

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

THE MIDDLE EAST WITHOUT A SINGLE SECURITY GUARANTOR

The Makkah Pact

A New Architecture of Regional Security

COLLECTIVE DETERRENCE, REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION
AND THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Saudi Arabia | Pakistan | Türkiye

Middle East Geopolitical & Security Center

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Executive Summary

For decades, the Middle East operated under an implicit strategic assumption: however fragmented the region became, the United States would remain the principal external security guarantor. That assumption has not disappeared, but it is becoming less exclusive.

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, signed by Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan on 7 August 2026, is one of the clearest expressions of this shift. Its central provision states that an armed attack on one of the three states will be regarded as an attack on all. The agreement is defensive in its declared purpose and is designed to strengthen collective deterrence and broaden defence cooperation.

The pact should not yet be described as a Middle Eastern NATO. Its strategic significance lies elsewhere: three influential middle powers are attempting to institutionalize regional security cooperation while preserving their existing relationships with Washington and other partners. Türkiye has since outlined plans for high-level political and military mechanisms, joint exercises across multiple domains, and deeper defence-industrial cooperation.

Egypt is central to the wider story. Cairo is not a signatory, but it participates with the three members in the R-4 consultative framework. Its eventual choice - to join, partner selectively, or remain outside - may determine whether the Makkah Pact stays trilateral or becomes the nucleus of a broader regional security network.

The Makkah Pact does not signal the end of the American security role. It signals the end of the assumption that one external power should be sufficient to guarantee regional security.

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Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, remarks to parliament, 27 August 2026. Bangladesh stated that it views the pact positively and would consider joining if invited, while confirming that no membership decision had been taken.

Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, media briefing, 27 August 2026. Pakistan described the Makkah agreement as an evolving security architecture open to additional signatories, subject to consultation among the founding members.

Analytical Note

1. From American Primacy to Security Diversification

The United States remains the most capable external military power in the Middle East. Its bases, naval presence, intelligence networks, defence agreements and weapons systems remain deeply embedded across the region. Saudi Arabia still depends heavily on American capabilities; Türkiye remains a NATO member; and Egypt continues to receive substantial U.S. military assistance.

The emerging change is therefore not an American withdrawal in the literal sense. It is the diversification of security dependence. Regional governments increasingly seek multiple layers of deterrence, industrial cooperation and political insurance rather than placing all strategic expectations inside one external framework.

The logic is straightforward. Washington's priorities are global, while Middle Eastern governments must live permanently with the consequences of regional instability. A security architecture designed around a single outside guarantor becomes vulnerable when that guarantor's attention, political appetite or strategic priorities shift.

The Makkah Pact is best understood as an additional layer beneath and alongside existing partnerships - not as their immediate replacement.

