

ISRAEL'S GREAT FEAR: IS THE MECCA AGREEMENT EXPANDING?

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Throughout history, the Middle East has been subject to intervention by global hegemonic powers —primarily the United States— due to both its trade routes and its natural resources. Looking specifically at the past quarter-century, it is evident that the strategies pursued by successive Washington administrations and Tel Aviv have been far from fostering peace and resolving conflicts. Every U.S. intervention in the region, made under the pretext of resolving problems, has only exacerbated existing issues and created new crises. When combined with Israel's unilateral, lawless, annexationist, and borderless interventions in the region, this has made the security impasse in the region chronic. The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement signed between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan is a crucial step toward rescuing the region from the spiral of instability it has been caught in since the early 2000s, and it emerged as a response to a pressing need. Signed on August 7, 2026, the agreement emerged as a response to the need for a regional security architecture that the Middle East has long lacked. Although the timing of this development—in an environment where the Israel/U.S.-Iran war is exerting pressure on a broad range of issues, from energy to the economy, both locally and globally—might lead one to conclude that the agreement is a consequence of the war, officials have stated that the agreement had been in the planning stages for nearly three years. The combination of Turkey's military power, Saudi Arabia's financial power, and Pakistan's nuclear power has influenced the security perceptions of countries in the region. However, it has been noted that the agreement is open to all countries in the region, particularly Egypt. Indeed, Hakan Fidan has stated in previous interviews that this agreement is “a product of the concept of regional ownership” and that “the alliance was established with the intention of expanding.”

Within the scope of this analysis, the Mecca Alliance will be examined based on known details; a framework will be established by addressing the questions of “why” and “how”; and it will be compared with similar alliances that were formed or attempted in the past. Subsequently, the perspectives of regional countries—particularly Egypt and Iran—on the Pact, their foreign policies and international relations, as well as the comments of regional analysts regarding the likelihood of these states' participation, will be addressed.

The Causes and The Timing

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement was signed on August 7, 2026. The first meeting of the Strategic, Political, and Defense Committee established under the agreement was held in Istanbul on August 31. At this meeting, it was decided to establish a secretariat for the alliance in Riyadh and to appoint a Pakistani national as secretary-general for a term of three years. This step is highly significant in terms of the alliance's institutionalization and

affirmation of its existence. According to Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, the process leading to the agreement began at the end of 2023, which means it coincided with the October 7 attacks. Fidan has frequently stated that the alliance is open to all participants who comply with the agreement's procedures and international law.

The power struggles among regional countries, conflicting interests, and ethnic and sectarian disputes have not only

undermined regional security but have also made the region more vulnerable to external intervention; indeed, this climate of insecurity has even served to legitimize certain forms of external intervention. Despite the existence of numerous organizations such as the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, all of them have proven inadequate when it comes to taking steps toward regional security and have been unable to take the initiative. Indeed, they are not security organizations. Efforts aimed at development have failed to yield results due to the inability to establish a stable environment. The path to economic, cultural, scientific, and other forms of development and cooperation in the region begins with military cooperation. This is because the failure of regional countries to ensure their own security leads to further escalation of unrest through external interventions. The primary objective of this alliance is to create an alternative regional security framework to counter the major powers that use the region's security as a pretext to justify intervention, and to establish a deterrent against aggressive, lawless actors such as Israel.

Similar Alliances Formed in the Past

Based on Article 5 of the NATO Charter—the principle of collective defense, which stipulates that an armed attack against one or more alliance members shall be considered an attack against all members—the Mecca Alliance has been dubbed in the media as “Muslim NATO,” “Middle East NATO,” or “Sunni NATO.” In terms of NATO's Article 5, the Mecca Alliance serves a similar function. However, the agreement does not cover “only” military intervention. According to the agreement's provisions, the countries are

focusing on interoperability. They have committed to cooperation in many areas, such as the compatibility of different militaries, mutual training, support, logistics, threat analyses, and the defense industry. Furthermore, in the event that a member country comes under attack, that country itself will determine the type of assistance to be provided. If it needs intelligence, it will receive support in that area; if it needs ammunition, it will receive logistical support; and if it needs military units, support will be provided upon request. According to Foreign Minister Fidan's statements, all of these are steps toward a “multi-stage” and layered cooperation. In fact, the fundamental goal here is to ensure stability and security in the region through deterrence. Indeed, Article 5 of the NATO Treaty has been invoked only once in its 75-year history; following the September 11 attacks in the U.S., NATO members declared that the attack was considered an attack on the entire alliance and expressed their solidarity with the U.S. Organizations established for “defense” purposes, such as NATO and the Mecca Alliance, essentially aim to prevent wars or attacks against member states before they begin by providing deterrence against threats. Furthermore, although the Mecca Alliance is still a very young alliance, it is working to complete its most challenging phase: the founding stage.

