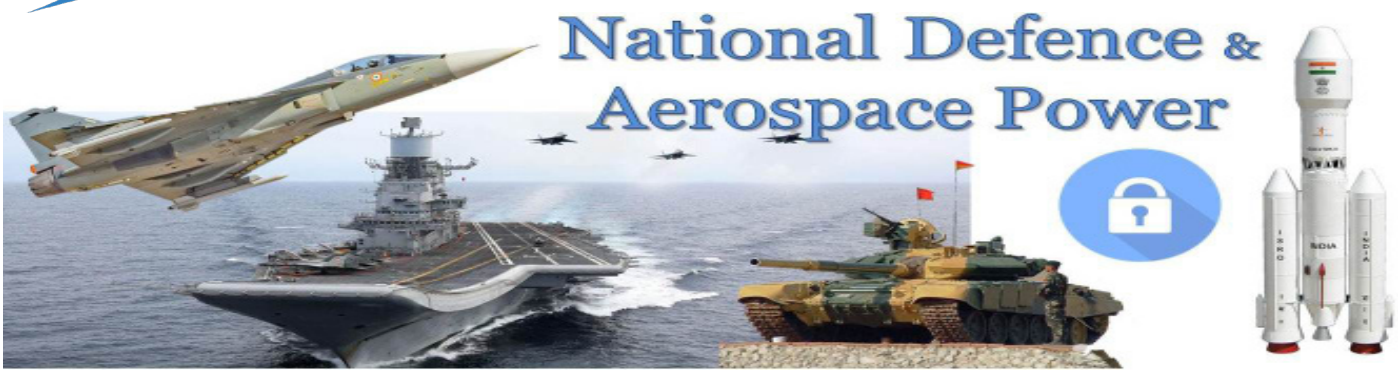
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PAKISTAN AND THE MECCA PACT: BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

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The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, signed on August 07, 2026, between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye in the holy city of Mecca, has raised some critical questions and generated ample debate regarding how it could potentially alter the security architecture in the Gulf and also how it will impact New Delhi's strategic, security, and economic concerns. The Pact's significance lies less in the joint military mechanism it creates, but more in the political geography it carves out and connections it draws between the Gulf and South Asia. The Pact has created a mechanism for the three signatories to convert historical and ideological links and political solidarity into defence cooperation and an integrated security apparatus.

As the crisis in West Asia intensified throughout 2026, Saudi Arabia's confidence in the United States (US) security umbrella weakened, and it felt a stronger need for a reliable security partner. Pakistan was anyway keen to have additional security alignments, given the fallout of the May 2025 conflict with India, when it suffered heavy strategic losses, even though it continues to drive the narrative of military victory for its own people and the world. All three parties bring a distinct advantage to the table. Saudi Arabia has the advantage

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of lavish financial capital flows, Türkiye offers a defence industrial base, and Pakistan has a large military force and an expanding nuclear arsenal. The Pact's central tenet is that an attack against one will be considered an attack against all three. With this, there is, of course, broader defence cooperation. It has also been referred to as an 'Islamic NATO', a narrative Pakistan has, for decades, tried to project to its people and the Muslim world at large to garner credibility for its self-perceived potential to acquire a broader security role in the region. Unlike the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Pact lacks clarity on the enemy, integrated defence capability, and geographical cohesion.

The location of the Pact's signing ceremony in Mecca adds symbolic weight to the agreement. It does grant the Pact more legitimacy and a popular appeal among the Muslim nations, which have diverse ideological orientations and regional agendas. Bangladesh's inclusion in the Pact is being discussed, and also the probability of Iran being a part of the security cohesion is on the cards. The extent to which the Pact expands remains to be seen and will be determined by multiple other factors.

The Mecca agreement reflects emerging dimensions of the security architecture in the Gulf, where middle powers are collaborating to form mini lateral alliances to cater to their security concerns and military build-up. Given Washington's inclination towards a 'burden-sharing' approach in the Gulf region, it can be assumed that the Mecca agreement did have US endorsement. The US eventually issued a statement expressing support for the Pact. President Donald Trump said that the Pact shows "how the Middle East is coming together, and how Countries will finally be able to defend themselves in a more meaningful way."[1]

The Pact was signed during a period of acute regional insecurity. All three signatories are aiming at different adversaries—deterring Iran remains a priority for Saudi Arabia; Pakistan would want to use the Pact to have a robust posture against India; and Türkiye would want to deal with the challenge from Israel. The agreement has ample ambiguity, and some details emerged after the first meeting of the Pact that took place in Türkiye on August 31, 2026. The Pact Secretariat will be in Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan will serve as Secretary General for the next three years. More details may emerge in subsequent rounds of meetings.

