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MECCA JOINT DEFENSE PACT: NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES



MECCA PACT: IMPLICATIONS FOR SAUDI ARABIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY AND SECURITY STRATEGY

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For Saudi Arabia, the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, signed on Aug. 7, 2026 with Türkiye and Pakistan, adds a new layer of deterrence, military cooperation and strategic depth to the Kingdom's evolving security architecture. Its significance extends beyond the collective defence commitment itself, reflecting a broader Saudi effort to strengthen national capability and diversify the partnerships through which its security interests are advanced. Riyadh has spent much of the past decade reassessing how best to protect its territory, critical infrastructure and economic interests in a regional environment in which threats have become more diverse and traditional assumptions about external security guarantees have repeatedly been tested. The pact should be read within this context, as another layer of deterrence, military cooperation and strategic depth within an increasingly diversified Saudi security strategy.

This evolution has been shaped by experience. The 2019 attacks on Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq and Khurais facilities were an important reminder of the vulnerability of critical infrastructure and of how quickly the regional

Over the past decade, Riyadh has reassessed how best to protect its territory, critical infrastructure and economic interests in a regional environment where threats have diversified and conventional assumptions about external security guarantees have repeatedly been tested. The agreement should be viewed in this context, as an additional layer within Saudi Arabia's increasingly diversified security strategy, providing deterrence, military cooperation and strategic depth.

threat environment was changing. Since then, the war on Gaza following Oct. 7, 2023, Iranian pressure surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping and the Israeli strike on Hamas political leadership in Doha in September 2025 have each added different dimensions to the Gulf security equation. Taken together, these developments have reinforced a Saudi assessment that contemporary threats require a broader combination of deterrence, preparedness, regional cooperation and national capability.

Riyadh's response has consequently been to broaden the capabilities and partnerships available to the Kingdom, placing greater emphasis on strategic flexibility and national capacity. The Mecca pact is a significant expression of this approach.

ADDING DEPTH TO SAUDI DETERRENCE

The most immediate implication of the Mecca pact is the additional strategic depth it brings to Saudi Arabia's deterrence posture. The Kingdom confronts a multidirectional threat environment encompassing ballistic missiles, drones, attacks on critical infrastructure, maritime disruption, cyber threats and the potential spillover of regional conflicts. The experience of recent years has also demonstrated how relatively inexpensive asymmetric capabilities can impose substantial economic and strategic costs. Against this backdrop, deterrence increasingly depends not only on the strength of Saudi Arabia's own capabilities, but on the range of military, technological and operational resources it can bring to bear in a crisis.

The pact strengthens this calculus by raising the potential costs of aggression against the Kingdom. Pakistan brings a large and experienced military establishment and decades of operational familiarity with the Saudi armed forces, while Turkiye contributes substantial conventional capabilities, combat experience and a rapidly advancing technological and defence-industrial base. Together, they expand the range of capabilities that can support Saudi deterrence and defence.

The value of the agreement, however, will depend on whether its collective defence commitment is translated into practical coordination. The establishment of a ministerial mechanism and a secretariat in Saudi Arabia provides an institutional basis for doing so. Joint planning, military exer-

cises, intelligence exchanges and greater interoperability would give the pact operational credibility beyond the political commitment itself.

For Saudi Arabia, the priorities for such cooperation are already evident from the threat environment it faces. Integrated air and missile defence, counter-drone capabilities, maritime domain awareness, cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection all address vulnerabilities exposed in recent years. Maritime cooperation is particularly important given the Kingdom's position between two strategically important waterways. Security in the Red Sea and around the Strait of Hormuz is directly connected to Saudi energy exports, trade routes and the wider economic transformation underway under Vision 2030.

The strategic value of the pact, therefore, lies not only in the prospect of collective action following an attack, but in building the preparedness and capabilities that can help deter one in the first place.

DEFENCE INDUSTRIALISATION AS NATIONAL SECURITY

Beyond its immediate deterrent value, the pact has potentially significant implications for Saudi Arabia's defence industrialisation. The Kingdom's objective is no longer simply to diversify its suppliers, but to develop greater control over the production, maintenance and development of the capabilities on which its security depends. Vision 2030 has placed the localisation of military expenditure at the centre of this transformation, with the aim of localising more than 50 percent of military spending by 2030.

