

Beyond the American Umbrella

What the Mecca Accord reveals about a changing regional order

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(TUR Presidency /Murat Çetinmühürdar - Anadolu Agency)

The Mecca Accord between Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan has inevitably invited comparisons with NATO, but its significance lies elsewhere. This policy outlook argues that the agreement reflects a broader transformation in regional security: from dependence on externally supplied guarantees towards greater regional ownership and security production. Bringing together Saudi financial and geopolitical weight, Türkiye's defence-industrial capabilities and operational experience, and Pakistan's military depth and strategic deterrence, the accord seeks to turn complementary strengths into collective capacity. Rather than replacing existing alliances, it represents a form of institutionalised hedging in an increasingly unpredictable security environment. Its ultimate test will be whether the three powers can translate political solidarity into credible deterrence while preserving the strategic autonomy that brought them together in the first place.

Beyond the “Islamic NATO” Analogy

The symbolism of the agreement is difficult to overlook. The leaders of Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan did not sign their joint defence accord in an ordinary government building or on the margins of an international summit. They signed it in Mecca, Islam’s holiest city. The choice gives the agreement a political and civilizational resonance extending beyond its immediate military provisions. Three of the Muslim world’s most consequential states: an Arab power at the heart of the Gulf, a major Turkish military and industrial power, and the Muslim world’s only nuclear-armed state. The gathering, therefore, was signalling not only closer strategic cooperation, but also a willingness to assume greater responsibility for the security of a region whose stability has long depended heavily on external powers.

The location should therefore be understood as part of the message rather than dismissed as ceremonial symbolism. Mecca reinforces Saudi Arabia’s centrality to the initiative, while simultaneously situating the agreement within a wider Muslim geopolitical space. Yet, this does not necessarily make the accord sectarian, nor does it mean that its purpose is to create a bloc directed against Iran or other regional actors. Türkiye and Pakistan both maintain important relations with Iran, while Riyadh itself has invested heavily in restoring diplomatic channels with Tehran. The Islamic dimension of the agreement can therefore coexist with a more pragmatic strategic purpose: building greater regional capacity to manage security challenges collectively.

The provision attracting the greatest attention is the declaration that an armed attack against one of the three countries will be regarded as an attack against them all. Inevitably, this has encouraged comparisons with NATO and particularly with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The comparison is useful, but only up to a point.

The Mecca Accord does not claim to reproduce NATO, nor should its effectiveness be judged by whether it eventually resembles it. NATO is the product of more than seven decades of institutional development. It possesses an integrated command structure, extensive military planning mechanisms, common standards, permanent headquarters and decades of interoperability among its armed forces. The Mecca framework begins from a very different institutional and geopolitical starting point.

More importantly, even NATO’s Article 5 is not a military “silver bullet.” The popular shorthand, “an attack on one is an attack on all,” often obscures the considerable political discretion contained within the treaty itself. Article 5 commits each ally to assist an attacked member but [allows](#) each state to take “such action as it deems necessary,” including, but not necessarily limited to, the use of armed force.

Indeed, Article 5 has been formally invoked only [once](#) in NATO’s history, following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States. Its rarity is instructive. Collective defence guarantees derive much of their value from deterrence, but their credibility also depends on governments exercising considerable judgement over when and how they are activated.

Historical experience illustrates the point. During the 1982 Falklands War, Britain did not receive Article 5 protection because the islands fell outside NATO’s geographical scope, while Türkiye, after downing a Russian military aircraft that Ankara said had violated its airspace on 24 November 2015, received NATO solidarity but [did not seek](#) to invoke Article 5 despite substantial pressure from Moscow. Together, these cases underline a broader reality of alliance politics: even close allies retain considerable discretion over collective defence, and governments must weigh whether invoking an alliance guarantee will strengthen deterrence or risk exposing divisions among partners unwilling or unable to respond.

Such restraint reflects a basic reality of alliance politics: formally testing a collective-defence guarantee can be risky when partners are uncertain about responding, since a visibly divided response may damage deterrent credibility more than managing the confrontation through other means.

The lesson for the Mecca framework is not that collective defence requires automatic military intervention. Even mature alliances preserve considerable political discretion. The more relevant question is whether the three signatories can make their solidarity sufficiently credible to deter aggression while retaining enough flexibility to manage their very different threat environments. That tension will ultimately provide one of the most important tests of the accord.

Why Now?

The Mecca Accord did not emerge from a vacuum. It reflects a broader transformation in the regional security environment in which the problem is not simply that the United States is “leaving” the Middle East. Washington remains deeply embedded in the region militarily, politically and economically, and continues to maintain bases, defence partnerships and extensive security commitments across the Gulf and beyond.