In the past, various organizations emerged to protect against the expansionism of great powers, such as the Balkan Entente (1934), NATO (1949), the Baghdad Pact (1955), and the Non-Aligned Movement (1961). Among these, the most recent meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement—of which all countries in the region except Turkey are members—was held in Uganda on January 17–20, 2024. It emerged during

the Cold War as a “Third World” or “third way” between the Soviet Union and the United States, with member countries declaring their neutrality. It is a political rather than a defense-oriented organization. When considering the Mecca Pact, while both structures are anti-expansionist, the Non-Aligned Movement does not involve cooperation or development. Furthermore, while the Mecca Pact is a local organization, the Non-Aligned Movement is a global platform, and its institutional framework is subject to debate.

The Balkan Entente serves as an important example for assessing the dynamics in the Middle East through the lens of the Mecca Pact. This is because, over the past quarter-century, both the United States and Israel have pursued policies of “Balkanization” in the region. The division of Iraq into three parts following the invasion of Iraq and efforts to divide Syria along Druze and Kurdish lines stand out as examples of this. Just as the period in which the Entente was formed was marked by rising German and Italian expansionism in Europe and the perception of a regional threat posed by Bulgaria, today we see parallels between American expansionism and the regional threat posed by Israel. Furthermore, the environment in which the countries forming the Balkan Entente found themselves at that time was quite tense. Despite serious historical issues, border disputes, and mutual distrust among member countries, they managed to come together on the issue of security. A driving force and security perception similar to that which formed the Balkan Entente gave rise to the Mecca Pact in the Middle East. Despite their differences, both formations aimed to preserve the existing status quo and create a security environment against external and regional aggression. However,

neither was a cooperation agreement. The Antant is merely a pledge that member countries will not pose a threat to one another. The fundamental difference here is that while the Balkan Antant is a “non-aggression and consultation” agreement that does not involve military integration or joint operational capabilities, the Mecca Pact aims to build a common defense architecture.

In terms of both region and substance, the alliance most closely resembling the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement is perhaps the Baghdad Pact. The Pact was formed on the cusp of the post-World War II shift in the global balance of power, during a period when the hegemony of France and the United Kingdom was being replaced by competition between the USSR and the United States. In this respect, it resembles the Mecca Pact. However, it was established through the efforts of Western powers as part of the “encirclement-Northern Belt” strategy developed by U.S. Secretary of State Foster Dulles to counter Soviet expansionism. Indeed, the United Kingdom was one of the leading member states of the pact. In this regard, the Mecca Pact differs significantly from the Baghdad Pact. The Baghdad Pact served as a means of seeking refuge from one group of hegemonic actors to another. In the Baghdad Pact, the necessity of aligning with the Western Bloc took precedence over the active role of regional countries. The Mecca Pact, on the other hand, grants regional countries the right to assume responsibility, ensure their own security, and have a say in their own region.

The Baghdad Pact included five countries—Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and Turkey—and although the participation of regional countries, particularly Egypt, was initially envisaged,

the Western powers' support for Israel, which was established in 1948, led Arab states to view Israel and the Mandate powers—rather than the Soviet Union—as the primary threat. Furthermore, disputes over the Suez Canal also negatively affected Egypt's participation in the Pact.

Ultimately, the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement inherits the Balkan Entente's determination to overcome chronic mistrust, the Baghdad Pact's ideal of establishing a regional security belt, and the Non-Aligned Movement's vision of an independent stance against the bloc politics of the great powers. Taking all this into account, the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement constitutes a unique, original, and self-sustaining regional power axis—a regional security ecosystem. Its independence from any other organization is also a key feature of the agreement. Indeed, in this way, any policy or institutional deadlock in other organizations to which member states belong will not carry over to the Mecca Alliance. The agreement's autonomous structure, which is independent of other existing institutional frameworks, provides strategic insulation. This will prevent issues arising in other international organizations to which member states belong from spilling over into the Alliance. Thus, “cross-institutional deadlock”—that is, the spillover of disagreements or tensions from one institution into the Pact—will be minimized. As in the aforementioned situation, the way in which overlapping memberships can paralyze security mechanisms is clearly observable in NATO-EU relations. For example, Hungary—a member of both the EU and NATO—expressed its reaction to the budget sanctions it faced in December 2022 due to issues regarding judicial independence and the rule of law in EU bodies at the NATO

negotiating table. During this process, it delayed Sweden's NATO accession approval for months, even though Sweden was one of the EU's harshest critics of Hungary. In this way, it has turned an issue on the EU agenda into a bargaining chip within a collective defense organization. In another example, disagreements within the EU regarding the defense industry and strategic autonomy (such as the competition between France and Germany) can also lead to mistrust and bureaucratic obstacles in NATO's operational planning and joint procurement mechanisms. Consequently, the establishment of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement as an autonomous entity, independent of existing organizations, prevents from the outset the transfer of member states' bilateral or institutional issues from other platforms to the Mecca negotiating table.

Another example is the Damascus Declaration, which took place in the recent past. Also known as the “6+2 Declaration,” which was established in 1991 against Iraq and Iran, aimed to unite the six Gulf countries under a security system provided by Egypt and Syria; however, the declaration collapsed because the financial support provided did not meet the expectations of Egypt and Syria, and because Kuwait and Saudi Arabia preferred to entrust their security to U.S.-led Western powers rather than to regional powers. This demonstrates that an alliance composed of strong members with the capacity to respond will serve as a reliable haven for other countries in the region as well.

