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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Deterrence, Innovation, Deeper Gulf Ties: Shashi Tharoor's Case on the Mecca Pact

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IR**GS2**

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Deterrence, Innovation, Deeper Gulf Ties: Shashi Tharoor's Case on the Mecca Pact

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Tharoor argues India's response should combine deterrence, innovation and deeper Gulf ties rather than alarm. If India deepens its own bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia and Turkiye independently, does that risk being read by Pakistan as India accepting the pact's legitimacy, or does it demonstrate India's ties with each signatory are genuinely separable from Pakistan's?"

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

The right response to a pact designed for ambiguity is not certainty about its threat, but confidence in India's own leverage regardless of how it resolves.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This is a signed op-ed by **Shashi Tharoor**, giving it direct authority as a former diplomat and sitting parliamentarian with foreign-policy expertise, on the same Makkah Joint Defence Agreement Ujiyari examined from Mohammed Ayoob's academic perspective on August 12. Reading both together lets you compare an academic IR analysis with a practitioner-politician's policy prescription, a genuinely useful contrast for a comprehensive Mains answer on India's West Asia policy response.

GS Paper 2: India and its neighbourhood; bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; effect of policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Strategic hedging vs alliance formation	Tharoor's characterisation of the pact's actual content	Directly comparable to Ayoob's academic framing from Aug 12
Credible deterrence	Maintaining sufficient independent military capability regardless of external alignments	The first prong of Tharoor's prescribed response
Defence-technological innovation	Reducing reliance on external partners through indigenisation	The second prong
Independent Gulf engagement	Deepening India-Saudi/UAE ties on India's own terms, separate from Pakistan	The third prong

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The **Makkah Joint Defence Agreement**, signed **7 August 2026** by Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan, declares an attack on any one signatory an attack on all three. India's Ministry of External Affairs responded that it was "examining implications" for national security and regional stability. India has built substantial independent bilateral relationships with Gulf states over the past decade, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, spanning energy imports, trade, remittances from India's large expatriate workforce, and growing defence and technology cooperation, relationships Tharoor argues give India real, usable leverage in responding to the pact.

THE ANALYSIS

1. Tharoor's hedging-versus-alliance distinction mirrors, but independently arrives at, the same core reading offered by IR scholarship on the pact. That two independent, differently positioned observers, an academic specialist and a practitioner-politician, converge on "hedging, not alliance" strengthens the credibility of that characterisation as the more defensible reading, though a complete answer should note they reach it through different evidence, Tharoor emphasising India's own leverage, Ayoob emphasising each signatory's distinct anxiety.

2. The three-part prescription treats the pact as a manageable development, not a crisis requiring reactive realignment. By recommending deterrence, innovation and continued independent engagement rather than a new alliance-formation response of India's own, Tharoor's framing implicitly argues India's existing strategic toolkit is adequate to the pact's actual significance.

3. The "independent Gulf engagement" prong is doing specific diplomatic work. By emphasising that India's ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE are separably strong, built on their own economic logic rather than [contingent](#) on Pakistan's relationship with those states, Tharoor argues India need not treat the pact as forcing a binary choice or a defensive posture toward the Gulf.

4. The defence-innovation prong connects this foreign-policy question to India's domestic industrial-policy priorities. Recommending indigenisation as part of the response to an external regional development links West Asia policy directly to India's Atmanirbhar Bharat defence-manufacturing push, a genuinely cross-cutting GS2-GS3 connection.

5. The counter-argument deserves serious weight precisely because Tharoor's own framing does not fully engage it. Even a hedging pact changes what other regional actors, Iran, Israel, factor into their own calculations, and can embolden Pakistan diplomatically regardless of the pact's binding content, a psychological and diplomatic effect that a purely "it's just hedging" reading may understate.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

Makkah Joint Defence Agreement: signed 7 August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, Pakistan

India's MEA response: "examining implications" for national security and regional stability

Author: Shashi Tharoor, former diplomat and Member of Parliament

WATCH THE TRAP: DO NOT CONFLATE THAROOR'S RESPONSE PRESCRIPTION WITH A CLAIM THAT THE PACT POSES NO RISK TO INDIA AT ALL. HIS ARGUMENT IS THAT INDIA'S EXISTING STRENGTHS ARE ADEQUATE TO MANAGE IT, NOT THAT THE PACT IS INCONSEQUENTIAL.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR Tharoor's measured, three-part response. It avoids overreacting to a pact whose binding content is genuinely limited, while using India's real, independently built leverage with Gulf states rather than treating the region as newly contested territory requiring a defensive reaction.

Argument AGAINST treating this as sufficient. Even non-binding pacts shift regional psychological calculus and can embolden Pakistan's diplomatic posture toward India regardless of enforceable commitments, a risk a purely capability-and-engagement-focused response may not fully address.