It would be useful to analyse what the three signatories gain from the Pact. For Saudi Arabia, the Pact provides an additional layer of security diversification amid its declining confidence in the US security umbrella. Saudi Arabia needs to secure its energy infrastructure, maritime routes, and development projects. The security arrangement offers Riyadh alternatives while it continues to maintain its relationship

with Washington.

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For Türkiye, the Pact brings in much-desired strategic relevance and elevates its position as a security provider in West Asia. Türkiye's relationship with Saudi Arabia has been through a strenuous phase, and this agreement does bring Ankara closer to Riyadh. Türkiye would also be keen to explore markets for its defence industry, especially as discussions around expanding the Pact continue.

Pakistan has projected the Pact as larger than life and a strategic game changer within its own country and to the outside world. The Pact can be seen as an extension of the Saudi–Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) signed in September 2025. The Mecca Pact uplifts Pakistan's diplomatic position and raises its stature to a 'net security provider' in the Gulf. Pakistan has sought financial bailouts and other rescue dividends from the Saudis for many years, and the Pact places Islamabad on a pedestal as a prime security provider for Riyadh. The agreement could, in a way, ensure continued Saudi financial support for Pakistan and will certainly give Pakistan (smoother and sustained) access to Saudi elites. Pakistan's defence cooperation with Türkiye has been gaining momentum over the last few years, and the agreement further ensures the defence partnership's continuity. For Pakistan, the Pact is a strategic assurance in times of uncertainty. Also, the initial Secretariat being with Pakistan (as Secretary-General) gives it agenda-setting influence. It will have leverage to shape the modalities and build the Pact's initial momentum.

Although public evidence and the limited details of the Pact do not show a nuclear dimension, Pakistan being a nuclear weapon state gives strategic weight to the Pact. In the past, Pakistan has emphasised and projected its nuclear weapon as an "Islamic Bomb," especially when it required funding from the Muslim world to build the nukes in the 1970s and 1980s.

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The US is moving toward a 'burden-shifting' or 'burden-sharing' approach in West Asia, where it wants to engage and maintain a strategic and economic footprint in the region without any kinetic commitment involving troop deployment or direct military operations. Pakistan, which is currently cherishing its position

in the good books of President Trump, is happy to be the US partner in this burden-sharing framework. This pact could also provide Pakistan a larger diplomatic role beyond South Asia.

Limitations for Pakistan

The agreement further formalises Pakistan's security relationships with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, which already existed through the defence cooperation agreements, defence production collaboration, military exercises, etc. Pakistan is probably the biggest beneficiary of the Pact in terms of diplomatic and strategic dividends. The relentless Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia have put the execution of the Pact to the test, and Pakistan's reaction till now has been restricted to issuing firm statements condemning the attacks, issuing warnings and expressing solidarity with Riyadh. It is unclear what kind of support Pakistan and Türkiye will extend to Saudi Arabia. The execution of the Pact does carry noticeable limitations for Pakistan, which are important to assess.

First, Pakistan seems to have seriously stretched its military commitments. A significant portion of Pakistan's military forces are positioned on its eastern borders to counter the perceived threat from India. Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan has been increasingly strained after the Taliban takeover in 2021, and the two neighbours have been in direct conflict and have exchanged strikes. Pakistan is engaged in kinetic operations along its western borders. The security situation within Pakistan is alarming, where two provinces (out of four) Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are troubled by raging insurgency and militancy. Pakistan military has been conducting counter-terror military operations without much success.

Given its security commitments to Riyadh, Pakistan has also deployed around 8,000 troops, a squadron of fighter jets, and an air defence system to Saudi Arabia under the SMDA.[2] In addition, Pakistan has committed to the Mecca Pact, which includes a collective security clause. It has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somalia to deepen cooperation on security, defence, and military capacity building.[3] Pakistan's military deployment commitments seem heavy, and the question is whether it can sustain them effectively in the long term.

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Second, the sectarian sensitivity in Pakistan and vulnerability arising from a shared border with Iran need to be

seriously considered in the potential execution of the Pact. Given the Shia population in Pakistan and support for Iran within, will Pakistan be willing to be seen as a part of an anti-Shia coalition? In 2015, Pakistan declined Saudi Arabia's proposal to be a part of a Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. And for this reason, Pakistan has been restricted to issuing statements in its response to the Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia (at the time of writing this brief).

