REGIONAL DEFENSE COOPERATION AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY: THE CASE OF THE SAUDI-TURKISH-PAKISTANI ALLIANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

This article examines the Saudi–Turkish–Pakistani Alliance defense coalition as a test case for whether trilateral security cooperation can advance collective security in the Middle East, applying Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to a case that deliberately spans the Middle Eastern and South Asian security complexes. The study develops a five-part conceptual typology—strategic alignment, security cooperation, defense alliance, collective defense, and collective security—and applies it through qualitative document analysis and structured cross-national comparison across six dimensions: strategic drivers, capability complementarity, institutional characteristics, convergence and divergence of national interests, constraints on institutionalization, and implications for regional deterrence. The analysis finds that the coalition codifies a binding mutual-defense clause that exceeds informal strategic alignment but has not achieved the institutionalization—a joint command, standing forces, a published treaty text, or a demonstrated response to an actual attack—that would place it within collective security in the stricter, universalist sense; it is best classified as a nascent collective-defense alliance. The study concludes that the coalition marks a genuine departure from the region's reliance on external security guarantees and bilateral arrangements, but that its evolution into a durable collective-defense or collective-security framework remains, on present evidence, an open empirical question.

Key words: Saudi–Turkish–Pakistani Alliance; Collective Security; Collective Defense; Regional Security Complex Theory; Middle East.

Introduction

The security architecture of the Middle East remains fragmented. Regional bodies such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League have proven structurally unable to establish a binding collective security framework, leaving states to manage shared threats—including Iran's missile and drone capabilities, Israel's expanding military reach, and the post-2021 recalibration of U.S. security commitments—through ad hoc and bilateral arrangements rather than institutionalized cooperation (Kamrava, 2016; Gause, 2022). Against this backdrop, the 2026 trilateral defense coalition between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Pakistan, formalized through the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement and its mutual-defense clause (which commentators liken to NATO's Article 5), marks a departure from the informal, dyadic alignments emphasized in recent scholarship on Gulf and Turkish middle-power behavior (Roberts, 2025; Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2026), as well as from analyses that treat Pakistan's regional role primarily through its bilateral defense ties (Middle East Institute, 2025; Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2026).

Research problem. It remains unclear whether a trilateral defense pact of this kind can function as more than a transient military alignment—that is, whether it can mature into a durable collective security arrangement capable of stabilizing the region—or whether it will instead be constrained by the same divergent national agendas, capability asymmetries, and weak institutionalization that have undermined earlier regional security initiatives.

Research gap. The existing literature has largely examined Saudi-Turkish and Saudi-Pakistani relations as separate bilateral ties and has analyzed the failure of the GCC and the Arab League without extending that analysis to emerging minilateral alternatives. Trilateral defense cooperation involving an extra-regional nuclear power such as Pakistan has received little sustained attention as a distinct unit of analysis, and RSCT has not yet been systematically applied to this configuration.

Aim and research questions. This study examines the Saudi–Turkish–Pakistani defense coalition as a test case of whether trilateral security cooperation can constitute a viable pathway toward collective security in the Middle East. It addresses three questions: (1) What strategic and geopolitical drivers underlie the formation of this alliance? (2) To what extent does the alliance display the institutional features of collective security, as opposed to an informal strategic alignment? (3) What structural constraints—including divergent state agendas, capability imbalances, and insufficient institutionalization—limit its evolution into a durable security framework?

Theoretical contribution. By applying RSCT to a trilateral, cross-regional coalition linking the Middle East and South Asia, this study argues that such alliances should be understood as an integral component of the evolving regional security complex rather than as an external addition to it, thereby extending RSCT beyond its conventional bilateral and single-region applications.

Literature Review

Three bodies of scholarship inform this study, and each is engaged critically rather than descriptively: the general theory of collective security and collective defense, the literature on the Middle East's regional security architecture, and RSCT as applied to regional defense cooperation.

Collective security, collective defense, and related concepts. The manuscript's central question—whether trilateral defense cooperation can advance regional "collective security"—requires distinguishing five concepts that are not interchangeable, ordered here from least to most binding. Strategic alignment is the loosest form: an informal convergence of threat perceptions among states that produces parallel or coordinated foreign policies without any codified mutual obligation (Walt, 1987). Security cooperation is a step further: it encompasses concrete but non-binding activities—such as joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and defense-industrial collaboration—undertaken to enhance mutual security without a legal commitment to intervene militarily on a partner's behalf. A defense alliance formalizes this relationship through a treaty stipulating mutual-assistance obligations, typically directed against a specified or implicit adversary (Snyder, 1997; Walt, 1987). Collective defense is a particular, bounded form of alliance in which member states commit to treating an attack on any one member as an attack on all, activated upon a defined trigger, following the logic of NATO's Article 5. Collective security, by contrast, is a universalist system in which any act of aggression by any state against any other obliges a collective response from all participants, regardless of prior alignment (Claude, 1962). Kupchan and Kupchan's (1991) "concert" model occupies an intermediate position, extending collective-security-like obligations to a great-power grouping without full universalism. Positioned along this continuum, the Mecca pact's declared mutual-defense clause, which commentators liken to NATO's Article 5, places it, in principle, within the collective-defense category rather than the classical collective-security ideal invoked in some public commentary. The empirical analysis below tests this distinction directly against the coalition's actual degree of institutionalization.