What has changed is something more subtle but arguably more consequential: the predictability of the American security guarantee. For decades, many regional states operated on the assumption that, whatever disagreements might arise with Washington, the United States would ultimately remain the principal external guarantor of regional stability and the security of its partners. That assumption has become increasingly difficult to sustain.

The shift is partly structural. U.S. strategic priorities have progressively moved toward the Indo-Pacific and competition with China, while successive American administrations have encouraged regional partners to assume a greater share of the burden for their own defence. This does not amount to disengagement, but it does mean that Washington has become more selective about where, when and how it is prepared to intervene.

At the same time, the region has become more dangerous and interconnected. The spillover from Israel's genocidal campaign on Gaza expanded into acts of aggression encompassing Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Iran and the Gulf, while Israel's increasingly bellicose military posture reinforced perceptions that established restraints on regional escalation were weakening. The Houthis demonstrated how a non-state actor could disrupt international shipping across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, while Iran's missile and drone capabilities exposed the vulnerability of critical infrastructure across the Gulf. The subsequent Iran war intensified these anxieties, demonstrating how rapidly military confrontation could spill across borders and threaten the economic and security interests of states far removed from the immediate battlefield.

The Strait of Hormuz provides perhaps the clearest illustration of this interdependence: any sustained disruption would reverberate through Gulf economies, global energy markets and trade routes linking Asia and Europe, directly affecting Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan. These overlapping crises have also exposed another vulnerability in the existing security architecture: military resources are finite. Air and missile defence systems are costly, interceptor stocks limited, and simultaneous crises can create competing demands on U.S. capabilities. The question for regional governments is therefore not whether the United States retains overwhelming military power but whether that power will always be available, in sufficient quantity, at the precise moment and in the precise theatre where its partners require it.

The erosion of the old security bargain therefore does not derive from American weakness, but from uncertainty over American prioritisation. Regional states increasingly have to ask where Washington would allocate scarce resources during simultaneous crises, how quickly assistance would arrive, and whether U.S. priorities would always coincide with their own.

These questions are reshaping the behaviour of regional middle powers. Saudi Arabia is not seeking to abandon Washington, which remains indispensable to its defence, but it is increasingly unwilling to rely on a single security provider.

The logic resembles the kingdom's wider economic transformation under Vision 2030: reducing excessive dependence on a single source and building multiple pillars of resilience.

Security diversification is becoming the strategic equivalent of economic diversification. Just as Riyadh seeks to reduce dependence on oil without abandoning hydrocarbons, it can reduce dependence on the United States without abandoning the American alliance. The objective is not substitution, but optionality.

Türkiye and Pakistan follow a similar logic of strategic diversification. Ankara remains firmly anchored in NATO while investing heavily in indigenous defence capabilities and cultivating partnerships beyond the Western alliance system. Pakistan, meanwhile, retains its strategic relationship with China, deepens its longstanding security ties with Saudi Arabia and maintains important channels with Washington. Neither is abandoning established partnerships; like Saudi Arabia, both are seeking to reduce the vulnerabilities associated with excessive dependence on any single external power.

This is what makes the Mecca Accord particularly significant. Separate bilateral relationships—Saudi-Pakistani defence cooperation, Turkish-Saudi rapprochement and Turkish-Pakistani military collaboration—are acquiring a trilateral framework. The Mecca Pact can, therefore, be understood as institutionalised hedging: the three states retain existing alliances while adding a security layer they can shape themselves. Rather than marking the demise of the U.S.-led regional order, it points towards a more plural architecture in which American power is increasingly supplemented by cooperation among regional middle powers.

The deeper transition is from a system in which security was predominantly supplied from outside towards one in which regional states increasingly seek to help produce it themselves. The Mecca Accord is not a rejection of existing alliances, but an attempt to create additional options when established guarantees prove insufficient, uncertain or overstretched.

From Security Consumers to Security Producers

Perhaps the most useful conceptual lens through which to understand the Mecca Accord comes from Professor Murat Yeşiltaş, Director of Foreign Policy Research at SETA. [Writing](#) in the aftermath of the agreement, Yeşiltaş argues that its deeper significance lies in an attempt by Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to move from "consuming externally provided security toward jointly producing it." In his formulation, a security-consuming state depends primarily on an external actor to define threats, provide capabilities and manage escalation, whereas a security-producing state develops the capacity to assess threats, mobilize resources, protect critical infrastructure and actively shape its own security environment.

This distinction captures an important transformation underway in the Middle East and its wider strategic neighbourhood. For much of the post-Cold War period, the prevailing regional security model was heavily externalised. Regional states purchased sophisticated weapons systems, hosted foreign military bases and relied on security guarantees provided principally by the United States and other Western powers. In moments of acute crisis, Washington was also expected to perform the more complex functions of deterrence, escalation management and, where necessary, direct military intervention.

