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Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan Defense Pact Reorders Middle East Security

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Criticality: High

Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitical

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Scope Note

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| Flash | Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan Pact Reorders Middle East

| Executive Summary

On August 7, 2026, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Turkey signed a mutual defense pledge, aligning three major Sunni Muslim countries amid concerns that the U.S.-Iran conflict could spread. The arrangement (known as the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement) does not include specifics on the commitments of each member, making their obligations for each others' defense unclear in the event of any particular military action. The treaty is likely equal parts mutual defense pact and wider alliance system designed to replace the U.S. force posture in the Middle East.

| Details

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement builds on a mutual defense treaty signed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in September 2025, just days after Israeli airstrikes targeted a Hamas meeting in Qatar.¹² Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, have traditionally relied on U.S. security commitments, resulting in their military capabilities being relatively limited. However, the incident in Qatar likely inspired Saudi Arabia to seek alternative methods of protection.

¹ ZeroFox Intelligence Flash Report: Israel Targets Hamas in Qatar, September 9, 2025

² [hXXps://gija.georgetown\[.\]edu/dialogues/the-saudi-pakistani-defense-pact-and-u-s-force-posture-in-the-gulf/](https://gija.georgetown.edu/dialogues/the-saudi-pakistani-defense-pact-and-u-s-force-posture-in-the-gulf/)

- The motivation for this was likely twofold. First, the United States had signaled for years that it planned to draw down its presence in the Middle East, making its future security commitments uncertain. Second, Saudi Arabia very likely sought a security arrangement that would allow it to deter aggression from Israel, a close U.S. ally unlikely to draw retaliation from the U.S. military. As a nuclear-armed state with a highly developed military and cultural ties to many Arab countries, Pakistan fulfilled these requirements. Promises of Saudi investment and wider economic support for the struggling Pakistani economy likely incentivized Pakistan to sign the agreement.

Similarly, Turkey maintains the second largest military in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after the United States and serves as a key weapons exporter.³ Therefore, a NATO-style mutual defense pact is likely to partially deter attacks against any of the three participant states.

- Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has faced numerous attacks in the last year. Iran has targeted Saudi Arabia frequently in 2026, while Houthi rebels in Yemen have attacked Saudi positions at least twice since the agreement with Turkey was finalized. On August 9, Houthi airstrikes reportedly hit a Saudi Aramco facility in southern Saudi Arabia.⁴

Pakistan's role as a mediator in talks between the United States and Iran likely explains why it has not become more involved on the side of Saudi Arabia. Turkey, like Pakistan, shares a lengthy border with Iran, while Iran and Saudi Arabia are separated by a small body of water. At this point, group members very likely judge that coming to Saudi Arabia's defense over these relatively minor attacks would risk incurring a disproportionately large response from Iran, likely in the form of cross-border attacks. This suggests there is a certain threshold of violence that would lead treaty members to activate the mutual defense element of the agreement, with attacks below this threshold not triggering a combined response. This creates opportunities for aggressors to continue utilizing low-level attacks against group members.

³ [hXXps://www.jpost\[.\]com/middle-east/article-905171](https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-905171)

⁴ [hXXps://fortune\[.\]com/2026/08/09/iran-houthi-rebels-yemen-red-sea-port-saudi-aramco-refinery/](https://fortune.com/2026/08/09/iran-houthi-rebels-yemen-red-sea-port-saudi-aramco-refinery/)

The pact is unlikely to fully deter Iran or Iran-aligned groups⁵—which have already repeatedly absorbed U.S. bombardments while continuing to retaliate—from attacking any of the member states. However, for Saudi Arabia in particular, the agreement was almost certainly influenced in part by recent Iranian and Israeli military actions. Pakistan, which has nuclear weapons, and Turkey, which already has the mutual defense protections offered by NATO, very likely view the accord as much more than a defense pact; their leaders likely view it as an alliance structure that has the potential to assume the military and economic role the United States has traditionally held in the region.

Analyst Commentary

In our Geopolitical Forecast 2026, ZeroFox anticipated that the Trump administration would continue focusing U.S. national security priorities on curtailing the United States's role as a primary enforcer and financier of international security commitments outside of its hemisphere.⁶ To this end, we forecasted that the administration would work to create conditions allowing U.S.-allied states in the Middle East to assume greater military responsibility.

