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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

A New Triple Alliance in West Asia: What Two Centuries of Ottoman-Saudi Rivalry Explain About the Mecca Pact

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A New Triple Alliance in West Asia: What Two Centuries of Ottoman-Saudi Rivalry Explain About the Mecca Pact

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"If two states abandon a two-century-old rivalry the moment their shared external guarantor becomes unreliable, what does that tell you about how durable the resulting alliance actually is?"

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THE LIFT LINE

Two centuries ago, one of these states beheaded the ruler of the other. Today they signed a pact promising to die for each other. Read that gap carefully before you read the treaty text.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Most IR answers on the Mecca Agreement will describe it as a new “NATO-style” alliance and stop there. The stronger answer does what this editorial does: it asks why now, and finds the answer not in any Saudi-Turkiye reconciliation but in both states independently losing faith in the same external guarantor, the United States. That reframes the pact from a story about Muslim-world unity into a story about the retreat of American security architecture in West Asia, a much larger and more testable theme.

GS Paper 2: India and its neighbourhood relations; bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests; effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Mecca Agreement	Trilateral collective-defence pact, Saudi Arabia-Turkiye-Pakistan, signed August 7, 2026	Named current-affairs event, signatories and date are Prelims-grade facts
Ottoman-Wahhabi War (1811-1818)	Ottoman campaign, led by Muhammad Ali Pasha and his son Ibrahim Pasha, that destroyed the first Saudi state	Historical background examiners use to test depth beyond the headline
Post-American transition	The broader thesis that regional powers in West Asia are self-organising as they lose confidence in assured US security guarantees	The editorial's real analytical claim, distinct from the pact's text
Strategic depth by combination	Alliance built on complementary assets (Pakistan's deterrent, Saudi capital, Turkish conventional power) rather than a shared command structure	Explains why the alliance is unusual in composition, not just in size
Untested collective-defence clause	A treaty commitment that has not yet been invoked, its real strength remains unknown	Central to the analytical debate on how seriously to weigh the pact

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The rivalry now being set aside is genuinely old. When **Abdullah bin Saud** succeeded his father as ruler of the first Saudi state (the Emirate of Diriyah) in 1814, Ottoman forces under **Muhammad Ali Pasha** of Egypt, acting on the Sultan's behalf, were already campaigning to destroy it and restore Ottoman control over the Arabian Peninsula. His son **Ibrahim Pasha** besieged Diriyah through 1818; the city surrendered, and Abdullah, his sons and his supporters were taken first to Cairo and then to Constantinople, where **Sultan Mahmud II** rejected a pardon request. In **May 1819**, Abdullah was beheaded in Constantinople, and Diriyah was razed. The Saudis rebuilt twice more, establishing a second Saudi state later in the nineteenth century and, after its defeat, a third in the early twentieth century that, with British support, grew into modern Saudi Arabia. The Ottoman Empire itself collapsed after the First World War, succeeded by the Republic of Turkiye.

Both states became close American allies after 1945, yet friction persisted and deepened in the twenty-first century: Turkiye's increasingly Islamist orientation under **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**, Ankara's support for the **2010-2011 Arab Spring** protests which Riyadh viewed as a threat to political order, the killing of Saudi dissident journalist **Jamal Khashoggi** inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in **2018**, and opposing sides in Libya's civil war.

What dissolved this rivalry was not reconciliation on its own terms but a shared, independent reassessment of American reliability. The United States' muted response to the **2019 Houthi drone and missile attacks** on Saudi Aramco facilities, Saudi Arabia's own **2023 normalisation with Iran, brokered by China rather than Washington**, and a wave of Iranian and Houthi strikes on Gulf states following the **United States and Israel's war on Iran, which began on February 28, 2026**, together convinced Riyadh that

it needed security partners beyond the American umbrella. Saudi Arabia first widened its defence relationship with Pakistan through a **bilateral Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in September 2025**, then brought in Turkiye through the trilateral **Mecca Agreement, signed August 7, 2026**, by Crown Prince **Mohammed bin Salman**, President **Erdogan**, and Prime Minister **Shehbaz Sharif**.