Potential for Expansion

When discussing the possibility of the pact's expansion, one important factor

must be taken into account: the four strongest armies in the region belong to Turkey, Israel, Iran, and Egypt.¹

These countries are followed by Saudi Arabia in fifth place. Excluding Israel, the other three countries in question are the most important actors in the Middle East in every respect. In the Middle East, where post-Sykes-Picot puppet states dominate, the countries with the deepest-rooted state traditions are Turkey, Egypt, and Iran—all three of which are heirs to imperial legacies. With populations of approximately 121 million, 93 million, and 88 million, respectively, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey are the region's most populous countries². Turkey's Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits, Egypt's Suez Canal, and Iran's Strait of Hormuz serve as the region's economic lifelines. Furthermore, Turkey's geopolitical position between Europe and Asia, Egypt's between Asia and Africa, and Iran's between West Asia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are all highly critical. The coming together of this trio poses a major threat to Israel's very existence. For this reason, Israel will make every effort to prevent these states from uniting. In fact, even the mere possibility of these two powers joining forces broadens Israel's perception of threat. Indeed, this was evident during the period following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the election of Mohamed Morsi as president in 2012–2013.

During Mursi's tenure, significant developments took place and steps were taken toward closer ties and coordination among Egypt, Turkey, and Iran. The Syrian crisis, which was just emerging at the time, was discussed among Turkey, Iran, and Egypt. After the collapse of Egypt-Iran

relations following the 1979 Camp David Accords, Mursi—who attended the Non-Aligned Movement summit held in Tehran in August 2012—became the first Egyptian leader to set foot in Tehran since 1979. The replacement of a leader like Mubarak—who maintained positive relations with Israel—with an Islamist leader like Mursi led to a thaw in Iran-Egypt relations, even as Sunni-Shia tensions persisted. In fact, at this summit, Mursi declared his support for Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy. The foreign relations unit of the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Mursi was a member, issued a statement indicating that their aim was “not to change the nature of relations with Tehran, but to normalize them.” By October of that same year, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had met with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Baku, and the resulting proposal—for “regional talks among Turkey, Iran, and Egypt to resolve the Syrian crisis”—came as a surprise to everyone. By February 2013, Ahmadinejad's visit to Cairo for the 12th Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation marked the first visit by an Iranian president since the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

Essentially, while Cairo's desire to pursue an independent foreign policy and Iran's wish to break free from its regional and international isolation have led to a rapprochement in Egypt-Iran relations, Turkey has been viewed as an indispensable partner—and a complementary element to this duo—due to both its support for Egypt and its moderate stance toward Iran, as well as its commitment to good neighborly relations. These steps represent the first-ever attempt at an alliance in the region's

¹ <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing-middle-east.php>

² worldometers

history among three states with Turkish, Arab, and Persian identities, as well as secular Sunni, Sunni, and Shia religious identities.

Gulf funds—which had been a major contributor to Egypt—and Israel were disturbed by the Egypt-Iran rapprochement. Although the pressure exerted on Mursi by the U.S. and the Gulf monarchies to distance himself from Iran, the divisions stemming from Sunni-Shia issues, and the Turkey-Iran rivalry in the region undermined this unity and rapprochement, even the mere possibility of these countries drawing closer led Israel to perceive a major threat. In June 2013, the process was interrupted by the Gezi Park protests in Turkey and the military coup that followed the anti-Morsi movements in Egypt. In the period that followed, claims that Israel was behind the Egyptian coup surfaced frequently; one such claim was made by then-Prime Minister Erdoğan. This structure, which was virtually a matter of survival for Israel, was dismantled in one way or another.

Hakan Fidan's statement regarding the Mecca Pact—that "it is, after all, an alliance established to expand"—and his message that "it was not formed in response to a specific threat," as expressed during a program in which he participated, demonstrate that the agreement is open to all countries that meet its conditions. However, the fact that the alliance is still new and in its early stages—and that its foundations must be laid with great care to ensure its success—is prompting Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, which Fidan referred to as "core members," to proceed cautiously. The communication between regional countries, the messages of welcoming openness, and the emphasis on "regionalism" indicate that the alliance

aims to become an independent security organization.

a. Egypt's Possible Participation

Since the very first day the Mecca Pact was established, Egypt has been at the forefront of the countries whose participation has been on the agenda. Turkey-Egypt relations, which were strained between 2013 and 2022, have recently gained momentum in the opposite direction. This momentum has accelerated in 2026.

The Mecca Pact did not start from scratch. The foundation of this agreement is the Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Defense Agreement, signed in 2025 between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which addresses defense cooperation and mutual commitment. Subsequently, the issue of Turkey's inclusion in this framework came to the fore, ultimately leading to a trilateral agreement.