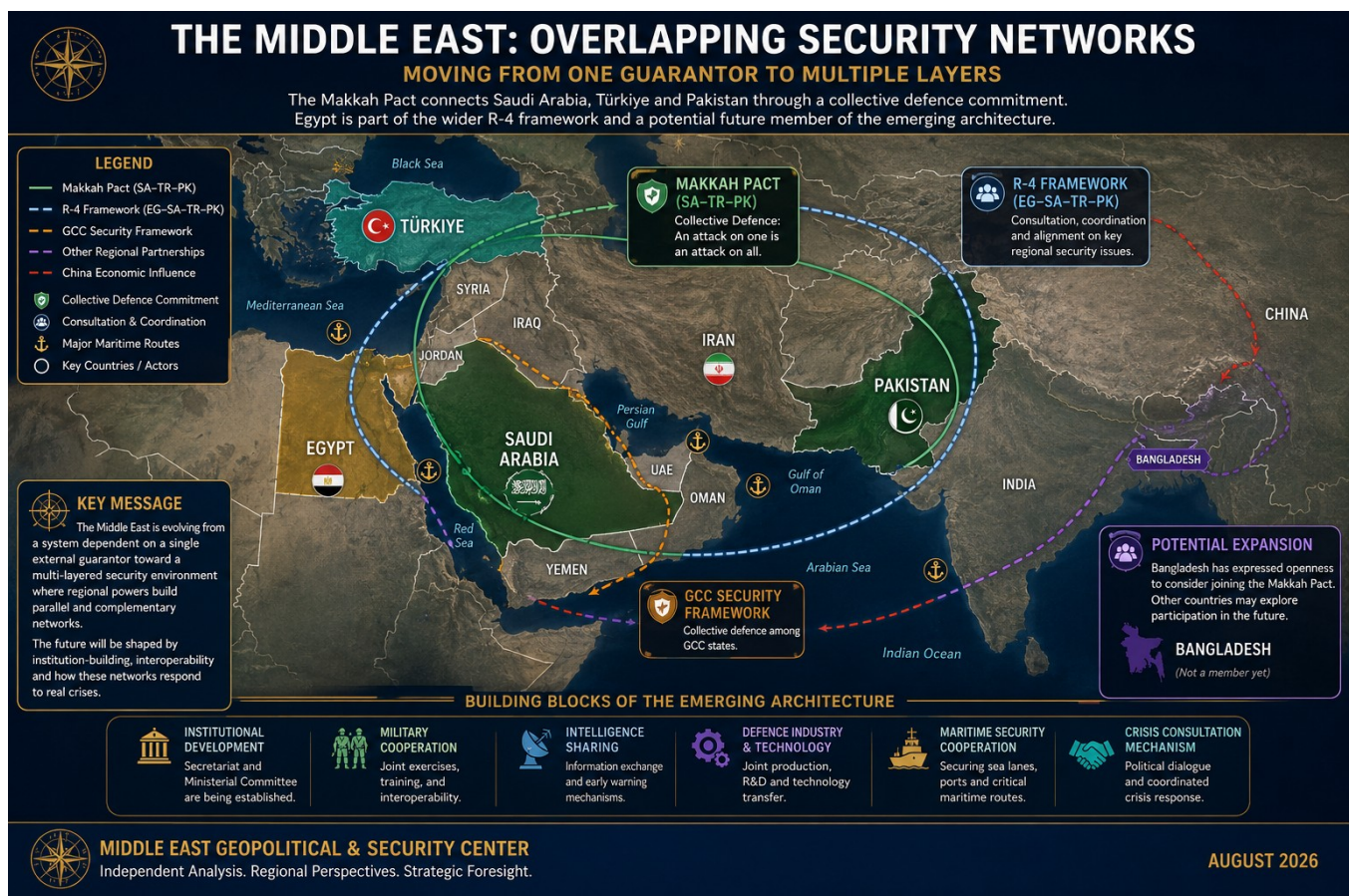


Figure 1. Overlapping security networks and the shift toward a multi-layered regional architecture.

2. The Makkah Pact: Why These Three States?

The agreement brings together three states with unusually complementary assets. Saudi Arabia contributes financial weight, energy centrality, diplomatic reach and growing investment in advanced defence capabilities. Türkiye contributes NATO experience, a large military, operational exposure across several theatres and a rapidly expanding defence-industrial base. Pakistan contributes a large professional military, decades of security cooperation with Gulf states and the strategic weight of being the Muslim world's only nuclear-armed state.

Yet complementary capabilities do not automatically create a coherent alliance. The three governments do not rank every threat in the same order. Their calculations toward Iran, Israel, South Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean differ. The pact's credibility will therefore depend less on ceremonial unity than on whether the members can develop common planning for crises in which their interests are not identical.

3. The Pakistan Factor: Nuclear Power Without a Nuclear Guarantee

Pakistan's participation gives the pact immediate strategic weight, but it should not be confused with an announced nuclear umbrella. The public agreement refers to collective deterrence and defence cooperation; it does not publicly extend Pakistani nuclear guarantees to Saudi Arabia or Türkiye.

That ambiguity may itself have deterrent value, but Islamabad has strong reasons to keep the nuclear question contained. It must manage its rivalry with India, its relationship with Iran and its international responsibilities as a nuclear state. In the near term, Pakistan's most credible contribution is likely to remain conventional: training, deployments, air defence, intelligence, exercises and strategic planning.

4. Türkiye: The Pact's Military-Industrial Engine

Türkiye may become the pact's most important source of military-industrial momentum. Ankara has transformed defence production into a strategic instrument, with growing capabilities in unmanned systems, missiles, electronic warfare, naval platforms and aerospace.

On 13 August, Türkiye's defence ministry described plans for joint exercises involving land, naval and air forces, air defence and unmanned systems, alongside cooperation in autonomous systems, electronic warfare and artificial intelligence. It also emphasized joint development, production, technology cooperation and long-term logistics support.

If implemented, these measures could turn the pact from a political commitment into an ecosystem of shared capabilities. Alliances become harder to unwind when their members manufacture, train, maintain and plan together.

