The Mecca Agreement: Türkiye–Saudi Arabia–Pakistan Alignment and the Making of a New Regional Security Order

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The recent geopolitical landscape in the Middle East has witnessed a momentum in rapprochement between regional actors. Following the normalization of relations in 2021, Ankara and Riyadh, first increased their economic cooperation and then deepened their partnerships, particularly in strategically critical areas such as the defense industry. By 2025, a framework for closer cooperation had already emerged as Ankara and Riyadh have adopted common approaches in their foreign policies concerning regional issues and threats.[1]

However, the escalation of the U.S.-Iran war on February 28, 2026 has transformed this bilateral effort into a trilateral framework. The "Operation Epic Fury" and the subsequent regional chaos proved that a Türkiye-Saudi partnership alone is not enough to create a security bloc that would serve as an alternative security arrangement for Gulf partners. This is where Pakistan's strategic inclusion becomes the "third pillar" of a new regional architecture. By integrating Pakistan's seasoned military manpower and fighter jet deployments with Turkish defense technology and Saudi financial weight, these three nations have formalized a new platform serving as an alternative power center through the trilateral defense agreement signed in Jeddah on 7 August 2026.[2]

1 Gökhan Ereli, "Turkey moves to power Saudi Arabia's defense-driven economic transformation", *Amwaj Media*, 6 March 2025.

2 "Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan sign joint defense agreement at Mecca summit", *Anadolu Agency*, 7 August 2026; "Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye sign defence deal amid regional turmoil", *Al Jazeera*, 7 August 2026.

Given the increasing instability following the US-Iran war, the trilateral collaboration increasingly functions as a survival mechanism, particularly for Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's role as a leading mediator in facilitating the April 2026 ceasefire and its willingness to provide a new security umbrella through its strategic deterrence partially compensates for declining U.S. security guarantees. This platform has now evolved into a formal political-military bloc capable of resisting both Israeli expansionism and the spillover effects of the U.S.-Iran conflagration.

This realignment may signal the early stages of a new political conjuncture in the context of alliance formation in the Middle East. By integrating their respective strengths, these states aim to formulate more effective policies under conditions of regional uncertainty. This rapprochement, both in terms of timing and content, should be primarily regarded as a necessity arising from the uncertainty created by regional and global threats, particularly in the post February 28 period. Indeed, the abrupt changes in U.S. policies in the Middle East, coupled with the growing sense of insecurity within the Gulf region, as well as Israel's military actions in Gaza and beyond and its subsequent assertive regional strategies, constituted significant warning signals for states such as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. These countries, tasked with maintaining intricate political equilibria, were thereby compelled to pursue new strategic avenues for collaboration.

The Mecca Agreement

On 7 August 2026, the trilateral cooperation framework among Türkiye, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia transitioned from a regional alignment to a robust alliance centered on defense collaboration. In a last minute announced ceremony in Mecca, Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed a joint defense agreement formally

binding Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan into a single collective security framework. The signing followed nearly a year of trilateral negotiations and arrived roughly eleven months after the original Saudi-Pakistani Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement was signed in Riyadh in September 2025.

The new pact extends to Ankara the collective-defense logic first established between Riyadh and Islamabad which suggests "an attack on any one signatory is to be treated as an attack on all three", a clause widely compared to NATO's Article 5. In practical terms, the agreement institutionalizes the division of strategic labor between Riyadh, Islamabad and Ankara. In other words, Saudi Arabia's financial capacity, Pakistan's nuclear deterrence and manpower, and Türkiye's conventional military strength and defense-industrial base are now put together under a single legal and political framework rather than a loose convergence of interests.

The signing confirms the central argument of this report which reads that the post-February 28 regional order has produced not merely closer coordination among Ankara, Riyadh, and Islamabad, but a durable institutional structure. The following analysis centers on delineating the factors that contributed to the establishment of a formalized, ratified alliance between the three countries. The study also examines the difficulties that the Mecca Agreement may encounter.

US as an Obscure Partner

A key factor prompting both Ankara, Riyadh and Islamabad to reassess their alliance strategies is the shifting nature of U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East.[3] As seen in the National Security Strategy document published by the White House, the US would not wish to be a party

3 "National security strategy of the United States of America", *The White House*, November 2025.

to new conflicts in the Middle East. Although Israel's security is still an important component of US policy in the region, Washington appears increasingly reluctant to treat the region as one to be actively managed but as a region that hosts potential partnerships for trade and technology investments as long as it suits its interests.