From this perspective, the likelihood of Egypt joining the Pact is increasing. The joint exercises conducted with Egypt over the past two years, the military framework agreement signed in February, and the defense cooperation and defense industry agreements signed in July are paving the way for the two countries to come together within the Mecca Pact. This is because the security cooperation carried out previously forms the basis for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's role as founding members of such a pact. Furthermore, Egypt maintains good relations with the other countries in the pact. It is currently a member of the "Regional Four." The R4 platform, consisting of Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, emerges as an informal political grouping. According to statements by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Republic of Turkey, the grouping has come together with the aim of “ongoing consultation and coordination among the four countries to support peace, security, stability, and prosperity in the Middle East and the broader region.” Given the group’s objectives and membership, Egypt’s participation in the Mecca Pact appears highly likely. Indeed, in a statement regarding the pact, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan remarked, “We are already acting toward one another as if we were members of the alliance. That’s how our relations are with all countries. There are a few technical issues there. Once these are implemented, there is no reason for Egypt not to be included.” These remarks indicate that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia also share no disagreement regarding Egypt’s participation. Thus, Egypt emerges as the first and most likely candidate member of the Mecca Alliance following its establishment. In this context, Egypt’s future participation is viewed as a continuation of a process that has already begun—a new phase in that process. Ali Bakir, a professor of international relations and security at Qatar University, also stated that Egypt’s participation would “significantly increase the agreement’s political weight, regional influence, and operational effectiveness.”

b. Iran’s Possible Participation

Although the formation of a defense alliance between Turkey and Saudi Arabia initially sparked skepticism and backlash from Iran, the inclusion of a “friendly” country like Pakistan—which has developed good relations with Iran—in the alliance, along with statements from officials, has dampened these reactions.

The formation of the alliance has offered regional countries an alternative and created an environment that will reduce the need for the U.S. security umbrella. Iran, which shapes its perception of friends and foes based on other countries’ positions toward Israel and the U.S., should, under normal circumstances, welcome a new security architecture that would curb U.S. influence in the region.

The formation of the alliance has offered regional countries an alternative and created an environment that will reduce the need for the U.S. security umbrella. Iran, which shapes its perception of friend and foe based on other countries’ positions toward Israel and the U.S., has welcomed a new security architecture that will curb U.S. influence in the region, according to statements by Mehdi Rahimi. According to a report by the London-based Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper, which is run by Palestinians, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mehdi Rahimi, after confirming that Tehran is currently examining the proposal, “praised the efforts of West Asian countries to establish a regional security framework” and stated that “Iran has long supported this initiative.”³ Iran has long argued that “regional balances should not be established by external actors.”

Nevertheless, Tehran’s “cautious optimism” reflects a strategic dilemma. The Mecca Alliance also represents an opportunity for Iran to explore an alternative equation. Considering factors such as the fall of Syria, efforts to integrate non-state armed actors into the Iraqi military, and Hezbollah’s disarmament in Lebanon, Iran’s influence in the region is clearly waning. In contrast, Israel is increasingly expanding its expansionist

³ <https://www.alquds.co.uk/-/هآرتس-دعوة-انضمام-طهران-ل-حلف-مكة-حق/>

activities through neighboring countries. When Israel's occupying and aggressive policies toward regional countries are considered alongside Iran's opposition to Israel, an environment is emerging within the new security architecture that could provide Iran with an unmissable opportunity for regional reintegration. On the other hand, in the eyes of some decision-makers in Iran, the Mecca Alliance also carries the potential to become a collective pressure tool that risks bringing Iran's proxy networks in the region under control and encircling Tehran. Consequently, rather than joining the alliance unconditionally, Iran's stance is likely to be guided by the goal of preventing the alliance from evolving into a hardline security bloc opposed to Tehran—particularly a Sunni axis—and minimizing its strategic vulnerabilities within the new multipolar balance of power. In this context, Tehran's position points to a multifaceted “wait-and-see” policy.

Regarding Iran's participation, Hakan Fidan said, “We've been discussing this in the region for more than two years. There have been times when we've discussed these issues with the Iranians as well. When Iran resolves its own issues in the region, and when it is time to contribute to constructive policies in the region and move toward a collective framework, their role will be necessary. We have always said this. In other words, the Iranians are no strangers to this issue.” Essentially, Russia also supports Iran's participation in the alliance. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking at an event with university students and faculty members, noted that more than 20 years ago, Russia had proposed that the Arab monarchies and Gulf countries—including Iran—

consider organizing a meeting to approve a special security concept for the Gulf coastal states, He explained that they acted on the premise that involving the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council simultaneously in such events would facilitate the process of organizing meetings, discussing mutual concerns, and reaching agreements on confidence-building measures, and added: “Conditions are being created for the transition to the establishment of a kind of permanent mechanism. If, at some point, an agreement is reached within the framework of such a structure regarding the conditions for Iran's participation in this process, this would be the most practical step in the process we are developing. In my view, if an agreement is reached at some point on the conditions for Iran's participation in this process, this would be the most practical step taken in the direction we have in mind as we develop our plan.”

