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Issue Brief

The Mecca Pact: A Middle-Power Coalition amid Turbulent Transition in West Asia

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Summary

Driven by instability from the Iran conflict, Israeli military assertiveness, and doubts about US security guarantees, the Mecca pact seeks to strengthen collective deterrence among key middle powers. While it could become the basis for a more inclusive regional order, it also risks deepening regional fault lines. For India, it would be important to understand the character of the pact in the context of both the ongoing, conflict-ridden security environment and the long-term transition in the order in West Asia.

On 7 August 2026, Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed a joint defence pact called the Mecca Joint Deterrence Agreement. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had earlier signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in September 2025. Türkiye, which has sought to build a new security architecture in the region through bilateral military cooperation agreements with several countries, including Egypt, Somalia and Syria, and has been expanding security cooperation with both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, has shown early interest in joining the Saudi–Pakistan military pact.¹

Turkish leaders routinely describe their country as a middle power and articulate a vision of regional order in which regional powers with similar economic, political and other capacities engage in closer cooperation to cope with an intensely challenging security environment and fill the vacuum created in the wake of the changing role of the United States in West Asia.² Over the last three years, the expansion of Israeli military action into Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, airstrikes on a Hamas delegation in Qatar last September, and a failed US–Israeli regime-change war in Iran, which invited Iranian retaliation against the Gulf States and beyond, have resulted in an unstable security environment, pushing regional states to take greater initiative to protect their own security and regional stability.

A Middle Power Coalition

The US–Israel war with Iran gave an impetus to efforts towards creating an institutional basis for cooperation among key middle powers of the region. Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, among other regional states, supported diplomatic efforts to prevent the US war with Iran. Once the US–Israel launched the campaign against Iran, both had a shared interest in supporting diplomatic de-escalation pathways to ensure that the war does not spill over into an endless and dangerous regional war, as opposed to the US/Israel vs Iran military conflict.

The foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan met in Islamabad on 29 March and established a common diplomatic front to reduce the risk of miscalculation and escalation. They backed Islamabad’s role in mediating between Iran and the United States. The quartet emerged as a crisis-time diplomatic front with the potential to evolve into a more durable partnership to coordinate not only a

¹ Ezgi Akin, [“Turkey, Egypt Expand Military Ties with Cooperation Frameworks: What to Know”](#), *Al-Monitor*, 13 July 2026.

² [“Turkish Minister Urges Stronger Middle-power Role”](#), *Dong-A Ilbo*, 6 June 2026.

collective diplomatic strategy but also collective defence. In this context, Egypt's absence from the Mecca pact has been a subject of debate. Analysts note that Egypt is interested in expanding security cooperation with individual members of the pact and remains keen to play a role in the regional security arrangement.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan noted regarding Egypt that “We already act toward one another as if we were alliance members. There are a few technical issues. Once these are implemented, there is no reason for Egypt not to be part of it.”³ The 'technical issue' that Fidan referred to may be the agreement's binding mutual defence obligations, about which much remains unclear. Cairo will seek to avoid binding commitments and preserve its ability to diversify partnerships across the region's fault lines.⁴

The Mecca Pact can be seen as a middle-power balancing coalition against an assertive Iran in the aftermath of the US-Israel war and Israel's bid for regional military dominance and greater 'regional ownership' in managing regional stability and security. It seeks to create a collective security mechanism among regional countries with comparable and complementary capabilities, which became aware of significant structural constraints on their ability to assert dominance and the pitfalls of pursuing a transformative agenda in the years following the Arab uprisings.

Their defence-oriented security alignment aims to enhance collective deterrence capabilities to fend off threats and aggression and to manage the risk of spillover of growing regional disorder and instability into their domestic arena. At the same time, grappling with geopolitical uncertainty, they seek to reduce the security dilemma among them, given that Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, before their recent rapprochement, were engaged in a contest for security and influence from the Horn of Africa to Qatar, and for the leadership of the Muslim world.

Notably, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan maintained that the pact does not target Iran or any other country and that, under a longer-term vision, it would not remain limited to three countries but "should and, if necessary, bring all countries under this umbrella".⁵ He said the preferred model was for the three core founding countries to set the alliance's principles, standards and long-term structure, while other countries could join with the core members' approval. The real ambition of the Mecca pact, therefore, lies in its vision of a region-led security architecture that could

³ Alperen Aktas, [“Regional Four-country Platform Including Egypt to Remain ‘Very Important’: Turkish Foreign Minister”](#), *Anadolu Agency*, 9 August 2026.

