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The Mecca Pact and the Emerging Regional Security Order

By

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	Page 3
1. Introduction.....	4
2. Three Powers, Three Strategic Calculations.....	5
3. A Strategic Triangle of Complementary Capabilities.....	6
4. The Limits of Article 5 Comparisons.....	6
5. Egypt's Absence and the Question of Expansion.....	6
6. Risks of the Regional Crisis Escalating.....	7
NOTES	8

Page | 2



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Executive Summary

Page | 3

- ✦ The Mecca Pact is best understood not as an “Islamic NATO” but as an early attempt to create a more regionally driven Middle Eastern security architecture.
- ✦ Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan are seeking greater strategic flexibility because recent conflicts have exposed the limitations and uncertainties of relying primarily on the United States and other external powers.
- ✦ Saudi Arabia's participation reflects Riyadh's effort to diversify its defence partnerships and protect critical energy, infrastructure, and economic-transformation interests without abandoning its close relationship with Washington.
- ✦ Turkey brings conventional military capabilities, defence-industry expertise, and NATO experience while using the pact to pursue greater strategic autonomy without formally distancing itself from its Western alliances.
- ✦ Pakistan strengthens the arrangement through its military capabilities and nuclear deterrent but also exposes the pact's limitations because Islamabad has strong reasons to avoid being drawn into a direct confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- ✦ The three countries form a potentially significant strategic triangle linking the Gulf, Eastern Mediterranean, and South Asia, but their divergent threat perceptions could make institutionalising the pact difficult.
- ✦ The pact's Article 5-style commitment is primarily intended to create deterrence by increasing uncertainty about the consequences of attacking any member rather than guaranteeing automatic military intervention.
- ✦ The comparison with NATO has important limits because the Mecca Pact currently lacks NATO's decades of integrated planning, interoperability, exercises, command structures, and established mechanisms for collective action. At the same time an attack on Turkey would also trigger the response of all NATO allies
- ✦ Egypt's absence highlights both the political constraints on expanding the pact and the potential importance of future membership, given Egypt's military weight and control of the Suez Canal.
- ✦ The Mecca Pact's ultimate significance will depend on whether its members translate political solidarity into intelligence-sharing, military exercises, command procedures, and credible rules for collective defence, particularly if the current war provides an early test.

Key Picture: Mecca Joint Defence Agreement



Source: EIU

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement on 7 August, marking a significant attempt to reshape the security architecture of the Middle East from within the region itself.¹ The agreement declares that an armed attack against any one of its three members will be regarded as an attack against all, language that inevitably invites comparisons with NATO's Article 5. Yet the more important story is not the creation of an "Islamic NATO". It is the emergence of a regional security arrangement among three very different powers that have concluded, for different reasons, that they can no longer afford to rely entirely on external guarantees for their security.

The pact is the product of a rapidly changing strategic environment. Saudi Arabia has faced direct attacks and growing threats to its infrastructure and energy interests. Turkey has watched instability spread across its neighborhood while seeking greater strategic autonomy. Pakistan has found itself increasingly important to Gulf security while attempting to preserve its delicate relationship with Iran.

At the same time, the wars involving the United States, Israel, and Iran have exposed the limitations of existing regional institutions and intensified doubts about the reliability and sustainability of the traditional American security framework. The Mecca Pact therefore deserves to be viewed as an early building block of a potentially more regionally driven security order. Ultimately, the pact's significance will depend on whether its members can turn political solidarity into durable institutions, credible deterrence, and practical cooperation.

The Mecca agreement cannot be understood without first considering the deterioration of the regional security environment that preceded it. For Saudi Arabia in particular, recent events have demonstrated that geographic distance and conventional military superiority do not necessarily protect critical infrastructure from missile, drone and other asymmetric attacks. The Kingdom has faced direct Iranian and Houthi strikes and threats to energy facilities, while the wider U.S.-Iran crisis has created risks to shipping, oil production, and commercial infrastructure. These pressures help explain why Riyadh has increasingly emphasised deterrence and regional partnerships rather than relying exclusively on outside (i.e. American) protection.

The timing is significant because the agreement was not negotiated in a period of relative calm and then unveiled as an abstract diplomatic initiative. It was formalised while the region was already experiencing a major war and while governments were confronting the possibility that existing security arrangements might not be sufficient. The pact is therefore partly a response to a practical problem. Saudi Arabia and its partners want potential adversaries to understand that an attack on one state could produce consequences involving several others.