THE ANALYSIS

- 1. This is a story about the guarantor, not the rivals.** A two-century rivalry does not end because its causes disappear; the Ottoman-Saudi history, Turkiye's Islamist turn, the Khashoggi killing, and the Libya proxy contest are all still real. What changed is that both Riyadh and Ankara separately concluded the United States' security commitment to the region has become conditional and unreliable, which is a far more consequential finding than the pact's text itself, because it signals a structural shift in West Asia's security architecture rather than a one-off diplomatic event.
- 2. The alliance is built on complementary weakness, not shared strength.** Pakistan brings a nuclear deterrent but a struggling economy; Saudi Arabia brings capital and oil leverage but direct exposure to Iran and the Houthis; Turkiye brings a NATO-scale conventional force and drone-industrial capacity but anxiety about Israeli military assertiveness in its own neighbourhood. Each state is compensating for what it individually lacks by pooling with states that lack different things, a combination that produces strategic depth on paper without necessarily producing unity of purpose in a crisis.
- 3. The collective-defence clause remains genuinely untested.** After the September 2025 bilateral pact, Pakistan clashed with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan on multiple occasions, and Saudi Arabia absorbed repeated Iranian and Houthi strikes, yet neither state invoked the other's defence commitment on the other's behalf. This is the single most important fact for assessing the pact's real strength: treaty language promising collective deterrence and actual battlefield behaviour when a signatory is attacked are two different things, and so far only the language exists.
- 4. Turkiye's NATO membership creates a genuine structural question, not a contradiction.** Ankara has stated the Mecca Agreement does not conflict with its NATO commitments, and this is technically correct, NATO's Article 5 applies only to attacks on NATO territory. But it does raise a live question for the alliance system more broadly: what happens when a NATO member's other treaty commitments pull it toward a crisis NATO itself has no stake in, a question West Asia's post-American transition will likely raise again.
- 5. The India dimension is real but narrow, and should not be overstated.** Pakistan brings its hostility with India into this arrangement, visible most recently in the brief aerial conflict following the **Pahalgam terror attack of April 22, 2025**, but the Mecca Agreement's own stated trigger is Gulf security in the post-February 2026 Iran war, and its text as reported makes no reference to India, Kashmir or South Asia. The pact does not commit Saudi Arabia or Turkiye to any India-Pakistan contingency; what it plausibly does, over time, is give Pakistan marginally greater access to Gulf financing, materiel and diplomatic cover, a second-order effect worth monitoring rather than a first-order threat requiring an alarmed response.

6. The counter-argument deserves genuine weight. An alliance clause never invoked has, by definition, no track record of holding, and the immediate post-pact evidence, Pakistan's unassisted clashes with Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia's unassisted absorption of Iranian and Houthi strikes, argues for caution before treating the Mecca Agreement as a settled, NATO-equivalent structure.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

Mecca Agreement: signed August 7, 2026, by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif

Precursor: bilateral Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, September 2025

Ottoman-Wahhabi War: Ottoman forces under Muhammad Ali Pasha and Ibrahim Pasha destroyed the first Saudi state; Diriyah surrendered in 1818; last Emir Abdullah bin Saud beheaded in Constantinople, May 1819

Modern Saudi Arabia: third Saudi state, founded early twentieth century with British support

Jamal Khashoggi: Saudi journalist killed inside the Saudi consulate, Istanbul, 2018

Arab Spring: 2010-2011; Turkiye supported the uprisings, Saudi Arabia viewed them as destabilising

Saudi Arabia-Iran normalisation: brokered by China, announced March 2023

US-Israel war on Iran: began February 28, 2026

Pahalgam terror attack: April 22, 2025; followed by a brief India-Pakistan aerial conflict (Operation Sindoor) in early May 2025

WATCH THE TRAP: DO NOT WRITE THAT THE MECCA AGREEMENT IS LEGALLY EQUIVALENT TO NATO'S ARTICLE 5. IT BORROWS ARTICLE 5'S LANGUAGE BUT NOT NATO'S SEVEN DECADES OF INTEGRATED COMMAND, STANDING FORCES OR PERMANENT SECRETARIAT, AND ITS FULL LEGAL TEXT WAS NOT PUBLIC AT SIGNING.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR reading this as a durable, consequential alliance. A two-century rivalry does not get set aside lightly; the fact that Saudi Arabia and Turkiye chose to formalise a collective-defence commitment despite this history shows how seriously both states now weigh the erosion of American guarantees. Treating the pact as symbolic risks under-preparing for a West Asia where more states follow the same logic and further realignments occur.

