

## **The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement**

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The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement is a landmark trilateral mutual defense pact signed on August 7, 2026, in the holy city of Mecca by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan, three of the Muslim world's most influential states demonstrating a growing willingness among regional powers to coordinate more closely on security matters.<sup>1</sup>

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement stipulates that an armed attack on any of the countries will be treated as an attack against all of them. This is a message of deterrence to potential aggressors that any attack will not remain a limited confrontation involving a single country and it could trigger a collective response involving three significant regional powers.<sup>2</sup>

According to the joint statement, the pact is based on the three countries' "deep historical ties, longstanding brotherhood, Islamic solidarity, shared strategic interests and well-established defense cooperation." It aims to strengthen collective deterrence against any act of aggression while expanding defense cooperation across all areas.<sup>3</sup>

The Mecca agreement comes at a time of heightened tensions in the region and the leaders said the agreement reflects their shared determination to enhance collective security, promote peace, security and stability in the region and beyond, and build a secure and prosperous future together.

The signatories bring different but complementary strengths to this partnership. Turkey fields NATO's second-largest military, Saudi Arabia is one of the world's top oil exporters and home to Islam's holiest sites, and Pakistan is the only nuclear-armed Muslim state. Together, they represent three important centers of power in the Muslim world.<sup>4</sup>

Since the war between US and Israel and Iran began on February 28, Iran and its allies have struck US bases and civilian infrastructure across Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Jordan, shut the Strait of

Hormuz to most shipping, and through the Houthis, declared a naval embargo on Saudi ports in the Red Sea.<sup>5</sup>

Saudi Arabia has since faced one of the largest sustained missile and drone campaigns, with Tehran repeatedly targeting military bases, energy infrastructure and civilian sites. According to Saudi authorities, Iran had launched 1,131 drones and 140 ballistic and cruise missiles at the kingdom by April 7, targeting oil facilities, power plants, military positions, civilian sites and foreign embassies.<sup>6</sup>

The deal also comes as a 2022 truce between Riyadh and the Houthi rebels in Yemen has broken down. After the two sides traded fire for the first time in years last month, Houthis declared a maritime blockade against the kingdom, threatening access to its ports, and has claimed to have attacked Saudi tankers in the Red Sea.<sup>7</sup> As the conflict expanded onto new fronts, Saudi Arabia last week unveiled plans for a multinational maritime defense coalition to protect shipping and energy supply routes in the Red Sea. Fourteen countries, including Pakistan, have voiced support for the coalition.<sup>8</sup>

The agreement was signed also against specific and immediate warnings. A Saudi official said the kingdom is preparing for coordinated attacks on energy facilities, ports and airports by Iraqi militias and Yemen's Houthis "in the very near future," under the guidance of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, citing intelligence that included tracked meetings between militia and Guards personnel and movements of drones and missiles.<sup>9</sup>

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan's foreign ministry reiterated the agreement stipulates that "any armed attack against any one of the three States shall be regarded as an attack against them all." It said the pact is intended to strengthen collective deterrence against aggression and deepen strategic defense cooperation among the three countries.<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said the agreement was "purely defensive in nature" and that other countries could join if they were willing to uphold its principles and resolve differences through peaceful means, adding the deal reflected a shared desire to strengthen strategic security cooperation.<sup>11</sup>

Islamabad has been fighting a border conflict with Afghanistan since February 2025 and came close to open war with India in May 2025. A formal alliance with two wealthy, strategically vital partners buys Pakistan diplomatic heft, economic engagement – and a stage on which its "battle-hardened military" and status as the Muslim world's only nuclear power become geopolitical currency.<sup>12</sup>

In September 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement under which aggression against either country would be treated as aggression against both. The agreement committed the two countries to strengthening

defense cooperation and joint deterrence while expressing their shared interest in regional and international peace.<sup>13</sup>

### **Turkey**

Turkey contributes advanced defense manufacturing capabilities (especially in drone and electronic warfare technology) and fields NATO's second-largest standing military. Turkey insisted that its joint defense pact signed with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan amid the US-Iran war was "not aimed at any particular country."<sup>14</sup>

For Türkiye, the pact consolidates its role as the Muslim world's most capable conventional military power and deepens what Ankara hopes will be commercial payoff: Turkish officials in Ankara say the deal should also boost economic ties with Riyadh and Islamabad, built as it is on "trust."<sup>15</sup>

### **Tehran's response**

For Iran the implications of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement between Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan are not clear-cut and the reactions to the agreement reflect political divisions in Tehran.