This did not mean that regional states lacked substantial military capabilities. The deeper limitation was structural: crucial functions such as deterrence, escalation management and strategic coordination remained disproportionately dependent on external powers. That model is gradually changing.

The emerging model therefore looks markedly different from the previous one. It places greater emphasis on indigenous defence production, intelligence sharing, integrated air and missile defence, maritime security, joint exercises, logistical coordination, critical-infrastructure protection and increasingly interoperable military capabilities. The objective is not simply to possess more weapons, but to acquire the ability to organise, sustain and coordinate security without depending on an external actor at every critical juncture.

Recent initiatives suggest that this transition is already moving beyond rhetoric. The Multinational Maritime Defence Alliance announced in Riyadh in July 2026 envisages precisely the kind of institutional infrastructure that security production requires: a permanent headquarters, joint command arrangements, a command-and-control centre and combined maritime operations. As Yeşiltaş observes, the importance of such mechanisms lies in their ability to produce maritime security rather than merely express political solidarity.

This is the crucial distinction between security cooperation and security production. The former can remain episodic: joint exercises are conducted, weapons are purchased and intelligence is exchanged when circumstances require it. The latter requires institutions capable of transforming separate national assets into sustained collective capacity.

This is the accord's central test. A political declaration does not automatically produce collective power: Saudi financial resources, Turkish technology and Pakistani military strength remain national assets unless institutions allow them to function together. As Yeşiltaş puts it, the challenge is to convert these different power profiles into a 'common strategic effect.'

Becoming a security producer does not imply autarky or the rejection of existing alliances. Türkiye will continue to benefit from NATO, Saudi Arabia from its extensive defence relationship with the United States, and Pakistan

from its strategic partnership with China. The objective is not self-sufficiency, but a better balance between dependence and agency.

External partnerships would increasingly complement regional capabilities rather than substitute for them, giving regional states greater capacity to identify priorities, develop responses and manage crises without relying on an outside power at every critical juncture.

Seen in this light, the Mecca Accord is an attempt to institutionalise the transition from security consumption to security production. Its success will depend less on the rhetoric of collective defence than on whether Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan can build the institutions, interoperability and shared capabilities needed to turn political alignment into operational capacity.

If successful, the Mecca Pact would add a new layer to the regional order: one in which increasingly capable middle powers do not merely seek protection within an international security architecture, but participate directly in constructing and sustaining it.

The Logic of Complementarity: Three Powers, Different Strengths

If the Mecca Accord is intended to facilitate a transition from security consumption to security production, its potential rests on the different assets its members bring to the table. Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan possess distinct economic, technological, military and geopolitical strengths; precisely this asymmetry makes the partnership potentially consequential.

At its simplest, the framework combines Saudi financial and energy power, Türkiye's expanding defence-industrial capabilities and Pakistan's military and strategic weight. Each possesses comparative advantages that could compensate for vulnerabilities or capability gaps elsewhere in the triangle.

Türkiye: Technology, Industry and Operational Experience

Türkiye contributes an increasingly sophisticated defence-industrial base and substantial operational experience. Its capabilities across unmanned systems, missiles, naval platforms, electronic warfare and air defence create opportunities not merely for arms sales but for co-production, technology partnerships, localisation and joint capability development. Decades of NATO membership also

bring experience in alliance planning, standardisation and interoperability, while established Turkish-Pakistani cooperation in areas including shipbuilding, aviation and training provides an existing foundation that the accord could expand into a trilateral framework.

Saudi Arabia: Capital, Geography and Political Weight

Saudi Arabia combines financial power, strategic geography and diplomatic influence. Its resources could accelerate joint defence projects requiring sustained investment in research, production and human capital, while its position between the Gulf and Red Sea places it close to the critical maritime arteries of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb. As a major energy power and G20 economy, the protection of Saudi infrastructure and surrounding trade routes has implications far beyond its borders. Riyadh also brings considerable political weight across the Arab and Muslim worlds, giving the partnership financial resources, strategic reach and diplomatic leverage.

Pakistan: Military Depth and Strategic Deterrence

Pakistan contributes military depth, mature defence institutions and strategic deterrence. Its large and experienced armed forces, missile capabilities and longstanding defence relationship with Saudi Arabia, including decades of training and military cooperation, provide an institutional foundation for deeper trilateral coordination. Its status as a nuclear-armed state inevitably adds strategic weight, although the Mecca Accord should not be interpreted as automatically extending Pakistan's nuclear deterrent to its partners in the absence of an explicit guarantee. Pakistan's geography also extends the framework from the Gulf into the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and South Asia.

