in West Asia, or whether it will ultimately prove to be a transient alignment forged under exceptional crisis conditions or dissipate as immediate pressures recede. The durability of the “Islamic Quad” will likely hinge on its ability to manage and reconcile the latent strategic divergences among its members—divergences that are currently subordinated to the exigencies of conflict management but may become more pronounced in a post-conflict setting. Key questions therefore center on whether these states can translate episodic coordination into sustained strategic convergence, or whether

competing regional ambitions, historical rivalries, and asymmetric external alignments will reassert themselves, fragmenting what is presently a pragmatic but fragile consensus.

The Geopolitics of a Collapsed Security Order

As four U.S. allies, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have spent years contending with the relative decline of American hegemony against the backdrop of a global order that has become significantly more multipolar while doubts about the reliability of U.S. security guarantees in the Middle East grow.

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Washington's close allies and partners have lost confidence in the United States as a security guarantor over the course of many years. During Barack Obama's presidency (2009-17), Washington's response to the Arab Spring uprisings and nuclear diplomacy with Iran left some in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain, with the perception of the United States as a security partner that failed to understand Gulf Arab concerns about revolutionary Islamist movements and causes as well as the Islamic Republic's foreign policy, including Tehran's ties with various anti-status quo non-state actors in the Arab world.

Amid Donald Trump's first term (2017-21), attacks on GCC states and their interests, whether carried out by Iran or at least linked to Tehran, combined with perceptions of the United States failing to respond adequately further informed perceptions of Washington becoming increasingly unreliable as a security guarantor. Specifically, such episodes entailed acts of sabotage off the UAE's east coast and the September 2019 Aramco attacks.^{1, 2} Amid Joe Biden's presidency (2021-2025), America's botched military withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, refusal to rein in Israeli aggression in Gaza and Lebanon, along with U.S.-U.K. military action in Yemen were foreign policy decisions that heightened uncertainty about the United States' role as a security guarantor in the region.

Despite the extent to which these specific events and U.S. policies led to a weakening of confidence in Washington's security guarantees on the part of regional actors, none of them did as harm to America's image as a reliable partner for GCC members and other U.S. allies and partners in West Asia as the second Trump administration's handling of Iran. The White House's support for Israel amid the 12-Day War that Tel Aviv began in June 2025 and, even more so, the ongoing American-Israeli war on Iran that began on 28 February led to a handful of Arab states, Turkey, and Pakistan believing that the Trump administration's foreign policy vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic was entirely aligned with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government and completely indifferent to the concerns that states such as Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and so on had articulated for a considerable period of time leading up to the launch of Operation Epic Fury in late February.³

Although GCC states have lacked a uniform response to the war, they were all opposed to the Trump administration's decision to attack Iran militarily, understanding and accurately forecasting how Tehran would lash out against them in response. Across the Gulf and other parts of West Asia there has been growing resentment toward the United States over this war, not necessarily driven by support for Iran's government but rather due to the destabilising impact that the conflict has had on the regional states and their economic interests, particularly with the Iranian attacks on GCC members and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz—an act that has severely disrupted global energy markets and economies worldwide. Additionally, the Israeli bombing of Doha in September 2025 combined with Trump's threat to "blow up" Oman in May 2026 further informed a Gulf Arab view that the U.S. is not a country that can be counted on to guarantee security and either directly threatens GCC states or at least permits its closest ally in the Middle East, Israel, to attack a Gulf Arab country.

The shocks caused by this conflict have highlighted the vulnerability of countries such as Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and other regional states. While these countries have sought to further diversify their security partnerships worldwide to become less dependent on the U.S. security umbrella, a major challenge stems from the lack of any alternative power that is both capable and willing to replace Washington in this capacity. Within

this context, the four nations of the “Islamic Quad” are coming together in response to a breakdown of the old security order and major regional shocks that have highlighted their vulnerabilities.

Formation of the “Islamic Quad”

The four-nation coordination framework has moved past ad hoc diplomacy and is showing signs of potentially becoming a structured consultation mechanism. The formation of this group of four influential Sunni Muslim states constitutes a pragmatic response to myriad security crises rather than a long-standing strategic bloc existing based on ideological or ideational alignment.