There are reports that Iran has been invited to join the pact. In fact, Al Mayadeen sources have reported that Iranian Parliament Speaker Mehdi Rahimi stated that “Tehran has received an invitation and that the offer is being evaluated by Iran's leadership.”⁴ In fact, Rahimi stated that the establishment of the “regional security umbrella”—which Iran has long sought—would be a gain for the Islamic Republic. In contrast, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ismail Baghaei stated that they had not received an official invitation but that proposals to establish dialogue with these countries on issues related to collective security in the region had been raised. He also noted that “Iran has no

⁴ <https://www.almayadeen.net/latestnews/2026/8/22/iran-rahimi-iran-accepted-call-for-inclusion-to-ath>

reason to believe that the Mecca Agreement is directed against it.”

As can be seen from this, there is a group within Iran that is evaluating the Pact. However, it is debatable to what extent Iran’s complex governance structure—involving religious elites, political circles, and military groups—will affect its participation in the Pact. It is likely that the reformists, who represent a more liberal wing, view the Pact favorably, but their power is also constrained by certain religious elites and the military. Iran’s participation in the alliance is likely to be hindered primarily by its relations with Saudi Arabia. A few years ago, particularly with China’s mediation, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia normalized despite the situation in Yemen. However, as long as the ongoing Houthi attacks from Yemen against Saudi Arabia and Iran’s ties to the Houthis remain a source of tension between the two countries, the normalization process will continue to be hampered.

Following the announcement of the Mecca Alliance, Iran launched attacks against Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE, but it appears to have removed Saudi Arabia from its list of targets. In contrast, the Houthis have intensified their attacks. In particular, between September 6 and 10, they carried out one of their most intense waves of attacks, targeting not only tankers in the Red Sea but also southern cities in Saudi Arabia and energy facilities such as ARAMCO. Looking at media reports, there is anticipation regarding what response Turkey and Pakistan will give to these attacks. However, the Houthi issue is Saudi Arabia’s own concern, and there is a push to form a multinational force or coalition

regarding Yemen. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has brought the situation in the Red Sea to the forefront in terms of global trade security and the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb. For the collective defense mechanism of the Mecca Pact to be activated, Saudi Arabia must raise this issue as a request for assistance in the interest of its own security; even in such a scenario, the Mecca Alliance must prepare the grounds and conditions for intervention in detail. A system must be established to answer questions such as what the position of the DDSA members would be in the event of a potential intervention, how they would respond to different types of attacks, and what the nature of the attacks and assistance would be—and all of this must be meticulously prepared. More technical details are needed regarding the stance of armed actors, such as the Houthis, toward Alliance members. Essentially, the Bab el-Mandeb issue is of concern to Turkey even outside the Alliance. The Red Sea connects the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, and Turkey is the most important country in the Mediterranean. With the world’s attention and the international community focused on Yemen and the Bab el-Mandeb region, it is inconceivable that Turkey would not be involved in the matter. It should not be viewed as unusual for Turkey to demonstrate a military presence in such a scenario.

Former Yemeni Minister and Ambassador Prof. Muhammad Kubati describes the Mecca Agreement as “the beginning of a local security architecture in the region.”⁵ Rather than focusing on identifying a single “enemy,” this points to a broader trend. Regional powers have stated that they wish to shape their own security strategies rather than rely on external guarantors.

⁵ <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1392975/> پیمان-مکه-علیه-ایران- / جدید-امنیتی-منطقه-که-ناگوی-اسلامی-نیست است-یا-اسرائیل-معماری-جدید-امنیتی-منطقه-که-ناگوی-اسلامی-نیست

Yemeni analyst and strategic advisor Muhammad Salem Mujavir shares a similar view.⁶ Israel argues that Iran and the Houthis are part of the region's strategic landscape, but that none of them should be presented as the sole target of the agreement. The focus is now entirely on the practical aspects of the agreement. Ambassador Kubati views Yemen and the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb as a potentially decisive test.⁷ In his view, maritime security cannot be separated from territorial security. However, he argues that protecting maritime transport is one issue, while ensuring stability in the region where threats originate is a separate matter. The Houthis and Red Sea security present a scenario in which an agreement can be tested without a traditional war between states.

Ali Muhibbi, an Iranian political analyst specializing in foreign policy and transatlantic relations, states that Saudi Arabia is concerned about the "axis of resistance," Pakistan is heavily focused on India, and Turkey is particularly concerned about Israel.⁸ Independent Iranian scholar Seyyid Mujtaba Jalalzadeh has offered a more precise and nuanced formulation. According to him, the agreement is a "multidimensional balancing" mechanism.⁹ While Iran and pro-Iranian armed groups—including the Houthis—continue to be significant factors in these calculations, Israel is also part of the deterrence equation, though the U.S. is not considered an enemy. The agreement emerges as a way to reduce excessive dependence on Washington. Iranian scholar Muhammad Riza Muhammedi states that while the

agreement targets both Iran and Israel, its deeper political significance may be to encircle Israel.¹⁰ It states that Tehran does not appear to be very concerned because, according to Iran's assessment, it is unlikely that Turkey or Pakistan would engage in a full-scale conflict with Iran or Israel.