2. Three Powers, Three Strategic Calculations

From the Saudi perspective, this pact represents an effort to convert its considerable economic and political influence into a more diversified security strategy. Riyadh remains deeply connected to the United States, but the current crisis has reinforced the risks inherent in depending too heavily on a single external guarantor. Saudi Arabia has enormous strategic interests to protect, including oil production, ports, shipping routes, and the infrastructure associated with its economic transformation. A disruption to any of these assets can have consequences far beyond the immediate battlefield. The Mecca agreement consequently provides Riyadh with another layer of deterrence and another mechanism for distributing the burden of regional security. This pact is part of Saudi Arabia's effort to diversify its defence partnerships while confronting the possibility of a broader regional war. The significance is therefore not that Saudi Arabia is abandoning Washington. Rather, Riyadh is determined to avoid being strategically dependent on Washington alone. The agreement gives Saudi Arabia additional options and potentially makes any future attack on the Kingdom more complicated for an adversary to calculate.

Turkey enters the arrangement in pursuit of greater strategic autonomy. Ankara seeks to maintain its existing traditional alliances with the West while developing additional relationships that allow Turkey to act independently when its interests diverge from those of other powers. The Mecca Pact gives Ankara a formal role in a regional security mechanism while allowing it to retain its NATO identity. Turkish officials have also emphasised that the new pact complements, rather than replaces, existing alliances. This distinction is important. Turkey is not necessarily choosing between NATO and the Middle East. Instead, Ankara is attempting to operate in both strategic environments simultaneously, making Turkey particularly valuable to the pact. Ankara can contribute substantial conventional military capabilities, defence-industry expertise and operational experience while also providing a potential bridge between Western and regional security structures.

Pakistan brings perhaps the most strategically distinctive contribution to the arrangement. Its military is large, experienced and accustomed to operating under demanding security conditions, while its nuclear deterrent gives Islamabad a unique strategic value. The new agreement also builds on the existing Saudi-Pakistani Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, signed in September 2025, giving the trilateral pact a pre-existing foundation.² Pakistan's participation, however, also introduces a major complication. Islamabad has close political and security ties with Riyadh, but it shares a long border with Iran and has strong incentives to avoid becoming directly involved in a confrontation between the Kingdom and Tehran. That tension could become particularly important during the current war. Pakistan's position could potentially become difficult if the conflict forces it to choose between its Saudi/Gulf commitments and the need to preserve stability along its western frontier. Pakistan therefore strengthens the alliance while simultaneously illustrating its limitations. Islamabad's participation demonstrates the desire for collective security. But it also shows why translating a political defence

commitment into automatic military action will be much more complicated than the Article 5 comparison suggests.

3. A Strategic Triangle of Complementary Capabilities

The three countries fit together because they offer complementary forms of strategic power. Saudi Arabia provides financial resources, geographic importance, energy leverage and considerable political influence in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Turkey contributes sophisticated conventional military capabilities, an expanding defence industry and experience from NATO operations. Pakistan contributes military manpower, strategic depth, and a nuclear deterrent.

Taken together, these capabilities create a potentially significant security triangle connecting the Gulf, the Eastern Mediterranean, and South Asia. The arrangement is therefore more consequential than a conventional bilateral defence agreement. At the same time, the differences among the three countries could make the pact difficult to institutionalise. Their threat perceptions are not identical, their relationships with Iran differ, and their geographic priorities often pull them in different directions. The alliance must therefore reconcile two competing realities. On one hand, each government has a strong incentive to demonstrate solidarity because each is vulnerable to regional instability. On the other, none wants to surrender the freedom to determine if, when, and how it enters a war. The success of the pact will in no small part depend on whether those competing interests can coexist within a credible collective defence framework.

4. The Limits of Article 5 Comparisons

The decision to formalise a mutual-defence commitment similar to NATO's Article 5 reflects a basic change in the strategic calculations of all three governments. The purpose is not necessarily to create an organisation capable of immediately fighting a major conventional war. Rather, it is to create deterrence through uncertainty. If an adversary knows that attacking Saudi Arabia, Turkey, or Pakistan could trigger a coordinated response involving the other two, the political and military cost of aggression becomes harder to calculate.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has described the agreement's mutual-defence provision as technically comparable to NATO's Article 5, while emphasising that it is defensive and not directed specifically against Iran or another country.³ The distinction from NATO, however, remains crucial. NATO's Article 5 is supported by decades of integrated planning, military exercises, command structures, interoperability and established procedures. The Mecca Pact does not yet possess that institutional depth. Its immediate power is therefore primarily political. By making an attack on one member a matter of concern for all three, the pact attempts to change an adversary's calculations before a crisis begins. In that sense, deterrence, not automatic war-making, is the pact's most immediate objective.

5. Egypt's Absence and the Question of Expansion

Egypt's absence is one of the most important questions surrounding the agreement because Cairo was an obvious candidate for inclusion. Egypt is one of the Arab world's largest military powers, controls the Suez Canal, and has historically played a central role in Arab security affairs. Nonetheless, Cairo did not sign the agreement with the three founding members. The precise reason remains somewhat unclear, and available reporting points to a combination of political and strategic considerations.

