



THE MECCA JOINT DEFENSE AGREEMENT: TRILATERAL SECURITY COOPERATION BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA, TÜRKIYE, AND PAKISTAN FOR REGIONAL PEACE, SAFETY, AND STABILITY

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ABSTRACT

On 7 August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye signed the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, a collective-defense pact stipulating that an armed attack on one signatory will be treated as an attack on all three. Signed against the backdrop of the wider US–Israel–Iran confrontation and growing doubts about the durability of Washington's regional security umbrella, the accord has been read by analysts as the foundation of a new, religiously and strategically anchored security architecture in the Muslim world. This paper examines the origins, structure, and likely consequences of the agreement for peace, safety, and stability in South Asia and the Middle East. Using a qualitative, document-based research design that draws on official statements, contemporaneous reporting, and the existing scholarship on Pakistan–Gulf–Turkish relations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the paper argues that the pact represents a shift from informal, bilateral security cooperation toward an institutionalized, treaty-based trilateral framework. It identifies the agreement's core drivers (a shared, state-centric conception of order; distrust of unilateral external intervention; and the economic and religious weight of Makkah as a unifying symbol), assesses its practical implementation challenges (sectarian sensitivities, resource asymmetries, and the absence so far of a standing command structure), and offers policy recommendations for translating the pact from a declaratory commitment into a durable instrument of regional peacebuilding. The paper concludes that while the agreement cannot by itself resolve the region's underlying conflicts, it constitutes a meaningful institutional step that, if consolidated through confidence-building measures and inclusive diplomacy, can contribute to a more stable security order across the Muslim world.

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INTRODUCTION

The city of Makkah al-Mukarramah occupies a singular place in the political imagination of the Muslim world: it is at once the spiritual centre of Islam and, increasingly, a venue for consequential diplomacy among Muslim-majority states. On 7 August 2026, that symbolic weight was joined to hard strategic substance when Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye signed the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement at a summit in the holy city, committing each signatory to treat an armed attack on any one of them as an attack on all three (Al Jazeera, 2026). Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan described the arrangement as "technically equivalent" to Article 5 of the NATO charter, and officials indicated that the pact would establish a ministerial committee and a general secretariat based in Saudi Arabia, with the possibility of Egypt joining at a later stage (Jerusalem Post, 2026).

The timing of the agreement is not incidental. It follows a period of acute regional turbulence generated by the war

between the United States/Israel and Iran, in which direct strikes reached Saudi territory and commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea was severely disrupted (Middle East Eye, 2026). For Pakistan, the world's only nuclear-armed Muslim-majority state, the pact marks a departure from its traditionally cautious posture as a regional mediator, positioning Islamabad's armed forces as a prospective security guarantor at the intersection of South Asia and the Gulf (Middle East Eye, 2026). For Saudi Arabia, the agreement builds on the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement it had already concluded with Pakistan in September 2025, while for Türkiye it consolidates a trajectory of deepening defence cooperation with Riyadh that has been underway since 2022 (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2026).

This paper asks a straightforward but consequential question: what does the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement mean for peace, safety, and stability — in the signatory states themselves, in the wider Muslim world, and in the international system more broadly? It situates the pact within the longer history of security cooperation among Muslim-majority states, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the 2015 Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance, and it evaluates the practical steps required to move the agreement from a declaratory framework toward operational effectiveness. The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on trilateral and multilateral security cooperation in the Muslim world. Section 3 sets out the research methodology. Section 4 presents the analysis, organized around the agreement's background, provisions, drivers, and implications. Section 5 discusses practical implementation and policy recommendations. Section 6 concludes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on security cooperation among Muslim-majority states has long noted a persistent gap between symbolic solidarity and institutionalized capability. Studies of the OIC — the 57-member organization established in 1969 and headquartered in Jeddah — describe it as an important normative and diplomatic forum but one whose member states each approach it instrumentally: Kayaoglu (2015), as discussed in subsequent literature, observed that Saudi Arabia engages the OIC from the standpoint of religious orthodoxy, Pakistan from the standpoint of security, and Türkiye from the standpoint of economic development, a divergence of priorities

