

The Mecca agreement: a loose alliance between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey

Adam Michalski, Krzysztof Strachota

On 7 August, in Mecca, Turkey, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, which aims to enhance collective deterrence and improve coordination and integration of the three countries' defence capabilities. In a joint statement, the signatories declared that an armed attack on one of them would be regarded as an attack on all three. Although the agreement's text remains unpublished, official statements have highlighted its defensive character and openness to expansion. Turkey has also underscored the importance of institutionalising cooperation. The United States, Iran and Israel have not officially commented on the agreement.

The formation of this alliance reflects the ongoing crisis in the regional security architecture and represents an effort to diversify the signatories' security partnerships beyond the United States without undermining their existing bilateral relations with Washington. Although in its current form the agreement does not constitute a full military alliance, it creates opportunities for enhanced political, military and economic cooperation among the signatories. It is also a success for Turkey in its efforts to safeguard its regional interests and pursue its economic and political goals amid challenges posed by Iran and Israel.

Commentary

- **The agreement serves as a response to the deepening crisis in the Persian Gulf security architecture, which has traditionally relied on US guarantees but is increasingly being undermined by the actions of Israel and Iran.** This trend became apparent in 2025, when Israeli strikes in Qatar prompted closer cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. It gained particular significance during the 2026 war between Israel and the United States on one side and Iran on the other, as well as during Iranian attacks on Saudi targets. Riyadh also faces a renewed challenge from the Houthis in Yemen, with the conflict having flared up again in recent weeks. Like other countries in the region, Saudi Arabia now sees its vital interests as increasingly threatened and its cooperation with the United States as failing to provide the desired level of security. Although its alliance with the US is not being called into question, Riyadh has begun to diversify its security partnerships. Its principal partner in this effort is Pakistan, with which it has maintained close military ties since the 1960s; the two countries strengthened their alliance in September last year. Islamabad subsequently signed a similar agreement with Kuwait in June this year. Saudi Arabia is also working to establish a maritime coalition to protect shipping routes around the Arabian Peninsula, as evidenced by the agreement it signed with 14 countries on 30

July. Meanwhile, the current crisis is drawing Riyadh closer to Turkey, while the United Arab Emirates is deepening its cooperation with Israel.

- **Regardless of its political and symbolic significance, the Mecca agreement does not currently represent a genuine military alliance.** Its text remains unpublished, its objectives are broadly defined, and no coordinating institutions or operational arrangements, such as those concerning force deployment, have been established. The signatories differ significantly from one another, are geographically distant and have different strategic priorities. There are also doubts about their readiness to engage in military action. For example, while Pakistan, an ally of Riyadh, deployed forces to Saudi Arabia during the Iranian attacks, it did not participate in military operations. Islamabad and Ankara also currently appear unlikely to engage militarily against the Houthis, who are now Saudi Arabia's most pressing security challenge, let alone confront Iran.
- **Despite its limitations, the agreement reflects the ongoing transformation of the Middle East and establishes a new framework for cooperation.** Notably, it facilitates the development of alternative mechanisms for political, military and economic collaboration, particularly within the defence industry and in the context of Saudi Arabia's domestic reforms under the 'Vision 2030' programme. The agreement also highlights the steadily growing ambitions and capabilities of actors from outside the region, namely Pakistan and Turkey. Its implications extend beyond the current conflict with Iran and include strengthening Turkey's position relative to Israel and Pakistan's influence in the Indian Ocean. One measure of the agreement's success would be the accession of other countries, such as Egypt, Qatar and Bahrain, or potentially Syria and Azerbaijan. In the current circumstances, the alliance is not directed against the United States, as cooperation with Washington remains essential for the signatories. Moreover, it could evolve towards the kind of 'burden-sharing' favoured by the US. In the long term, the agreement will pose a challenge to both Iran and Israel, each of which may seek to expose its shortcomings.
- **The Mecca agreement is a success for Ankara and a step towards both the regional security architecture it has advocated and closer political and military cooperation with the region.** While not intended as an alternative to NATO, the agreement diversifies Turkey's security instruments. It is also designed to enhance Ankara's position relative to Israel and Iran and to demonstrate Turkey's ability to form cross-regional coalitions. Ankara will therefore work to expand the format. At the same time, it will seek to institutionalise the alliance and operationalise cooperation in intelligence, logistics and military capabilities. In the long term, the agreement may facilitate increased arms exports and joint weapons production by combining Turkish technology, Saudi capital and Pakistan's military-industrial base, thereby delivering both financial and military benefits to Ankara.