Some sources claim that Saudi Arabia opposed Egypt's inclusion at this stage, despite Turkish efforts to bring Cairo into the pact, supposedly because of Riyadh's perception of the Abdel Fatah al-Sisi government being "unreliable" and "aid-dependent".⁴ Other reporting suggests that Egypt itself was cautious because it was trying to balance its security relationships with Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).⁵ Historically, Cairo has been wary of alliances in which it lacks decisive influence over military decision-making. Today, Cairo has strong reasons to avoid signing onto a pact that could eventually obligate it to participate in conflicts involving Iran or other regional actors. Egypt has its own security priorities, particularly Gaza, the Sinai, the Red Sea, and the Suez

Canal. Joining an emerging military bloc would therefore offer advantages but could also reduce Cairo's diplomatic flexibility.

Egypt's absence should not necessarily be interpreted as permanent. In fact, the available evidence points toward the possibility of later membership. Fidan has said that Egypt could join the Mecca Pact after technical issues are resolved, and Turkish officials have openly discussed expanding the arrangement. That possibility is noteworthy because Egypt would add something the founding three members do not possess: direct control of the Suez Canal, a large Arab military establishment, and an indispensable geographic position linking the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Gulf security systems. However, Cairo is likely to move cautiously. Egypt would probably prefer to join only after the pact's military obligations become clearer. A later Egyptian accession could consequently be more consequential than immediate membership because Cairo could first determine whether the alliance becomes a genuine security institution or remains primarily a political declaration.

6. Risks of the Regional Crisis Escalating

The Mecca Pact's immediate implication for the current war is that it raises the potential cost of further regional escalation. The pact was signed while the conflict involving Iran, Israel, the United States and regional actors was already spilling across international borders while threatening to further regionalise and internationalise. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan have all insisted that the agreement is defensive and not directed against Iran. But that distinction may not eliminate its strategic consequences. For Tehran, the emergence of a formal defence relationship involving Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan creates a new variable in calculating attacks against targets in Gulf Cooperation Council member states. For Saudi Arabia, it offers additional reassurance at a moment when Iranian strikes have demonstrated the vulnerability of its territory and infrastructure.

For Turkey and Pakistan, however, the pact creates a difficult question. How far are they actually prepared to go if Saudi Arabia comes under sustained attack? The answer could determine whether the agreement strengthens deterrence or instead exposes divisions within the coalition. In the short term, therefore, the pact may discourage attacks against its members. But if fighting continues and one member suffers a major attack, the alliance could face its first real test almost immediately.

The larger implication is that the Middle East may be moving toward a security system based less on one dominant external guarantor and more on overlapping regional partnerships. That does not mean the United States is becoming irrelevant. American military power, intelligence capabilities, weapons systems, and diplomatic influence remain central to the region. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan appear to be preparing for a world in which they cannot assume that American protection will always be available on the terms they prefer.

The Mecca Pact, therefore, represents a form of strategic hedging. It gives its members another mechanism for responding to crises without requiring them to abandon existing relationships. This could ultimately encourage additional countries, including Azerbaijan, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, and Syria, to participate.⁶ Although Turkish officials have already indicated an interest in expanding the pact while analysts have identified Egypt as a particularly plausible future member, expansion could also make the pact harder to manage. Every new member would introduce different relationships with Iran, Israel, the United States, and other regional powers. The challenge will be to create a common security policy without eliminating the individual strategic flexibility that initially attracted Riyadh, Ankara, and Islamabad to the pact.

Ultimately, the significance of the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement will be determined not by the symbolism of its signing, but by what its members do next. The agreement is important because it reflects a shared conclusion among Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan that the region's existing security arrangements are no longer sufficient by themselves. Its Article 5-style provision attempts to turn that conclusion into deterrence by making an attack on one member a potential problem for all three. The current war gives the pact even greater urgency because its credibility could be tested soon. If the members establish intelligence-sharing, military exercises,

command procedures, and clear rules for collective action, the agreement could become the foundation of a genuinely more autonomous regional security architecture. If they cannot, it may remain largely symbolic. The Mecca Pact is therefore best understood not as an “Islamic NATO” already created, but as the beginning of an experiment whose outcome could reshape the Middle East’s security architecture.

NOTES

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/saudi-arabia-turkey-pakistan-sign-joint-defence-deal-amid-regional-turmoil-2026-08-07/>

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/saudi-arabia-nuclear-armed-pakistan-sign-mutual-defence-pact-2025-09-17/>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/8/turkiye-says-mecca-defence-pact-not-aimed-at-iran>

⁴ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-arabia-opposed-egypts-inclusion-mecca-agreement-sources-say>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ <https://asia.nikkei.com/politics/defense/turkey-pakistan-saudi-pact-a-muslim-nato-5-things-to-know>