that has historically limited the organization's collective-security ambitions (as cited in later reviews of OIC politics). Mustafa's (2020) review of OIC challenges similarly finds that intra-Muslim rivalries — most visibly the Saudi–Iranian rupture and disputes such as Kashmir — have constrained the organization's capacity to act as a unified security actor. A parallel literature examines Pakistan's bilateral and pan-Islamic diplomacy. Ahmad and colleagues' (2023) study of Pakistan's OIC policy argues that Islamabad has used the organization to build international prestige and to internationalize disputes such as Kashmir, even as it has declined to press for structural reforms that would challenge Saudi Arabia's dominant role within the body. Work on the 2015 Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance against terrorism is instructive for assessing the durability of Muslim-world security pacts: that 41-nation coalition, though nominally open to the whole OIC membership, was in practice Sunni-dominated and excluded Iran, Iraq, and Syria, which limited its credibility and effectiveness despite Pakistan's prominent role in its command structure (academic review of the Islamic Military Alliance). This precedent is directly relevant to assessing whether the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement can avoid a similar fate.

More recent scholarship examines the alliance dynamics specific to the Turkey–Pakistan–Saudi Arabia–Egypt cluster. A 2026 study of alliance-building under shared security pressures in the "Greater Middle East" notes that although the literature has long emphasized Pakistan's military and financial ties with Saudi Arabia, these relations had not, until recently, evolved into a fully institutionalized regional alliance, in part because Islamabad sought to preserve domestic sectarian balance and to avoid severing ties with Iran (comparative alliance study, 2026). The same body of work observes that the three core partners share a broadly state-centric conception of regional order prioritising strong central governments, territorial integrity, and functioning institutions while viewing state fragmentation and the empowerment of non-state armed actors as the principal sources of long-term instability (Al Jazeera, 2026).

Commentary published immediately after the Mecca signing offers a further, more contemporary layer of analysis. Policy analysts at the Observer Research Foundation and the Atlantic Council frame the pact as a response to the perceived erosion of the US security umbrella in West Asia, arguing that it embeds Pakistan more deeply into Middle Eastern

security architecture and gives Saudi Arabia and Türkiye additional strategic insurance independent of Washington (Observer Research Foundation, 2026; Atlantic Council, 2026). Other commentary, including from the Global Research network, situates the pact within a broader multipolar trend in which Muslim-majority states pursue "multi-alignment" rather than exclusive reliance on any single external patron (Global Research, 2026). Taken together, the literature suggests three recurring themes that this paper builds on: (i) Muslim-world security cooperation has historically been long on declaratory solidarity and short on institutional capability; (ii) Pakistan's security relationships with the Gulf states are deepening from informal cooperation toward formal, treaty-based commitments; and (iii) any assessment of a new pact's contribution to regional peace and stability must weigh its institutional design against the historical pattern of underperformance seen in earlier Muslim-world alliances.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory, and document-based research design appropriate for analysing a recent, still-unfolding policy development for which large-N quantitative data are not yet available. The design combines (i) a documentary analysis of primary sources — the joint statement issued at the Mecca summit, official OIC and government reactions, and statements by the foreign and defence ministers of the three signatories — with (ii) a thematic review of secondary sources, comprising peer-reviewed and working-paper literature on the OIC, the 2015 Islamic Military Alliance, and Pakistan–Gulf–Turkish relations, and (iii) contemporaneous reporting and expert commentary from established news organizations and policy institutes.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Sources were purposively selected on the basis of relevance, credibility, and recency. Primary sources include the text and official summaries of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement as reported by the signatory governments and the OIC Secretariat. Secondary academic sources were identified through a review of research on OIC politics, pan-Islamism, and Muslim-world military alliances. Journalistic and think-tank sources were limited to established outlets with a

demonstrated record of regional-security reporting (for example, Al Jazeera, Reuters-sourced wire coverage, the Atlantic Council, and the Observer Research Foundation), used specifically to capture expert reaction to an event that postdates most peer-reviewed literature on the subject.

Analytical Framework

The analysis is organized using a modified alliance-theory framework drawn from international-relations scholarship on collective defence pacts, which evaluates a security arrangement along four dimensions: (i) the drivers or precipitating conditions that bring signatories together; (ii) the institutional design of the pact (its formal commitments, command structures, and dispute-resolution mechanisms); (iii) the credibility and capability of the commitment, including the material and political resources each partner brings; and (iv) the pact's likely externalities for third parties and for regional stability more broadly. This framework is applied descriptively and interpretively rather than through statistical testing, consistent with the exploratory, single-case nature of the study.