In addition to this, the US retreat in action and rhetoric, the Israeli attack in Doha has also made US security guarantees less 'reassuring' in the eyes of regional actors.[4] This concern has even further deepened following US attack on Iran and the quagmire it created in the Gulf region. The discussion of the US security umbrella and Iran's withdrawal from the region after its heavy defeat in the Syria-Lebanon line has opened up new competition in the Middle East and paved the way for new platforms for collaboration. Israel's unrestrained aggression in the region has also triggered Ankara's security concerns with attacks in Iran, Syria, and Qatar. Questions such as the future of the Turkish military presence in Syria and the possible participation of the Turkish Armed Forces in the peacekeeping force in Gaza show that a confrontation between Türkiye and Israel is very likely in the medium and long term, and Ankara is not only looking for a way to increase its military capacity but also to secure itself through new regional partnerships.

Riyadh, on the other hand, was initially triggered by the Israeli attack on Doha, and then US war against Iran, which had a significant impact on Gulf security. These developments raised serious doubts in the Gulf about the 'functioning of the US security umbrella'. These doubts, as seen in the case of Yemen, have prompted Riyadh to act with urgency and encouraged the Saudi leadership to pursue regional co-operation.

In this context of declining trust, the physical military presence of regional powers such as Türkiye and Pakistan has become a central element of the

4 "Israel on the rampage: The strategic implications of the attack on Doha", *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*, 24 September 2025.

new security architecture. While the US security guarantees are increasingly perceived by regional actors as conditional and distant, the tangible deployment of Pakistani troops and fighter jets to Saudi Arabia provides a more immediate and culturally aligned defense framework.[5] This partnership can be interpreted as a strategic adjustment. Pakistan acts as a reliable security provider that does not bring the complicated political baggage often associated with Western military interventions.

Furthermore, this cooperation creates a "Plan B" security model for the Kingdom. By coordinating with Pakistan and Türkiye, Riyadh is building a defense system that relies on regional partners who have a direct stake in the stability of the Gulf. For example, the integration of Pakistani military expertise with Turkish advanced defense technology may offer a level of protection that the U.S. umbrella did not consistently provide during the 2026 crisis. This trilateral military synergy compensates for the decline of U.S. guarantees and signals a shift toward regionalized defense.

Pakistan as the Strategic Mediator

The inclusion of Pakistan into this strategic alignment adds a diplomatic dimension beyond military cooperation. While the Middle East was witnessing the destructive effects of the 2026 U.S.-Iran war, Pakistan positioned itself as a mediator, hosting talks involving delegates comprising of senior officials from both countries and facilitating the essential April 8 ceasefire through the "Islamabad Talks".[6] This role was the result of intense coordination with Ankara. By hosting high-level consultations with the foreign ministers of Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt in late March 2026, Islamabad successfully positioned this platform as an alternative for

5 Faisal Ali, "Pakistan sends fighter jets to Saudi Arabia amid fragile US-Iran ceasefire", *Al Jazeera*, 11 April 2026.

6 "US-iran peace talks: How Pakistan came to host the talks", *BBC*, 10 April 2026.

conflict resolution. This coordination allowed these nations to present a unified front, particularly within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), ensuring that regional peace was managed by regional actors rather than external superpowers.

Furthermore, this diplomatic synergy is fundamental to the pursuit of strategic autonomy for the Muslim world. The Islamabad Talks, which saw direct engagement between U.S. and Iranian officials for the first time since 1979, demonstrated that Pakistan and Türkiye could provide a "security-for-peace" framework that the West could not achieve alone. By leveraging its 900-kilometer border with Iran and its deep-rooted strategic ties with Riyadh, Pakistan has acted as a bridge that prevents localized conflicts from turning into a total regional collapse.

This trilateral alignment, now codified in a signed defense pact, helps reduce exposure to the volatility of U.S. foreign policy shifts.. When the U.S. security umbrella became questionable following the Doha attacks, the combined diplomatic weight of Ankara and Islamabad offered Riyadh a more stable alternative. Through this coordination, the alliance does not just balance Iran and Israel, it positions itself to fill potential gaps in regional power dynamics. Consequently, Pakistan's role as a mediator and its nuclear deterrence capacity, Türkiye's military power and multi-dimensional foreign policy and Saudi Arabia's financial capacity and central position in Gulf security is transforming this alliance from an informal arrangement into a durable, treaty-based component of regional stability that can challenge the assertiveness of both Israel and traditional global powers.

