

## **A New Alliance in the Middle East Equation: “Mecca Joint Defense Agreement” or “Sunni Axis?”**

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With Donald Trump's return to office as President of the United States on January 20, 2025, significant disruptions and various crises have emerged in the international system. Although these developments are associated with Trump's leadership, they are actually progressing systematically around the world. Because there are many countries that compete with global powers and aim to become global powers in the future. For this reason, alliances and collaborations formed by medium-sized states have become balancing elements against the globalist powers that have shaped the world order since the Second World War. In this context, the profound upheavals in the international arena, and especially in the Middle East (such as the October 7 Gaza incident, Israel's attack on Iran, the weakening of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the undermining of the Houthi Movement in Yemen), have made the formation of new alliances in the region a necessity. The international system's shaping of global and regional developments has brought to the forefront a possible trilateral alliance between Pakistan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Particularly the conjunctural developments that have emerged with the events in the Middle East stand out as one of the most important issues.

The other hand, it is noteworthy that after detailed consultations between the parties of the aforementioned tripartite alliance, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will visit Saudi Arabia on August 7, 2026, and the agreements will be signed. Because when the relations between Türkiye and Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, or the mutual relations of all three countries are considered comprehensively, this alliance is of great importance in the context of region, strategy and security. Of course, the trilateral alliance is not merely a specific initiative aimed at security threats in the Middle East.

This alliance also aims to contribute to the struggle of Türkiye, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia against common threats to the Islamic world and to reshape regional balances. The real question is whether the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement was implemented to counter existing or future threats in the Islamic world, or to forge an alliance similar to the 1955 Baghdad Pact between Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. In other words, it is necessary to determine whether the countries in question formed this alliance out of their own needs or out of a need to shape regional balances and alliances.

### **How Did the Tripartite Alliance for the Middle East Develop and What Does It Mean?**

The trilateral alliance that has come to the fore between Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, with the completion of diplomatic consultations and President Erdoğan's signing of the "Mecca Joint Defense Agreement" in Mecca, is reminiscent of a situation similar to the Baghdad Pact. This is because the

establishment of such an alliance is related to the geopolitical weight and influence that each of the three countries has in their respective regions. For example, it can be said that Türkiye is a significant power in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and even on a global scale. As a NATO member, Turkey has considerable power in the military and defense industry in these regions. Pakistan is the only nuclear power in the Islamic world and a key player in South Asia. It is also noteworthy that Saudi Arabia is the economic and religious center of gravity in the Gulf and the Islamic world, playing a significant role in regional security and the stability of energy markets. Any rapprochement or establishment of a joint defense alliance between Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia demonstrates that positive or negative developments in the regional context can no longer be resolved by each country's own policies in terms of security and diplomacy. In this case, if a regional alliance similar to NATO or the Baghdad Pact is to be established, it is important that the member countries subsequently adopt harmonious policies in line with their strategic and common interests, as a single bloc.

Conversely, Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif signed the "Joint Strategic Defence Agreement" in September 2025. This agreement was made to increase security cooperation within the framework of the two countries' efforts to ensure peace in the Middle East and the world. Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, in a statement to the Saudi Press Agency, emphasized that the bilateral agreement signed with Saudi Arabia "aims to improve aspects of defense cooperation between the two countries and increase joint deterrence against any attack." According to this bilateral agreement, any attack on one of the two countries will be considered an attack on both countries. In this context, it can be said that with the agreement signed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in September 2025, Pakistan has become an important security partner for Saudi Arabia. Because, according to the Collective Defense Agreement, the clause "an attack on one country shall be considered an attack on the other" constitutes an important line of defense between the two countries.

In light of the above developments, Pakistan's Minister of Defence Industries, Raza Hayat Hiraj, stated on January 15, 2026, that Pakistan had finalized a draft defence alliance with Turkey and Saudi Arabia after approximately one year of negotiations, and that talks were continuing to reach a final agreement that would pave the way for formal signing. Hiraj stated that this alliance was different from the bilateral Joint Defence Agreement that Pakistan signed with Saudi Arabia last year.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated in a press conference on January 15, 2026, that Ankara was in talks with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to join a defense alliance to be established by the two countries. Fidan explained that discussions and negotiations were ongoing between the parties, but no agreement had yet been signed. In light of all these developments, Ankara's involvement in such a comprehensive defense alliance with Riyadh regionally demonstrates a strategic shift in foreign policy and defense in the Middle

East equation. This situation will have significant implications for Türkiye's relations with Iran or Arab countries. For instance in the long term, there is a possibility that Türkiye could become involved in a potential conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

### **The Importance of the Türkiye-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Alliance**

Ankara's relations with Islamabad date back to 1947, the year of Pakistan's founding. Turkey was among the first countries to support and recognize Pakistan's independence and contributed to Islamabad's admission to the United Nations. Regardless Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relations have developed in parallel on religious, political, and security grounds. Turkey-Saudi Arabia relations, however, have been built in a spiral of competition and cooperation, significantly influenced by regional changes. During the Arab Spring, while Saudi Arabia pursued policies against the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, Türkiye, Egypt, and other Arab countries supported this movement. However, all this, a conjunctural basis exists for these countries to become allies in the context of current regional developments.