5. Saudi Arabia: From Security Consumer to Security Architect

Saudi Arabia is increasingly attempting to shape the regional security environment rather than merely purchase protection within it. The Makkah Pact fits a wider pattern of strategic diversification: maintaining the U.S. relationship, engaging China economically, sustaining dialogue with Iran, improving ties with Türkiye and deepening longstanding defence cooperation with Pakistan.

For Riyadh, strategic autonomy does not mean neutrality between all powers or the abandonment of Washington. It means reducing the risks created by excessive dependence on any one partner. The pact also gives Saudi Arabia a platform from which to influence the institutional design of a more regionally driven security order.

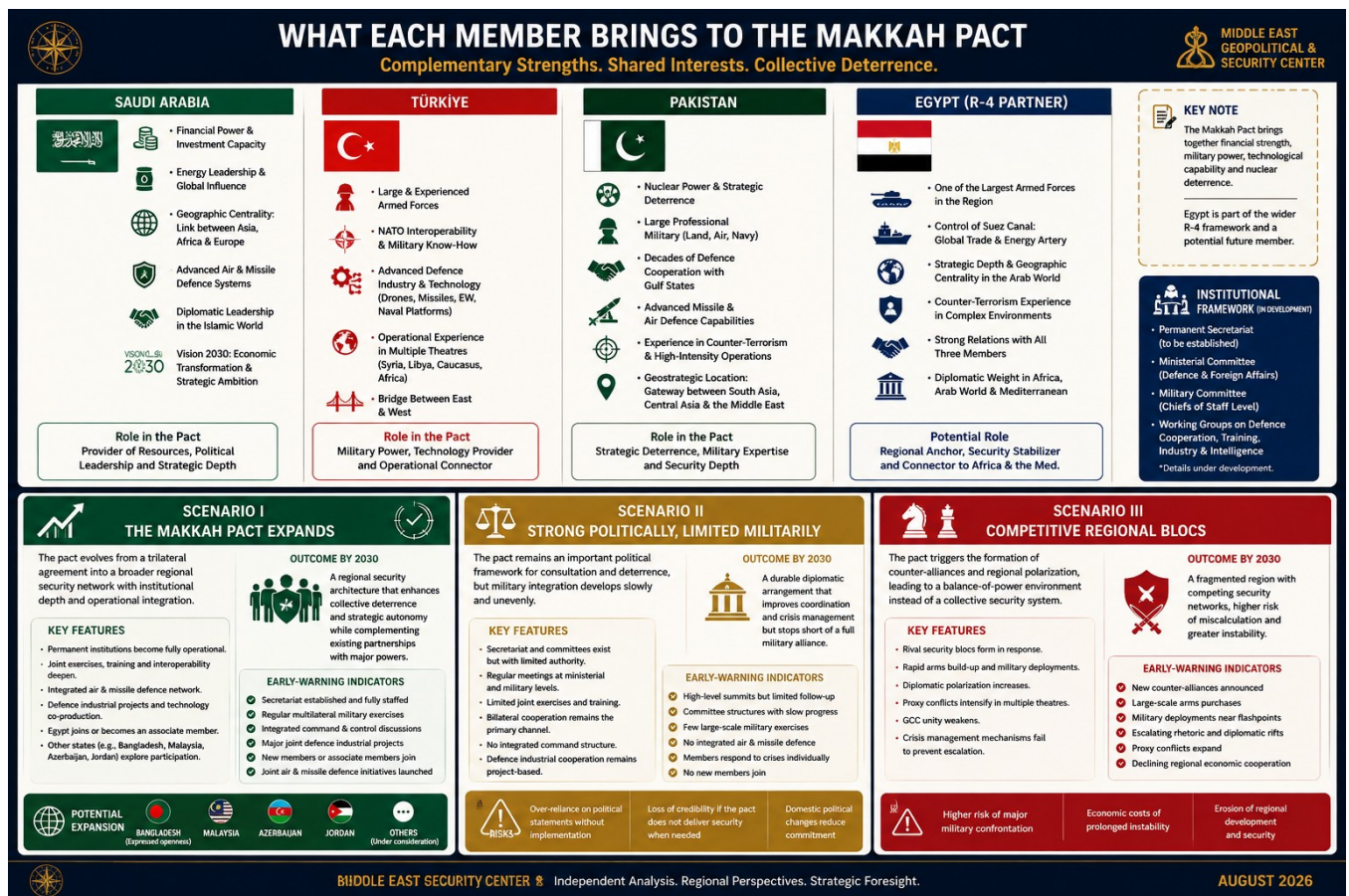


Figure 2. Complementary capabilities of the three signatories, with Egypt shown separately as an R-4 partner rather than a pact member.