Hardline Iranian officials and state media dismissed the agreement as an ineffective "paper agreement", warning Riyadh that relying on foreign partnerships or "borrowed security" would not protect the kingdom from regional realities. Some portrayed it as proof of the failure of American deterrence and of Iran's success in undermining the old regional order.

Ebrahim Rezaei, a member of the Iranian parliament's national security committee, wrote on X: "The Saudis should know that a paper agreement with Turkey and Pakistan will not bring them security, just as years of one-way nursing of the Americans brought them none," "Correct your policies so you no longer need to go begging for security."<sup>16</sup>

Alireza Araf, the Friday prayer leader in Qom said: "Borrowed security and begging America for security will not save you. As long as you are with the enemies of Islam and Iran, the roar of our missiles will threaten you."<sup>17</sup>

Hardline state media, including the Kayhan newspaper criticized Pakistan's involvement in the pact as a contradiction of its regional mediation role and argued the alliance implicitly targets Tehran and its allies.

Friday preachers in provinces like Khuzestan responded with aggressive rhetoric regarding Iran's missile capabilities and deterrence posture in the Persian Gulf. They dismissed the "NATO-style" alliance and issued stark warnings, explicitly promising that the "roar of our missiles" will reach its signatories if they actively interfere in the conflict.

In contrast, more pragmatic circles refrained from characterizing the "Mecca Agreement" as an anti-Iranian offensive military alliance or an "Islamic NATO" capable of altering the regional balance of power. Nevertheless, many viewed it as a

manifestation of a broader shift in Middle East security architecture amidst the ongoing regional conflict—a shift centered on a gradual transition from near-exclusive reliance on the United States toward more diverse regional security networks.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi avoided directly naming the trilateral pact but publicly urged regional Muslim states to reject outsiders, rely solely on their own capabilities, and embrace "true brotherhood".

On one hand, Iranian commentators highlighted the differences between the three nations, the ambiguity surrounding their military commitments, and the fact that neither Turkey nor Pakistan is likely to rush into a direct confrontation with Iran.

On the other hand, the very fact that Saudi Arabia is forging closer security ties with two of Iran's major neighbors, particularly NATO member Turkey and nuclear-armed Pakistan is viewed as a signal that cannot be ignored. From their perspective, as the conflict between Iran and the United States persists and Arab states feel increasingly threatened by Iran and its allies, a regional security network could gradually take shape, posing a more significant challenge to Tehran.

### **The Houthi response**

A 2022 truce in Yemen's civil war, which Saudi Arabia entered more than a decade ago on the side of the internationally recognized government, appeared to have collapsed last month, with the Houthis announcing a maritime blockade of its northern neighbor and hitting Saudi tankers in the Red Sea.<sup>18</sup>

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis said on August 5, 2026, that they attacked two Saudi oil tankers, as the rebels pressed on with their maritime blockade of the kingdom. These were the eighth and ninth Saudi oil tankers targeted since the start of the blockade last month, according to figures given by a Houthi military spokesman.<sup>19</sup>

On August 11, 2026, a Tanzania-flagged small cargo ship had been targeted by a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis from eastern Taiz province while it was sailing through Bab al-Mandeb Strait.<sup>20</sup> If confirmed, the fatalities on the Tanzania-flagged Tihamah would be the first deaths in a Houthi strike on a ship since Middle East conflict was triggered by US-Israeli attacks on Iran at the end of February 2026.<sup>21</sup>

With Iran's closure of Hormuz, the Saudi port of Yanbu on the Red Sea became the main exit point for Saudi oil, with the Bab al-Mandeb Strait turning into a crucial transit route for crude.<sup>22</sup>

The Yemeni threat to shipping and Saudi oil facilities comes in parallel with Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which has become the central flashpoint between Tehran and Washington amid efforts to end the Middle East war begun by the US and Israel in February.

