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The Mecca Pact and the Rise of Strategic Hedging

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The Mecca Pact and the Rise of Strategic Hedging

 The Hindu

12 August 2026

GS2



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Ayoob argues the Mecca pact is "strategic hedging," not an anti-American realignment, since Saudi Arabia still depends on US military technology, Turkiye remains in NATO, and Pakistan has no interest in confronting Washington. If every signatory keeps its US ties intact, does the pact meaningfully change the regional balance at all, or is its significance mostly symbolic?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)

The Hindu

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

Three states did not build a new alliance in Mecca; they each bought a different kind of insurance, and insurance policies bought at the same table still change what the room looks like.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This is a signed op-ed, not an unsigned institutional editorial, by Mohammed Ayoob, University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations at Michigan State University and author of *From Regional Security to Global IR* (2024), a specialist voice worth citing by name in a Mains answer. His central analytical move, “strategic hedging” as distinct from both alliance-formation and anti-American realignment, is the kind of precise framework GS2 examiners reward over a vague “growing Muslim unity” reading.

GS Paper 2: India and its neighbourhood; [bilateral](#), regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests.

CONCEPT	MEANING	SOURCE
“Strategic hedging,” not alliance	Ayoob’s core analytical frame for the pact	From the op-ed
Saudi vs Turkiye distinction for India	Riyadh is low-risk; Ankara is “a more complicated problem”	From the op-ed
Trump-Munir “personal chemistry”	Ayoob’s own explanation for strengthened Pakistan-US ties	From the op-ed
Israel’s “fragmentation” advantage	The pact erodes an enduring Israeli strategic asset, per Ayoob	From the op-ed
Makkah Joint Defence Agreement text, dates, signatories	Institutional and procedural detail	Ujjayari’s addition
MEA’s official statement	India’s formal diplomatic response	Ujjayari’s addition

WHAT THE OP-ED ARGUES

(This section reports Mohammed Ayoob’s own argument, as a named author writing in The Hindu’s op-ed pages, not an unsigned editorial. Institutional detail he does not specify, exact signing venue, precise dates, is addressed separately below.)

Who is arguing this. Mohammed Ayoob is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations at Michigan State University and the author of *From Regional Security to Global IR* (2024). This is a signed op-ed carrying his own analytical judgment, distinct from The Hindu’s institutional editorial voice.

What the pact reveals. Ayoob’s central claim is that the mutual defence agreement Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan signed on **7 August** in Mecca is significant less for its treaty text than for what it reveals about the “changing calculations of three important Muslim-world states.” The agreement states an attack on any one member “will be considered an attack upon all three.” Ayoob is careful to note the pact does **not terminate** any signatory’s dependence on outside powers: Saudi Arabia “remains tied to Washington militarily,” Turkiye “remains a NATO member,” and Pakistan’s relationship with the US has “recently strengthened,” which Ayoob attributes explicitly to the “personal chemistry” between President Trump and Pakistan’s Army Chief, **Asim Munir**. The pact, in his reading, supplements these external guarantees rather than replacing them.

Complementary strengths. Ayoob identifies what each state brings: Saudi Arabia contributes **financial resources, energy power and political influence**; Turkiye brings the **strongest conventional military among Muslim West Asian countries** and an **expanding indigenous defence industry**; Pakistan brings a **large professional military** and decades of cooperation with Saudi Arabia, but “most importantly,” its status as the Muslim world’s **only nuclear-armed state**. On the nuclear dimension

specifically, Ayooob's framing is careful: "Pakistan has not formally extended a nuclear guarantee to its partners," but "an adversary contemplating an attack upon one member must now take Pakistan's nuclear capabilities into account."