Israeli Expansionism

Israel's aggressive expansionist strategy, which has become more evident after 7 October, has simultaneously activated the security concerns of both Ankara, Riyadh and Pakistan. On the Iraqi and Syrian fronts, Ankara is

in intensive contact with Israel's PKK card, which continues to threaten Türkiye directly, as well as Turkish allies in the region. Türkiye's military presence in Syria has provided Tel Aviv with a pretext for Israeli incursions into the region. It is also possible to say that Israel is directly and indirectly taking sides against Ankara's regional counterparts in Sudan and Somalia. In order to avoid seeing the Turkish Armed Forces in Syria and Gaza, Israel has been announcing its discontent with Ankara's regional policies both in the media and at the level of leaders, and this situation has led Turkish foreign policy decision-makers to emphasize "Israel" more clearly in their statements on the YPG, especially in the Syrian context.[7]

On the other hand, from the perspective of Saudi Arabia, Israel's measures undermining the stability of the newly established Syrian government,[8] which seeks to cultivate close ties with Saudi Arabia in the region, as well as its impact on the Lebanese government, which receives direct support from Riyadh, have been regarded as destabilizing. Furthermore, Israel's breaches of the Gulf security framework, exemplified by the attacks in Doha and its involvement in Yemen, have been perceived as particularly alarming developments. Finally, Riyadh's transition from approaching normalization with Israel to adopting a stance of balancing against Israel has been prompted by Tel Aviv's aggressive actions in the region, which have engendered a sense of insecurity in Riyadh.

The 2026 war between the U.S. and Iran provided a window for Israel to project its military power deeper into the Levant and even toward the Gulf region. US attacks on Iran was consequently caused serious damage for the Gulf countries and demonstrated that traditional deterrence models are no longer sufficient to protect Gulf sovereignty. Rather than prioritizing concerns of Gulf nations, the U.S. has become a direct party to the conflict, effectively endangering the very survival of the Gulf monarchies.

7 "Türkiye warns Israel-YPG co-op may harm Damascus deal", *Daily Sabah*, 22 December 2025.

8 "Saudi Arabia condemns Israeli 'aggression' against Syria", *Arab News*, 21 March 2026.

From Regional Competition to Economic Integration

Ankara sees the power vacuum in the region, where Iran has suffered a critical loss of capacity, and the US has shifted its focus, as an opportunity to make itself the most important actor in the region, and instead of an aggressive strategy, it has sought new collaborations. The renewed rapprochement with Egypt and the restoration of relations with Saudi Arabia, which were once at a breaking point due to the blockade of Qatar, and the upward trend in these relations again provide clues to Ankara's strategy. Türkiye is keen to advance its growing influence in Syria and its positive relations with Iraq and Egypt without triggering a new rivalry, and in this respect, cooperation with Riyadh seems to be prioritized. Ankara sees cooperation with Riyadh as an insurance that will facilitate Turkish presence in the Gulf, in addition to the Levant, North Africa, and East Africa regions as well. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia sees cooperation with Ankara as functional in terms of balancing Iran and Israel simultaneously. Like Ankara, Riyadh is also eager for increasing its influence in the Middle East and beyond. However, Iran and Israel's aggressive policies in recent years compel Riyadh to engage in a positive competition with Ankara, which involves co-operation rather than confrontation or competition.

This gradual convergence in strategic outlook has also begun to extend beyond security considerations, laying the groundwork for deeper economic coordination among Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The transformation of the relationship between these actors is driven by a shift from ideological competition to pragmatic statecraft.[9] In the previous decade, the competition for leadership in the Islamic world often led to diplomatic friction, especially regarding the role of political Islam. However, the current regional landscape, characterized by the 2026 U.S.-Iran war and

9 İsmail Numan Telci, "Turkey's vision for stability and the construction of a multi-dimensional regional alliance", *Politics Today*, 16 February 2026.

the resulting instability, has forced these actors to prioritize survival and economic resilience over ideological purity. By moving beyond these energy-consuming divisions, these countries now focus on creating tangible results through socio-economic integration.

A vital component of this realignment is the intersection of large-scale economic projects. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the Kingdom's economy away from oil,[10] finds a natural partner in Türkiye's growing role as a transcontinental logistics and energy hub. Furthermore, the integration of Pakistan into this framework connects the Gulf to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This creates a strategic bridge that links the markets of Central Asia and China with the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Such a corridor is both an economic and strategic tool to ensure that the region remains relevant in a world where global trade routes are being rewritten.

This economic synergy also serves as a stabilizing force against regional threats. When trade and investment become the primary drivers of foreign policy, the cost of conflict becomes too high to ignore. For instance, Saudi investments in the Turkish and Pakistani defense sectors do more than just build military capacity but they also create a shared industrial ecosystem that discourages unilateral actions. By linking their economic destinies, these three nations are effectively favoring development over competition or proxy wars. Consequently, the transition to pragmatic statecraft is a functional requirement to manage the post-2026 regional order. Through this integration, the trio is building a central political and economic power that can protect regional interests without relying on unpredictable external security guarantees.

10 Abdulelah Darandary and David Havrlant, "Economic diversification under Saudi Vision 2030", *King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center*, 14 April 2021.

Constraints and Risks

Despite these trends, the alignment faces important structural constraints which should not be underestimated. First, the historical trajectory of relations between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia shows that cooperation has not always been stable or linear. Periods of rivalry, especially after the Arab popular movements, created mutual distrust at both political and societal levels. Even though recent normalization has reduced tensions, it is not fully clear whether this rapprochement has been institutionalized deeply enough to resist future crises. In this sense, the current alignment may remain vulnerable to leadership changes or sudden regional shocks that can revive earlier disagreements.