In the days before the Mecca signing, Iran-aligned Houthi forces killed dozens of Yemeni government troops and fired missiles and drones at Saudi Aramco facilities in Jizan and Yanbu. Aramco is the Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil company.<sup>23</sup>

The Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said the Houthis had "succeeded in targeting the Aramco refinery in Jizan with a drone, and the strike was precise", adding the attack had been launched in response to Saudi drone incursions into northwest Yemen and retaliation for Saudi strikes on Hodeidah.<sup>24</sup>

The Houthi movement responded to the Mecca pact with an immediate, high-intensity military offensive designed to test the resolve of the new coalition:

On the ground in Yemen, the Houthis launched at least 12 drone and ballistic missile attacks targeting Saudi-backed government troops and military sites in the strategic provinces of Marib and Hadramout. The initial waves killed at least 30 soldiers.

Escalating the stakes, Houthi artillery and missiles hit the southern Saudi border region of Najran. The coalition spokesman, Maj. Gen. Turki al-Malki, confirmed that the indiscriminate shelling wounded 11 civilians, including a 4-year-old child and a Pakistani citizen.

Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Houthi government in Yemen, said the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement would have no effect and that the "blockade for blockade" policy would continue.<sup>25</sup>

The Houthi leadership also stated that Saudi Arabia's newly built Red Sea maritime coalition will not deter them. They insisted they will continue blockading and firing upon any Saudi-linked or hostile commercial shipping in the Bab al-Mandeb strait until their political demands are met.

Yemen's internationally recognized government said on August 9 that it's armed forces, struck the Houthis on several fronts. The spokesperson of the army said that the operation was launched in response to "repeated and treacherous" Houthi attacks against its personnel and civilians. He warned of a firm response to any future attacks.<sup>26</sup>

The latest escalation came after the Houthis launched a large-scale attack using ballistic missiles and drones targeting military sites in Marib and Hadramawt, leading to the deaths of 17 military officials, and an unknown number of injured. The attacks later spread to displacement camps and residential neighborhoods in the city of Marib, killing two people and wounding 14.<sup>27</sup>

On August 9, 2026, the Houthi militia has targeted Mokha port in western Yemen with missiles and drones marking a new escalation in the country. The Yemeni military said seven people including military personnel and civilians were killed and 30 others wounded. Air defenses intercepted and shot down 11 Houthi drones that participated in the attack, the military said.<sup>28</sup>

Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council Chairman Rashad al-Alimi said the attack showed the Houthis' "systematic war" on Yemen's resources, accusing the militia of targeting vital infrastructure on which Yemenis depend.<sup>29</sup>

The Houthi's military spokesman Yahya Saree said that the militia had carried out a military operation targeting concentrations and weapons depots in the Mokha area.<sup>30</sup>

On August 9, 2026, a Houthi drone struck a position belonging to the Shabwa Defense Forces in Najd Margad, near the border with Marib, killing two soldiers and wounding several others.<sup>31</sup>

Yemen's armed forces have targeted several Houthi positions and gatherings in response to attacks. Army drones targeted Houthi mortar systems and positions in the al-Radha Mountains in the governorate of Marib while the air force targeted a Houthi camp on the al-Alam front in al-Jawf governorate.<sup>32</sup>

### **The involvement of Iraq**

Iran-backed Iraqi militias and Saudi Arabia are engaged in a sharp military escalation, while the Iraqi government is caught in a high-stakes balancing act to protect its sovereignty and strategic ties.

### **The Involvement of Iraqi Militias**

Under the supervision of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), these Iraqi groups have synchronized their operations with Yemen's Houthis to coordinate a multi-pronged aerial campaign against Saudi ports, airports, and civilian hubs. Iraqi militias—operating under the umbrella of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (including factions like Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba and Kata'ib Hezbollah)—have launched multiple cross-border drone and missile attacks targeting Saudi energy infrastructure and oil facilities in the Eastern Province.