Why each state signed. For Saudi Arabia, Ayooob cites strategic insurance rooted in a pattern, the **2019 attacks on its oil installations**, "subsequent regional crises," and the "current confrontation with Iran." For Turkiye, the pact is read "through the prism of **strategic autonomy**," part of President Erdogan's project of transforming Turkiye from "NATO's southeastern flank into an independent centre of power," expanding Ankara's influence into the Gulf and South Asia and creating opportunities for its defence industry. For Pakistan, the pact "widens strategic horizons beyond the traditional India rivalry," institutionalising close relations with Saudi Arabia and Turkiye and converting military capability into greater geopolitical influence.

"The pact through India's eyes." Ayooob deliberately separates the two non-Pakistan signatories rather than treating the pact as a single bloc directed at India. New Delhi has cultivated "exceptionally close relations" with Saudi Arabia over two decades, he writes, and India should not automatically read the pact as anti-Indian: Riyadh "has enormous economic and strategic interests in maintaining good relations with India" and "little incentive" to let the agreement become an instrument in Pakistan's disputes with India. Turkiye, however, is "a more complicated problem," given Ankara's repeated support for Pakistan's position on Kashmir and its supply of weapons Pakistan has used against India. Ayooob's specific prescription: New Delhi should seek explicit reassurance **from Riyadh** that the pact has no application to the India-Pakistan confrontation, while resisting the temptation to view the alignment exclusively through Pakistan's prism.

Iran and Israel. Ayooob calls the Iran implications "very complicated." Given the Saudi-Iran rivalry and recent mutual attacks, it is "tempting" to read the pact as an anti-Iranian coalition, but Turkiye and Pakistan both share borders with Iran and have a "complementary interest" in keeping restive minorities in their own border regions in check, giving them strong reasons to avoid confrontation with Tehran. Israel, Ayooob argues, is "likely to view the pact with greater concern": one of Israel's enduring strategic advantages has been the political and military fragmentation of the Muslim world, and while the pact does not explicitly create an anti-Israeli alliance, the combination of Saudi finance, Turkish conventional military strength and Pakistani nuclear capability "inevitably alters strategic calculations."

Washington's paradox. For the US, Ayooob identifies a structural irony: Washington has long demanded its regional partners assume greater responsibility for their own defence, but "greater responsibility can produce greater strategic autonomy," which in turn "diminishes American **leverage**." It would, in his assessment, be "premature to describe [the pact] as an anti-American realignment," since Saudi Arabia still depends heavily on US military technology and security guarantees, Turkiye remains in NATO, and Pakistan has no interest in confronting Washington "in the midst of their current love fest." The more appropriate description, he concludes, is **strategic hedging**: "when several major states begin hedging simultaneously, their cumulative actions can transform the regional order."

The closing frame. For most of the modern era, Ayooob writes, West Asian security arrangements were created and guaranteed by outside powers. The Mecca pact raises the possibility of something different: a more autonomous security architecture constructed by the region's own powers. India, with enormous

economic, energy and strategic stakes in West Asia, “cannot remain a spectator,” but nor should it “react with undue alarm.”

Ujjiyari's addition begins below. Nothing past this point should be read as Ayoob's argument.

BACKGROUND THE OP-ED ASSUMES

The following is Ujjiyari's addition, not part of Ayoob's argument. He writes for readers who already know the pact's exact date, venue and signatories; a complete answer needs this procedural detail alongside his analysis.

The **Makkah Joint Defence Agreement** was signed on **7 August 2026** by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Prime Minister **Mohammed bin Salman**, Turkiye's President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**, and Pakistan's Prime Minister **Shehbaz Sharif**, at a gathering the three governments styled the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence. The core clause, that an armed attack on one signatory “shall be regarded as an attack against them all,” echoes Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty in form; the text also explicitly invokes **Article 51 of the UN Charter**, the inherent right of self-defence, and states the agreement targets no specific country while inviting other states committed to regional peace and stability to join.

The pact extends the bilateral **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement** Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed on **17 September 2025** at Al-Yamamah Palace, Riyadh, itself a response to Israel's **9 September 2025** airstrike on Doha, Qatar, a specific, dated precedent Ayoob's piece does not itself name but which is directly relevant to the “2019 attacks and subsequent regional crises” he cites as shaping Saudi anxiety. India's Ministry of External Affairs responded to the Mecca pact by stating it was “examining implications” for national security and regional stability, and separately noted it expects Saudi Arabia to “keep in mind mutual interests and sensitivities,” a formulation read as diplomatically pointed given Pakistan's co-signatory status.