The initial steps toward this quad’s formation took place early on in the U.S.-Israel-Iran war via a host of meetings between the Egyptian, Pakistani, Saudi, and Turkish foreign ministers with the inaugural meeting occurring in Riyadh on the sidelines of a broader Islamic consultation process, where the four states convened to discuss regional escalation and the growing risks associated with the conflict involving Iran.⁴ What followed were meetings in Islamabad and Antalya with one soon to be held in Cairo, underscoring continuity in the framework as well as a desire for each of the four countries to host such engagement.^{5, 6, 7} Put simply, rather than being a one-off crisis consultation in the Saudi capital, the “Islamic Quad” has demonstrated a commitment to a sustained diplomatic track.

A notable feature of this emerging framework is the increasing regularity and institutional layering of engagement. In addition to ministerial-level dialogue, deputy foreign minister meetings and senior official consultations have been introduced to maintain continuity between high-level summits. This bureaucratic deepening suggests an attempt to create an informal but durable coordination channel capable of responding quickly to fast-moving crises. The emphasis on maintaining communication during periods of regional volatility indicates that the “Islamic Quad” has established itself as a “contact group” for crisis management amid the war centred on Iran.

Over these past several months, the quad’s functional agenda of the framework has become clearer. A central priority has been establishing a mediated communication channel between the United States and Iran, with Pakistan frequently positioned as the main diplomatic bridge. This intermediary role reflects both Islamabad’s diplomatic positioning and its ability to maintain working relations with multiple sides of the conflict. Alongside mediation efforts, the “Islamic Quad” has focused on de-escalation strategies, particularly in relation to maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz and the broader protection of energy and trade flows.

Despite such developments, the framework remains explicitly non-binding. None of the participating states have committed to a formal mutual defence obligation, and there is no indication of a NATO-style command structure or integrated military alliance. Instead, the emphasis has been placed on consultation, coordination, and crisis response. This reflects both political caution and structural constraints. Each member maintains distinct strategic priorities and external alliances.

Even so, the emergence of this grouping reflects a broader shift in West Asia’s diplomacy. Rather than relying solely on external powers or existing institutions such as the Arab League or GCC, these states are increasingly pursuing “regional ownership” of security management.⁸ The formation of this framework therefore represents less the creation of a new alliance in the traditional sense and more the gradual institutionalisation of crisis-driven cooperation among middle powers seeking to stabilise a rapidly fragmenting regional order. With the announcement of the “Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding” on 14 June, the central role of Pakistan—along with strong support from the other “Islamic Quad” members—in bringing Washington and Tehran to this diplomatic breakthrough speaks to this framework’s bridging capacity.⁹

Strategic Drivers of Alignment

The risk of direct and indirect confrontation involving Iran and Israel has heightened fears of spillover effects, particularly for states with exposed and porous borders, critical infrastructure, or strategic chokepoints. Such

shared vulnerability has encouraged greater consultation among the powers in the “Islamic Quad”, which share interests in containing escalation and reducing exposure to unpredictable conflict dynamics in this new era of greater global disorder.

Egypt

The war centred on Iran poses a major economic threat to Egypt because it directly disrupts the external flows the Egyptian economy depends on as the country is vulnerable to energy shocks and capital flight. The conflict has pushed up global energy prices, while also interrupting regional gas supplies, particularly when Israel temporarily halted production from the Leviathan field, cutting a key source of gas to Egypt. At the same time, instability in the Strait of Hormuz and heightened insurance costs disrupt trade routes, reducing Suez Canal revenues and export activity.¹⁰ Tourism and foreign investment have also come under pressure due to regional insecurity warnings. Combined with the outflow of “hot money,” currency depreciation, and rising fuel subsidies, the war exposed how dependent Egypt remains on volatile external financing from GCC states, Europe, and international institutions.¹¹

From a security perspective, the war increases risks for Egypt’s immediate neighbourhoods, especially the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Horn of Africa. Egypt’s core concern is that escalation involving Iran, Israel, and GCC members could spill into maritime conflict that threatens shipping through the Bab al-Mandab and the Suez Canal corridor, both vital to Egypt’s security and revenue.¹² The possibility of Houthi-linked disruptions in Yemen further compounds this threat, raising the risk of a wider regional naval confrontation.¹³ Officials in Cairo have maintained valid concerns about Egypt being indirectly pulled into conflict dynamics through its military cooperation with GCC partners such as the UAE, including air defence deployments. Beyond the immediate theater, instability also intersects with Egypt’s fragile periphery, such as Sudan and the Horn of Africa, where competing regional alignments risk expanding proxy conflicts that could strain Egypt’s borders and military resources.

