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Syria's Potential Accession to the Makkah Pact: Strategic Implications and Regional Security Considerations

Dr. Tughral Yamin [1]

Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani said that there are negotiations on whether Syria will join the Makkah pact, and that Syria is part of the region's security either way. He spoke at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain. He had said much the same in Islamabad in August, when he told reporters Damascus was weighing whether to join the new Saudi-Turkish-Pakistani grouping. That visit was the first by a Syrian foreign minister to Pakistan in 19 years. Read closely, the statements are cautious. Damascus has "considered" and "discussed" joining, but it has not applied, and nobody has invited it.

The motive is easy to understand. The Makkah agreement, signed on 7 August this year, states that an attack on one of the three countries is an attack on all of them. For a government that has faced repeated Israeli attacks on its territory, a clause like that is very attractive. A state that is rebuilding its army and still lacks full control of its own territory would gain a great deal from even a loose association with a Saudi-Turkish-Pakistani bloc.

Does Syria Really Have "Nothing" to Offer?

However, this assessment may be overstated. Syria is weak by conventional measures, but alliances are not built only on military contributions. The Saudi-Pakistani relationship is itself lopsided. Riyadh brings money and Islamabad brings manpower and a nuclear umbrella, and nobody calls that a transaction between equals.

Syria does bring a few things:

- Geography: It sits between Turkey, Israel, Iraq and Jordan, and it is a front line in several regional rivalries at once.
- Political Value: A Syria that anchors itself to the Sunni-majority powers, rather than to Iran or to Russia, is a strategic gain for Ankara and Riyadh. That matters more than any tank count.
- Alignment: Damascus has already voiced support for the Gulf states against missile and drone attacks, which signals where it wants to stand.

The Real Obstacle is Cost, Not Capability

The problem is not that Syria is too weak to contribute. It is that Syria could be a liability. A mutual-defence clause works only if members are willing to fight for each other. If Damascus joined, any new Israeli strike or flare-up on the Golan would become a question for Riyadh, Ankara and Islamabad about whether the pact applies. Pakistan, already stretched on its own borders and managing its commitments to Saudi Arabia on

[1] Brig (r) Dr. Tughral Yamin is a Senior IPS Associate. He can be reached at tughral@ips.net.pk

two tracks, is unlikely to want that exposure. Turkey has its own friction with Israel over Syria. Saudi Arabia has spent recent years trying to lower regional tensions, not take on new ones.

Accordingly, the allies are likely to respond in a way that falls short of outright approval. Plausible forms include observer status, a bilateral defence or training arrangement with one of the three, or a vague statement of "cooperation" with the grouping. Those give Damascus political cover without triggering the collective-defence clause. Al-Shaibani's own phrasing, that Syria will stand by anybody that protects regional security whether or not it formally joins, suggests Damascus knows this and is leaving itself room.

The Bottom Line

Syria's request will not fail for lack of anything to offer, but it could stall because membership is too expensive for the existing members to accept. The decision will say less about Syria's merits than about how far Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan want the pact to extend, and whether they see it as a deterrent for the three of them or the start of a wider security bloc. For now, expect warm words, more visits and quiet bilateral deals, and no formal accession.