THE ANALYSIS

1. Ayoob's “strategic hedging” label is doing real analytical work, distinct from both “alliance” and “irrelevant symbolism.” He does not argue the pact is meaningless because it lacks NATO-style institutional scaffolding, nor does he treat it as a *fait accompli* military bloc. His claim is narrower and more precise: three states are separately buying insurance against different anxieties, using the same instrument, and their simultaneous hedging can still “transform the regional order” even though no single signatory intends confrontation with Washington.

2. The Saudi/Turkiye distinction for India is the piece's most practically useful contribution, and it is easy to miss. A reader who treats “the pact” as one undifferentiated bloc will flatten Ayoob's actual argument, which is that Riyadh's economic stake in India makes it a low-risk partner in this specific pact, while Ankara's Kashmir position and arms supplies to Pakistan make it “a more complicated problem.” His prescription, seek reassurance from Saudi Arabia specifically, follows directly from this distinction and should not be generalised into “seek reassurance from all three signatories.”

3. The nuclear framing is more nuanced than a flat “denial,” and the nuance matters. Ayooob does not report a Saudi or Pakistani official statement ruling out any nuclear dimension; he instead observes that Pakistan has not formally extended a guarantee, while noting the practical effect is functionally similar, an adversary must still factor in Pakistan’s capability. This is a more careful, less easily disproven claim than a simple assertion that the pact “has no nuclear dimension,” and a Mains answer should preserve that distinction.

4. The Israel argument identifies a specific mechanism, not just general alarm. Ayooob’s point is precise: Israel’s advantage has specifically been the Muslim world’s political and military fragmentation, and this pact, by combining Saudi finance, Turkish conventional strength and Pakistani nuclear capability under one umbrella, erodes exactly that advantage, independent of whether the pact names Israel at all.

5. The Washington “paradox” is a transferable analytical point beyond this specific pact. Ayooob’s observation, that pushing regional partners toward self-reliance can produce autonomy that reduces US leverage, is a general pattern in US alliance management, not unique to West Asia, and is worth citing wherever a Mains question asks about the trade-offs of US “burden-shifting” strategy toward its partners.

6. Reading this alongside the earlier, September 2025 bilateral pact avoids treating the Mecca agreement as appearing from nowhere. Ayooob’s own listed drivers for Saudi anxiety, the 2019 attacks and “subsequent regional crises,” are consistent with, but broader than, the specific Doha strike that triggered the September 2025 bilateral agreement; a complete answer should note that this later, trilateral pact builds on an already-existing hedge rather than representing Saudi Arabia’s first such move.

BEYOND THE OP-ED

This section is Ujiyari’s addition: procedural detail and comparative frameworks Ayooob does not raise directly.

India’s formal response and the Quad/SCO comparison. The MEA’s “examining implications” language sits alongside India’s own long-standing **multi-alignment** posture in West Asia, parallel strategic partnerships with Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran without binding alliance to any. This is the same “hedging” logic Ayooob applies to Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan, applied by India to its own neighbourhood, worth noting as a comparative point since UPSC has tested India’s own hedging posture (the Quad, its SCO membership) using similar language.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS, FROM THE OP-ED:

Author: Mohammed Ayoob, University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University; author of *From Regional Security to Global IR* (2024)

Pact signed 7 August, Mecca; core clause: attack on one “considered an attack upon all three”

Saudi Arabia’s contribution: financial resources, energy power, political influence; anxiety rooted in the 2019 oil installation attacks, subsequent regional crises, and the Iran confrontation

Turkiye’s contribution: strongest conventional military among Muslim West Asian states; expanding defence industry; motive framed as strategic autonomy

