

A New Security Triangle: Decoding the Geopolitical Significance of the Mecca Defense Alliance

Mohosina Mostofa Mity¹



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Introduction

For decades, security in the Middle East and South Asia has largely been shaped by powerful external actors, bilateral partnerships and separate regional rivalries. The Mecca Defense Alliance signals a different possibility. On 7 August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye signed a joint defense agreement in Mecca that treats an armed attack on one member as an attack on all.² At first glance, it may appear to be another defense arrangement in a region already crowded with

¹ Mohosina Mostofa Mity is a Research Associate at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS). She completed her BSS & MSS in International Relations from the Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).

² Saudi Press Agency, "Joint Statement of the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Türkiye and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," August 7, 2026, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/ar/w2649223>

alliances. But its importance lies in who is sitting at the same table. Saudi Arabia brings financial strength, energy influence and a central position in the Arab world. Türkiye contributes military capacity, strategic geography and a growing defense industry. Pakistan brings extensive military experience and nuclear capability. Together, they connect the Gulf, the Middle East and South Asia within one emerging security framework. The three governments describe the pact as defensive and not directed against any particular country. Yet the timing matters. It comes when regional conflicts are testing traditional security arrangements and when states are increasingly seeking greater control over their own security.

South Asia: A New External Variable in the Regional Security Order

The Mecca Pact introduces a new external variable into South Asia's security environment by connecting the region more closely with the Gulf and Middle East. Its geographical importance is therefore greater than the three members themselves. Pakistan provides the direct South Asian link, while Saudi Arabia connects the arrangement to the Gulf and Türkiye links it to the Middle East, Europe and NATO. The pact effectively redraws the western edge of the Indo Pacific by linking security developments in the Gulf with South Asia. This could make developments in the Middle East more relevant to South Asian strategic calculations, particularly because the region depends heavily on Gulf energy supplies, trade routes, remittances and maritime connections.

For India, the pact creates a more complicated strategic environment. Saudi Arabia has strong economic relations with New Delhi. Nevertheless, Pakistan now has a formal defense relationship with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, both of which possess significant political and economic influence. This could increase India's need to manage its relationships with the Gulf more carefully while preventing the Pakistan issue from affecting its wider regional partnerships. India's concern is therefore less about an immediate military threat and more about a gradual change in the balance of diplomatic and strategic influence around its western neighborhood. Indian analysts have already begun examining whether the pact could alter India's security calculations.³

The implications extend to Bangladesh and the smaller South Asian states. Bangladesh's interest in the pact demonstrates that the arrangement is already influencing strategic choices beyond

³ Mecca Joint Deterrence Agreement: Implications for India," The Diplomat, August 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2026/08/mecca-joint-deterrence-agreement-implications-for-india/>

Pakistan. Dhaka's possible participation could give the pact a stronger South Asian dimension and extend its geographical reach towards the Bay of Bengal. At the same time, it could introduce new sensitivities into Bangladesh's relations with India and affect its traditional preference for maintaining flexibility among major powers.⁴ Afghanistan could also become an area of diplomatic coordination under the emerging framework, given Pakistan's direct security interests in Afghanistan and the established diplomatic engagement of Türkiye and Saudi Arabia with the Afghan issue. More broadly, the pact could encourage greater defense cooperation, military diplomacy and strategic coordination across South Asia. However, it could also encourage competing alignments if states begin viewing the arrangement through an India Pakistan or wider geopolitical lens. The central South Asian implication is therefore not the creation of a new military bloc, but the gradual linking of South Asian security with an emerging Gulf Middle Eastern security network.

Implications for the Gulf: A New Layer in Regional Security

The Mecca Pact could add a new layer to the Gulf's security environment. Its importance comes not only from the three countries involved but also from the changing security situation in the Gulf. The pact was signed after growing concerns about the ability and willingness of the United States to provide security during the recent conflict with Iran. The agreement reflects a wider effort by Saudi Arabia and other regional states to develop additional security options as confidence in the existing US security framework has weakened.⁵ At the same time, the pact is still at an early stage and is more likely to provide a political and deterrent signal than immediate military integration.

For Saudi Arabia, the agreement provides an opportunity to diversify its security partnerships without ending its relationship with the United States. Saudi Arabia remains heavily dependent on external military capabilities, but it has also been trying to develop greater defense capacity of its own. The country spent an estimated \$83.2 billion on defense in 2025, making it the eighth-largest

⁴ Ruma Paul, "Bangladesh Could Consider Joining Mecca Pact, in Test for Foreign Ties," Reuters, August 25, 2026. Reuters article

⁵ Chaesung Chun and Jaehyun Im, "Activation of the Türkiye-Saudi-Pakistan Mecca Defense Pact and the Reshaping of the Gulf Security Architecture," *East Asia Institute*, September 2, 2026. <https://global.eai.or.kr/en/reports/990495>

military spender in the world.⁶ Türkiye can contribute defense technology and military expertise, while Pakistan brings long-standing military cooperation with Saudi Arabia. The pact could therefore support Saudi Arabia's effort to develop more diverse sources of security and defense cooperation. However, this does not mean that Riyadh is seeking to replace the US security relationship. The Mecca Pact is better understood as an additional option rather than a substitute for the existing system.