Second, the internal conditions of the partners, particularly Pakistan, may limit the sustainability of this cooperation. Pakistan's economic fragility, recurring balance of payments problems, and dependency on external financial assistance constrain its ability to project consistent power abroad. While its military and diplomatic capacities are significant, the gap between ambition and economic capability should be carefully considered. Similarly, Saudi Arabia's strategic priorities are also evolving under its economic transformation agenda, and it is not guaranteed that long-term military commitments will always align with its domestic reform needs. These factors suggest that the alignment is shaped by internal limitations of each actor.

Finally, diverging threat perceptions may complicate the cohesion of this trilateral framework. Türkiye's security concerns are often centered on Syria and non-state actors, while Saudi Arabia focuses more on Iran and Gulf security, and Pakistan must also consider its eastern border and relations with India. Because of this, the definition of "common threat" may not always be shared in the same way. In addition, although the alliance emphasizes strategic autonomy, there is still a considerable level of dependence on external defense technologies and global supply chains. This creates a

contradiction between the goal of autonomy and the realities of the international system. For these reasons, the alignment should be understood as a flexible and evolving arrangement that may face serious tests in the coming years.

Towards a Pragmatic Strategic Alignment

Finally, it should be emphasized that there are common dynamics driving the three countries to act under an alliance. The first of these dynamics is the desire of Ankara, Riyadh and Islamabad to translate their pursuit of strategic autonomy into tangible results. In line with this goal, these countries, having lost significant ground in their respective contexts, now aim to strengthen their capacity-building processes by leveraging each other's strengths and to achieve their objective of becoming key players in regional politics. For example, Türkiye, having made significant progress in the defense industry, generously shares these gains with Saudi Arabia, while Riyadh makes its hydrocarbon-based financial capacity available to Ankara. Pakistan on the other hand possess a strong military alternative and deterrence capacity given by nuclear capabilities.

The lessons learned from the 2026 U.S.-Iran conflict have accelerated this industrial synergy. During the height of the crisis, Iran's massive use of low-cost drone swarms and the subsequent heavy U.S. and Israeli electronic counter-strikes revealed a critical vulnerability. The regional actors realized that relying on Western hardware, which can be remotely controlled or withheld during a conflict, is a major strategic risk. Therefore, achieving total electronic and aerial sovereignty has become a shared priority for the Türkiye-Saudi-Pakistan bloc.

This is where the "security-for-investment" model becomes a functional necessity. By providing substantial funding for projects like the KAAN 5th-generation fighter and joint R&D in electronic warfare, Saudi Arabia is both buying equipment and securing its own defense future.[11] For Türkiye and Pakistan, this financial support allows for the rapid development of indigenous technologies that are free from external embargoes. The 2026 war proved that in a modern high-tech battlefield, having an independent military-industrial complex is the only way to ensure national survival. This trilateral cooperation creates a self-sufficient defense ecosystem.

Another critical dynamic on the path to a strategic alliance is the shared interest in preventing ideological differences from hindering cooperation. Indeed, in past years, periodic divisions stemming from claims to leadership of the Sunni world and the Muslim Brotherhood movement have been energy-consuming elements, particularly exploited by hostile actors in the region or beyond. Therefore, Ankara and Riyadh have reformulated their relationship on a plane where ideological differences cannot override strategic alliances, and have seen that this new system has the potential to yield much more beneficial results.

On the geostrategic level, it should be underlined that the combined force of Pakistan's strategic deterrence which rooted in its presumably status as a nuclear power and the Turkish military presence in the Qatar, Somalia and Syria offers a concrete alternative to US security guarantees. This potential alliance will also address the threats created by Israeli aggression. This cooperation could function as a counter-weight to expansionist strategies of Israel. By coordinating their military postures, Ankara and Islamabad ensure that any threat to Saudi territorial integrity is met with a response from regional actors who possess both the capability and the political will to maintain the balance of power. Consequently, this alliance is to insulate the region from the spillover effects of broader geopolitical confrontations.

11 John Calabrese, "The Saudi-Turkish pragmatic realignment", *AGSI*, 18 February 2026.

With the trilateral defense agreement signed in Jeddah on 7 August 2026, this rapprochement has been formalized into a regional platform for strategic cooperation. In this respect, this alliance has the potential to emerge as a central political actor in the evolving geopolitics of the Middle East. An alliance structure where ideological approaches are less important, strategic and economic cooperation is prioritized, reconciliation rather than division is the main goal, and joint foreign policy engagements are pursued, is now being tested in practice, and its success will shape the region's security architecture for years to come.

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