

TURKEY WATCH

Regional Press and Policy Monitor

24 July to 8 August 2026

Primary Turkish-language sourcing (Anadolu Agency, Presidency of the Republic, Yeni Safak, Hurriyet, TRT Haber, Sabah, NTV) with strategic assessment drawn from Chatham House, the Atlantic Council and the Middle East Institute. Persian, Arabic and Turkish material rendered into English with fidelity to source rhetoric.



Executive Summary

Ankara used the fortnight to turn a year of hedging into a signed instrument. On 7 August, at the Al-Safa Palace in Mecca, President Erdogan joined Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in signing the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, a trilateral pact that treats an armed attack on any one signatory as an attack on all three. The text carries to Turkey the mutual-defence commitment



Signing of the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, Al-Safa Palace, Mecca, 7 August 2026.

Riyadh and Islamabad concluded in September 2025. Erdogan and the Turkish system presented it in the register of the UN Charter, invoking the Article 51 right of self-defence and stressing that the agreement targets no country and remains open to other allies. On the same day, the Presidency's Centre for Countering Disinformation stated that Turkey remains bound to its NATO commitments.

The pact did not stand alone. Across the same days Ankara pressed Israel on two declaratory tracks, one centred on Syria and one on Gaza, and lent its signature to an eight-state foreign-ministers' statement condemning Israeli conduct in Gaza, issued on 6 August. None of this carried a visible cost with Washington, which Ankara continues to run as a separate, compartmentalised channel. The selective-alignment model long identified as the core of Erdogan's foreign policy held: build parallel structures that reduce dependence on Western guarantees while keeping the Western relationship formally intact.

Pro-government commentary framed the shift in civilizational terms. In two *Yeni Safak* columns published just ahead of the window, **Ibrahim Karagul cast Israel as an internal threat to the United States itself and argued that the region's new map leaves no place for an Israeli state, the eschatological register within which hardline opinion reads Ankara's alignment.**

Seen against the longer arc, the fortnight fits Turkey's long-run strategy rather than cutting against it.. Ankara keeps the Western alliance for its leverage and its hardware while building the parallel architecture that will one day make that alliance optional, and the Mecca pact signed alongside a same-day reaffirmation of NATO commitments is that method in miniature. The ambition is displacement rather than exit: to stand, with partners, as the security provider the Gulf turns to when it doubts Washington. The advance runs south, from the footprint in Syria and Libya through Mecca into the Gulf and toward the Indian Ocean, and Karagul's civilisational vocabulary supplies the narrative that casts the movement as destiny. This cycle is one measured step in that cumulative march.

Key Judgments

1. The Mecca pact reads as an architecture rather than an operational alliance. Its collective-defence clause mirrors the 2025 Saudi-Pakistan text, which produced no automatic Pakistani response when Saudi Arabia came under attack. The near-term product is deterrent signalling, not a binding trigger.
2. For Ankara the value compounds. The pact adds an economic heavyweight and a nuclear-armed state to a Turkish-led security network that, on the Atlantic Council's reading, already reaches Qatar, Syria and Libya, sharpening deterrence against Israel without a formal breach with the West.
3. Turkey reaffirmed its NATO obligations on signing day. The hedge is additive. It is designed to raise Ankara's leverage inside Western structures, not to exit them, which is why the compartmentalisation of the Washington channel matters more than the pact's headline language.
4. The eight-nation Gaza statement of 6 August is the concrete multilateral step the rhetoric had been pointing toward. Binding economic measures against Israel have still not followed, so declaratory action continues to outrun policy.
5. Fidan's call to open the Strait of Hormuz places Turkey, for the first time this cycle, inside the Iranian maritime-coercion file, aligning Ankara's stated position with Gulf shipping concerns and with the ceasefire diplomacy it is trying to broker.