6. Not an Islamic NATO - At Least Not Yet

The mutual-defence language naturally invites comparison with NATO's Article 5, and Turkish officials have themselves drawn a technical comparison. But the analogy has limits.

NATO's credibility rests not only on a treaty clause but on permanent institutions, integrated planning, common procedures, established command arrangements, interoperability and decades of exercises. The Makkah Pact is still building those foundations.

Importantly, however, it is no longer accurate to describe the pact as having no institutional plan. Türkiye has publicly outlined mechanisms involving defence ministers, foreign ministers and chiefs of staff, along with joint exercises and defence-industry cooperation. The key question is now implementation: how quickly will those mechanisms become staffed, routine and operational?

7. The R-4 Precedent

The Makkah Pact did not emerge in isolation. Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye had already been developing a four-country consultative framework. Their foreign ministers first met in Riyadh in March 2026 and met again in Amman on 5 August, two days before the Makkah agreement was signed.

This wider framework matters because it demonstrates that the strategic conversation extends beyond the three signatories. Egypt was already part of the political architecture even though it did not accept the mutual-defence commitment.

8. Egypt's Strategic Choice: Join, Partner, or Remain Outside?

Egypt's absence is one of the pact's most important strategic questions. Cairo works closely with all three members and shares concerns over maritime security, non-state actors, Sudan, the Horn of Africa and regional instability. Yet a binding collective-defence commitment creates risks that are different for Egypt than for the current signatories.

Membership could expose Cairo to crises involving Iran, Israel or even South Asian contingencies. Egypt also values its role as a mediator and has historically been cautious about military blocs that could reduce freedom of action.

Cairo therefore has three broad options. Full membership would maximize influence inside the pact but create the greatest risk of entrapment. A strategic-partner or associate model could provide access to consultation, exercises, intelligence, maritime security and selected defence projects without automatic defence obligations. Remaining outside would preserve maximum autonomy but could become costly if the pact develops into a major regional institution.

For the near term, selective partnership appears the most flexible path. Egypt can watch how the pact responds to its first genuine crisis before deciding whether political symbolism has been converted into dependable military value.

9. The Gulf Question

Saudi Arabia already sits inside the GCC's collective-defence framework. A stronger Makkah Pact therefore raises questions about how overlapping arrangements will interact. They may prove complementary, with Türkiye and Pakistan supplying capabilities that reinforce Gulf resilience. But they could also expose differences among GCC members over threat perceptions, external partnerships and Saudi regional leadership.

The most likely future is not one clean alliance structure. It is a network of overlapping arrangements: GCC defence, bilateral U.S. ties, the Makkah Pact, maritime coalitions and issue-specific partnerships.

10. Iran: Threat, Partner, or Both?

Iran is both a driver of regional insecurity and a state with which all three signatories have reasons to preserve channels. Türkiye and Pakistan share borders and economic interests with Iran, while Saudi Arabia has invested in diplomatic engagement even amid confrontation.

The pact may therefore pursue deterrence and dialogue simultaneously. Its success could depend on whether it can raise the cost of aggression without becoming a mechanism that makes permanent confrontation inevitable.

11. Israel and the New Regional Balance

Israel will inevitably assess the pact through the lens of regional balance. The agreement is not formally directed against Israel, but closer Saudi-Turkish-Pakistani coordination alters strategic perceptions. Türkiye's relationship with Israel has deteriorated sharply, Pakistan does not recognize Israel, and Saudi normalization has become more difficult amid regional conflict.

The danger is that one security network generates another. IISS has highlighted the possibility that states including Israel, India, Greece, Cyprus or the UAE could deepen coordination if they perceive the new arrangement as threatening. A pact intended to strengthen deterrence could therefore either stabilize the region or accelerate competitive bloc formation.

12. China Is Important - But It Is Not Replacing America

China's economic importance to the Middle East is undeniable, but economic centrality is not the same as security-guarantor status. Replacing the United States would require extensive basing, intelligence integration, logistics, military interoperability and a willingness to assume responsibility during regional crises.

The more plausible outcome is a multipolar system in which China remains a major economic and diplomatic partner while the United States retains unique military weight and regional powers build stronger security mechanisms of their own.