⁴ Ahmed Abdouh, [“Should Egypt Join the Mecca Pact?”](#), Chatham House, 14 August 2026.

⁵ Gizem Nisa Demir and Fatma Zehra Solmaz, [“Mecca Joint Defence Agreement Does Not Target Any Country: Turkish Foreign Minister”](#), *Anadolu Agency*, 9 August 2026.

rise above containment efforts and bloc formation that marred earlier initiatives, such as the US-backed Middle East Strategic Alliance, announced in May 2017, which brought together the GCC countries, Egypt and Jordan.

Coping with the Uncertain Future of US Security Role

The US–Israel war with Iran, which started by disregarding regional voices warning against the dire pitfalls of overreliance on military power and then exposed the limits of US military power in shaping outcomes and its inability to defend allies, has undermined the US-led security architecture in the region. Iran's retaliatory attacks against US bases in the Gulf States have also exposed the strategic bargain underpinning these bases, which allowed the US to project power across the region while providing security guarantees to allies. These bases, once strategic assets, became targets of Iranian attacks.

These bases in the Gulf States, some of the largest and most permanent in the region, have sustained serious damage during two months of Iranian retaliatory strikes, prompting the Pentagon to move US troops westward to Jordan, which came under heavy attacks from Iran during renewed escalation in July. There are growing reports that the US Defense Department is reconsidering its presence in the region, and might not rebuild its bases as they were before the conflict.⁶

Not only do the regional states now have to deal with a much more assertive Iran, but also with Iranian-backed non-state armed groups like Houthis in Yemen and Iraqi militias, which have carried out drone and missile attacks on Saudi oil facilities. Facing acute threats that could derail their ambitious plans for economic transformation, and a US strategic drawdown that could leave it unable to defend against attacks from Iran and its non-state allies, Riyadh's response has been to support diplomacy with Iran. At the same time, it is prioritising the bolstering of its domestic capabilities and the cultivation of partnerships that can complement, if not replace, the US security umbrella.

The Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, have sought deeper security guarantees from the United States and have reinforced their importance to Washington by committing to major investments in the US economy. Trump's first overseas trip during his second term was to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, widely reported as an investment tour that secured US\$ 2 trillion in investment

⁶ [“Pentagon Weighing Smaller Military Presence in Gulf Once Iran War Ends”](#), *The Washington Post*, 18 August 2026.

deals.⁷ However, the US is increasingly seen as an unreliable and unpredictable partner.

In early July, the Trump administration signed a civil nuclear deal with Riyadh that would allow for exports of US nuclear technology to the kingdom. Notably, the agreement was based on bilateral rather than international safeguards to ensure the programme's peaceful nature, including an option for future enrichment of fissile material. The agreement, which had been signed after months of negotiations, faces an uncertain future after the Trump administration abruptly reversed course and conditioned the deal on the Kingdom's recognition of Israel.

The regional states have been alarmed by what they see as a US-Israel axis committed to using military force to transform the regional order. Over the last three years, Israel has continued to enjoy US diplomatic cover as it engages in military action across the region, including air strikes on the soil of US allies such as Qatar, further raising questions about whether the US in fact shares Israel's regional agenda.⁸ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has described Israel as a regional and global superpower and, in a stark departure from the vision of the Abraham Accords, which favoured diplomatic normalisation and economic interdependence, articulated a vision of the country as a “Super-Sparta”⁹ seeking military dominance and a self-reliant economy.

At a time when US political support for military funding to Israel has been dwindling, both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu are seeking to transform the US-Israel military relationship from being centred largely on US military aid to Israel to a partnership rested on the integration of defence industrial and intelligence capabilities. These discussions have gathered momentum as the 10-year US-Israel Memorandum of Understanding mandating annual US military aid to Israel is expiring in 2028.