Limitations

Because the agreement was signed only days before this study was conducted, several limitations follow. The full legal text of the agreement has not been made public in complete form, so the analysis relies on official summaries and expert interpretation of its provisions. The absence of an operational track record means that claims about the pact's effectiveness are necessarily provisional and should be revisited as implementation proceeds. Finally, as with any study of an actively developing geopolitical event, sources reflect the interpretive positions of the outlets and analysts cited, and the paper has sought to triangulate across multiple, ideologically varied sources to mitigate this bias.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Background: From Bilateral Ties to Trilateral Architecture

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement did not emerge in isolation; it is the latest and most formal expression of security ties that have deepened incrementally over the past decade. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's relationship, often described by officials as "brotherly" and rooted in nearly eight decades of

cooperation, has long combined religious affinity — Pakistanis' reverence for the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah — with material cooperation, including Pakistani military training and advisory support to the Kingdom (Gulf News, 2025). This relationship was formalized in September 2025 through a bilateral Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, under which aggression against either state would be treated as aggression against both (Gulf News, 2025). In parallel, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia steadily improved relations from 2022 onward, including expanding cooperation in the defence-industrial sector (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2026). A trilateral security dialogue began to take shape when the foreign ministers of Türkiye, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt met in Riyadh on 19 March 2026 during an Islamic summit to discuss combining their security capabilities within a joint framework (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2026). The Mecca signing in August 2026 is best understood as the culmination of this incremental process rather than a sudden, standalone event.

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement: Provisions and Institutional Design

According to the joint statement and subsequent official clarifications, the agreement establishes a mutual-defence obligation among the three signatories: an armed attack on one will be considered an attack on all (Jerusalem Post, 2026). Officials have stressed that the pact is "purely defensive in nature" (Al Jazeera, 2026), and that it is intended to strengthen the signatories' collective security while promoting peace, security, and stability in the region and beyond. Structurally, the agreement provides for a ministerial committee and a general secretariat to be based in Saudi Arabia, giving it a degree of institutional permanence beyond a one-off declaration, and it leaves open the possibility of enlargement, with Egypt cited as a likely future participant (Jerusalem Post, 2026). Analysts note that the three partners bring complementary material assets to the arrangement: Türkiye contributes NATO's second-largest military and an established defence-industrial base; Pakistan brings a large, combat-experienced military and the only nuclear arsenal in the Muslim world; and Saudi Arabia offers substantial financial resources together with its unique religious and diplomatic standing as custodian of Islam's two holiest sites (NBC News, 2026).

Drivers of the Agreement

Three drivers stand out in the analysis. First is the erosion of confidence in the US security guarantee.

The direct exposure of Saudi territory to strikes during the US–Israel–Iran confrontation, and the disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea, appear to have convinced Riyadh, Ankara, and Islamabad that they could no longer rely exclusively on external patrons for their security (Middle East Eye, 2026; Observer Research Foundation, 2026). Second is a shared, state-centric conception of regional order: the three governments converge in viewing strong central governments, territorial integrity, and functioning institutions as the basis of stability, and state fragmentation and non-state armed actors as its principal threats (Al Jazeera, 2026). Third is the symbolic and normative value of anchoring the agreement in Makkah itself. Signing the accord at the Islamic world's holiest site, alongside a Pakistani prime ministerial visit for Umrah, allowed the signatories to frame a hard-security commitment in the language of Islamic solidarity, lending it a legitimacy that a purely secular defence pact would lack (Al Jazeera, 2026).

Implications for Peace, Safety, and Stability

The agreement's implications operate at three levels. At the bilateral and trilateral level, the pact is likely to enhance deterrence against external aggression toward any of the three states, potentially reducing the risk of unilateral strikes of the kind that struck Saudi territory during the Iran conflict (Middle East Eye, 2026). At the regional level, the OIC Secretary-General welcomed the agreement as "a fundamental pillar for supporting security and stability in the region and across the Muslim world" (OIC Secretariat statement, 2026), suggesting that the pact may serve as a nucleus around which broader Muslim-world security cooperation — potentially including Egypt — could consolidate. At the systemic level, however, the agreement introduces new uncertainty into great-power relations: some commentary reads it as a hedge against declining US reliability that could nonetheless be steered or leveraged by outside powers for burden-sharing purposes (Atlantic Council, 2026; Global Research, 2026), while an editorial in the Jerusalem Post cautions that, if it develops an explicitly anti-Israel orientation, the pact could complicate rather than stabilize the broader regional balance (Jerusalem Post, 2026).