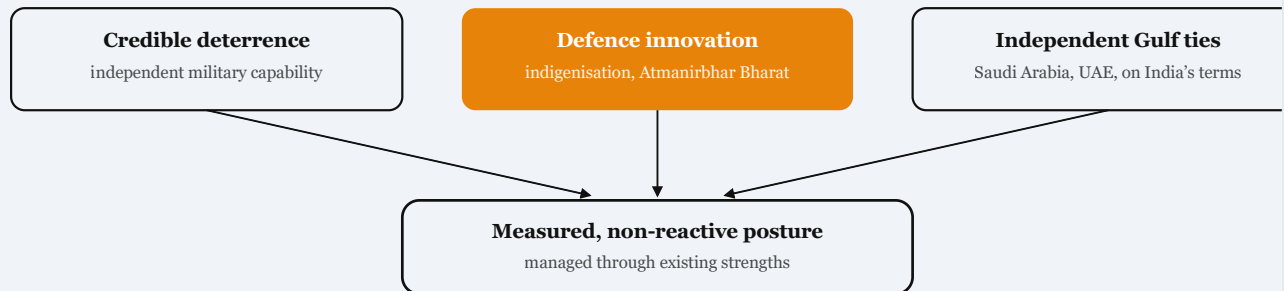
Balanced verdict. Tharoor's prescription is a sound baseline strategic posture, but should be paired with active, calibrated diplomacy specifically aimed at ensuring Saudi Arabia and Turkiye do not read India's measured response as indifference, since diplomatic signalling matters even when formal treaty obligations do not compel any specific action.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable pattern: **when a regional development is ambiguous in its binding significance, the appropriate response often combines confidence in one's own existing strengths with continued vigilance about the development's diplomatic and psychological effects, rather than**

either alarm or dismissal. This dual posture, neither panicking nor ignoring, is a reusable diplomatic-response framework for any ambiguous regional realignment in India's neighbourhood.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



Tharoor's three-part prescription, deterrence, innovation and independent Gulf engagement, converges on a measured strategic posture rather than a reactive realignment.

TAKEAWAY BOX

The right response to a pact designed for ambiguity is not certainty about its threat, but confidence in India's own leverage regardless of how it resolves.

Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, 7 August 2026; author **Shashi Tharoor**; India's MEA, "examining implications."

in diplomacy, does projecting calm confidence in the face of an ambiguous security development serve national interest better than public vigilance, or does it risk appearing indifferent to a genuine, if uncertain, shift in the regional balance?

UPSC has repeatedly tested India's West Asia policy and neighbourhood strategic hedging (GS2); comparing this practitioner's prescription with the academic reading of the same pact strengthens any answer on India's response options.

"India's response to ambiguous regional security pacts should rest on its own strengths rather than reactive realignment." Examine this claim with reference to the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement.

Sources: *Indian Express, Ministry of External Affairs*

Source: Deterrence, Innovation, Deeper Gulf Ties: Shashi Tharoor's Case on the Mecca Pact — Ujyari.com | Free
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● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Shashi Tharoor argues India should not overreact to the Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye Mecca defence pact, characterising it as strategic hedging rather than a warfighting alliance aimed at India, and prescribes a three-part response: credible deterrence, defence-technological innovation, and deepening independent engagement with Gulf states rather than alarmism.



SUPPORTING

- The pact's mutual-defence clause, while formally significant, does not commit its signatories to binding, costly military obligations of the kind a genuine warfighting alliance would require, supporting a hedging rather than alliance-formation reading.
- India's own substantial, independently built relationships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE give it real leverage to seek reassurance and continue deepening ties on its own terms, rather than being forced into a reactive posture defined by Pakistan's involvement in the pact.
- Credible deterrence and defence-technological innovation, expanding India's own indigenous defence-industrial capability, are presented as the more durable long-term response than diplomatic alarm over a single pact.



COUNTER

Even a hedging, non-binding pact between a nuclear-armed state and two influential regional powers can still shift the psychological and diplomatic calculus other actors use in dealing with Pakistan, meaning dismissing it purely as symbolic hedging risks understating its practical effect on Pakistan's regional standing and confidence.



WAY FORWARD

Tharoor's prescription combines three tracks: maintaining credible deterrence capability, accelerating defence-technological innovation and indigenisation, and deepening India's own independent, bilateral engagement with Gulf states, using India's substantial existing leverage rather than treating the pact as requiring a fundamentally new strategic posture.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Shashi Tharoor argues India's response to the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement should combine credible deterrence, defence innovation and deeper independent Gulf engagement rather than alarm. Examine this three-part prescription and assess its adequacy. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Writing in the Indian Express, Shashi Tharoor argues India's response to the Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye Makkah Joint Defence Agreement should combine credible deterrence, defence innovation and deeper independent Gulf engagement, characterising the pact itself as strategic hedging by its signatories rather than a warfighting alliance specifically aimed at India.

BODY

Tharoor's argument rests on distinguishing the pact's formal declaration, that an attack on one signatory is an attack on all three, from its actual binding content, which lacks the institutional scaffolding, standing command structures, integrated force planning, that a genuine military alliance would require. This supports his reading of the pact as strategic hedging by three states managing distinct anxieties, rather than the birth of an anti-India military bloc.

His prescribed response has three parts: first, maintaining credible deterrence, ensuring India's own military capability remains a sufficient check regardless of regional alignment shifts; second, accelerating defence-technological innovation and indigenisation, reducing India's reliance on external partners for critical capability; and third, deepening India's own independent, bilateral relationships with Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, built over decades of energy, trade and remittance ties that give India real leverage separate from how those states relate to Pakistan. This three-part approach treats the pact as a development to be managed through India's existing strengths rather than one requiring a fundamentally new or defensive strategic posture.

CONCLUSION

Tharoor's prescription is notable for what it does not recommend: it does not call for treating the pact as an existential threat requiring a reactive alliance-formation response of India's own. A Mains answer should credit this measured framing while noting the counter-argument that even non-binding pacts can shift regional psychological calculus in ways that pure "hedging, not alliance" readings may understate.

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