



MAKKAH Defence Pact and Its Strategic Implications

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Abstract: The recent Makkah Joint Defence Agreement signed between Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan has emerged as important development in regional geopolitics of middle-east. It becomes all the more critical given incessant conflicts between Iran and Israel/US and Russia and Ukraine are going on, affecting global economic and strategic stability. It is pertinent to understand and analyse why the pact came into vogue, factors that brought three Islamic nations out of which two, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye who seemed antagonistic to each other. How these actors could play their perceived role in the pact and how and why that could affect other major powers, including India.

Keywords: Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, Houthis, Financial Action Task Force, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Indus Water Treaty, NATO.

The much-hyped Makkah Defense Alliance formed in Mecca recently in August between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye, has been in news for various reasons. Its importance is to be analyzed in the political as well as strategic and security contexts. The genesis of the agreement too, deserves an insight into contemporary geopolitical and strategic developments, particularly in the region and its surroundings.

A meeting between the three Heads of State/Governments was hosted at Makkah (Saudi Arabia) by Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and attended by Turkish President Erdogan and Pakistani PM Sharief. Since this trilateral agreement came into vogue less

than a year after a similar bilateral was signed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, it brings an interesting insight into the whole development.

Firstly, it looks clear that while all the three signatories were keen to get into it; the question of Saudi Arabia, acceding to the inclusion of Turkiye looks interesting. It is no secret that the two countries till very recently had competed for influence and tried to undermine each other in varied regional geopolitical games. Realizing the limits of its military capabilities and increasing mistrust with big neighbor United Arab Emirates (UAE), Prince Salman signed a bilateral military agreement with Sharief in September, 2025.

Saudi Arabia got into bilateral defense mechanism with Pakistan in the backdrop of increasing unpredictability of Trump administration's role in the volatile middle-east, likely Israel-Iran tensions and growing distance with UAE, especially on support to opposing factions in Yemen and Sudan. However, realizing limits of Pakistani national power witnessed in the subsequent US/Israel and Iran conflict, Prince Salman was forced to get into a perceived unlikely alliance with Erdogan's Turkiye, on one side and Pakistan, on the other. So it clearly is indicative of Saudi unease on the changing global geopolitical landscape, including middle-east.

Turkiye however, sees maximum benefits through its participation in the three-member defense pact. In spite of being a member of NATO (where its real influence remains limited due to Israel's clout with US/other major western powers), it sees an increase in its political/strategic role in Persian Gulf, Middle-east and South Asia (through Pakistan). Further, it gets a big market for sale of its growing drone/armament manufacturing while allowing it



strategic autonomy with not depending upon US/west only to promote its own interests in the backdrop of its friction with fellow NATO member. Greece.

Pakistan too, feels it has huge benefits being member of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement (MJDA). The enormous public celebrations, media hype and political glee suggests that it as usual sees net results of all developments only through the prism of an anti-India front. It believes that a tripartite pact will prevent India from having aggressive designs against it and even in case of an invasion from India, Turkey (with arms and weaponry) and Saudi Arabia (diplomatically and financially) will join it to fight back.

India has steady and amiable relationship with Saudi Arabia while has less-than friendly relationship with Turkey and hostility with Pakistan. No wonder, it came out with a diplomatic and measured response to the Mecca Pact. However, there is a certain possibility that if Bangladesh and (in an unlikely scenario, Maldives as so-called Muslim brotherly countries) try to get into the block, India will be at unease.

The possibility in the contemporary scenario looks distant and unlikely. One of the important reasons for Saudi Arabia enthusiastically backing it is its own sense of insecurity, from Iran and Yemen-based Houthi rebels besides a bit of Israel. Though political relations and understanding with Israel appear improved but competition with Iran to lead the Islamic world (Shia-Sunni rivalry), continues to create trouble for Prince Salman and his country.

However, the latest round of Iran-backed Houthi drone/missile strikes on Saudi oil and military infrastructure has created a new dilemma for Mecca Pact. While Prince Salman expected Pakistan with its military stationed in Saudi, to face the rebels head-on, reports have suggested that a significant number of government and Pakistani forces have either surrendered or ran away from the scene. Pakistani government/military too seem uncertain of its course of action.

Joining the conflict against rebels would have earned it the confidence of Saudis while encouraging other Muslim states like Bangladesh, Qatar and Egypt to give a serious thought about joining the block in near future. Financially too, Saudi could have offered some more support to beleaguered Pakistani economy. However, it could certainly have angered Iran that in any case does not trust Pakistan either and would have opened its frontier with Pakistan to sneak-in rebels in strife-torn regions of Balochistan, creating a nightmarish security scenario for it. Hence, even after initially threatening rebels with attacks, Pakistan has tried to play it down, suggesting the pact is 'defensive in nature.'