Argument AGAINST overreading an untested clause. The strongest evidence available so far, Pakistan's unassisted clashes with Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia's unassisted exposure to Iranian and Houthi strikes after the September 2025 bilateral pact, shows that collective-defence language has not yet translated

into collective action. A pact that has not been invoked even once in its bilateral form is a weak basis for confidently forecasting trilateral behaviour in a future crisis.

Balanced verdict. Both readings can be true simultaneously: the pact is a genuine and historically significant signal of West Asia's post-American transition, and its practical scope remains unproven. The sound analytical position treats the Mecca Agreement as evidence of a structural trend worth tracking closely, not as a finished alliance whose behaviour in a crisis can already be predicted.

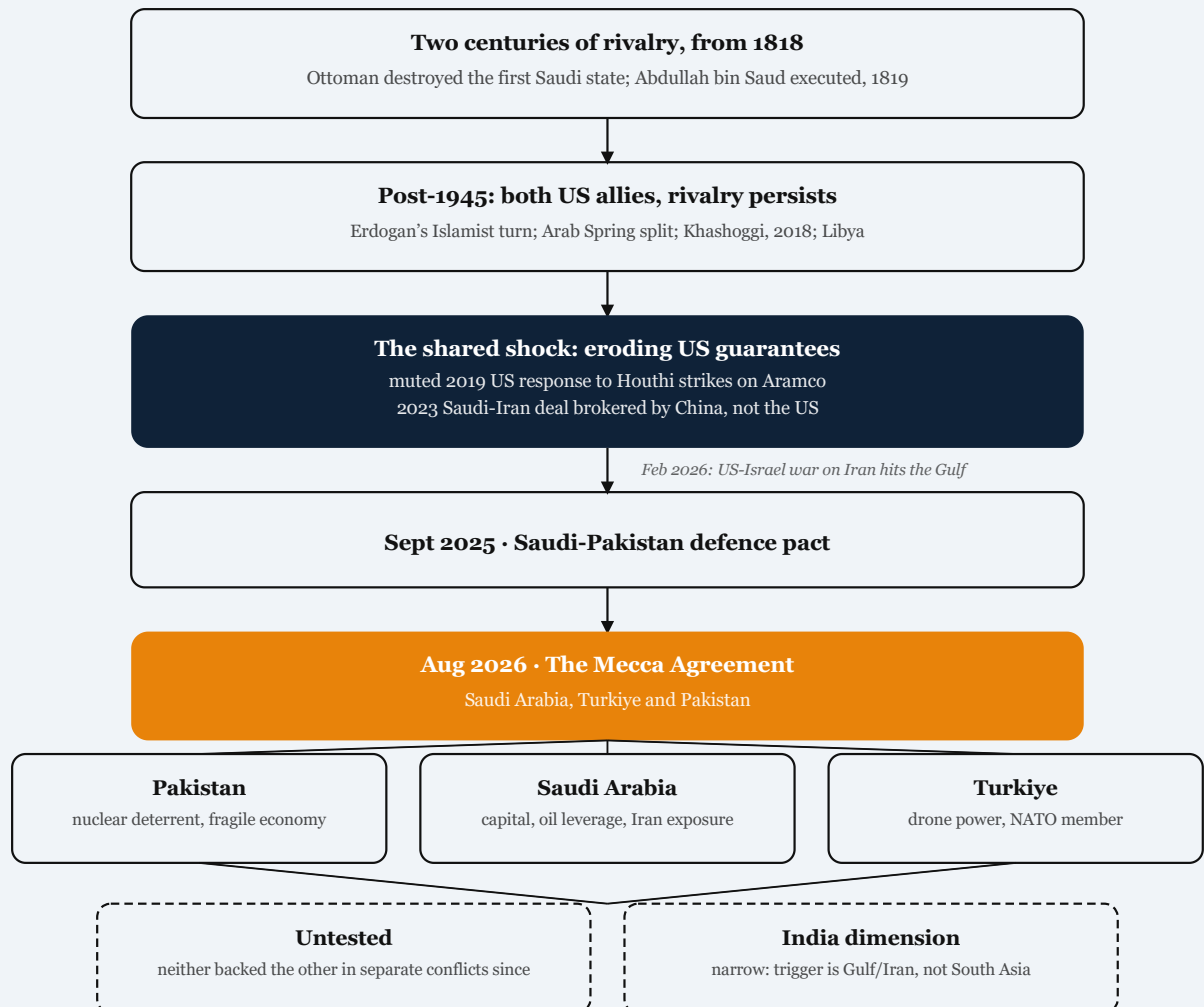
HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable pattern: **when two historic rivals suddenly align, ask what changed about their shared external environment before asking what changed between them.** States rarely resolve centuries of rivalry through goodwill alone; they set rivalry aside when a bigger, common problem makes cooperation more useful than continued competition. Here, that common problem was the same for both Riyadh and Ankara: a declining confidence that Washington's security guarantees, once assumed, would hold when tested.