The pact could also affect the Gulf's approach to Iran. The agreement is officially defensive and does not identify Iran as an enemy. However, Iran remains an important part of the security environment that encouraged Saudi Arabia and its partners to strengthen collective deterrence. The East Asia Institute notes that the pact emerged in a period of direct military threats from Iran and growing concerns about the security of Gulf states. A stronger defense relationship could therefore increase the cost of military pressure against Saudi Arabia. At the same time, if Iran sees the pact as the beginning of a wider regional military grouping, it could contribute to greater mistrust and competition. The future impact will depend on whether the alliance combines deterrence with diplomatic engagement.

The pact could also influence the wider GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council). The six GCC members do not have identical security priorities or foreign-policy approaches. The Mecca Pact should therefore not be treated as a new Gulf-wide defense organization. Instead, it could exist alongside the GCC and other bilateral security relationships. Its possible expansion could make this more important. Türkiye has indicated that other countries may join, while Egypt and several other states have been discussed as possible participants. If membership expands, the pact could connect the Gulf more closely with the Red Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and South Asia.

Implications for the West: A Challenge to US Primacy?

The Mecca alliance does not currently represent a replacement for the US security architecture in the Middle East. Rather, its importance lies in the possibility that it could gradually reduce the exclusivity of the United States as the region's principal external security provider. This matters because Saudi Arabia, the most important Gulf member of the pact, remains deeply dependent on

⁶ "Saudi Arabia Military Spending 2025: \$83.2 Billion Defense Budget," MilitarySpend, accessed September 2, 2026, <https://militaryspend.org/country-profiles/saudi-arabia>

American military technology. The United States supplied 74 percent of Saudi Arabia's major arms imports between 2020 and 2024, while Spain supplied 10 percent and France 6.2 percent.⁷ The combination of high defense spending and heavy dependence on foreign suppliers gives Riyadh both a strong incentive and substantial financial capacity to diversify its security partnerships.

For Washington, the effect would be mixed. In the short term, greater regional military capacity could actually support American interests by allowing regional partners to assume more responsibility for air defense, maritime security and other conventional security tasks. Stronger regional capabilities could potentially reduce some of the burden on the United States while supporting broader US security objectives. The pact therefore should not be viewed as an anti-American development. It could contribute to the burden-sharing that Washington has repeatedly sought from its regional partners.

The longer-term issue is leverage rather than presence. Even if the United States retains its military bases, intelligence networks and defense relationships, a Saudi Arabia with alternative sources of military technology, production and strategic support would have greater freedom to resist US preferences. This possibility is significant because the US is not simply an arms supplier but a wider security provider. The Mecca Pact could create a parallel channel through which Saudi Arabia and potentially other regional states obtain defense technology, training, military coordination and deterrence without depending exclusively on Washington. The alliance should be considered as an effort to ensure security diversification rather than substitution.

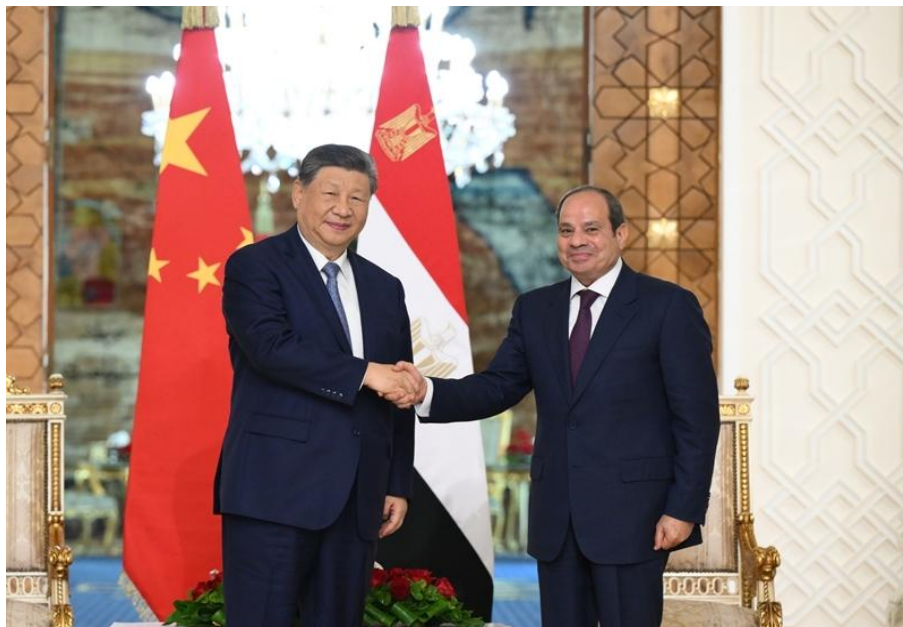
China: Benefiting from a More Multipolar Security Order