Regional security architecture in the Middle East. A substantial body of literature documents the Middle East's failure to develop binding regional institutions comparable to NATO or the OSCE. Kamrava (2016) and Gause (2022) attribute this to persistent interstate rivalries and the absence of a shared threat consensus among GCC and Arab League members. Adler and Barnett's (1998) concept of a "security community"—a group of states among which war has become unthinkable—offers a useful benchmark precisely because the Gulf falls short of it. Unlike the Euro-Atlantic case, Gulf and wider Middle Eastern security relations remain transactional rather than community-based. More recent work by Roberts (2025) shifts the focus from failed formal institutions to the informal, capability-based alignments through which middle powers such as Saudi Arabia and Türkiye now manage security, a shift that the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (2026) documents as extending to Pakistan and Egypt. These strands converge on a common diagnosis—"institutional fragmentation"—but diverge on its trajectory: some interpret informal alignment as a transitional stage toward deeper institutionalization, whereas others view it as a durable substitute for formal institutions. This study's research problem is situated directly within that unresolved debate.

Regional Security Complex Theory and its application. RSCT explains regional security dynamics through the interdependence of threats, vulnerabilities, and institutions among proximate states (Buzan & Wæver, 2003), building on the earlier securitization framework developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998). RSCT has been applied extensively within single, geographically bounded complexes—such as the Gulf sub-complex or the South Asian sub-complex considered separately—but has rarely been extended to arrangements that deliberately span two sub-complexes simultaneously. Scholarship on Pakistan's regional security role (Middle East Institute, 2025; Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2026) documents its dual exposure to Middle Eastern and South Asian dynamics empirically but does not embed this duality within RSCT's structural vocabulary of inter-complex "boundaries." The Saudi–Turkish–Pakistani coalition, which formally links a Gulf actor and a South Asian nuclear power under a single defense instrument, therefore represents a case that existing RSCT applications are not yet fully equipped to classify. The analysis below operationalizes RSCT through five sequential constructs—regional security structure, threat interdependence, patterns of amity and enmity, external penetration, and the institutionalization of defense cooperation—before drawing out their implications for the regional security architecture.

Taken together, this literature leaves three issues under-addressed that the present study takes up directly. First, where prior work treats collective security and collective defense as interchangeable, this study classifies the Mecca pact explicitly against both logics. Second, where the regional-architecture literature has examined the failures of the GCC and the Arab League largely apart from emerging minilateral alternatives, this study treats the trilateral coalition as a direct empirical test of whether such alternatives can substitute for absent formal institutions. Third, where RSCT has been applied within single sub-complexes, this study extends it to a cross-regional configuration linking the Middle East and South Asia, thereby developing the specific theoretical contribution introduced in the Introduction.

Materials and Methods

Research design. This study employs a qualitative, theory-guided single-case design centered on the Saudi–Turkish–Pakistani trilateral defense coalition, combining document analysis with structured cross-national comparison. The case is treated as an embedded case study, with the trilateral pact as the primary unit of analysis and each signatory state as an embedded sub-unit of comparison.

Data and document sources. Two strata of sources are used. The first consists of the academic and theoretical literature on collective security, regional security architecture, and RSCT reviewed in the preceding section. The second comprises documentary and analytical material on

the coalition itself: official statements accompanying the September 2025 Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement and the August 2026 Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, as well as analyses published by established international affairs institutions, including the Council on Foreign Relations, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Institute for National Security Studies, the Atlantic Council, Arab Center Washington DC, Foreign Policy, and Al Jazeera. This second stratum was necessary because the pact was signed in August 2026 and had not yet generated a substantial body of peer-reviewed empirical literature at the time of writing.

Source selection criteria. Academic sources were selected on the basis of their direct theoretical or empirical relevance to collective security, Gulf and Middle Eastern security architecture, or Pakistan's regional role. Non-academic sources were included only when the publishing institution had an established record of security-policy analysis, when the claim could be corroborated by at least two independent sources, and when the material addressed the coalition's stated rationale, capabilities, or institutional design rather than speculative commentary.