Saudi Arabia

The American-Israeli war on Iran has posed a structural economic challenge to Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 by tightening the fiscal and investment environment at the exact moment the Kingdom is reassessing its most ambitious transformation agenda. Even before the conflict, major “giga-projects” such as The Line, Trojena, and other large-scale developments tied to the Public Investment Fund (PIF) were being scaled back or suspended as returns lagged expectations and fiscal realism increased. The war has reinforced this retrenchment by disrupting trade flows, raising borrowing and insurance costs, and slowing key growth sectors like tourism and foreign investment.¹⁴ It also adds pressure on already plateauing PIF capacity and forces a sharper prioritisation of spending toward narrower, more strategic areas like AI, logistics, and industrial policy, undercutting the broad, capital-intensive vision that initially defined Vision 2030.

Geopolitically and in terms of hard security, the war has exposed the Kingdom to elevated systemic risk because its economic model depends on stable regional shipping lanes, investor confidence, and uninterrupted energy exports. The partial or full disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, combined with Iranian missile and drone capabilities and the vulnerability of alternative routes such as Red Sea corridors, increases the cost and uncertainty of exports, even if Saudi Arabia is more resilient than some of its fellow GCC members due to its East-West pipeline and territorial depth. Nevertheless, reduced oil exports, damaged petrochemical output, and higher shipping insurance premiums translate into slower growth and greater volatility in state revenues. These disruptions directly complicate Vision 2030’s assumption of stable external conditions for diversifying the economy into tourism, mega-events, and global capital attraction.

Politically and strategically, the conflict intensifies the trade-offs at the core of Saudi transformation: between state-led modernisation, domestic stability, and external geopolitical exposure. Vision 2030’s success depends not only on capital but also on predictability, and both have been strained by a prolonged Iran standoff that

remains unresolved. The war also reinforces a turn toward “fiscal realism,” accelerating a shift away from prestige-driven global projects and toward domestically anchored investments in resilience, infrastructure, and supply chains.¹⁵ At the same time, it amplifies uncertainty for long-term initiatives tied to global positioning, including sports diplomacy, tourism expansion, and preparations for events like the 2034 World Cup, while reinforcing the broader risk that external conflict and internal constraint together narrow the space for experimentation on which Vision 2030 originally relied.

Pakistan

The war has imposed significant economic and energy costs on Pakistan, primarily through its exposure to disrupted regional energy markets. With around 85 percent of its crude oil imported and much of it transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, Pakistan is highly vulnerable to any interruption in Gulf shipping lanes.¹⁶ As Iranian actions to disrupt maritime traffic pushed up global oil prices, Pakistan faced immediate inflationary pressure, rising import costs, and strain on already limited foreign exchange reserves. Even efforts to expand renewable energy provided only partial insulation. The domestic consequences were severe enough that the government introduced austerity measures such as reduced working weeks, school closures, energy-saving restrictions, and salary cuts for officials, underscoring how external energy shocks translated directly into domestic economic disruption.

Security pressures have also intensified due to Pakistan’s geographic proximity to the conflict. Sharing a roughly 900-kilometer border with Iran, much of it in under-governed terrain, Pakistan faces heightened risks of cross-border instability, including militant movement, intelligence spillover, and potential refugee flows.¹⁷ The conflict amplifies existing fragilities in regions like Balochistan, a historically tumultuous part of Pakistan where armed separatist groups and cross-border militant networks have long operated. At the same time, Pakistan’s internal sectarian composition, where a significant Shia minority lives alongside a Sunni majority, raises concerns that regional polarisation could fuel domestic tensions. Combined with Pakistan’s ongoing security challenges along its western frontier, the American-Israeli war on Iran increases the burden on state institutions already stretched by counterterrorism and border management demands.