The Mecca alliance could create both an opportunity and a strategic dilemma for China. Its immediate importance for Beijing is that the pact could contribute to the gradual diversification of the Middle Eastern security order away from exclusive dependence on the United States. This is consistent with China's broader preference for a more multipolar international system. The pact reflects growing regional doubts about reliance on Washington and could create additional space for Beijing's influence in the Middle East. China also has strong material interests in the stability of the region. In 2025, almost 15 million barrels of crude oil per day, equivalent to nearly 34

⁷ Zain Hussain and Alaa Tartir, "Recent Trends in International Arms Transfers in the Middle East and North Africa," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), April 10, 2025

percent of global crude oil trade, passed through the Strait of Hormuz.⁸ China and India together received 44 percent of these exports.⁹ Any security arrangement that improves the protection of Gulf energy infrastructure and maritime routes therefore has direct implications for Chinese economic security. The pact could consequently support Beijing's interests without requiring China to assume the financial and military costs of becoming the region's primary security provider.

The defense relationship between China and Pakistan adds another dimension. China supplied 80 percent of Pakistan's major arms imports during 2021–25, up from 73 percent in 2016–20, while Pakistan's arms imports increased by 66 percent over the same period.¹⁰ If the Mecca Pact develops joint procurement, technology cooperation and defense production, Pakistan could potentially serve as an indirect channel through which Chinese defense capabilities become more relevant to the alliance's wider security ecosystem.



Chinese President Xi Jinping holds talks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Cairo, Egypt. [Photo/Xinhua]

⁸ International Energy Agency (IEA), "Strait of Hormuz," International Energy Agency, February 2026, <https://www.iea.org/about/oil-security-and-emergency-response/strait-of-hormuz>

⁹ International Energy Agency (IEA), "Strait of Hormuz," International Energy Agency

¹⁰ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Global Arms Flows Jump Nearly 10 Per Cent as European Demand Soars," March 9, 2026, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2026/global-arms-flows-jump-nearly-10-cent-european-demand-soars>

However, this creates a paradox for Beijing. The pact advances a more autonomous regional order, which generally favours China's multipolarity agenda, but China itself is not institutionally inside the emerging security mechanism. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye are strengthening their collective capabilities without creating a formal Chinese role. This limits Beijing's ability to shape the alliance's strategic decisions. The significance of this gap has become clearer with President Xi Jinping's call on 2nd September 2026 for Middle Eastern states to develop a new regional security architecture based on regional ownership and reduced external interference.¹¹ The Mecca Pact and China's proposal therefore point towards the same broader trend- the regionalization of Middle Eastern security. For Beijing, the strategic challenge will be to convert this trend into influence without assuming the costly responsibilities traditionally associated with the US security role.

Way Forward: The Alliance's Present Status and What Potential Members Should Consider

The Mecca Defense Alliance has now moved beyond the stage of a political announcement. On 31st August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan held the first meeting of the Strategic Political and Defense Committee in Istanbul. The three countries agreed to establish a permanent secretariat in Saudi Arabia, headed initially by a Pakistani Secretary General for three years.¹² They also agreed to strengthen defense capabilities, military interoperability, defense industry cooperation, joint technology development and joint production. This shows that the pact is beginning to develop an institutional structure, although its military mechanisms are still at an early stage.

The pact is also becoming more open to expansion. Türkiye has indicated that other countries could join if they share the alliance's approach to regional security and respect international law. However, the exact membership criteria, military obligations and decision-making procedures for future members have not yet been fully developed. This uncertainty is important for countries

¹¹ State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "Xi Raises Four-Point Proposal on New Security Architecture for Middle East," China Government, September 2, 2026, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202609/02/content_WS6a97dbb6c6d00ca5f9a0cf63.html

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, "Strategic Political and Defence Committee of the Makkah Agreement for Joint Defence: Joint Statement," August 31, 2026, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/strategic-political-and-defence-committee-of-the-makkah-agreement-for-joint-defence--joint-statement--31-august-2026.en.mfa>

considering membership because joining a defense pact creates commitments that can affect foreign policy well beyond defense cooperation.

The Mecca Pact should also not be treated as another NATO. Its collective defense principle is similar to NATO's Article 5 because an attack on one member is considered an attack on all. However, NATO has a much deeper institutional structure, including integrated military command, established defense planning, joint exercises and decades of operational experience. The Mecca Pact currently has a political leadership mechanism and a planned secretariat, but no comparable integrated command structure, standing military forces, or established operational mechanisms have yet been identified.

Countries considering membership should therefore first seek clarity on the pact's actual obligations. They should examine what assistance would be expected during a military crisis, who would make the decision to respond, how military operations would be coordinated and how the financial costs would be shared. They should also understand the implications for intelligence sharing, defense procurement, military bases and interoperability. These questions are particularly important because the pact is still developing its institutional framework. Also, potential members should consider the wider diplomatic consequences. Membership could strengthen defense cooperation and provide access to training, technology and strategic partnerships. At the same time, it could affect relations with neighboring states and major powers. The central question should therefore not be whether the Mecca Pact is an Islamic NATO. The more important question is whether joining would strengthen national security without reducing strategic flexibility or creating commitments that do not serve long term national interests.