13. What Would Make the Makkah Pact Real?

The pact's credibility can be measured through observable indicators: whether ministerial and military committees meet routinely; whether a permanent secretariat becomes functional; whether exercises grow in scale and complexity; whether air and missile defence systems become interoperable; whether intelligence mechanisms become institutionalized; and whether joint defence projects move from announcements to production.

The first serious crisis involving a member will matter more than any communiqué. The response will reveal how the phrase 'an attack on one is an attack on all' is interpreted in practice - consultation, logistics, intelligence, air defence, deployment or direct combat.

From Trilateral Pact to Expandable Security Architecture

Developments in late August 2026 provide the first concrete indication that expansion is no longer purely theoretical. Bangladesh has publicly signalled that it views the Makkah Pact positively and would consider participation if invited by the founding members. Pakistani officials have also described the agreement as an evolving security architecture open to additional signatories, while stressing that operationalization remains at an early stage.

This does not mean that Bangladesh is joining the pact. No accession decision has been announced. Strategically, however, the discussion matters because it tests whether the Makkah framework can attract states beyond its original Saudi-Türkiye-Pakistan core. If formal invitations, observer arrangements or associate mechanisms begin to emerge, the pact would start to resemble an expandable security network rather than a fixed trilateral agreement.

Egypt remains the more consequential strategic variable because of its geography, military weight and role in Arab security. Bangladesh, by contrast, is an early indicator of the pact's potential geographic reach. Together, these cases should be watched as evidence of whether the Makkah Pact develops outward as well as inward.

Three Scenarios to 2030

The agreement is too new for deterministic forecasts. The following scenarios are structured analytical pathways designed to identify the indicators that would distinguish institutional expansion from political symbolism or regional polarization.

Scenario I - The Makkah Pact Expands

The three members progressively institutionalize cooperation and open pathways for additional participation. Egypt joins or develops a formal associate status. Selected Gulf and other states cooperate in specific domains. Joint exercises, defence-industrial projects, maritime security and integrated air-defence initiatives deepen.

Under this scenario, the pact does not replace the United States. It becomes a regional pillar operating alongside American and other external partnerships, giving members greater strategic autonomy and collective resilience.

Early-warning indicators include a staffed permanent secretariat; regular multilateral exercises; integrated command-and-control discussions; major joint defence-production projects; Egyptian associate or full participation; formal invitations, observer or associate arrangements for additional states; and the movement of Bangladesh or other interested countries from public interest toward structured accession talks.



Scenario I infographic - expansion into a broader regional security network.

Scenario II - Strong Politically, Limited Militarily

This is the most plausible near-term pathway. The pact remains politically significant and provides consultation, signalling and selective cooperation, but military integration develops slowly and unevenly.

Bilateral relationships continue to do much of the practical work. Joint exercises remain limited, command integration is shallow and the members retain wide discretion over how they respond to crises.

Early-warning indicators include frequent summits but modest operational follow-through; slow institutional development; selective rather than integrated exercises; continuing reliance on bilateral defence ties; and ambiguous responses when a member faces pressure.