Türkiye is particularly relevant in this regard. Its defence sector has developed rapidly across unmanned systems, electronic warfare, precision munitions, armoured vehicles and aerospace technologies. Existing cooperation between Türkiye's Baykar and Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI) on the Akıncı (UCAV) unmanned combat aerial vehicle illustrates the model Riyadh is seeking to advance: moving beyond procurement toward local production, technology transfer and the development of domestic expertise.

The Mecca framework provides an opportunity to expand this model into joint development, maintenance, research and development, supply chains and potentially third-market production. Pakistan adds another dimension through its established

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While Pakistan brings a large and experienced military establishment, along with decades of operational experience and accumulated cooperation with the Saudi armed forces, Türkiye contributes strong conventional capabilities, combat experience and a rapidly developing technology and defense industry base. Together, the two countries broaden the range of capabilities available to support Saudi Arabia's deterrence and defense.

defence-industrial and aerospace capabilities and its longstanding military relationship with the Kingdom.

For Riyadh, the strategic significance extends well beyond the economics of Vision 2030. Greater domestic capacity to maintain, repair and replenish defence systems reduces exposure to supply disruptions, export restrictions and changing external priorities during a crisis. Defence industrialisation therefore strengthens both resilience and freedom of action. In the longer term, the pact's contribution to building Saudi capability may prove as important as the collective defence commitment itself.

STRATEGIC DIVERSIFICATION WITHOUT STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT

The Mecca pact also illustrates the increasingly differentiated character of Saudi Arabia's security partnerships. Riyadh does not approach closer relations with one partner as necessarily coming at the expense of another. Instead, different relationships are increasingly assessed according to the capabilities they provide and the Saudi national interests they advance.

The U.S. remains a central defence partner, particularly in advanced military systems, intelligence, training and interoperability. Türkiye and Pakistan bring different forms of value, from defence-industrial cooperation and technology transfer to longstanding military ties and operational depth. The Mecca pact therefore represents an expansion of Saudi Arabia's strategic options rather than a realignment away from its established partnerships. The underlying principle is that the Kingdom's security architecture should be sufficiently broad to serve Saudi interests across different contingencies rather than depend on any single relationship to address the full spectrum of threats.

This approach also helps explain why the pact should not be interpreted as an alliance directed against Iran, Israel or any other particular state. Saudi Arabia has invested considerable diplomatic capital in reducing regional tensions, including through its engagement with Iran, while simultaneously strengthening its defence capabilities and partnerships. For Riyadh, deterrence and diplomacy are complementary instruments. The ability to engage regional actors from a

position of greater security and preparedness expands, rather than constrains, the Kingdom's diplomatic room for manoeuvre.

GCC AND THE REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

The Mecca pact should be understood as an additional layer within, rather than an alternative to, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) security framework. Gulf security remains structurally interconnected across airspace, maritime routes, energy infrastructure and critical supply chains, making the GCC indispensable to Saudi Arabia's regional security calculations. The trilateral framework adds external strategic depth by bringing Pakistani and Turkish military capabilities into a broader architecture that already combines national capabilities, GCC collective security and bilateral partnerships. For Riyadh, the advantage of this layered approach is flexibility: different mechanisms and partnerships can be mobilised against different types of threats.

The credibility of the pact will nevertheless depend on implementation. Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan will not necessarily share identical interests across every regional or international issue, and the practical meaning of collective defence will require greater clarity over what constitutes aggression, what forms of assistance would follow and how rapidly the three states could coordinate in a crisis. The relevant measure of success, however, is not whether the three countries adopt identical positions on every dispute. It is whether the framework produces greater interoperability, stronger intelligence and contingency planning, deeper defence-industrial cooperation and, ultimately, more credible deterrence.

GREATER SAUDI STRATEGIC AGENCY

The broader significance of the Mecca pact lies in what it reveals about the direction of Saudi security policy. The Kingdom is increasingly seeking not only to diversify its partnerships, but to exercise greater influence over the capabilities, relationships and institutional arrangements on which its security depends. Türkiye and Pakistan add military, technological and strategic depth to an architecture that will continue to include the U.S. and the GCC, but which is increasingly shaped by Saudi Arabia's own priorities. The pact should therefore be judged not by

Gains in the defense industry strengthen both resilience and freedom of action. Over the long term, the contribution the Mecca Agreement makes to the development of Saudi Arabia's own defense capabilities could become as important as the collective defense commitment itself.

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