Turkey

Turkey’s concern about a continued U.S.–Israel–Iran war is rooted first in systemic regional destabilisation that directly undermines its core security environment. The conflict has redrawn the strategic map from the Gulf to the Eastern Mediterranean, producing “multi-vector volatility” that affects Turkey simultaneously from the north (Russia–Ukraine war), the south (Iran, Israel, GCC states), and its broader neighborhood. In such an environment, escalation risks spill over into Turkey’s immediate security perimeter, especially the Black Sea and eastern borders, raising the likelihood of refugee flows, cross-border militancy, maritime insecurity, and disruptions to NATO’s southern flank.¹⁸ Turkish officials explicitly link regional wars to the stability of the Black Sea and stress that lasting peace in nearby theaters, including Iran and Ukraine, is essential for regional security.

Economically, the war has posed a direct threat through trade disruption, energy market instability, and damage to regional connectivity—areas central to Turkey’s growth model. The escalation increases risks to critical corridors such as the Strait of Hormuz, which President Recep Tayyip Erdogan highlights as essential to global economic stability, while also threatening Turkey’s role as a transit hub linking Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. The fragmentation of supply chains and potential sanctions-driven isolation of Iran further constrains Turkey’s commercial flexibility and energy diversification options. At the same time, the conflict undermines the “post-war regional integration” logic, meaning that without de-escalation, economic interdependence in the region cannot deepen, which will limit Turkey’s ambitions to expand trade networks, logistics infrastructure, and cross-border investment ties that depend on stability.¹⁹

Geopolitically, prolonged U.S.–Israel–Iran confrontation may serve to intensify great-power unpredictability and narrow Turkey’s strategic autonomy. Washington’s “erratic conduct” and reliance on coercive escalation create

uncertainty for allies, forcing Turkey into constant recalibration in a fragmented international order where traditional diplomatic mechanisms are weakening. This increases the risk that Turkey could be pressured into alignment choices that undermine its long-standing balancing strategy. In response, Ankara seeks to preserve its “functional mediator” role, maintaining channels with Iran, NATO partners, and regional actors, while avoiding overcommitment to any bloc. However, sustained escalation would reduce Turkey’s diplomatic space, weaken its credibility as a broker, and limit its ability to pursue the Ottoman-inherited logic of flexible alignment and multi-vector balancing that many observers see as central to Ankara’s long-term statecraft.

State-Level Interests and Contributions

Each member of the emerging framework brings distinct strategic assets, as well as specific vulnerabilities, which both enable cooperation and limit deeper integration. Turkey occupies a hybrid position as a NATO member and an increasingly autonomous regional power. Its expanding defence industry, particularly in unmanned systems and naval capabilities, combined with its active mediation diplomacy, allows it to function as both a military contributor and political facilitator. Ankara’s strategic objective is to maximise regional influence while maintaining flexibility between Western alliances and Middle Eastern partnerships.

Saudi Arabia contributes significant financial resources and remains a highly influential energy producer. The Kingdom’s strategic recalibration reflects Riyadh’s desire to diversify security partnerships in response to perceived regional volatility and shifting U.S. engagement patterns. Although still reliant on Western military cooperation, Saudi Arabia is increasingly investing in regional defence coordination and sees value in building supplementary security frameworks that enhance deterrence and strategic depth.

Pakistan offers nuclear capability, a large standing military, and significant operational experience, making it a critical strategic asset within the grouping. However, its economic fragility and complex security environment, particularly its relations with India and Iran, constrain its ability to act as a fully autonomous security provider. Pakistan’s role is therefore shaped by both deterrence capacity and diplomatic flexibility, particularly in mediation efforts.

Egypt provides geopolitical depth through its control of the Suez Canal and its position as the most populous Arab state with a substantial military establishment. However, its economic dependence on external financial support, particularly from partners in GCC, limits Cairo’s strategic autonomy. Egypt’s approach is therefore cautious and stability-oriented, focused on preserving regional equilibrium and safeguarding critical maritime infrastructure.

Collectively, the four states in the “Islamic Quad” form a complementary set of capabilities rather than a unified strategic bloc, with each contributing distinct but uneven forms of power.

Cooperation Mechanisms and Emerging Military Dimension

Although the four-nation framework remains informal, at least for now, the “Islamic Quad” is increasingly supported by a growing network of practical cooperation mechanisms, particularly in the military and defence-industrial domains. Rather than establishing a centralised command structure, the emerging model relies on bilateral and multilateral exercises, defence agreements, and incremental interoperability initiatives. This reflects a deliberate preference for flexibility over formal alliance obligations.