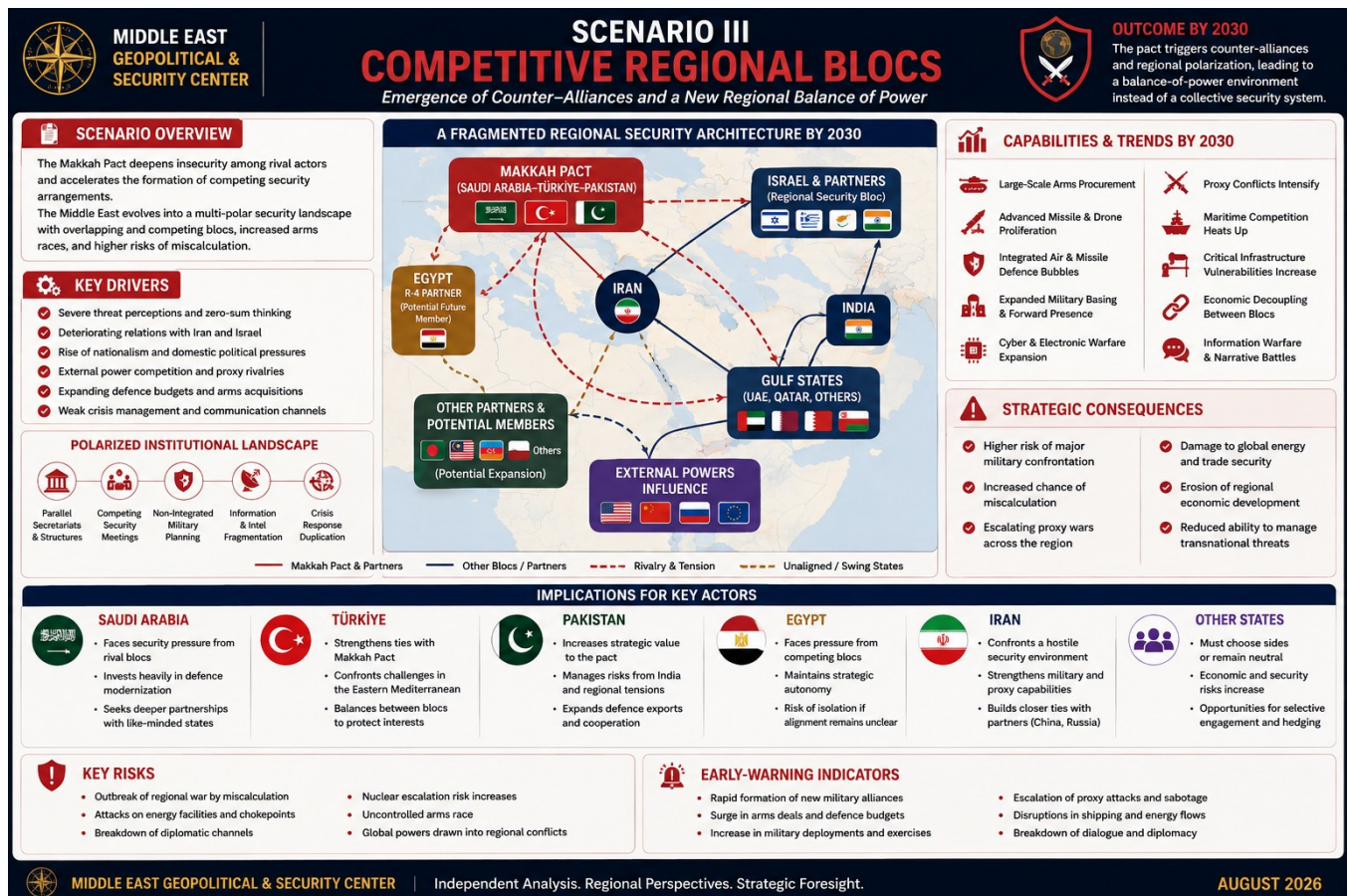
Scenario II infographic - durable political alignment with limited military integration.

Scenario III - Competitive Regional Blocs

The pact generates anxiety among rival actors and accelerates counter-alignments. Israel, India, Greece, Cyprus, Gulf states or other partners deepen security cooperation in response. Iran strengthens its own partnerships and proxy capabilities.

Instead of producing collective regional security, the Middle East moves toward a balance-of-power system characterized by competing networks, accelerated procurement, more military deployments and a higher risk of miscalculation.

Early-warning indicators include rapid formation of counter-alliances; major increases in defence spending; expanding military deployments near flashpoints; deterioration of GCC cohesion; intensifying proxy competition; and declining crisis-management channels.



Scenario III infographic - competing regional blocs and a higher-risk balance of power.

Strategic Conclusion

The Makkah Pact should neither be dismissed as symbolic diplomacy nor exaggerated into a fully formed Islamic NATO. Its importance lies between those extremes.

It is a test of whether regional middle powers can build durable security institutions without severing their relationships with the United States or subordinating themselves to another great power. It is also a test of whether collective deterrence can coexist with strategic flexibility in a region where the members do not share identical threat perceptions.

For Saudi Arabia, the pact is an instrument of security diversification and regional leadership. For Türkiye, it opens a larger strategic and defence-industrial space. For Pakistan, it expands its Middle Eastern role while increasing the complexity of its commitments. For Egypt, it creates a strategic choice that can be postponed, but probably not ignored indefinitely.

The most consequential outcome may not be a single new alliance. It may be the normalization of overlapping security networks in which regional states possess more agency, external powers remain important, and no single guarantor is expected to carry the entire burden.

What happens when the Middle East decides that no single security guarantor is enough?

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Analytical Note

The scenarios and assessments in this report are analytical judgments rather than predictions. The Makkah Pact remains under development. Its strategic importance will depend on implementation, military interoperability, institutional durability and the behaviour of its members during an actual regional crisis. References and factual claims reflect information available through 28 August 2026.