

continue to resist, supported by substantial external resources. But the fundamental strategic question has changed. For years, the central question was whether Ansarullah could withstand external pressure. It has demonstrated that it can. The question now is whether it can transform its new territorial

and military position into a durable political advantage across Yemen. The humanitarian consequences of renewed warfare remain severe, and continued fighting will impose further costs on the Yemeni population. Any assessment of the military balance must therefore recognize the human consequences of

the conflict. Yet from a strategic perspective, the direction of the war has changed. Ansarullah has moved from defending its established position to reshaping Yemen's military geography. The western coast, Mocha, Bab el Mandeb, and the Red Sea islands have become interconnected elements of that

transformation. The battles now unfolding in Marib and other parts of Yemen will determine whether this transformation continues. At the regional level, the implications are even broader. A stronger Ansarullah gives Iran an additional strategic variable in its confrontation with the

United States and Israel, while forcing Saudi Arabia and its partners to reconsider a strategy that has failed to produce decisive results despite years of substantial investment. Yemen is therefore entering a new strategic era. The balance of power is no longer defined simply by the number of aircraft, missiles,

or financial resources available to each side. It is increasingly determined by who can sustain pressure, maintain organizational cohesion, exploit geography, and convert battlefield resilience into lasting political leverage. By those measures, Ansarullah has fundamentally altered the trajectory of Yemen's war.

Ansarullah attacks on Saudi Arabia challenge joint defence alliance

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OPINION

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis (Ansarullah) of Yemen have once again escalated, further exacerbating the security situation in the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi-led coalition, alongside the Yemeni cabinet at Aden, has intensified military operations against Houthi targets across several parts of Yemen. The Houthis have carried out attacks against military targets, as well as critical energy infrastructure, in Saudi Arabia. The conflict has also extended into the maritime domain, posing risks to commercial shipping and vessel movement through the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb Strait. This widening conflict has added another layer of complexity to the already volatile regional security environment. The evolving situation also raises questions about the credibility of the joint defence alliance, signed by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan.

Saudi critical infrastructure attacked
As tensions in the Strait of Hormuz continue to persist, developments in the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb have emerged as another major security challenge for Saudi Arabia. The Houthis in Yemen, who had largely remained dormant during the US-Israel war, have intensified their attacks against the Kingdom. Since the first week of September, they have launched several attacks targeting Saudi territory, including critical energy infrastructure, such as the Abha International Airport, King Khalid Air Base and the East-West Pipeline (Petroline). The pipeline, which has gained particular strategic significance since the onset of the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, is a critical alternative route for exporting Saudi oil to the outside world. Extending about 1,200 kilometres from the oil-producing Abqaiq oil field in eastern Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, the Petroline has become a vital economic and energy lifeline for the Kingdom amid ongoing disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. The pipeline has been temporarily shut down following the attacks. Saudi Arabia has stated that these drones were launched from Iraq, but it has resisted retaliation at the request of the Iraqi prime minister. Several armed groups are operating in



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (L) shakes hands with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif after signing a joint defence agreement on August 7, 2026, while Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman watches.
● AFP

Iraq, over which the Iraqi government exercises little or no effective control. The attack on the pipeline demonstrates an apparent intention to target Saudi Arabia's economic capabilities and critical energy infrastructure at a particularly vulnerable moment. For the Kingdom, it represents yet another serious breach of its security environment. It highlights the difficulty of protecting an extensive critical infrastructure network from threats originating across multiple geographical fronts.

Disruption in the Red Sea and Bab el Mandeb
Meanwhile, the security chal-

lenge has also extended into the maritime domain. The Houthis have claimed to have established control over the Red Sea coastline of Yemen. This enables them to disrupt the maritime traffic and energy supplies passing through this strategically important waterway. They have also claimed to have captured Mayun Island in the Strait of Bab el Mandeb off the Yemeni coast. In addition, their seizure of the strategically important port of Mokha (Mocha) along the Red Sea has further strengthened their position along maritime corridors. Thus, the growing instability in the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb is creating an additional and increasingly complex security challenge for Saudi Arabia and the wider regional order.

Challenge for the joint alliance
The Kingdom sought US assistance in responding to the

deteriorating security situation. However, President Donald Trump reportedly declined the Saudi request. Against this backdrop, the crisis has also raised important questions about the relevance and credibility of the joint defence alliance between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan, which stipulates that an attack against one member should be regarded as an attack against all. Although both Turkey and Pakistan have condemned the Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia, neither has, thus far, come to provide military assistance to the Kingdom against the Houthi attacks. A major visible discrepancy exists between the Alliance's stated commit-

Fighters loyal to the Ansarullah (Houthis) march during a rally in Sana'a, Yemen, on September 16, 2026.
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ment to collective defence and its members' response during a crisis. This raises questions about the Alliance's nature and credibility. It also raises the question of whether the joint alliance can go beyond a political declaration and become a regional alliance for collective security architecture in West Asia. Pakistan faces a strategic dilemma. While it has committed to Saudi Arabia, it does not intend to be drawn into direct military conflict against the Houthis. Joining the war against the Houthis would not only entangle Pakistan in the regional war in West Asia. Still, it would also undermine the image it seeks to project as a mediator in the region. Pakistan is, moreover, keen to maintain good relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran simultaneously. Ankara faces a similar predicament. The Houthi attack on Saudi Arabia is the first significant test of the credibility of the joint defence alliance. As the Kingdom continues to confront the Houthis, the declared political and diplomatic solidarity of Turkey and Pakistan has not translated into tangible military support. The Saudi-Houthi confrontation, therefore, exposes a gap between the alliance's declared commitment to collective defence and the willingness of its members to undertake joint action when one of them comes under attack. This episode underscores the primacy of individual national interests in shaping the strategic choices of the alliance's members in the volatile political landscape of West Asia.

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