Joint military exercises have played a key role in building operational familiarity among the armed forces of participating states. These include air, naval, and special forces drills conducted in various bilateral and multilateral formats, designed to improve coordination, tactical alignment, and communication across militaries. Parallel to these exercises, defence-industrial cooperation has expanded significantly, including arms procurement agreements, co-production initiatives, and technology transfers in areas such as drone systems, naval platforms, and armoured vehicles.

Institutionally, defence cooperation is further reinforced by existing bilateral agreements, most notably between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, as well as expanding Turkey–Pakistan and Turkey–Egypt defence partnerships. These relationships provide the foundational infrastructure upon which broader multilateral coordination is being layered. However, cooperation remains carefully calibrated to avoid triggering binding mutual defence obligations, which could constrain national autonomy or create escalation risks.

In addition to military cooperation, the framework has increasingly engaged in crisis-oriented diplomacy involving Gaza, Syria, Sudan, and maritime security concerns. This dual-track approach, which effectively combines defence cooperation with diplomatic mediation, suggests an emerging division of labour within the “Islamic Quad,” where military capacity supports, instead of replaces, political coordination. Although still in an early phase, these mechanisms indicate a gradual shift toward structured interoperability albeit without formal institutionalisation.

Regional and Global Implications

The emergence of a coordination framework among these four Sunni Muslim nations carries significant implications for both regional stability and the broader global order. At the regional level, it signals a shift away from reliance on external security guarantees toward a model of intra-regional crisis management. This reflects growing dissatisfaction with the performance of traditional security providers and regional institutions, and an increasing willingness among middle powers to assume greater responsibility for stabilisation efforts.

One major implication is the potential reconfiguration of diplomatic balances involving Israel and Iran. Although the framework does not constitute an anti-Israel or anti-Iran alliance, it introduces a new collective actor capable of influencing negotiations, ceasefire arrangements, and regional de-escalation efforts. This may complicate unilateral strategies pursued by regional powers and introduce additional constraints on escalation dynamics.

Globally, the framework reflects the broader trend of multipolarisation, in which middle powers assert greater strategic autonomy amid relative U.S. retrenchment and the simultaneous presence of China and Russia in the region. Rather than replacing great power influence, this alignment operates alongside it, creating a more fragmented but also more pluralistic security environment.

For external actors, such as the United States, China, and Russia, the emergence of this “Islamic Quad” introduces both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it may facilitate burden-sharing in regional stabilisation. On the other hand, it may reduce external leverage and increase the complexity of diplomatic engagement. Overall, the framework contributes to a more decentralised regional order in which security governance is increasingly distributed among regional actors rather than concentrated in external powers.

Conclusion

The emerging coordination among Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey represents a significant development in the geopolitics of West Asia. However, it does not yet constitute a formal alliance or cohesive security bloc. Instead, it is best understood as a crisis-driven and interest-based framework of pragmatic cooperation, shaped by shared exposure to regional instability and declining confidence in external security guarantees.

The driving forces behind this alignment, ranging from economic disruption and maritime insecurity to geopolitical fragmentation and shifting global power dynamics, are substantial and likely to persist in some form. However, the structural constraints facing the grouping are equally significant. Divergent threat perceptions, historical rivalries, uneven capabilities, and differing external alignments all limit the depth of possible integration.

As a result, the most plausible trajectory is one of gradual and selective institutionalisation rather than full alliance formation. Cooperation is likely to deepen in specific functional areas such as defence industry

collaboration, military exercises, and diplomatic mediation, while remaining flexible and non-binding at the strategic level. This reflects a broader transformation in international politics, where middle powers increasingly favour adaptable, issue-based coalitions over rigid alliance structures.

Ultimately, the significance of this framework lies less in its current institutional form and more in what it reveals about the evolving logic of regional (dis)order. It signals a shift toward greater regional agency, increased hedging behavior, and a rebalancing of authority away from external powers. Whether this experiment develops into a durable structure or remains a temporary response to crisis will depend on whether shared interests can outlast the pressures that initially brought these states together.

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