Saudi Arabia was attacked multiple times from Iraqi territory: first with a series of drone launches that were intercepted en route to Riyadh and the oil-rich Eastern Province on July 27, and second via a successful July 28 attack on Abqaiq, the world's largest oil-processing facility.<sup>33</sup>

On July 28, American and Saudi aircraft conducted strikes on at least seven sites in Iraq that U.S. Central Command described as "terrorist logistics and weapons sites" used by Iran-backed militias.<sup>34</sup>

Following joint U.S.-Saudi retaliatory airstrikes Iraqi militant leaders vowed direct military vengeance ("fire for fire") against both US and Saudi Arabia. But on next day they announced that they has decided "to postpone the response " following a call from the head of Badr organization, Hadi al-Ameri, and other political leaders.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Position of the Iraqi Government**

Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi's administration is walking a diplomatic tightrope, attempting to condemn external actions while simultaneously reining in domestic

militants. The Iraqi federal government strongly condemned the joint U.S.-Saudi airstrikes, labeling them a "blatant violation of Iraq's sovereignty" and an unacceptable attack on official state-embedded security headquarters (referring to the PMF).

Baghdad maintains a firm official policy that Iraqi territory must not be used as a launchpad or arena for attacks on neighboring countries or for settling regional scores. Prime Minister Zaidi has ordered all domestic armed factions to come under direct state control, threatening legal and counter-terrorism action against those refusing to disarm ahead of a rigid September 30, 2026 deadline.

The Iraqi government is stepping up efforts to rein in armed groups. Government measures include uncovering headquarters, cells and drone-production networks linked to factions planning attacks on neighboring countries. In one of the boldest operations of its kind in years, Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service uncovered cells and drone-production networks in Baghdad that were run by Iranian figures, along with weapons caches and equipment. The operation was conducted jointly with the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, suggesting that detailed intelligence had been gathered ahead of the highly precise and secretive raids.<sup>36</sup>

Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi's planned visit to the kingdom was postponed due to the exchange of fire. Despite the crisis Zaidi is actively working to shield economic and strategic integration with Saudi Arabia. The government recently mediated a fragile, temporary truce where militias agreed to delay retaliatory strikes against Saudi Arabia in exchange for the temporary suspension of domestic government crackdowns against them.

On August 8, 2026, Iraqi Prime Minister al-Zaidi met Saudi general intelligence chief, Khalid al-Humaidan, to discuss coordination over regional security developments. Zaidi said Iraq would not allow its territory to be used to launch attacks or activities targeting any other country. He reiterated Baghdad's commitment to protecting its sovereignty and preventing regional escalation.<sup>37</sup>

## **Summary**

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement signed on August 7, 2026, by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan establishes a landmark trilateral collective-security architecture. The central provision dictates that an armed attack against any one of the three signatory states will be treated as an attack against all three, closely mirroring NATO's Article 5.

The Mecca pact does not, by itself, remake the Middle East. Signatories have explicitly stressed that the pact is "purely defensive" and legally remains open to other regional nations willing to resolve conflicts peacefully.

The alliance combines three distinct regional strengths: Saudi Arabia's immense financial and diplomatic weight, Turkey's advanced NATO-standard defense industry



(such as drones and fighter programs), and Pakistan's extensive military experience as a nuclear-armed power.

The full text of Mecca Joint Defense Agreement remains classified and the initial joint statements failed to outline the exact military commitments each country has accepted, leaving it unclear how bound they are to specific military operations. Its transition from a "paper agreement" into a fully operational pact will be proven only by how the three nations navigate the escalating war involving Iran and the ongoing Houthi military campaign against Saudi Arabia in the months ahead.

## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey sign Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, Al Arabiya, August 7, 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Hani Hazaimah, Makkah Agreement is not a pact against anyone, Arab news, August 10, 2026.

<sup>3</sup> Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye sign tripartite defense agreement in Makkah, Dawn, August 8, 2026.

<sup>4</sup> Hani Hazaimah, Makkah Agreement is not a pact against anyone, Arab news, August 10, 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Mecca pact ties three Sunni powers together as Iran-backed attacks loom, Iran international, August 8, 2026.