Pakistan’s contribution: large professional military; only nuclear-armed state among the three; motive: widening strategic horizons beyond the India rivalry

Pakistan-US ties recently strengthened, attributed to Trump-Asim Munir “personal chemistry”

Ayoob’s India prescription: seek reassurance from Riyadh specifically, not Ankara; do not view the pact exclusively through Pakistan’s lens

Israel’s eroded advantage: the Muslim world’s political and military fragmentation

Central verdict: “strategic hedging,” not alliance, not anti-American realignment

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS, UJIYARI’S ADDITION:

Signatories: Mohammed bin Salman (Saudi Arabia), Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkiye), Shehbaz Sharif (Pakistan)

Predecessor: bilateral Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, Saudi Arabia-Pakistan, 17 September 2025, following Israel’s 9 September 2025 Doha airstrike

Pact text invokes Article 51 of the UN Charter

India’s MEA: “examining implications” for national security and regional stability

WATCH THE TRAP: DO NOT ATTRIBUTE THIS PIECE TO “THE HINDU” AS AN UNSIGNED EDITORIAL VOICE. IT IS A SIGNED OP-ED BY MOHAMMED AYOOB, A NAMED ACADEMIC, AND A MAINS ANSWER CITING IT SHOULD SAY SO EXPLICITLY, BOTH BECAUSE ACCURATE ATTRIBUTION MATTERS AND BECAUSE HIS SPECIFIC, NUANCED ARGUMENTS (THE SAUDI/TURKIYE DISTINCTION, THE CAREFUL NUCLEAR FRAMING) ARE HIS OWN ANALYTICAL JUDGMENTS, NOT INSTITUTIONAL CONSENSUS.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR reading this as manageable strategic hedging. Ayoob’s own case is carefully built: every signatory’s ties to Washington remain visibly intact, the complementary-strengths logic explains why each state signed without requiring any anti-Western motive, and his India-specific prescription (reassurance

from Riyadh, not blanket alarm) offers a proportionate, actionable response rather than treating the pact as an existential threat.

Argument AGAINST underestimating its cumulative effect. Ayoob himself does not claim the pact is inconsequential, his closing argument is that simultaneous hedging by several major states “can transform the regional order,” and his own observations about Israel’s eroded fragmentation-advantage and Washington’s diminishing leverage describe real, structural shifts, not merely symbolic ones.

Balanced verdict. These are not contradictory readings, they are the same argument held together: the pact is hedging in form and cumulative in effect. Ayoob’s analytical contribution is precisely refusing the binary of “meaningless symbolism” versus “new NATO,” and a Mains answer that reproduces his Saudi/Turkiye distinction and his Washington paradox will be doing more accurate work than one that reduces the piece to “expert says pact is not a big deal.”

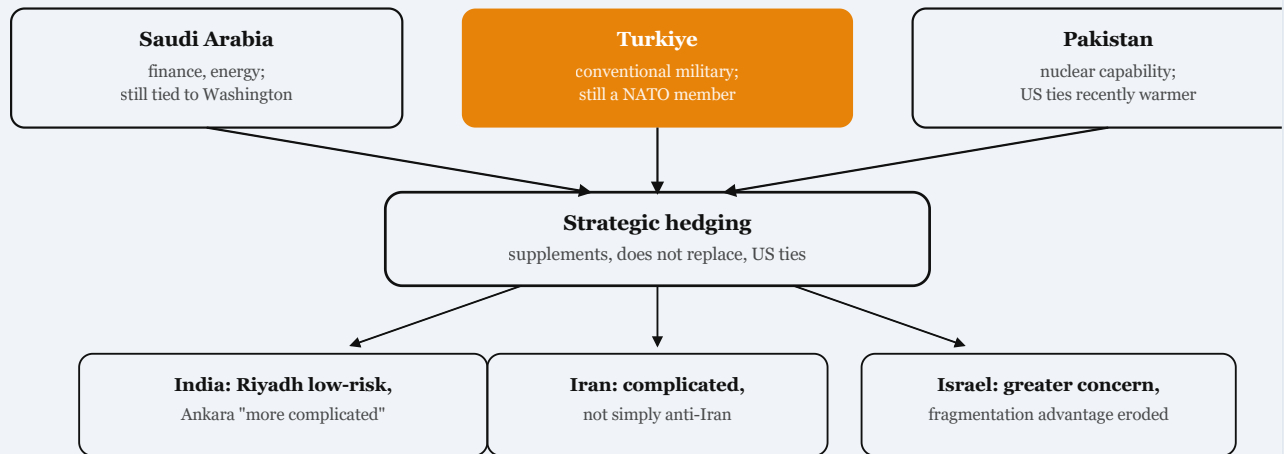
HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable pattern: when a named academic op-ed makes a claim, cite the author, not the newspaper, and preserve the specific distinctions that make the argument analytically useful rather than flattening it into the newspaper’s general editorial line. Ayoob’s piece is valuable precisely because of its specific moves, distinguishing Saudi Arabia from Turkiye for India’s purposes, distinguishing “hedging” from both “alliance” and “irrelevance,” and carefully qualifying the nuclear claim rather than flatly denying or asserting it. A Mains answer that reproduces only the pact’s existence and a vague “expert view” loses everything that makes this source worth citing by name.