Looking at media reports and analyst opinions, the rationale behind the Mecca Alliance appears to have become clear. Nearly everyone agrees that the Pact is a product of regional countries assuming their own security responsibilities as an alternative to the shifting balances of power in the Middle East and the increasingly fragile U.S. hegemony. The general perception on the Iranian side is that the Pact does not include Iran within its scope of threats. Nevertheless, the issue of the Houthis will likely be one of the most significant tests the Pact will face. This situation is likely to affect Iran's participation. Indeed, the Alliance requires an environment in which member countries do not pose a threat to one another's security but, on the contrary, act as guarantors for one another. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the Alliance will not adopt an interventionist stance toward the foreign policies of its member countries. For example, despite Russia's anti-NATO stance, Turkey, as a NATO member, is able to act as a mediator in relations with Russia. In other words, while such alliances do not restrict member countries' room for maneuver, their stances remain tied to their own policies.

It is important to recall the 2015 "Islamic Army" initiative. Talks were held between

⁶ <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1392975/>-بیمن-مکه-علیه-ایران-است-یا-اسرائیل-معماری-جدید-امنیتی-منطقه-که-ناگوی-اسلامی-نیست

⁷ <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1392975/>-بیمن-مکه-علیه-ایران-است-یا-اسرائیل-معماری-جدید-امنیتی-منطقه-که-ناگوی-اسلامی-نیست

⁸ <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1392975/>-بیمن-مکه-علیه-ایران-است-یا-اسرائیل-معماری-جدید-امنیتی-منطقه-که-ناگوی-اسلامی-نیست

⁹ <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1392975/>-بیمن-مکه-علیه-ایران-است-یا-اسرائیل-معماری-جدید-امنیتی-منطقه-که-ناگوی-اسلامی-نیست

¹⁰ <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1392975/>-بیمن-مکه-علیه-ایران-است-یا-اسرائیل-معماری-جدید-امنیتی-منطقه-که-ناگوی-اسلامی-نیست

the U.S., the Gulf Arab states, and Egypt to establish an “Arab NATO,” and during these talks, Saudi Arabia announced in December 2015 the formation of the “Islamic Alliance Army (Islamic Alliance Against Terrorism).” Comprising 41 members with broad participation from different continents, the Alliance was built upon four core pillars: media, finance, intelligence, and military institutions. At that time, Iran did not join this alliance due to geopolitical rivalry, sectarian divisions, fundamental disagreements over the definition of terrorism, proxy forces, and other factors.

Although relations today are not as bad as they were back then, proxy forces still hang over the countries in the region like the Sword of Damocles, casting a shadow of uncertainty. Considering the recent tensions with the Houthis and the diplomatic efforts underway with Iran, Iran must choose between “stopping” the Houthis, “abandoning” them when it cannot rein them in, or continuing its support and thereby “coming into conflict with the three Pact countries.” Its relations with Pakistan—an important neighbor from both an economic and security perspective—will also be decisive in determining its next move. Most importantly, however, Iran must learn to trust the Sunnis within a security equation that includes Turkey, with whom it is in regional competition, and Saudi Arabia, with whom it is in sectarian competition. One possibility is that if the UAE-Israel bloc forms a “counter-pact,” Iran’s likelihood of joining the Mecca Alliance will also increase.

Possible Participation of Other Countries in the Region

After Egypt and Iran, perhaps the most prominent country is Syria. The close military and political ties between Turkey and Syria are viewed by Israel as a major threat regarding Syria’s potential participation in the Mecca Alliance. However, the Shara administration must first establish sovereignty over all of its territory.

Since a country that is currently under occupation and fighting for its sovereignty cannot make progress on foreign policy issues without resolving its internal matters, its accession to the pact is problematic. Israel’s decades-long occupation of the Golan Heights, coupled with the Israel Defense Forces’ (IDF) daily incursions into new villages in Quneitra, remains an intractable knot in the security equation and continues to undermine the Syrian government’s central authority. Having strengthened the central government by eliminating separatism in the north through the integration of the SDF into the army, Syria must now focus on the Druze and Israeli issues in the south to achieve full sovereignty. Israel is able to continue its occupation because there is no deterrent force in the region, and both Syria and Turkey have avoided direct confrontation with Israel. It remains uncertain whether Syria’s potential involvement would lead Israel to perceive it as a security threat and escalate its aggression, or whether it would prompt Israel to withdraw.

The “Development Corridor” supported by Turkey—along with trade routes connecting Turkey to Europe, such as Lebanese ports and the Hejaz Railway—pass through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, all of

which are weak states. From Israel's perspective, this situation fuels fears that the security umbrella provided by Turkey's NATO membership will extend to these countries. Looking at Iraq, it is evident that the country is caught between American tutelage and Iranian influence.