<sup>6</sup> Attack on one is attack on all, say Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in joint defense pact, TRT, August 7, 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye sign tripartite defense agreement in Makkah, Dawn, August 8, 2026.

<sup>8</sup> Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye sign tripartite defense agreement in Makkah, Dawn, August 8, 2026.

<sup>9</sup> Saudi Arabia braces for attacks on ports and airports by Iraqi militias working with Iran-backed Houthis, CNN, August 7, 2026.

<sup>10</sup> Attack on one is attack on all, say Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in joint defense pact, TRT, August 7, 2026.

<sup>11</sup> Pakistan says pact with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye is 'purely defensive', Arab news, August 9, 2026.

<sup>12</sup> Asad Mirza, Three Flags, One Shield: Inside the Makkah Pact, Reshaping the Middle East, The AIDEM, August 8, 2026.



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- <sup>13</sup> Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan sign a key defense agreement, Ahram online, August 7, 2026.
- <sup>14</sup> Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan sign a key defense agreement, Ahram online, August 7, 2026.
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- <sup>16</sup> Mecca pact ties three Sunni powers together as Iran-backed attacks loom, Iran international, August 8, 2026.
- <sup>17</sup> Mecca pact ties three Sunni powers together as Iran-backed attacks loom, Iran international, August 8, 2026.
- <sup>18</sup> Yemen's Houthi claims it struck refinery on Saudi's Red Sea coast, Ahram online, August 9, 2026.
- <sup>19</sup> Yemen's Houthis say attacked two Saudi oil tankers, Ahram online, August 5, 2026.
- <sup>20</sup> Houthi missile attack kills three members of commercial vessel crew in Bab al-Mandeb, Al Arabiya, August 11, 2026.
- <sup>21</sup> 3 Killed in Houthi Attack on Cargo Ship in Bab al-Mandeb Strait, Asharq Al Awsat, August 11, 2026.
- <sup>22</sup> Yemen's Houthis say attacked two Saudi oil tankers, Ahram online, August 5, 2026.
- <sup>23</sup> Yemen's Houthi claims it struck refinery on Saudi's Red Sea coast, Ahram online, August 9, 2026.
- <sup>24</sup> Asad Mirza, Three Flags, One Shield: Inside the Makkah Pact, Reshaping the Middle East, The AIDEM, August 8, 2026.
- <sup>25</sup> Iran-backed Houthis dismiss Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, Iran international, August 8, 2026.
- <sup>26</sup> Yemeni military strikes Houthi targets after Marib, Hadramawt attacks, Al Arabiya, August 9, 2026.
- <sup>27</sup> Yemeni military strikes Houthi targets after Marib, Hadramawt attacks, Al Arabiya, August 9, 2026.
- <sup>28</sup> Yemen says Houthi attack on Mokha kills seven, wounds 30, UN envoy expresses concern, Al Arabiya, August 10, 2026.
- <sup>29</sup> 7 killed in Houthi drone, missile attacks on Yemen's Red Sea port of Mocha, Arab news, August 9, 2026.
- <sup>30</sup> Houthis target Yemen's Mokha port with missiles, drones, killing eight, Al Arabiya, August 9, 2026.
- <sup>31</sup> Houthis launch new drone wave across Yemen's government-held areas, Arab news, August 10, 2026.

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<sup>32</sup> Yemen targets Houthi positions in response to attacks, Al Arabiya, August 11, 2026.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Knights, How to Prevent Militias from Disrupting Iraqi-Saudi Relations, The Washington Institute, July 30, 2026.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Knights, How to Prevent Militias from Disrupting Iraqi-Saudi Relations, The Washington Institute, July 30, 2026.

<sup>35</sup> Iraqi PM, Saudi intelligence chief discusses regional security as militias delay response, The new Arab, August 8, 2026.

<sup>36</sup> Iraqi Government Increases Pressure on Armed Factions as Deadline Nears, Asharq Al Awsat, August 10, 2026.

<sup>37</sup> Iraqi PM, Saudi intelligence chief discusses regional security as militias delay response, The new Arab, August 8, 2026.