The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement: From Hedge to Architecture

Turkish primary reporting sets the scene tightly. Erdogan flew to Jeddah on the morning of 7 August, travelled on to Mecca, and met Mohammed bin Salman at the Al-Safa Palace before the trilateral text was signed with Shehbaz Sharif. The Turkish rendering of the name is Mekke Ortak Savunma Anlasmasi, which translates as the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement. Some outlets, including Al Jazeera, have rendered it as the Mecca Joint Deterrence Agreement; the Turkish savunma is unambiguously defence, and the Defence rendering should be preferred.

Anadolu Agency (TR), 7 August 2026 <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/turkiye-suudi-arabistan-ve-pakistan-ortak-savunma-anlasmasi-imzaladi/4021014>

Erdogan set out the pact's purpose in his own words, carried by the Presidency and Anadolu:

This agreement, grounded in collective deterrence, will contribute to advancing our security and defence cooperation, to developing joint projects in the defence industry, and to the fight against terrorism.

President Erdogan, via Presidency of the Republic / Anadolu Agency (TR), 7 August 2026 <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/turkiye-suudi-arabistan-ve-pakistan-ortak-savunma-anlasmasi-imzaladi/4021014>

He added that the agreement affirms the right of self-defence set out in Article 51 of the UN Charter, that it targets no country, and that it remains open to the participation of allies. Communications Director Burhanettin Duran framed the signing as the strategic consolidation of shared history and brotherhood.

Haberler / Anadolu Agency (TR), 7 August 2026 <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/iletisim-baskani-duran-mekke-ortak-savunma-anlasmasi-tarihi-bir-adimdir/4021140>

Turkish coverage of the pact noting the Presidency's statement that Ankara remains bound to its NATO commitments (Haberler).

The structural point is that this was not improvised. Talks on Turkish accession were reported at an advanced stage in January, after Israel's 2025 strikes inside Qatar drew only a muted Western response, and Chatham

House read the trajectory at the time as classic hedging: a separate defence agreement that makes Turkey more secure if NATO proves unreliable, and that yields leverage inside NATO in the meantime. What materialised on 7 August is precisely that instrument.

Chatham House, 29 January 2026 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/01/talk-turkish-military-alliance-saudi-arabia-and-pakistan-reflects-ankaras-opportunistic>

Where the pact does the most work for Ankara is deterrence and industry. The Atlantic Council's Rich Outzen argues that the agreement broadens an umbrella Turkey has already opened to Qatar, Syria and Libya, adds an economic giant and a nuclear power to Ankara's side, and thereby sharpens deterrence against an Israel whose leaders increasingly speak of Turkey as an adversary. He expects Turkish defence industries to gain commercially, and reads the pact as reinforcing Turkey's place in the trade and energy networks running between India and Europe.

Atlantic Council (Rich Outzen), 7 August 2026 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/why-saudi-arabia-pakistan-and-turkey-just-signed-a-defense-pact/>

The limits are equally clear, and two analysts mark them. The Middle East Institute's Gonul Tol cautions against the Muslim NATO label: the identical clause in the 2025 Saudi-Pakistan pact did not generate an automatic Pakistani military response when Saudi Arabia was struck. The Atlantic Council's Allison Minor adds a further caveat that bears on the nuclear framing: Pakistani officials have maintained that the 2025 agreement carried no nuclear umbrella, and that neither that pact nor the older Gulf Cooperation Council commitment has ever produced an Article 5-style response in practice.

Middle East Institute (Gonul Tol), 7 August 2026 <https://x.com/gonultol/status/2085710577721123106>

Atlantic Council (Allison Minor), 7 August 2026 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/why-saudi-arabia-pakistan-and-turkey-just-signed-a-defense-pact/>

The direction of travel is expansion. The pact's own architecture is built to grow, and Al Jazeera's reporting describes it as the possible core of a wider alignment sitting between Israel and Iran and wary of both, with the door left open to Egypt, Qatar, Syria and the UAE. The overlap with the 6 August Gaza statement is worth noting: four of that document's eight signatories, Egypt, Qatar, the UAE and Jordan, are among the states most often named as accession candidates. If even one or two accede, the trilateral hedge becomes the institutional spine of the Sunni entente that Ankara's doctrine has been signalling toward for over a year.