The annual US defence policy bill, the 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which includes Section 224 titled the United States-Israel Defense Technology Cooperation Initiative, was passed in the House in July. This will make Israel a full member of the US defence and intelligence apparatus. It seeks to integrate the defence industrial bases of the two countries through joint research

⁷ Elizabeth Dent, [**“Unpacking Trump’s 2025 Gulf Investment Tour”**](#), The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 25 June 2025.

⁸ Joe Kent, [**“US-Israel Integration is Far from ‘America First’”**](#), *The Responsible Statecraft*, 3 June 2026.

⁹ Jonathan Lis, [**“We Are ‘Super Sparta’: Netanyahu Says Israel Faces Isolation, Must Shift to Self-reliance”**](#), Haaretz, 15 September, 2025

and development of critical defence technologies and co-production, as well as potentially integrating Israeli technologies into US air and missile defence, such as the Golden Dome Project. This push for US–Israel military integration is viewed with apprehension by US regional allies, who are concerned not only about the inadequacy of US security commitments but also about the influence Tel Aviv appears to have on the Trump administration's regional policy.

For instance, Ankara, having improved ties with Washington since Trump's return to power, is pushing to rejoin the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program, from which it was expelled in 2019 over its acquisition of Russian S-400 air defence systems. Ahead of the NATO summit in Ankara, Trump announced that Washington intends to lift sanctions on Turkey's defence procurement agency under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), potentially clearing the way for the export of General Electric F-110 engines needed to power Türkiye's fifth-generation stealth fighter jet program Kaan and for a return to the F-35 programme.

The US commitment to ensuring Israel's qualitative military edge has long enabled Israel to object to American fighter sales in the region. However, Prime Minister Netanyahu's public opposition to the Turkish sale was framed as a shift in the region's balance of power. But Netanyahu went further, saying that Türkiye has aggressive aspirations.¹⁰ The prospect of Türkiye's growing air capabilities through the F-35, mirroring Israel's operational inventory, is a cause of concern for Israel, which is determined to maintain its air superiority in the region.

Türkiye's Rise as a Regional Security Broker

Türkiye, with its growing military capabilities, NATO membership and strategic location, sees itself as a major regional power with influence across the Caucasus, the Middle East, the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara sees a regional security platform led by like-minded regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as crucial to strengthening its strategic autonomy and role as a key security broker amid a turbulent transition in regional order. At the same time, Ankara seeks an advantage over competing regional formations led by Israel, whether it is the Greece–Türkiye–Cyprus trilateral or the Israel–UAE axis in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.

¹⁰ Francesco Salesio Schiavi, [**“Turkey's F-35 Return and Saudi Arabia's Fighter Ambitions”**](#), Gulf International Forum, 7 August 2026.

As a defence pact bringing together Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, the leading power in the Arab world, and Pakistan, the only Muslim country with nuclear deterrence, it also rivals the US-backed vision of a regional order centred on the Abraham Accords and expanding Arab–Israel normalisation, especially with Saudi Arabia. For Ankara, therefore, creating an inclusive security platform with Saudi Arabia, potentially including other Arab states, has great geopolitical value in preventing the emergence of an Israeli-led anti-Turkey bloc in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.¹¹

Conclusion

The Mecca Pact, a collective defence pact between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, two leading powers in West Asia and Pakistan, could be a turning point in the security architecture of West Asia, long dominated by the United States. It has the potential to become the core of an indigenous and even inclusive regional order, provided it can maintain a balance between deterrence and diplomacy *vis-à-vis* both adversaries and rivals. Otherwise, in a region marked by competing understandings of security and visions of regional order, it could just as easily strengthen existing regional fault lines.

For India, it would be important to understand the character of the pact in the context of both the ongoing, conflict-ridden security environment and the long-term transition in the order in West Asia. While New Delhi would continue to deepen both the economic and security pillars of its strategic partnerships with major countries in the region, it would also increasingly operate according to a long-term strategic vision for its role in the region.

Moreover, the growing diplomatic and security role of Pakistan in West Asia, spearheaded by its military elite, poses challenges, especially if it can mobilise both diplomatic and military support for its misadventurous policy against India. India can also leverage its strong bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia, and the mutually beneficial improvement of India–Turkish relations, to nudge Riyadh and Ankara to support stability not only in their own region but also in South Asia.

¹¹ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, “[Turkey’s Search for a Middle East Order](#)”, Brookings, 16 June 2026.

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