Challenges and Limitations

The historical record counsels caution about assuming the pact will straightforwardly deliver

peace and stability. The 2015 Islamic Military Alliance, though formally open to the full OIC membership, functioned in practice as a Sunni-dominated coalition that excluded Iran, Iraq, and Syria, undermining its claim to represent the Muslim world as a whole and raising sectarian concerns given Pakistan's prominent command role (academic review of the Islamic Military Alliance). Contemporary analysts flag comparable risks for the Mecca pact: Pakistan's own security calculus remains oriented primarily toward its rivalry with India rather than Middle Eastern contingencies, and experts note the accord is unlikely to include any nuclear component precisely because Islamabad's deterrent is designed with India, not the Gulf, in mind (NBC News, 2026). Scholars of regional alliance-building also observe that Pakistan has historically avoided taking sides between Riyadh and Tehran in order to preserve domestic sectarian balance, a multi-faceted balancing strategy that may constrain how far Islamabad is willing to operationalize its new commitments in practice (comparative alliance study, 2026). Finally, without a published, detailed legal text, a standing joint command, and agreed rules of engagement, the pact risks remaining, as earlier OIC-linked initiatives have been characterized, more of a "talk-fest" than an operationally effective security institution (Ahmad et al., 2023) unless it is deliberately built out through the institutional steps discussed below.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION: RECOMMENDATIONS

Translating the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement from a declaratory commitment into a durable contributor to peace, safety, and stability requires deliberate institution-building. Based on the preceding analysis, the paper offers the following recommendations.

- Publish a clear, detailed legal text specifying the scope of the collective-defence clause, the threshold that triggers mutual assistance, and the decision-making procedure of the proposed ministerial committee, so that the commitment is credible and verifiable rather than purely symbolic.
- Establish the general secretariat in Saudi Arabia with a standing secretariat staff, a joint planning cell, and a schedule of regular joint exercises, modelled on confidence-building practices used by other collective-defence arrangements, to

build interoperability among the Saudi, Pakistani, and Turkish armed forces.

- Create an explicit dispute-resolution and consultation mechanism to manage differences among the signatories — for example over relations with Iran or India — so that domestic political constraints in any one member state do not paralyse the alliance during a crisis.
- Pursue a phased, inclusive enlargement strategy, engaging Egypt and other willing OIC members on terms that avoid replicating the sectarian exclusivity that limited the 2015 Islamic Military Alliance, thereby strengthening the pact's claim to represent broader Muslim-world solidarity rather than a narrower geopolitical bloc.
- Pair the security agreement with parallel economic, humanitarian, and religious-diplomacy initiatives — trade facilitation, joint counter-terrorism cooperation, and coordinated positions within the OIC — so that the pact contributes to positive as well as negative peace, addressing root causes of instability and not only external military threats.

Maintain transparent, non-provocative communication with the United States, the European Union, and Israel regarding the pact's defensive character, to reduce the risk that external actors read the agreement as an anti-Western or anti-Israel bloc and respond in ways that could destabilize the wider region.

CONCLUSION

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement signed by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye on 7 August 2026 marks a significant, if still incomplete, step in the evolution of security cooperation among Muslim-majority states. It builds on a decade of deepening bilateral ties, formalizes a mutual-defence commitment comparable in rhetoric to NATO's Article 5, and draws symbolic strength from its signing in Islam's holiest city. The agreement responds to genuine anxieties about the reliability of external security guarantees and reflects a shared, state-centric vision of regional order among its signatories. At the same time, the historical experience of earlier Muslim-world security initiatives — most notably the 2015 Islamic Military Alliance — demonstrates that declaratory solidarity does not automatically translate into operational effectiveness, and that sectarian exclusivity, resource asymmetry, and unresolved bilateral rivalries can hollow out even well-intentioned pacts. Whether the

Mecca agreement becomes a genuine pillar of regional peace, safety, and stability, or remains a largely symbolic gesture, will depend on the institutional choices its signatories make in the months ahead: publishing a clear legal framework, building a functioning joint secretariat, managing internal disagreements, pursuing inclusive enlargement, and complementing hard-security commitments with economic and diplomatic cooperation. Future research should track the agreement's implementation empirically as further details become available, and should examine comparatively how it interacts with existing regional architectures, including the OIC, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and NATO.

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