There is military and political turmoil among, on the one hand, Shiite groups opposed to both Iran and the U.S.; on the other hand, groups like the Hashd that cannot separate themselves from Iran; and on yet another hand, political groups that oppose Iran's use of Iraq as a security buffer. For Iraq, caught between the U.S. and Iran, joining an alternative regional security framework would be a crucial step for its national security. Efforts to centralize the military are a critical step toward strengthening Iraq's central government. The potential for a country with a weak central government to join a defense pact is debatable. Furthermore, the inclusion of a predominantly Shia country like Iraq in the Alliance would largely dispel concerns about the "Sunni Block" within the Mecca Alliance. This, in turn, would enhance the Alliance's regional legitimacy.

Some analysts have stated that Algeria's participation would significantly strengthen the Pact; indeed, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has made similar remarks. Egypt's potential accession to the Pact—of which Turkey is a founding member—is likely to trigger Libya's accession as well. During the Libyan crisis following 2011, Turkey emerged as the political and military patron of the Tripoli-based government (Government of National Accord) in the west, while Egypt became the political and military patron of the House of Representatives and the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Haftar in

the east. Should Turkey and Egypt come together under the same security umbrella (the Mecca Defense Pact), this synergy will extend to Libya as well. Synchronizing the defense doctrines of Ankara and Cairo within the framework of a regional alliance, and having the two main sponsors join the same military bloc, would minimize competition over Libya and the dynamics of a "zero-sum game." However, Libya must first resolve its own internal political issues. Participation in the Mecca Alliance requires collective defense and institutional military integration. The biggest obstacle preventing Libya from joining the pact at this stage is the absence of a single central command structure that can serve as a point of contact. If Egypt were to join the Alliance, it would be much easier for two Alliance members—who guarantee each other's security on the ground—to resolve the issue in Libya. As a result of resolving this issue, it would be entirely natural for Libya to be included in a security equation involving both of its patrons.

Looking at the Gulf region regarding the Mecca Alliance, it is evident that the most positive stance has come from Qatar. Qatar's satisfaction with the pact, its previous military and security cooperation with Turkey, and its close strategic relations with the three member countries of the Alliance make it a potential candidate as well. In addition to its deep defense ties with Turkey, Qatar has also normalized relations with Saudi Arabia—with which it had previously experienced various tensions—through the Al-Ula Agreement (2021). Majid Al-Ansari, the official spokesperson for the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also noted in his statements that such alliances represent a "responsibility" for regional security and highlighted that Qatar participates in

various regional platforms aimed at strengthening cooperation and joint coordination¹¹; however, he noted that it is still too early for other countries to join the Alliance.¹²

Some pro-American and pro-Israeli analysts interpret the agreement as an alliance against Israel, while others see it as a sign that the U.S. is seeking new security guarantors in light of its inability to fully protect the Arab monarchies. During the war with Iran, there was internal backlash in the Gulf countries against the U.S., both over the failure to stop the war and the failure to adequately ensure their security. Nabeel Alhamar, media advisor to the ruler of Bahrain, has advocated moving beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council toward a Gulf Union in which Bahrain's future defense would become increasingly integrated with that of Saudi Arabia. Similar arguments have emerged in Kuwait and Qatar in favor of stronger collective security.

The only Gulf actor to react to the alliance has been the United Arab Emirates. In addition to tensions with Saudi Arabia and competition for Gulf leadership, the UAE's close ties with Israel have also made its participation in the agreement a contentious issue. In fact, the agreement has angered some people considerably. Abdulkhaleq Abdullah, an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of the UAE, said, "If this agreement is not an alliance, what should it be called? Was this agreement made with the knowledge of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries? Does it strengthen the 2000 Gulf Collective Defense Agreement (GCC), which collapsed due to Iran's aggression?" He has reacted

quite harshly to the agreement with these statements.¹³ According to him, the fact that Saudi Arabia, despite being a Gulf country, seeks its security "outside the Gulf framework," and the "neglect" of the UAE as a counterpart, has harmed Gulf cooperation. This debate, which has dragged on due to responses from some Saudi officials, actually suggests that the Mecca Alliance has created rifts in relations among Gulf countries.

Conclusion

The absence of a local security system in the Middle East—particularly over the last quarter-century—has turned this region into a battleground for extra-regional actors and major powers. Actors intervening under the pretext of resolving issues that regional states have been unable to address have either exacerbated existing problems or created new ones. The Mecca Joint Defense Alliance has emerged as both an opportunity and a necessity for local states to break free from foreign security umbrellas and from the unreliable guarantees of powers—as seen in the aftermath of the Israel/U.S.-Iran War. The Alliance has stated that it is not established against any specific actor and is open to all regional states that act in accordance with international law. Indeed, Egypt stands out as one of the first and most important candidates. As the most populous country in the Middle East, the former political and current cultural leader of the Arab world, home to one of the region's most significant militaries, and a strategically important country on the African continent, Egypt is a highly significant candidate for the Pact. Given the ties it has developed with Pact members in recent

¹¹ وأمن المنطقة مسؤولية "اتفاق مكة للدفاع المشترك" قطر: نرجب بإعلان
جماعية تتطلب التنسيق