This pattern recurs across contemporary alliance formation. It explains why Gulf states that competed for influence during the Arab Spring have increasingly hedged toward China and Russia on select issues even while remaining formally aligned with the US. It explains India's own doctrine of **multi-alignment**, built on the same underlying insight that no single partner's continued strategic commitment can be assumed indefinitely. And it is the lens through which India should watch West Asia going forward: not by asking whether the Mecca Agreement is aimed at India, which its text does not suggest, but by asking which other regional realignments the same underlying erosion of American guarantees will produce next, and how India's own Gulf partnerships should be diversified in response.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

From rivalry to alliance: what actually changed



Two centuries of Ottoman-Saudi rivalry did not end because the two sides reconciled; it was overridden by a shared fear that US security guarantees can no longer be trusted. The Mecca Agreement is self-help alignment against that shared risk, not a real friendship, and it has not yet been tested by an actual conflict.

TAKEAWAY BOX

Alliances born of shared fear are common. Alliances born of a shared loss of faith in a protector are rarer, and worth watching more closely.

Mecca Agreement (August 7, 2026, Saudi Arabia-Turkiye-Pakistan); precursor **Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement** (September 2025); **Ottoman-Wahhabi War**, destruction of the first Saudi state (1818), execution of **Abdullah bin Saud** (1819); **Jamal Khashoggi** killing (Istanbul, 2018); **China-brokered Saudi-Iran normalisation** (2023); **US-Israel war on Iran** (February 28, 2026); **Pahalgam attack** (April 22, 2025) and **Operation Sindoor** (May 2025).

is it good statecraft or dangerous opportunism to set aside a two-century rivalry the moment a common external guarantor becomes unreliable, and what does the speed of that reversal suggest about how binding the resulting alliance will actually be under pressure?

UPSC has repeatedly tested West Asia's shifting alliance patterns and India's neighbourhood-adjacent security environment; this editorial supplies the specific historical depth, the Ottoman-Saudi rivalry, and the specific mechanism, eroding US security guarantees, that explain why the region's alliance map is being redrawn in 2026.

"The Mecca Agreement's significance lies less in its text than in what it reveals about American security guarantees in West Asia." Critically examine this statement with reference to the historical Ottoman-Saudi rivalry and the events of 2019-2026.

Sources: *The Hindu, Al Jazeera, Atlantic Council, PIB*

Source: A New Triple Alliance in West Asia: What Two Centuries of Ottoman-Saudi Rivalry Explain About the Mecca Pact — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The Mecca Agreement is significant less for what its collective-defence clause legally commits its signatories to, which remains untested and deliberately vague, and more for what its existence reveals: a two-century-old Ottoman-Saudi rivalry has dissolved not because its underlying causes were resolved but because both states independently concluded that American security guarantees in West Asia can no longer be assumed, forcing them toward self-help alignment with each other and with Pakistan.



SUPPORTING

- The rivalry being set aside is not superficial. It runs from the Ottoman destruction of the first Saudi state in 1818 and the beheading of its last Emir, Abdullah bin Saud, in Constantinople in 1819, through Cold War-era competition for leadership of the Muslim world, to twenty-first-century friction over Turkiye's Islamist turn under President Erdogan, its support for the 2010-2011 Arab Spring uprisings that Saudi Arabia viewed as destabilising, the 2018 killing of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, and opposing sides in the Libyan civil conflict.
- The proximate driver is American retrenchment, not sudden goodwill. Washington's muted response to the 2019 Houthi drone and missile strikes on Saudi Aramco facilities, Saudi Arabia's own 2023 rapprochement with Iran brokered by China rather than the United States, and the sustained attacks Gulf states absorbed after the United States and Israel struck Iran on February 28, 2026, together convinced Riyadh that its seven-decade reliance on American security guarantees could no longer be treated as automatic.
- Each signatory brings a distinct, non-overlapping asset rather than a shared military doctrine: Pakistan supplies the Muslim world's only nuclear deterrent and decades of Gulf military training experience but a fragile economy; Saudi Arabia supplies capital and oil leverage but faces direct exposure to Iran and the Houthis; Turkiye supplies a NATO-scale conventional military and an expanding drone-industrial base but worries about an increasingly assertive Israel in its own neighbourhood, a combination of complementary strengths rather than a single command structure.
- The pact's own recent history argues against overreading its collective-defence clause. After the bilateral Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement of September 2025, Pakistan clashed repeatedly with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia absorbed repeated Iranian and Houthi strikes, yet neither state intervened militarily on the other's behalf, showing that the treaty language of collective deterrence has not yet been tested against the harder question of whether any signatory would actually fight for another.