Strategically, the latest attacks by Houthis have created serious global economic and strategic implications. What was being described by some as Muslim NATO, a big development for regional and global order, the very relevance and longevity of Mecca Pact, has come under scanner.

The most important protagonist in the block, Saudi Arabia, will have to rethink seriously the utility of the pact. If it does not provide basic security to Saudi Arabia what tangible benefits, it might get out of it. The other two actors, Turkiye and Pakistan, will certainly benefit out of it. Erdogan sees his influence suddenly extending to middle-east, Persian Gulf and south Asia with the help of Mecca Pact. Also, its armament industry gets a bigger market while its influence might rise further in the Islamic world, most probably at the cost of Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan hopes to get diplomatic and financial support from the other two partners, in case of a military conflict with India, including on Kashmir and Indus Water Treaty (IWT) issues. Also, after years of diplomatic isolation, thanks to, its being part of Grey List of Financial Action Task Force (FATF), it is hoping of a enhanced role in global geopolitics and use its leverage as being part of Mecca Pact.

But what will Saudi Arabia gain? By including over ambitious Erdogan's Turkey into it, it willingly provided him with a platform to increase his political, economic and military role in regions far beyond his frontiers. By supporting Pakistan in case of a conflict with India, it may annoy New Delhi that could further bring it in closer embrace to UAE which already has a chasm with Saudis. US who has been the security guarantor to middle-east countries for long, already should be unhappy over this pact. Post-Trump in 2028, there is a possibility that US will be more observant and involved in the politico-strategic developments in the region and might well try to play a more active role.



As for implications of Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA) on India, there are reasons for it to be at disquiet if not angry. Post-2014 the Modi government has been following a pro-active policy in dealing with issues of global geopolitics. It has been working with plans against varied scenarios in rapidly changing volatile situation in the region and beyond. As External Affairs Minister (EAM) Jaishankar has repeatedly stressed that India is quickly adapting itself with only intent to protect and promote its national interests. Hence while continuing to ignore Pakistan, the open and unrestrained entry of Turkey in its backyard, will force India to think and act in far distant regions that it never ventured previously. That is evident in India's new-found interest and economic and strategic moves in countries like Cyprus and Greece, both having serious historical conflicts and friction with Erdogan's Turkiye.

India's bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia have seen an unexpected cooling down in recent months. It looked surprising especially in the backdrop of high bonhomie, generated by Modi and Prince Salman's reciprocal visits and Saudi promise of investments to the tune of US\$ 100 billion, including an ARAMCO West Coast Refinery project worth US\$ 50 billion in Maharashtra. The petroleum import diversification initiated by India, resulting in reduction of imports from Saudi and aggressive following of 'Saudiization' (Nitaqat), affecting India's huge labour diaspora in the country has played a role in it.

But having a functional Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) between India and Saudi in place, there is almost no possibility of any Saudi military (?) help accruing to Pakistan, in case of a conflict in south Asia. But a big financial help, leading to procurement of weapons to be used against India, could cause concern. However, India would be unhappy if in haste, Bangladesh decides to join it and force it to take counter eco-strategic measures against it.

Finally, to make it more active and important, there needs to be clarity on the so-called collective defiance (NATO Article 5) mechanism, if any. Though there has been talk of this mechanism being part of Mecca Pact, the circumstances, manner, financial, military obligations and way of participation of member countries, in case of attack on one, is yet to be clearly spelt out, at least in public. Then, there is tacit defense being used by some circles in Islamabad that the option is to be exercised when a state attacks a member country and not when non-state actors like Houthis are in action. This lack of clarity is creating doubts for countries like Bangladesh who are keen on being part of a (Islamic) security umbrella but confused how to present the case to neighbor like India (that certainly will not take the development as normal). Egypt one of the Islamic block's powerhouses, too, seems reluctant to join the block for this reason. It looks like that the Mecca Pact should have been brought in with greater geopolitical thoughts, taking into considerations of response of major powers like US, Russia, China, India, Iran, Israel, Europe along with likely regional and global order in near future.

DECLARATION

I, Aparna Sinha, a Ph.D. Research Scholar in the Department of Political Science at Seacom Skills University, Bolpur, West Bengal, under the supervision of Prof (Dr) Deb Kumar Panja, do hereby declare that the research article titled "MAKKAH Defence Pact and Its Strategic Implications" is an original piece of work conducted and written by me.

I further declare the following:

- **Originality:** This article is my own original work. It has not been published previously, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.
- **Conflict of Interest:** I have no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest, competing interests or relationships that could inappropriately influence or bias the authorship, research findings or conclusions presented in this manuscript.