

EXPRESS OPINION

India should avoid treating the Mecca alliance as a monolith

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Ultimately, the emergence of a Turkey–Saudi–Pakistan alignment represents an evolution in regional geopolitics, not a rupture.

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The emergence of a Joint Defence Agreement between [Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan](#), formalised at Mecca, reflects a deep structural shift in West Asian geopolitics. It is driven by converging threat perceptions, great power competition, and a search for strategic autonomy in a fragmenting global order. For India, such a grouping would not be a catastrophe, but would add a complexity requiring immediate prioritisation — both militarily and diplomatically.

One of their objectives is a shared interest in managing a scenario where Iran relinquishes nuclear ambitions after a US-Iran agreement but emerges as the decisive military power in the Middle East (barring Israel), but wholly dependent on China, militarily and economically, and hence dominating the Shia-Sunni divide. The trio would pursue containment without direct confrontation in countering Iranian influence across Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf, while avoiding escalation into open conflict.

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A second driver is uncertainty about the future of Western security structures. Ankara increasingly appears to hedge against a future where NATO weakens due to reduced commitment from the United States, a diminished Russian threat in a post-[Vladimir Putin](#) scenario, and internal European fragmentation caused by the rightward shifts in Germany and France. The remaining European powers led by Italy will seek to accommodate China's manufacturing supremacy. Ankara has the incentive to diversify its strategic options. In this light, a Turkey–Saudi–Pakistan axis is less an aggressive coalition and more a hedge against systemic uncertainty.

Militarily, the complementarity among the three is notable. Turkey contributes an increasingly sophisticated defence industry, particularly in drones and naval

shipbuilding, Saudi Arabia offers financial depth and strategic geography, while Pakistan provides manpower and nuclear deterrence. Yet the alignment is aimed at deterrence rather than joint warfighting. To become an aggressive threat, they would require command and doctrinal integration, which they are far from achieving. They would also challenge Israeli-US attempts to divide the Islamic world, not contesting their technological superiority, but balancing the dyad diplomatically, economically, and strategically.

For India, the most immediate implications arise from Pakistan's role within this grouping. Despite its relatively limited economic base — its GDP is smaller than that of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu — Pakistan has leveraged Chinese military technology and financing to sustain strategic parity. This dynamic serves a broader purpose for China: keeping India regionally preoccupied so that Beijing can concentrate on its primary competition with the United States. Access to Turkish defence innovation and potential Saudi financial support could further enhance Pakistan's capabilities, particularly in drones, precision systems, and network-centric warfare.

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This evolving military landscape complicates India's deterrence calculus. However, the more fundamental constraint lies within India itself: Finite financial resources impose a hard choice between prioritising the continental or the maritime theatre.

India's enduring strategic advantage lies at sea. Dominance in the Indian Ocean allows it to hold at risk critical energy flows and trade routes, particularly those linking the entire world to China. Investing in a much larger maritime force structure offers a cost-effective asymmetry against both China and the tripartite treaty that no continental deployment can match. In contrast, expanding land-based forces along the western front would only reinforce the gross errors of swallowing the Chinese bait of a militarized Pakistan to cause an expensive and meaningless South Asian escalation.

This creates a central high-level strategic dilemma: Whether to remain continentally fixated or pivot decisively toward maritime primacy. The logic of the emerging alignment suggests that India should resist being drawn into a continental contest against a "Tamil Nadu" armed with Chinese technology, thereby advancing Chinese interests.

India's military priorities should emphasise speed, technology, and selective dominance. On land, this means developing the capability for rapid, high-intensity operations that can only be achieved by sacrificing mass for agility, precision strike systems, and real-time intelligence. Territory is an irrelevant factor in modern war when every country's biggest investments are in data centres, digital infrastructure, energy corridors and electricity grids, the destruction of which renders the victim blind, deaf, mute and in darkness. In the air and missile domains, India must accelerate investments in AI targeting software and deep-strike capabilities. Equally critical is information dominance: space-based surveillance, cyber capabilities and AI-enabled

compact decision-support systems. Here, India has the opportunity to leapfrog rather than match adversaries incrementally.

Diplomatically, India should avoid treating the alignment as monolithic. Differences — particularly between the UAE and Saudi Arabia — offer space for calibrated initiative. Deepening economic and technological ties with the UAE, while maintaining strong energy and investment relations with Saudi Arabia can prevent the emergence of a unified bloc hostile to Indian interests, when both blocs host the huge Indian diaspora, which is both a lever and a vulnerability.

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Simultaneously, India's partnerships with the United States, France, and other like-minded powers provide external balancing capacity. These relationships, combined with India's geographic advantage, ensure that it is not strategically isolated.

Ultimately, the emergence of a Turkey–Saudi–Pakistan alignment represents an evolution in regional geopolitics, not a rupture. It reflects a world where middle powers are hedging against what they view as the future. For India, a power above the level of

all three, clarity can only come from its own version of where the world is headed, defining which requires the amalgamation of trends in demography, politics, military power, technology, and culture. Thereafter, we can allocate our finite resources by choosing between leverage over “defending” borders and maritime advantage over a continental fixation. By doing so, it can avoid the trap of being regionally contained, a long-term strategic objective of China.

Menon is a retired rear admiral and author of The Long View from Delhi. The author uses the tool of net assessment to define emerging strategic scenarios

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