- The conflict with Iran can thus be viewed, in part, as an attempt to mitigate the threat Iran poses, thereby enabling U.S. allies to manage regional security arrangements more effectively. While this conflict has almost certainly not gone according to plan, it has very likely not changed the Trump administration's desire to deprioritize U.S. foreign security commitments and redirect those resources towards its own hemisphere.

The United States is almost certainly encouraging similar alliance building by its allies in other parts of the world.

- Russia's failure to capture more than 20 percent of Ukraine after nearly five years of fighting has coincided with the Trump administration urging Europe to take a more active role in the continent's defense.

⁵ [hXXps://x.com/EbrahimRezaei14/status/2085694930077237398](https://x.com/EbrahimRezaei14/status/2085694930077237398)

⁶ ZeroFox Assessment: Geopolitical Forecast 2026, December 18, 2025

- ZeroFox has observed a new system of alliances developing between Asian states to counter China, replacing the diminished U.S. security footprint in the region. Alliances built between Japan, Australia, India, and the Philippines in 2026 are likely the most advanced of all the regions,⁷⁸ whereas Europe has struggled to secure new defense partnerships.

It is unclear what role the United States played in orchestrating the pact between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, but it is very likely supportive of it. For decades, the United States has taken the leading role in providing security support for its allies in the region—particularly against the threat posed by Iran—and the Trump administration is likely eager to reduce this level of support.

An alliance between Israel and the Muslim-majority countries in the region is not realistic. Israel's military and economy, while advanced, are not large enough to provide a sufficient military deterrent or economic support system for its allies, even if political and religious divisions could be reconciled. Therefore, an alliance of the region's largest economy, Saudi Arabia, and leading Muslim military powers in the region is likely more politically practical for exerting influence across the wider area. The fact that the grouping also includes some of the region's largest countries by population likely explains why a smaller-yet-influential country such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) could not play the leading role.

- Nevertheless, these smaller countries will likely play a supporting role in a broader alliance to offset U.S. retrenchment. The UAE, for example, maintains close relations with Israel, whose security concerns still need to be managed across the region. Saudi and Turkish influence is also very likely key for bringing along some of the region's midsize economies, such as Egypt and other Gulf countries, as well as the small-yet-insecure nations of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, which have historic but diminishing ties with Iran.

⁷ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/in-japan-australia-has-a-partner-for-long-haul>

⁸ https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/the-philippines-japan-joint-statement-on-the-elevation-to-a-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-weaving-the-future-together-peace-prosperity-possibilities/

Some of these nations (such as the UAE, Egypt, and Jordan) maintain relations with Israel, while the three defense pact members do not, and Turkey's relations with Israel have deteriorated substantially in recent years. Israel is very likely to view the latest pact with suspicion and likely to formalize a separate alliance to offset any threats to its security interests in the region. Therefore, the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement is likely only the beginning of a broader military reordering of the Middle East, rather than its completion.

| Conclusion

The war in Iran has almost certainly disrupted the U.S. timescale for deprioritizing that region. Nevertheless, the latest Saudi, Pakistan, and Turkey agreement outlines a potential new alliance system whereby the three regional powers will leverage their economic and military strengths. The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement will likely extend to include new members and burden-sharing pacts, allowing the United States to eventually recede from the region militarily. However, there are risks to this approach that are likely to cause the United States to have to maintain its force posture in the region indefinitely. Iran has already demonstrated its ability to repeatedly disrupt the region and is likely to continue doing so over the long term, and the Muslim-majority nations are not monoliths; they each have their own differences regarding political, economic, and cultural issues that are likely to emerge and complicate alliance-building and burden-sharing going forward.

Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

	Red	Amber
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	Sources may use TLP:AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may NOT share TLP:RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	Recipients may ONLY share TLP:AMBER information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. Note that TLP:AMBER+STRICT restricts sharing to the organization only.
	Green	Clear
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	Sources may use TLP:CLEAR when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may share TLP:GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	Recipients may share TLP:CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

| Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%