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Rapid Forces in Saudi Arabia: How Far Should Pakistan Go?

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The decision by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye to move immediately towards the rapid deployment of agreed military forces and capabilities in Saudi Arabia marks an important transition in the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement from political commitment to operational reality. But the phrase “rapid deployment” requires careful examination. It does not necessarily mean that Pakistani and Turkish troops are about to enter the Yemen war.

The emergency meeting of the Strategic-Political and Defense Committee in Riyadh on October 5 decided to implement the collective-defense commitments and ensure the rapid deployment of agreed forces and capabilities in the Kingdom, subject to approved arrangements and the national legislation of the three countries. The stated purpose is to enhance readiness, military integration and the collective capacity to counter threats.² This wording is significant.

What Does Deployment Actually Mean?

A rapid force is not necessarily a large expeditionary army. It can consist of

specialized contingents that can be moved quickly when a threat develops. In the Saudi context, the immediate requirement is likely to be defensive: air-defense personnel, radar and surveillance specialists, reconnaissance elements, electronic warfare teams, logistics and communications personnel, engineers and other specialists capable of reinforcing Saudi Arabia’s existing military architecture.

Pakistan already has military personnel in Saudi Arabia under longstanding bilateral arrangements. Defense Minister Khawaja Asif has said that Pakistani and Turkish forces currently have a supportive role, including Pakistani reconnaissance, while Saudi forces are conducting combat operations. He also indicated that the Riyadh meeting formalized the alliance’s organizational structure.³

The appointment of retired Lieutenant General Nauman Mahmood as the first Secretary-General of the Makkah Alliance for a three-year term is another indication that the alliance is beginning to acquire a permanent institutional and command mechanism.⁴

The likely model, therefore, is not a single multinational army replacing national

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² “Pakistan, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia Agree to Rapid Force Deployment in the Kingdom under Makkah Pact,” *Dawn*, October 5, 2026, updated October 6, 2026, <https://www.dawn.com/news/2034893/makkah-defence-pact-meeting-to-be-held-today-in-riyadh-confirms-fo>

³ “Pakistan, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia Agree to Rapid Force Deployment in the Kingdom under Makkah Pact,” *Dawn*, October 5, 2026, updated October 6, 2026, <https://www.dawn.com/news/2034893/makkah-defence-pact-meeting-to-be-held-today-in-riyadh-confirms-fo>

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, “Joint Statement: Emergency Meeting of the Strategic, Political and Defense Committee of the Makkah Alliance for Defense, Riyadh, 5 October 2026,” October 5, 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/joint-statement-emergency-meeting-of-the-strategic-political-and-defense-committee-of-the-makkah-alliance-for-defense-riyadh-5-october-2026>

commands. Each country should retain command over its own forces, while a joint headquarters or coordination mechanism provides intelligence fusion, communications, planning and operational coordination. Such an arrangement would permit the three countries to respond collectively without surrendering national command authority.

What would be the Missions?

The first mission should be the protection of Saudi territory. This could include reinforcing the defense of major cities, military installations, oil facilities, airports, ports and critical infrastructure against missiles and drones. The protection of Makkah and Madinah would understandably have the highest political and religious sensitivity.

The second mission could be intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. Pakistan's reported reconnaissance role is particularly relevant because early warning is indispensable against low-flying drones and cruise missiles.

The third mission would be logistics and force protection. A rapid force has little value unless it can be sustained, protected and integrated with Saudi command-and-control systems.

The fourth mission would be deterrence. The very presence of Pakistani and Turkish capabilities in Saudi Arabia would signal that an attack on the Kingdom risks confronting three militaries rather than one.

None of these four missions requires Pakistan to conduct offensive operations inside Yemen.

The Crucial Question: Where Does the Mission End?

This is where Pakistan must establish clear rules of engagement. The Makkah Agreement states that an armed attack against one member is regarded as an attack against all, while Pakistan has repeatedly described the accord as defensive and consistent with Article 51 of the UN Charter.⁵

An attack on Saudi territory therefore presents a straightforward case for collective defense. An attack on a Saudi military base, airport, oil installation or civilian population would justify Pakistani assistance in defending the Kingdom. But this is different from participating in an offensive campaign inside Yemen. The distinction is strategically vital. If Pakistani forces begin attacking Houthi positions in Yemen, Pakistan could cease to be a participant in Saudi territorial defense and become a belligerent in the Yemeni civil war. That could expose Pakistani personnel to retaliation, widen Pakistan's confrontation with Iran and potentially draw Islamabad into a conflict whose objectives, duration and end-state it cannot control.

How Can Pakistan Avoid Being Drawn into a Wider War?

Pakistan should therefore adopt a *defense-within-the-Kingdom* doctrine:

1. The government should publicly clarify that the immediate deployment is intended to protect Saudi territory and critical infrastructure.
2. Pakistani troops should operate under clearly defined national command arrangements, even when integrated with the alliance's joint planning and intelligence mechanisms.
3. The rules of engagement should distinguish between *defensive interception* and *offensive strikes*. Pakistani forces should be authorized to defend themselves and Saudi territory but should not automatically participate in attacks against targets inside Yemen.
4. Any proposed Pakistani offensive operation outside Saudi territory should require an explicit political decision by Islamabad, rather than becoming an automatic consequence of alliance coordination.
5. Pakistan should preserve its diplomatic

⁵ PMinistry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Message to the Nation on the Signing of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement," October 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/message-to-the-nation-on-the-signing-of-the-makkah-joint-defence-agreement>

channel with Iran. Islamabad has already advocated dialogue and diplomacy over coercion in dealing with the Houthi crisis.⁶ That policy should not be abandoned merely because Pakistan is strengthening Saudi Arabia's defenses.

6. Pakistan should encourage the Makkah Alliance to maintain a diplomatic track alongside its military preparations. Indeed, deterrence works best when the adversary understands the limits of the alliance as clearly as its capabilities.

A Defensive Shield, Not an Expeditionary War

The rapid deployment decision is potentially a sensible evolution of the Makkah Agreement. Saudi Arabia faces a genuine missile and drone threat, while the conflict around Bab al-Mandeb is becoming increasingly dangerous. The alliance can help Riyadh close defensive gaps without necessarily

becoming an instrument for intervention in Yemen.

Pakistan's strategic objective should therefore be simple: defend Saudi Arabia without becoming a party to every Saudi military operation. There is a major difference between helping an ally protect its territory and joining an open-ended war beyond that territory. Pakistan can honor the Makkah commitment, reinforce Saudi deterrence and protect the sanctity of the Two Holy Mosques while retaining enough strategic autonomy to pursue diplomacy.

The success of the Makkah Alliance will ultimately depend not merely on how rapidly forces can be deployed, but on how clearly the members define their missions, command relationships and limits of engagement. Rapid deployment should strengthen deterrence. It must not become a mechanism for rapid escalation.

⁶ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan 'Prefers Dialogue over Coercion' to Address Houthi Threat," Dawn, September 18, 2026, https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=18_09_2026_001_005