This same discipline, checking whether a claim comes from a signed, credentialed author versus an institutional editorial voice, applies whenever a newspaper’s opinion page carries both. The weight a Mains answer should give a claim, and how confidently it can be attributed, differs between the two.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Complementary hedges, not one alliance



Ayoob reads the Mecca pact as three complementary hedges layered atop, not replacing, each signatory's US ties, with India, Iran and Israel each drawing a distinct, non-uniform lesson from it.

TAKEAWAY BOX

When several states hedge at once, at the same table, the room itself changes, even if no one in it intended to build an alliance.

*Author **Mohammed Ayoob** (Michigan State University); pact signed **7 August**, Mecca; Pakistan is the **only nuclear-armed signatory**; Saudi anxiety traced to the **2019 oil installation attacks**; Pakistan-US ties linked to **Trump-Asim Munir** rapport; central verdict, “**strategic hedging**.”*

*Signatories **Mohammed bin Salman, Erdogan, Shehbaz Sharif**; predecessor bilateral pact **17 September 2025** (after the **9 September 2025 Doha strike**); pact invokes **Article 51, UN Charter**; India’s MEA, “examining implications.”*

Ayoob distinguishes Saudi Arabia from Turkiye rather than treating “the Muslim world” as a monolith reacting uniformly to India. As a civil servant advising on a similarly multi-actor regional development, how would you resist the temptation to flatten distinct national interests into a single bloc-level threat assessment?

UPSC has repeatedly tested India’s neighbourhood and extended-neighbourhood policy and India-Pakistan-Gulf dynamics (GS2); this op-ed’s Saudi/Turkiye distinction is a sharper, more citable analytical tool than a generic “Gulf pact” framing.

“Mohammed Ayoob describes the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement as ‘strategic hedging’ rather than alliance formation.” Examine this characterisation and its specific implications for India’s approach to Saudi Arabia and Turkiye respectively.

Sources: *The Hindu*, “The Mecca Pact and the rise of strategic hedging” by Mohammed Ayoob, Ministry of External Affairs

Source: The Mecca Pact and the Rise of Strategic Hedging — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Mohammed Ayoob reads the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement as evidence of changing strategic calculations among three important Muslim-world states, each supplementing, not replacing, its dependence on external security guarantees; the result is not a new Sunni bloc but a case of simultaneous strategic hedging that, cumulatively, can still reshape the regional order even though no single signatory intends an anti-American realignment.