From this perspective, it is necessary to distinguish between the relationship between Türkiye and Pakistan and the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia within the context of the trilateral alliance. Because it can be said that each of the three countries has relations with each other on different grounds. But, looking at the Kashmir issue as an example, it is seen that a strategic trust environment, extending to cooperation, has been created between the three countries because Ankara and Riyadh have supported Islamabad in all international platforms from the beginning. In addition, it is possible to emphasize that the trilateral alliance that Pakistan has established with Türkiye, which has a strong defense industry, and Saudi Arabia, which has influence both in terms of its economic power and its Muslim identity, will be effective on the international stage. Pakistan attaches special importance to its relations with both Türkiye and Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that Pakistani policymakers can be described as characterizing Türkiye as an effective regional military power and Saudi Arabia as a key supporter that can play a leading role in the region and the Islamic world. This situation necessitates taking into account the ongoing conflict with India over Kashmir and Israel's expanding aggressive power and influence in the region after October 7. Therefore, a strategic alliance between Türkiye, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia would create an alternative equation in the Middle East to Israel, India, and the United Arab Emirates.

On the other hand, it is necessary to remember some differences in approach that have occurred in the past between the three countries. For example, Ankara and Islamabad had completely different policies during the Afghan civil war. Because Ankara supported the Northern Alliance while Islamabad supported the Afghan Taliban. Riyadh followed different policies depending on special circumstances. However, these differences did not turn into fundamental disagreements and did not affect the essence of relations between the three countries. In other words, these political divergences and differences of

opinion remained within certain limits and did not lead to major crises. In light of all the developments mentioned above, Ankara-Islamabad relations have improved since 2016, and these relations have been further strengthened by the expansion of joint military exercises, the signing of defense agreements, and Türkiye's investments in Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sector. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, plays a supportive role in maintaining economic and political stability in Pakistan.

The scope and content of the "Mecca Joint Defence Agreement," signed on August 7, 2026, by Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with President Erdoğan and Pakistan Prime Minister Sharif at the Safa Palace in Mecca, are of great regional importance. It is possible to say that the Mecca Agreement will create a regional shield by strengthening collective deterrence in the Middle East or the Islamic world. In particular, it can be emphasized that the provision in the agreement text stating that any armed attack against any member state will be considered an attack against all members is a critical threshold. Therefore, the aforementioned agreement text declares that it does not directly target any third country, and its sole purpose is to increase collective deterrence and protect regional peace. In this context, the Mecca Mutual Defence Agreement can be considered a regional military and defense agreement similar to NATO or the Baghdad Pact.

It is important to underline that the current alliance talks between Türkiye, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia are not ordinary, but rather a transition towards a multi-dimensional strategic partnership within the framework of cooperation. This is because Pakistan demonstrated its support for Baku during the 44-day War of Independence between Armenia and Azerbaijan, showing that this is in line with Türkiye. Regardless it is worth noting that Pakistan's strategies have also had an impact on the agreements between Saudi Arabia and Türkiye on many regional issues. It can be said that the rapprochement and cooperation opportunities in the relations between Türkiye, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia are actually stronger than the difficulties that could prevent the establishment of a trilateral alliance.

When evaluated within the context of regional developments, it is necessary to emphasize that the conflict between India and Pakistan, Israel's violent attacks on Gaza, the escalating tension against Iran since February 28, the power rivalry between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in Yemen, and Tel Aviv's ongoing interventions in Syria have accelerated the rapprochement of these three countries. In addition, when the strengthening cooperation between India and Israel is added, it virtually compels Ankara, Riyadh, and Islamabad to form a common alliance to protect regional security balance and stability in order to combat threats in the Middle East under the "Mecca Joint Defense Agreement." On the other hand, it is also necessary to remember some differences in approach that have existed between the three countries in the past. For example, Ankara and Islamabad had completely different policies during the Afghan civil war. Ankara supported the Northern Alliance while Islamabad supported the Afghan Taliban. Riyadh pursued different policies depending on specific circumstances. However, these differences did not turn into fundamental disagreements and did not affect the essence of relations between the three

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and Islamabad to form a common alliance under the "Mecca Joint Defense Agreement" to combat threats in the Middle East and maintain regional security balance and stability.

### **Overall Assessment**

With the Trump era, the international system has entered an age of alliances, and as a result of the rapid changes in the Middle East and the world, the establishment of an Islamic alliance, led by countries such as Türkiye, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, along with the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, is of serious importance. From another perspective, aiming to transform the long-standing cooperation between Ankara and Islamabad, and Riyadh and Islamabad, into a defense alliance has a high probability of success in the short and medium term. It is openly available that there are advanced discussions between Turkey and Pakistan regarding defense industry and fighter jets, unmanned aerial vehicles, and technology exchange, including experience sharing. Pakistan's share in Turkish defense industry exports is 10%.

The signing of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement could offer deterrence and collective defense capabilities in important issues concerning the Middle East, particularly Palestine and Kashmir, or especially the Islamic world. In light of all these developments, the aforementioned agreement is a regional defense shield rather than a "Sunni axis" as Israel claims. President Erdoğan's statement regarding the agreement, emphasizing that it affirms the right to self-defense as defined in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, that it does not target any country, and that it is open to the participation of all brotherly countries aiming for the peace, prosperity, and stability of our region, is an important message. It is highly likely that this agreement will expand in the coming period with the participation of Egypt, Qatar, Syria, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

In summary, rather than focusing on whether the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement signed between Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia will be effective, attention should be paid to how these countries will proceed with the alliance in the near future in regional crises (Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen). Because the extent to which the countries within the alliance will adhere to the terms of the agreement will become clear over time. Currently, however, there are some unanswered questions. It is not yet clear whether joint action will only be taken in the event of attacks from states, or whether joint action will also be taken in the event of threats from non-state armed groups, militias, or terrorist organizations in any country. For example, the Houthis in Yemen and the Iranian-backed Shia militia forces in Iraq occasionally target Saudi Arabia. In such a situation, it is unclear whether this agreement will be implemented. It currently seems more likely that the answers to these questions will be given through the developments in the region in the coming period.