¹² https://x.com/alaraby_ar/status/2087125052886016110

¹³ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-mecca-agreement-has-given-UAE-Israel-alliance-the-jitters>

years and its increasingly strained relations with Israel, its participation appears highly likely, though the timing remains unknown. As for Iran, another key country, while its participation currently seems unlikely due to regional rivalries with Turkey and Saudi Arabia and disputes over proxy forces, statements by officials indicate that the issue of joining the Alliance has been raised; however, it is clear that various political and military groups within the country hold differing views on the Pact. In particular, the fact that all three member countries are Sunni has led some circles to perceive this initiative as a “Sunni front.” Among the Gulf countries, Qatar has taken a fairly moderate stance toward the Alliance, while the UAE has expressed opposition. Reasons such as Iraq’s preoccupation with its own internal affairs and Syria’s focus on Israel’s annexation indicate that other countries in the region are not yet ready to join. Israel’s reaction to the pact, however, is a subject for another analysis.

The general consensus regarding the Mecca Alliance—which heralds a new order in the region—is that it marks the beginning of a post-American era. In a region like the Middle East, such an alliance will not only counter external threats but also minimize members’ perceptions of threats against one another, thereby fostering cooperation and enhancing trust among the countries of the region. For example, although relations between Turkey and Greece—both NATO members—are quite tense, their shared membership in NATO serves as a guarantee that they will not attack one another. In a hypothetical scenario, this implies that other NATO members would not provide military support to either of these two countries. In the event of any dispute, efforts to reach a compromise within the

framework of the alliance can be undertaken much more easily. Thus, in such alliances, members are protected not only from external threats but also from one another. Regional actors are generally aware that, although this alliance is fundamentally a security alliance, at its core lies the “prosperity and associated economic progress that a stable region will bring” thanks to deterrence. Similarly, the countries that signed the Balkan Entente (Greece, Turkey, Romania, and Yugoslavia) were states that had experienced bloody wars in the past and had serious border disputes and deep-seated mistrust among themselves. Nevertheless, they were able to come together with rational pragmatism in the face of a common threat. Today, the fact that actors such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan—which have different political traditions, geopolitical priorities, and even areas of past competition—are sitting down at the table out of existential concerns stemming from regional chaos and external interventions is the clearest indication of this historical parallel.

Mecca, which appears in the alliance’s name, holds sacred significance for the Islamic world beyond simply being the site where the founding agreement was signed. The fact that the alliance’s three founding states are Muslim, that the agreement is named after Mecca, and that it is a security-based organization has led some circles to refer to the Mecca Alliance as the “Muslim NATO.” For this organization, which also draws on Islamic references, to serve as the architect of an alternative security architecture in the region, it is crucial that it position itself beyond religious, ethnic, and sectarian connotations. The Middle East is home to millions of non-Muslims, primarily Christians. In a region where politics is dominated by religion, sect, and ethnicity,

these affiliations must either be set aside or serve as unifying factors to enable cooperation. Although it may seem insignificant in interstate relations, public support can trigger either threats or opportunities for cooperation. Furthermore, there should be no hesitation regarding the participation of countries like Lebanon—where religion plays a significant role in their dynamics—in the alliance.

Another factor that will ensure the Pact's success is its visibility on the ground and its ability to take the initiative in responding. The Houthis carried out their largest-scale attacks this week since the start of the U.S./Israel-Iran war. The Houthi attacks, which followed Iran's decision to remove Saudi Arabia from its list of targets, serve as a test of the Pact's credibility. Indeed, in the wake of the attacks, even though the Pact has not yet been fully established, all eyes have turned to Turkey and Pakistan to see if a response will follow. It is anticipated that the Pact will face its first and greatest test in Yemen. Although the pact was not established specifically to address security threats from Iran, the fact that the Houthi issue points the finger at Iran will hinder the pact's expansion and reinforce suspicions that it is a "Sunni bloc." On the other hand, failing to provide an adequate response to the Houthis will undermine the pact's credibility and stability.

Essentially, Pakistan's conveyance to Iran of Saudi Arabia's "warning to rein in the Houthis" can also be viewed as a function of the Pact. This is because, according to officials' statements, the agreement is not intended for offensive purposes. The member country under attack determines for itself what kind of support it needs. This support may be intelligence-related,

logistical, or military. Pakistan's transmission of Saudi Arabia's message to Iran should be interpreted as diplomatic support. Nevertheless, should these attacks intensify and continue, moves in favor of Saudi Arabia are expected from Turkey and Pakistan. Taking such actions is of critical importance. For the Pact to be taken seriously and to serve as a deterrent, it will need to take action when necessary. This is because there appears to be an expectation, particularly on the part of Yemen and Iran, regarding the stance the Alliance will take. How this expectation is met has the potential to influence the Alliance's deterrent effect on other actors in the future.

In summary, what the Alliance will become and where it will go will be determined by the resolve of its members. The Alliance must convince the international community of its support for its members. Diplomatic channels should be opened and utilized as much as possible; however, it must also convince those seeking to test the Alliance that, should diplomatic options be exhausted, full support will be provided to any member state under attack in the event of a potential intervention. The deterrent power of the agreement lies precisely here.

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