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A New Security Triangle Emerges with the Makkah Pact

Context

- The **Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA)**, signed on August 7, 2026, by Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, marks a significant shift in West Asian security.
- Emerging amid the **S.-Iran conflict**, regional instability and uncertainty over American security guarantees, it reflects Saudi Arabia's effort to diversify its strategic partnerships.
- Though its collective-defence provision resembles **NATO's Article 5**, the MJDA is better viewed as an experiment in regional security diversification than a prospective Muslim NATO.

A Shifting and Uncertain Regional Order

- West Asia is experiencing growing instability due to Israeli assertiveness, Iranian tensions, non-state actors and disruptions around strategic maritime chokepoints.
- Saudi Arabia has responded through multiple arrangements, including its **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement with Pakistan** and a **Multinational Maritime Defence Alliance**.

- The MJDA remains strategically ambiguous. It does not identify a specific adversary or establish its relationship with the GCC, Arab League or **OIC**.
- Riyadh has also denied that it represents a military axis or sectarian bloc. This ambiguity offers flexibility but raises questions about its **deterrent credibility**.

Historical and Strategic Contradictions

- The three partners possess significant strategic differences.
- Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have historical mistrust rooted in **Ottoman rule**, while Ankara's earlier support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other regional groups has unsettled Gulf monarchies.
- Pakistan presents different challenges. Its previous military deployments to Saudi Arabia generated disagreements over command structures and Islamabad's reluctance to confront Iran or Yemen.
- Its 900-kilometre border with Iran, domestic security pressures and rivalry with India further constrain its strategic choices.
- Thus, although the partners share broad interests, their divergent priorities could limit the emergence of a cohesive military bloc.

Saudi Arabia's Security Imperatives

- The MJDA is primarily driven by **Saudi security requirements**.
- Riyadh faces asymmetric threats to oil facilities, civilian infrastructure and maritime routes, alongside risks involving the **Strait of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb**.
- Yet Türkiye and Pakistan may not possess the capabilities required to counter such threats effectively.
- Even the U.S., with its advanced military presence, has struggled to eliminate these vulnerabilities.
- Hence, the MJDA is unlikely to replace American protection; instead, it represents **strategic hedging** and additional security insurance.

Complementarity and Defence Cooperation

- Despite its limitations, the partnership offers substantial complementarities.
- Saudi Arabia contributes financial resources and defence spending, Türkiye possesses a growing **defence-industrial complex**, and Pakistan provides a large and experienced military force.
- Cooperation in joint military exercises, weapons interoperability, defence technology, intelligence-sharing and **co-production of military equipment** could strengthen all three partners.
- The arrangement could also enhance Türkiye's and Pakistan's political and economic influence in Saudi Arabia.

The Iran Question and the Limits of the Alliance

- Iran remains the central strategic complication. Türkiye and Pakistan share borders and significant interests with Tehran and are unlikely to welcome automatic involvement in a war against Iran.
- Consequently, the MJDA may prove most effective as a mechanism of **deterrence and strategic coordination** rather than as an instrument for major warfare.

- Continued low-intensity conflict could increase its relevance, while a full-scale war could expose divisions among the partners. Conversely, regional peace could make the agreement less necessary.

The Declining Certainty of Pax Americana

- The MJDA reflects growing doubts about the reliability of an exclusively U.S.-led security system.
- Saudi Arabia appears to be pursuing **multipolar security arrangements** rather than abandoning Washington altogether.
- This represents a broader transition from dependence on a single external guarantor towards **greater regional strategic autonomy**.
- Riyadh's objective appears to be diversification of security partnerships and reduction of vulnerability to sudden shifts in American policy.

Implications for India

- Pakistan's participation could provide Islamabad with greater diplomatic leverage and encourage attempts to use the MJDA against India.
- Nevertheless, New Delhi should avoid overreaction.
- Saudi Arabia has deep and expanding economic relations with India, including strong energy and trade interests.
- Riyadh is therefore unlikely to jeopardise its relationship with India merely to support Pakistani adventurism.
- India should pursue **strategic vigilance without strategic overreaction**, while deepening economic, maritime, energy and diplomatic engagement with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

Conclusion

- The MJDA is neither an inconsequential diplomatic gesture nor the immediate foundation of a Muslim NATO.
- It represents **Saudi Arabia's search for strategic autonomy**, Türkiye's regional ambitions and Pakistan's quest for greater strategic relevance.
- Its future depends on overcoming historical mistrust, reconciling divergent interests and developing credible defence cooperation.
- For India, the appropriate response is **careful monitoring, deeper Gulf engagement and strategic autonomy** rather than alarm.
- Ultimately, the MJDA's significance will be determined by whether it can convert political commitments into effective deterrence, interoperability and regional security coordination.

A New Security Triangle Emerges with the Makkah Pact FAQs

Q1. What is the MJDA?

Ans. The MJDA is a joint defence agreement between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan.

Q2. Why did Saudi Arabia support the MJDA?

Ans. Saudi Arabia supported the MJDA to diversify its security partnerships and reduce dependence on the United States.

Q3. What limits the MJDA's effectiveness?

Ans. Divergent strategic interests and historical mistrust among the three partners limit its effectiveness.

Q4. Why is Iran important to the MJDA?

Ans. Iran is important because both Türkiye and Pakistan share borders and significant interests with it.

Q5. How should India respond to the MJDA?

Ans. India should maintain strategic vigilance while deepening its economic and diplomatic engagement with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

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