Al Jazeera, 7 August 2026 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/7/saudi-%E2%81%A0arabia-pakistan-and-turkiye-sign-defence-deal-amid-regional-turmoil>

The Pressure Campaign Against Israel

The declaratory track ran in parallel. On 6 August, Foreign Minister Fidan hosted his Syrian counterpart Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani in Ankara and used the joint press conference to deliver the cycle's sharpest Syria-specific language, casting Turkey as Damascus's protector against Israeli military action. In the Turkish original he called Israeli strikes on Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity one of the gravest threats to the country's stability, urged the international community toward a stronger response, and pressed for observance of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.



Israel's attacks targeting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity are among the most serious threats to the country's stability.

FM Hakan Fidan, via Anadolu Agency / Hurriyet (TR), Ankara, 6 August 2026 <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/fidan-ve-seybani-ankarada-gorustu-43264805>

FM Fidan with Syrian counterpart al-Shaibani at the Ankara press conference, 6 August 2026 (Hurriyet).

Two threads from the same press conference deserve to be logged. First, Fidan folded the Iran file into his remarks, calling for an immediate ceasefire and for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. This is the first time in the cycle that a senior Turkish official has spoken directly into the maritime-coercion file that dominates the Iranian monitor, and it aligns Ankara's stated interest with Gulf and shipping concerns. Second, on Gaza he argued that Israel seeks to uproot Palestinians from their land, that Netanyahu will not succeed, and that continued Israeli strikes are incompatible with any will for peace and obstruct the Board of Peace plan.

FM Hakan Fidan, via Haber7 / ahaber (TR), 6 August 2026 <https://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/3649143-bakan-fidandan-aciklama-ateskes-saglanmali-hurmuz-acilmali>

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar answered the Syria charge on the asymmetry of footprints, claiming on X that Turkey occupies roughly five percent of Syrian territory against an Israeli presence of about one tenth of one percent. Those figures are Sa'ar's own and are contested; they are logged here as a public claim, not a verified measurement.

FM Gideon Sa'ar (X), 5 to 6 August 2026 <https://x.com/gidonsaar/status/2085448178892165210>

The most consequential development on this track was collective rather than rhetorical. On 6 August the foreign ministers of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, the UAE and Indonesia issued a joint statement condemning in the strongest terms Israeli violations in Gaza, singling out strikes on medical facilities and civilian infrastructure and continuing civilian casualties. This is the concrete multilateral instrument the week's rhetoric had been gesturing toward, and it binds the Mecca trio to five further states in a single text.

Turkish MFA joint statement, via Haberler (TR), 6 August 2026 <https://www.haberler.com/guncel/turkiye-dahil-8-ulkeden-israile-karsi-ortak-20123325-haberi/>

Turkish coverage of the eight-nation foreign-ministers' statement on Gaza, 6 August 2026 (Haberler).

Erdogan's own messaging kept to the register of a strong response and sanctions against Israel. The specific sanctions wording circulating from his account this cycle could not be matched to a Turkish-language primary and is logged as attributed pending confirmation; the underlying posture, that Israel will not change course without pressure, is well attested across his recent statements.

President Erdogan (X), on or around 7 to 8 August 2026 (attributed, unconfirmed against primary) <https://x.com/RT Erdogan/status/2085728451537862693>



Washington: A Deliberately Quiet Week

No fresh Erdogan-Trump exchange surfaced, and the silence reads as convenient. Ankara has an interest in letting the pact's non-targeted, defensive framing settle in Washington before any friction narrative can attach to it. The clearest signal of that management was domestic and immediate: even as it signed in Mecca, the Presidency's disinformation unit stated that Turkey remains committed to its NATO obligations. That is the compartmentalisation thesis stated in Ankara's own voice, the hedge presented as additive to the alliance rather than a departure from it.

