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Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

The Makkah Agreement: A New Strategic Layer in Pakistan's Security Calculus

Tughrul Yamin¹

On 7 August 2026, in the holiest city of Islam, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye signed the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement – a trilateral pact declaring that an armed attack on any one of the three states will be treated as an attack on all three. The image of Shehbaz Sharif, Mohammed bin Salman, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan standing together after the signing was as symbolically loaded as it was strategically significant. It builds on the bilateral Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed in September 2025, and it arrives at a moment when the region's old security assumptions are visibly cracking under the weight of the 2026 Iran war and the resulting doubts about American reliability as a guarantor.

For Pakistan, this is not a stray diplomatic gesture – it is another layer in a defense posture that has, for decades, been built out of necessity rather than choice.

Three Countries, Three Threats

The most interesting – and most complicating – feature of this pact is that its three signatories don't share a single, common adversary. Saudi Arabia has spent the past several years watching Iran and Iran-aligned militias (the Houthis, Iraqi Shia groups) strike at its territory and its economic ambitions directly. Türkiye's

threat map is different – it runs through the Kurdish question, tensions with Greece and Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, and its own complicated relationship with Syria and Russia. Pakistan's threat perception, meanwhile, is dominated overwhelmingly by India, with Israel occupying a much smaller and more recent place in that calculus.

A pact stitched together from three different threat maps is, almost by definition, not going to function like NATO's Article 5. Analysts have been explicit about this: the arrangement is better understood as a framework for closer strategic, industrial, and diplomatic coordination among three regional powers than as an ironclad collective-defence treaty with automatic triggers. Pakistan's own foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, was careful to describe it as “purely defensive in nature” and not directed at any particular country – a necessary hedge, given how differently Riyadh, Ankara, and Islamabad might read the same provocation.

That ambiguity is a real limitation. But it doesn't mean the pact is empty of value for Pakistan – it just means the value has to be understood in layers rather than as a single guarantee.

Where Pakistan Actually Gains

A hedge against an unreliable Washington

¹ Brig (r) Tughrul Yamin is a Senior IPS Associate. He can be reached at tughrul@ips.net.pk

The most important shift underlying this agreement is not Pakistani or Saudi military doctrine – it is the growing regional perception that the United States can no longer be counted on as the default security guarantor. Analysts at the Atlantic Council have framed the pact as part of the emergence of a “post-American Middle East” – not one without the US, but one that no longer organizes its security exclusively around American power. For a country like Pakistan, which has ridden the boom-and-bust cycle of American strategic interest for seventy years – indispensable during the Cold War and the War on Terror, sidelined in between – a partnership that doesn’t rise and fall with Washington’s attention span is genuinely valuable, independent of how binding its legal language turns out to be.

Strategic and psychological weight vis-à-vis India

Pakistan’s security establishment has always sought to compensate for India’s larger conventional military and economy through alliances, nuclear deterrence, and diplomatic weight. The Makkah Agreement adds to that toolkit. Indian commentary itself is the best evidence that this matters: Indian strategists and defence planners have written that the pact deserves “careful attention” because it could strengthen Pakistan’s battlefield position and add international political pressure that shortens the window for India to convert any future military success into a lasting strategic outcome. When your rival’s own analysts are recalibrating around your new alliance, that alliance has done real strategic work – even before a single shot is fired under its terms.

Money, technology, and defence-industrial depth

The three partners bring genuinely complementary assets to the table: Türkiye’s fast-growing defence-industrial base (drones, armoured vehicles, naval platforms), Saudi Arabia’s financial firepower, and Pakistan’s large, combat-experienced military and its nuclear deterrent. For Pakistan specifically – chronically short of foreign exchange and investment capital

– closer defence-industrial and financial integration with Riyadh and Ankara offers a pathway to modernizing its forces that does not run through Washington.

Diplomatic insulation and regional standing

Pakistan has spent years working to be seen as more than “the country next to Afghanistan” or “the country with the bomb.” Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and a NATO member with regional ambitions of its own repositions, Pakistan has emerged as a central node in a new axis of Muslim-majority middle powers, rather than a peripheral, aid-dependent actor. That status is itself a form of security – it raises the diplomatic cost for any adversary contemplating unilateral action against Pakistan.

The Other Side of the Ledger

None of this comes free of complication, and a fair reading of the pact has to hold onto the caveats.

First, the trigger question remains genuinely murky. Would Riyadh and Ankara be obligated to respond militarily to an India-Pakistan clash the way Islamabad might feel entitled to expect? Nothing in the public language of the agreement answers that cleanly, and Gulf states have their own reasons to avoid being pulled into a South Asian nuclear rivalry they have no stake in.

Second, the pact has visibly accelerated countervailing alignments rather than deterring them outright. Commentary out of Israel has suggested the agreement is pushing India and Israel closer together diplomatically, and it has added friction to Saudi-Israeli normalization talks – meaning the region may simply be trading one set of blocs for another rather than becoming safer overall.

Third, Pakistan’s own nuclear doctrine remains, as analysts have pointed out, oriented specifically toward India – the Makkah Agreement does not change that targeting logic, and Islamabad has been careful not to suggest it extends its nuclear umbrella to its new partners, even as

questions about exactly that keep surfacing in the coverage

The Bottom Line

The Makkah Agreement is not a NATO-style tripwire that guarantees Saudi or Turkish soldiers would fight alongside Pakistan in a war with India. What it is – a diplomatic signal of solidarity among three regional powers,

a hedge against American unreliability, a channel for Gulf capital and Turkish defence technology, and a reminder to New Delhi that Pakistan is not diplomatically isolated – is still a meaningful addition to Pakistan's multi-layered security strategy. In a neighbourhood where certainty is scarce and alliances are increasingly transactional, adding a layer of ambiguity that works in your favour is, in itself, a form of deterrence.