From Complementarity to Collective Capacity

The Mecca Accord therefore rests less on similarity than on strategic complementarity. However, the objective cannot simply be a transactional division of labour in which one country finances, another manufactures and the third provides military capacity. The more consequential possibility is what Professor Murat Yeşiltaş describes as 'triangular-structured interdependence': a relationship in which each participant possesses capabilities that the others value and cannot easily reproduce independently.

Such interdependence need not undermine strategic autonomy. Autonomy does not require self-sufficiency; it can instead come from diversifying dependencies and reduc-

ing excessive reliance on any single provider. Saudi Arabia could gain access to Turkish and Pakistani defence capabilities while advancing localisation; Türkiye could benefit from investment, production scale and wider markets; and Pakistan from Saudi resources and Turkish technology while contributing its own military expertise. Properly structured, the relationship could become mutually enabling rather than unidirectional.

The real challenge is converting complementarity into collective capacity. Saudi financial power, Turkish technology and Pakistani military strength remain separate national assets unless institutions translate them into interoperability and a common strategic effect. This could involve joint research and co-production, coordinated procurement, shared logistical infrastructure, intelligence and early-warning mechanisms, air and missile defence cooperation, maritime surveillance and joint exercises. Existing Turkish-Pakistani military-industrial cooperation and longstanding Saudi-Pakistani defence ties provide useful foundations; the Mecca Accord's task is to connect them within a durable trilateral framework.

Ultimately, the question is not whether the three countries possess sufficient strategic assets (they clearly do), but whether this pact can provide the institutional machinery to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. That leads directly to the agreement's central dilemma: how to make collective capacity credible enough to deter adversaries without creating commitments so rigid that one member can draw the others into conflicts they would otherwise choose to avoid.

Deterrence Without Entrapment

The Mecca Accord's greatest strength may also generate its most difficult dilemma. Collective defence enhances deterrence precisely because an adversary contemplating aggression against one member must consider the possibility of confronting all three. However, the more credible that commitment becomes, the greater the risk that one member could draw the others into a confrontation arising from interests or threat perceptions they do not fully share.

This is the classic problem of entrapment in alliance politics. Glenn Snyder [defined](#) it as "being dragged into a conflict over an ally's interests that one does not share, or shares only partially." For Snyder, alliances must continually navigate the tension between entrapment and its opposite danger, abandonment: commitments that are too weak may fail to deter an adversary, while commitments that are too rigid can restrict members' freedom of action.

For the Mecca Accord, this tension is particularly relevant because Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan do not share identical threat environments. A major confrontation be-

tween Saudi Arabia and the Houthis or Iran would pose different strategic calculations for Ankara and Islamabad. Likewise, a crisis involving Pakistan in South Asia, or Türkiye in its own immediate neighbourhood, would not necessarily engage Saudi interests to the same degree. The accord must, therefore, reconcile a collective commitment with the reality that the three states will continue to assess particular conflicts through their own national interests.

The solution need not be automatic military intervention. Indeed, as the NATO experience discussed earlier demonstrates, credible collective defence can coexist with considerable discretion over the nature of the response. The Mecca Accord could similarly develop a graduated spectrum of solidarity, ranging from political and intelligence support to weapons and logistical assistance, air and missile defence, maritime deployments and, in the most serious circumstances, direct military action. Such flexibility would allow the three states to demonstrate that aggression against one will carry wider costs without requiring every crisis to become a war for all three.

The challenge is, therefore, to achieve “deterrence without entrapment”. Too much ambiguity and adversaries may doubt whether the other members would respond at all; too much automaticity and members may fear surrendering control over when and where they fight. The accord’s credibility will ultimately depend on finding a workable space between these two extremes.

This may prove to be the pact’s defining test. Its success does not require Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to respond identically to every threat. Rather, it requires potential adversaries to believe that aggression against one member could activate a broader set of political, economic and military capabilities whose precise extent cannot safely be discounted. Credible solidarity, rather than automatic intervention, may, therefore, offer the best means of strengthening collective deterrence while preserving the strategic autonomy that the accord was designed to enhance.

Conclusion

The Mecca Accord should be judged neither by whether it becomes an “Islamic NATO” nor by whether it supplants the United States as the region’s principal security provider. Its significance lies elsewhere. It reflects a region in which increasingly capable middle powers are seeking to diversify their security relationships, produce more of their own security and turn complementary national strengths into collective capacity. For Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, this is less a break with existing alliances than an attempt to acquire greater room for manoeuvre within an increasingly unpredictable international order.

Whether the Mecca Accord succeeds will depend on what follows the signatures. Institutions, interoperability and credible mechanisms for cooperation will matter more than declarations of solidarity. Above all, the three partners must make collective defence credible enough to deter aggression without making it so automatic that they inherit one another’s conflicts. If they can strike that balance, this accord may come to represent something more consequential than another defence pact: an early building block of a regional security order increasingly shaped—and produced—by the region itself.