Presidency Centre for Countering Disinformation, via Haberler (TR), 7 August 2026 <https://www.haberler.com/dunya/erdogan-savunma-anlasmasi-hicbir-ulkeyi-hedef-20126760-haberi/>



The backdrop from the prior cycle still frames the file. Trump praised Erdogan in early July for keeping Turkey out of the Israel-Iran war, and Netanyahu was reported to have pressed Trump by phone to rein in Erdogan's rhetoric and limit arms sales that would further modernise the Turkish air force. Read against that backdrop, the Mecca pact functions as insurance against exactly the outcome Netanyahu is seeking: reduced US arms and diplomatic cover for Ankara, offset by political weight and defence-industrial cooperation that does not run through Washington.

Backdrop (prior cycle): Jerusalem Post, 6 July 2026; Axios, 6 July 2026 <https://www.axios.com/2026/07/06/trump-nato-netanyahu-erdogan-israel>

The Ideological Layer: Karagul and the Blue Homeland Frame

Ibrahim Karagul's Yeni Safak column supplies the clearest reading of the ideological register in which the pro-government press situates this alignment. Two columns from immediately ahead of the window, dated 21 and 23 July 2026, are logged here because **they are strongly indicative of that register.**

In the 21 July column, Karagul argues that **Israel has become an internal threat to the United States itself, that Washington must in the end choose between sacrificing itself and sacrificing Israel, and that Israel's fear of Turkey is well founded because, in his phrase, the new map of the region will carry no Israeli state.** He closes on an eschatological note, **warning that whoever lies down with Israel will wake in hell, which he presents as the world's new reality.**

Ibrahim Karagul, Yeni Safak (TR), 21 July 2026 (pre-window, indicative) <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahim-karagul/israil-abd-icin-de-bir-ic-tehdittir-ya-kendini-feda-edecek-ya-israillisrailin-turkiye-korkusu-gercektir-cunku-yeni-cografya-planinda-israil-haritasi-olmayacaktır-artik-bundan-sonra-israil-ile-yatan-cehenneme-uyanacak-dunyanin-yeni-gercegi-budur-4841807>

The 23 July column extends the same thesis into an American frame. Karagul contends that the internal threats once engineered against Turkey, by which he means the networks he ties to FETO and the PKK, have now become an internal threat to the United States, and that this threat is Israel. What Erdogan endured, he writes, prefigures what Trump will face; Huntington had the fault line wrong, and the real internal threat runs through Israel rather than a clash of civilisations. He reads a fire at Turkish Aerospace Industries through the same lens of sabotage and anxiety.

Ibrahim Karagul, Yeni Safak (TR), 23 July 2026 (pre-window, indicative) <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahim-karagul/turkiyenin-ic-tehditleri-abd-icin-de-ic-tehdit-haline-geldierdoganin-yasadiklari-trumpin-yasayacaklarihuntington-yanlis-yazmisabd-icin-ic-tehdit-israildir-tusasta-yangin-sabotajdegil-ama-yine-de-korktuk-4842378>

The analytic value of these columns is not predictive but diagnostic. They show the civilisational and eschatological vocabulary through which a flagship pro-government voice converts a security hedge into a project of regional reordering, one in which Israel is not a state to be balanced but a presence to be removed from the map. That vocabulary is the substrate that makes the Mecca pact and the eight-nation Gaza statement legible to Ankara's base as something larger than transactional deterrence.

The pact sits comfortably inside the Blue Homeland, or Mavi Vatan, logic that has governed Turkish naval posture since 2006, a doctrine that treats the Eastern Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Sea as sovereign strategic space, and which Erdogan has invoked when defending Turkey's rights from the Blue Homeland to cyberspace. The Qatar dimension is structurally relevant even without new headlines: Turkey's tolerance for, and periodic sponsorship of, Muslim Brotherhood-linked networks, most visibly through the shared hosting of Hamas figures with Doha, forms part of the substrate that makes a Sunni entente legible to Ankara's domestic base and distinguishes it from a purely transactional security pact.