Third, Pakistan's financial crisis and continued dependence on external finance will continue to shape its posture. In recent years, Pakistan has heavily relied on the lavish and convenient bailouts by the Saudis, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and China. Although Pakistan's latest economic figures project growth and stability in foreign reserves, the economy's basic structural issues remain unchanged. The debt burden is significant, consuming a large part of the federal budget, and the revenue-spending gap continues to pressure the economy. The economic stress and heavy reliance on external assistance (International Monetary Fund and World Bank) create a structural asymmetry within the Pact.

Fourth, for the last couple of years, Pakistan has been trying to manage its relationship with Iran; it has positioned itself as a neutral mediator in the West Asian crisis and has high stakes in the conflict. Given the economic, security, and strategic stakes for Pakistan, its limited response is understandable.

What Does it Imply for India?

Developments in West Asia have altered Pakistan's strategic position and elevated its diplomatic standing. Its long-term relationship with the Saudis has been transformed into a formal security partnership. The new security architecture in West Asia implies stronger security signalling for Pakistan and may entail a more assertive role in crisis management. Assessment of Pakistan's strategic behaviour in the past suggests Islamabad's diplomatic elevation could potentially strengthen Pakistan's risk-taking capabilities vis-à-vis India. Pakistan could also try to cultivate support (against India) at the international forums and project its threat perceptions in West Asia.

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Another significant consequential effect of the Pact would be on defence cooperation. It can be assumed that

Pakistan will gain smoother access to Saudi funds and Turkish platforms, electronic warfare (EW) capabilities, drones, fifth-generation aircraft, the Turkish KAAN and naval technology. This could influence regional security dynamics through broader maritime security cooperation, port access, diplomatic positioning of the three states, intelligence sharing, and military exercises. India will need to closely watch the potential impact of this defence triangle on India's ambitious project, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

The Government of India's reaction to the developments in West Asia and the Mecca Pact has been to be watchful: "We (India) continue to closely follow developments in the West Asia conflict. As far as this particular agreement is concerned, we are examining its implications, both from the perspective of our national security as well as considerations of regional peace and stability. India remains fully committed to safeguarding its national interests and will take all necessary measures in this regard."[4]

India has high stakes in the Gulf, and this needs cautious management. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is India's largest trading partner, and in the Financial Year (FY) 2024-2025 trade reached USD 178.56 billion (Exports: USD 56.87 billion; Imports: USD 121.68 billion). This amounts to around 15 per cent of India's global trade.[5] Not only trade, but the GCC is also a critical source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for India, and as of September 2025, cumulative investments from the GCC exceeded USD 31.14 billion.[6] Indian diaspora in the GCC is close to around 10 million people, and according to the Government of India, "These strong and enduring people-to-people connections form the foundation of the relationship between India and GCC countries, which is further reinforced by the substantial presence of Indian companies across the region."[7]

In February this year, India and the GCC signed a Joint Statement on the Free Trade Agreement.[8] The strategic partnership between India and Saudi Arabia remains rooted in crude oil and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), green energy, industrial collaboration, investment, intelligence sharing, and people-to-people contacts. Given India's deep engagement in the region, the Gulf monarchies are less likely to be drawn into the India-Pakistan crisis.

The West Asian region is also multi-aligning, cautiously managing its relationships with the US, Pakistan, China, and India to serve diverse interests, including security, diplomacy, infrastructure, skilled labour, and technology. However, given the complex dynamics in the region, it looks like it is time for India to recalibrate its approach in West Asia and ensure the security of its strategic and economic interests.

Irrespective of the outcome of mediation efforts in the West Asian crisis, Pakistan will continue to reap the dividends of its expanded and assertive role in the region. The short-term implications of the Mecca Pact will be Pakistan's elevated diplomatic position, revival of strategic relevance, and a psychological boost. The long-term implications of the Pact will be enhanced political consultation and defence industrial collaboration between the three countries and potential expansion of the Pact. However, there are serious limitations for Pakistan: its financial vulnerabilities, continued dependence on bilateral and multilateral financing, emerging nature of the state with autocratic positioning of the military establishment, fragile political setup, raging insurgency, and intense militancy within. India has distinct leverage from its political stability, sustained growth, and structural advantage in West Asia. It remains to be seen how it sustains this advantage and also converts its economic and demographic influence into strategic advantage.

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Notes:

[1] "Trump Welcomes Defense Pact Between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan," *Arab News*, August 17, 2026, https://www.arabnews.com/middle-east/trump-welcomes-defense-pact-between-saudi-arabia-turkiye-and-pakistan-2654914. Accessed on August 20, 2026.

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[5] Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India, "India and Gulf Cooperation Council Sign Joint Statement on the India–GCC Free Trade Agreement," February 24, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2232327&reg=48&lang=2. Accessed on August 12, 2026.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

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