**COUNTER**

Even an untested collective-defence clause changes the diplomatic terrain permanently, because deterrence works partly through ambiguity. A hostile actor weighing an attack on any one signatory now has to price in the possibility, however uncertain, that Pakistan's nuclear status or Turkiye's drone-industrial capacity could be invoked in its defence, and that changed calculus is a real strategic effect even if the alliance never fires a shot in anger.

**WAY FORWARD**

Read the Mecca Agreement as evidence of a structural trend, the erosion of assumed American security guarantees across West Asia, rather than as a finished alliance architecture. Smaller and mid-sized regional states, and external powers with stakes in the region including India, should expect further realignment as more states independently reach the same conclusion Riyadh and Ankara reached, and should build their own regional partnerships on demonstrated capability and diversified relationships rather than on any single guarantor, American or otherwise, remaining reliable indefinitely.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

The Mecca Agreement of August 2026 brought Saudi Arabia and Turkiye, historic rivals for influence in West Asia, into a trilateral defence pact with Pakistan. Examine the historical roots of the Ottoman-Saudi rivalry and discuss whether a collective-security alliance built primarily on a shared perception of American retrenchment can be considered durable. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

On August 7, 2026, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan signed the Mecca Agreement, a NATO-style collective-defence pact treating an armed attack on any one signatory as an attack on all three. The historical weight of this moment lies in who signed it: Saudi Arabia and Turkiye carry a rivalry stretching back to the Ottoman destruction of the first Saudi state in 1818-19, and its dissolution into a formal alliance is best explained not by reconciliation but by both states independently losing confidence in American security guarantees.

BODY

The Ottoman-Saudi rivalry began when Ibrahim Pasha's forces, acting for the Ottoman Empire, destroyed the first Saudi state at Diriyah in 1818 and executed its last Emir, Abdullah bin Saud, in Constantinople in 1819. The Saudis rebuilt twice more, founding modern Saudi Arabia in the twentieth century with British backing, while the Ottoman Empire collapsed after the First World War and gave way to the Turkish Republic.

Both states became close American allies after 1945, but rivalry persisted, sharpened by Turkiye's Islamist turn under Erdogan, Ankara's support for the 2010-2011 Arab Spring which Riyadh viewed as a threat to regional stability, the 2018 killing of Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, and opposing sides in Libya's civil war. What changed is not this history but Saudi Arabia's confidence in Washington: a muted American response to the 2019 Houthi strikes on Aramco, Riyadh's own 2023 normalisation with Iran brokered by China rather than the United States, and repeated Iranian and Houthi strikes on Gulf states after the US-Israel war on Iran began on February 28, 2026, together signalled that American guarantees could no longer be assumed.

Saudi Arabia responded first with a bilateral defence pact with Pakistan in September 2025, then widened it to include Turkiye in August 2026, combining Pakistan's nuclear deterrent, Saudi capital, and Turkiye's conventional and drone-industrial strength. Whether this constitutes a durable alliance is genuinely open: after the September 2025 pact, Pakistan fought Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia absorbed Iranian strikes without either invoking the other's help, suggesting the collective-defence clause remains more a signalling device than a tested commitment.

CONCLUSION

The Mecca Agreement should be read as a symptom of a broader post-American transition in West Asia rather than as a finished, NATO-equivalent structure. Its durability will be tested only when one signatory is

actually attacked and the others must decide whether treaty language becomes military action, a test the alliance has not yet faced.

Until then, its clearest and most reliable effect is diplomatic: three states with historically divergent, even hostile, trajectories have signalled to the region and to Washington that they no longer consider American protection sufficient on its own.

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