One further Turkish-primary note reinforces the corridor logic behind the pact: commentary carried by Anadolu framed the agreement as strengthening the southern corridor of the Organisation of Turkic States, running from the Caspian to the Gulf and on to the Indian Ocean, and as reinforcing the guarantee of the Middle Corridor between China and Europe.

Anadolu Agency (TR), 7 August 2026 <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/siyasilerden-mekke-ortak-savunma-anlasmasina-iliskin-aciklama/4021215>

Assessment: The Continuity Line

Read against the longer arc, none of this fortnight's moves is a departure. Each is a datapoint on a trajectory Ankara has held with unusual consistency: keep the Western alliance for the leverage and the hardware it supplies, while assembling the parallel architecture that will one day make that alliance optional. The Mecca pact and the same-day reaffirmation of NATO commitments are the two halves of that method set down in a single news cycle. Turkey banked both, using membership to keep pressing for the F-35 and engine technology while signing an instrument designed to thin its dependence on the very guarantor those concessions come from. The ambition beneath the method is displacement rather than exit. Ankara is not trying to leave the Western system so much as to stand, with partners, as the provider the Gulf turns to when it doubts Washington, and every question about American reliability is an opening it is now structured to fill.

The direction of that advance is south. The footprint that began in Syria and Libya now reaches, through Mecca, into the Gulf and toward the Indian Ocean, and the corridor language carried by Anadolu, from the Caspian to the Gulf and on to the sea lanes, describes the map Ankara is drawing for itself. Karagul supplies the vocabulary that renders the movement as destiny rather than opportunism, a new geography in which Israel holds no place and Turkey resumes the role its doctrine assigns it. Seen this way the fortnight is one more measured step in a patient, cumulative march, and the analytic task is less to react to each step than to keep measuring the ground already taken.

Rhetoric Versus Reality

Claim	What the record shows
The Mecca pact targets no country	Erdogan and the Turkish system state this explicitly, invoking Article 51 and NATO continuity. Analysts nonetheless tie its timing to regional anxiety over Israeli power projection, and Ankara-side readings present it as sharpening deterrence against Israel.
An attack on one is an attack on all	The identical 2025 Saudi-Pakistan clause did not produce an automatic Pakistani response when Saudi Arabia was struck (by Iran or their Houthi proxy) . Pakistani officials say the earlier pact carried no nuclear umbrella. The language is aspirational deterrence rather than a binding trigger.
Israel destabilizes Syria	Fidan's central charge this cycle, sourced to Turkish primaries. Sa'ar's public rebuttal cites a Turkish Syrian footprint of about five percent against an Israeli presence near one tenth of one percent; those figures are contested.
A strong response and sanctions against Israel	A multilateral declaratory step did occur: the eight-nation foreign-ministers' statement of 6 August. Binding Turkish economic measures, trade suspension or a diplomatic downgrade have not followed. Rhetoric still outpaces policy.

Indicators to Track

- Whether Egypt, Qatar, the UAE, Jordan or Indonesia signal interest in acceding to the Mecca pact. Four of these co-signed the 6 August Gaza statement, which makes accession signalling the single most important indicator of whether this becomes a bloc or stays a trilateral gesture.
- Whether the eight-nation Gaza statement converts into any binding measure, sanction or downgrade, rather than remaining declaratory.
- Whether Ankara operationalises Fidan's Hormuz framing in any concrete diplomatic role, given Turkey's parallel effort to broker a ceasefire.
- Any published military annex to the Mecca agreement clarifying actual force-commitment obligations.
- Any Erdogan-Trump contact addressing the F-35 and S-400 file, now potentially complicated by the new pact.
- Further Fidan-Sa'ar exchanges as the primary live escalation channel on Syria, and any Turkish move on the 1974 Disengagement of Forces line.
- Whether the Karagul register migrates from opinion columns into official or semi-official framing of the pact, a marker of how far the civilisational narrative is being adopted rather than merely voiced.