SUPPORTING

- Each signatory brings a complementary strength, Saudi Arabia's financial resources and energy power, Turkiye's conventional military strength and expanding defence industry, and Pakistan's large professional military and, most significantly, its status as the Muslim world's only nuclear-armed state, meaning an adversary contemplating an attack on any one member must now factor in Pakistan's nuclear capability even without a formally extended guarantee.
- Saudi anxiety stems from a pattern rather than one incident: the 2019 attacks on its oil installations, subsequent regional crises and the ongoing confrontation with Iran; Turkiye's motive is strategic autonomy, transforming from a NATO flank into an independent centre of power; Pakistan's motive is widening its strategic horizons beyond the India rivalry while converting military capability into greater geopolitical influence.
- For India specifically, Ayoob distinguishes Saudi Arabia, with which India has built exceptionally close relations over two decades and which has little incentive to let the pact become an instrument of Pakistan's India disputes, from Turkiye, "a more complicated problem" given Ankara's repeated support for Pakistan's Kashmir position and its arms supplies used against India.



COUNTER

It would be premature to call this an anti-American realignment: Saudi Arabia remains heavily dependent on US military technology and security guarantees, Turkiye remains a NATO member, and Pakistan, in the midst of what Ayoob calls its current "love fest" with Washington under Trump and Army Chief Asim Munir, has no interest in confrontation with the US; each signatory's external ties to Washington remain intact even as the pact adds a regional layer alongside them.

**WAY FORWARD**

Ayoob's own prescription for India is two-part: seek explicit reassurance specifically from Riyadh, not Ankara, that the pact carries no application to the India-Pakistan confrontation, while resisting the temptation to view the entire alignment exclusively through the prism of Pakistan; India should engage as a substantial economic and strategic stakeholder in West Asia rather than as an alarmed spectator, since the pact points toward a more autonomous, regionally-constructed security architecture that India cannot ignore but need not treat as a hostile bloc.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Mohammed Ayoob describes the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (August 2026) between Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan as strategic hedging rather than the birth of an anti-Western alliance. Examine this characterisation and assess the pact's specific implications for India's West Asia and Pakistan policy. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

On 7 August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan signed the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, declaring that an attack on any one signatory would be considered an attack on all three. Writing in The Hindu, Mohammed Ayoob, Michigan State University's University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, reads the pact not primarily for its treaty text but for what it reveals about the changing strategic calculations of three consequential Muslim-world states, a reading with direct implications for India, Iran, Israel and the United States alike.

BODY

Ayoob's core claim is that the pact represents states supplementing, not replacing, their reliance on external security guarantees. Saudi Arabia remains tied to Washington militarily; Turkiye remains inside NATO; Pakistan's relationship with the US has, if anything, strengthened recently, a development Ayoob links explicitly to the personal chemistry between Trump and Pakistan's Army Chief, Asim Munir.

What the pact adds is a regional layer of mutual insurance built from complementary strengths, Saudi financial and energy weight, Turkiye's conventional military and defence-industrial capacity, and Pakistan's professional military and nuclear status. On the nuclear question specifically, Ayoob is precise: Pakistan has not formally extended a nuclear guarantee to its new partners, but any adversary contemplating an attack on Saudi Arabia or Turkiye must now weigh Pakistan's nuclear capability regardless.

For India, Ayoob draws a careful distinction rather than treating the pact as a single, undifferentiated threat: Saudi Arabia's deep, mutually beneficial relationship with India gives Riyadh little reason to let the pact serve Pakistan's interests against India, while Turkiye, given its record of backing Pakistan on Kashmir and supplying it arms, is "a more complicated problem." Ayoob also flags implications beyond South Asia, a complicated read on Iran given Turkiye and Pakistan's own shared border-security interests with Tehran, and a more concerned Israeli reading of a pact that erodes one of Israel's enduring strategic advantages, the political and military fragmentation of the Muslim world.

CONCLUSION

Ayoob's own term, "strategic hedging," is doing precise analytical work: not alliance, not confrontation with Washington, but three states simultaneously insuring against uncertainty, whose cumulative effect can still alter the regional order even absent any single anti-American intention. His prescription for India follows

the same precision, seek explicit reassurance from Saudi Arabia specifically, and resist reading the entire alignment through Pakistan's lens alone.

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