Sources

Turkish primaries: Anadolu Agency, Presidency of the Republic (Communications Directorate and Centre for Countering Disinformation), Yeni Safak, Hurriyet, TRT Haber, Sabah, NTV, Haber7, ahaber, T24. Turkish MFA joint statement (6 August). Strategic analysis: Chatham House, Atlantic Council (Outzen, Minor, Kugelman), Middle East Institute (Gonul Tol), Al Jazeera. Israeli and US-side backdrop: Gideon Sa'ar (X), Jerusalem Post, Axios. Priority given to Turkish-language primaries for all statements by Turkish officials.

Appendix A: Indicative Karagul Columns (Yeni Safak)

Two columns from immediately ahead of the reporting window, included for their diagnostic value on the ideological register described above. Titles are given in the original Turkish with an English rendering; the columns are summarised rather than reproduced in full.

1. Israel is an internal threat to the United States too. Either it sacrifices itself or Israel. Israel's fear of Turkey is real, because in the new geography plan there will be no map of Israel. From now on, whoever lies down with Israel will wake in hell. This is the world's new reality.

Original: Israil ABD için de bir iç tehdittir. Ya kendini feda edecek ya İsraili. İsrailin Türkiye korkusu gerçektir çünkü yeni coğrafya planında Israil haritası olmayacaktır. Artık bundan sonra Israil ile yatan cehenneme uyanacak. Dünyanın yeni gerçeği budur.

Yeni Safak, 21 July 2026. Karagul frames Israel as an internal, not merely external, threat to the United States, argues that Washington will ultimately have to choose between itself and Israel, and grounds Israel's fear of Turkey in a coming regional order that, on his account, leaves no place for an Israeli state. The closing image is eschatological, presenting the removal of Israel from the map as an emerging certainty rather than an aspiration.

Full text (TR): <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahim-karagul/israil-abd-icin-de-bir-ic-tehdittir-ya-kendini-feda-edecek-ya-israiliisrailin-turkiye-korkusu-gercektir-cunku-yeni-cografya-planinda-israil-haritasi-olmayacaktırartik-bundan-sonra-israil-ile-yatan-cehenneme-uyanacak-dunyanin-yeni-gercegi-budur-4841807>

2. Turkey's internal threats have become an internal threat for the United States too. What Erdogan lived through, Trump will live through. Huntington wrote it wrong. For the United States, the internal threat is Israel. Fire at Turkish Aerospace Industries: not sabotage, but we were frightened all the same.

Original: Türkiye'nin iç tehditleri ABD için de iç tehdit haline geldi. Erdoğan'ın yaşadıkları Trump'ın yaşayacakları. Huntington yanlış yazmış. ABD için iç tehdit İsraildir. TUSAŞ'ta yangın: Sabotaj değil ama yine de korktuk.

Yeni Safak, 23 July 2026. Karagul argues that the internal threats once cultivated against Turkey, which he ties to the networks he labels FETO and the PKK, have now turned inward against the United States, and that the threat in question is Israel. He casts Erdogan's experience as a template for Trump's, inverts Huntington's clash-of-civilisations thesis by locating the real fault line inside the Western camp, and reads a fire at Turkish Aerospace Industries through the same register of sabotage and unease.

Full text (TR): <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahim-karagul/turkiyenin-ic-tehditleri-abd-icin-de-ic-tehdit-haline-geldierdoganin-yasadiklari-trumpin-yasayacaklarihuntington-yanlis-yazmisabd-icin-ic-tehdit-israildir-tusasta-yanin-sabotajdegil-ama-yine-de-korktuk-4842378>