Evidentiary standards. Throughout the analysis, four categories of claims are kept explicitly distinct. Documented facts are statements that can be verified against primary sources—official joint statements, ministerial declarations, and on-the-record remarks by named officials—and are cited directly to those sources. Interpretations from the academic and analytical literature are attributed to their authors (e.g., "analysts have characterized …") rather than presented as the study's own findings. The authors' own analytical conclusions, including the RSCT-based classification developed below, are original arguments derived from the documented evidence and are identified as such rather than presented as reported fact. Finally, statements about the coalition's future trajectory or effectiveness are treated as possible developments, appropriately qualified, and are never presented as established empirical results. Where the evidence is incomplete or contested—as in claims concerning an extended nuclear deterrent or predictions of the pact's future battlefield performance—this is stated explicitly rather than resolved through assumption.

Period of analysis. The analysis covers developments from September 2025, when the bilateral Saudi—Pakistani Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement was signed, through September 2026, when this manuscript was prepared. Earlier academic literature on GCC and Arab League fragmentation, published between 2016 and 2022, is used as background context rather than as data on the coalition itself.

Units of analysis. The primary unit of analysis is the trilateral coalition as a security arrangement. Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Pakistan constitute three embedded units of comparison, while the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement and the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement are analyzed as the coalition's two constitutive policy instruments.

Comparative dimensions. The three states are compared systematically across six dimensions: (1) strategic drivers; (2) capability complementarity; (3) institutional characteristics; (4) convergence and divergence of national interests; (5) constraints on institutionalization; and (6) implications for regional deterrence. These dimensions structure the analysis presented in the following section.

Analytical procedure. The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, thematic document analysis is used to extract each state's declared strategic rationale and capability contribution from primary statements and secondary analyses. Second, the three states are compared systematically across the six dimensions identified above. Third, the resulting comparative profile is mapped onto RSCT's operationalized sequence of regional security structure, threat interdependence, patterns of amity and enmity, external penetration, and the institutionalization of defense cooperation. This mapping is used to assess whether the coalition more closely approximates a collective-security concert, a bounded collective-defense pact, or an informal alignment, drawing on the conceptual distinctions developed in the literature review.

Limitations. Three limitations qualify these findings. First, the full text of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement has not been publicly released; therefore, the analysis relies on official summaries and secondary reporting rather than on the treaty text itself. Researchers with access to the full text through official or diplomatic channels are encouraged to verify the findings presented here against the agreement. Second, because the coalition was formed only weeks before this manuscript was prepared, the evidentiary base relies more heavily on policy and journalistic sources than is typical in peer-reviewed security studies, although every empirical claim was corroborated by at least two independent sources. Third, as a single-case design, the study's findings apply specifically to this coalition and are not intended to be generalized to trilateral security arrangements as a class without further comparative research.

Results

This section reports the study's descriptive and analytical findings, organized around the six dimensions specified in the Materials and Methods section, before their theoretical interpretation through RSCT in the section that follows.

Strategic drivers of trilateral cooperation. The coalition's formation followed a documented erosion of confidence in U.S. security guarantees during and after the 2026 Iran war, prompting Gulf and allied states to pursue self-organized security arrangements (Roberts, 2025; Atlantic Council, 2026). It builds directly on the September 2025 Saudi—Pakistani Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement, which was extended in August 2026 to include Türkiye (Saudi Press Agency, 2025, 2026). Officials from all three states have consistently framed the pact as defensive and non-exclusive and as open to other states willing to accede to its principles (PBS News, 2026).

Complementarity of military and economic capabilities. The three states bring differentiated but complementary resources: Saudi Arabia contributes capital and regional political convening power; Türkiye, a NATO member, contributes a sophisticated domestic defense-industrial base and combat-tested personnel; and Pakistan contributes a large professional military and its status as the Muslim world's only nuclear-armed state (PBS News, 2026; Middle East Institute, 2025). Economic linkages reinforce this division of labor: Pakistan received a $3 billion Saudi cash infusion in April 2026, while the pact offers Riyadh a pathway toward localizing defense procurement and provides Türkiye's defense industry with expanded market access (Arab Center Washington DC, 2026).

Institutional characteristics of cooperation. The agreement establishes a mutual-defense clause— "any armed attack against any one of the three states shall be regarded as an attack against them all" (Saudi Press Agency, 2026)—but provides for no joint command or standing multinational forces, and no full treaty text has been publicly released (Foreign Policy, 2026; Arab Center Washington DC, 2026; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2026). As of September 2026, ratification remained incomplete: Türkiye's parliamentary approval was reported to be pending, with activation not expected before October (The Week, 2026).

Convergence and divergence of national interests. The three states converge in their discomfort with reduced U.S. security commitments and in their shared framing of the pact as an expression of Islamic solidarity rather than as a bloc directed against a named adversary (PBS News, 2026). They diverge, however, in their threat priorities—Saudi Arabia's are centered on the Gulf and Yemen, Türkiye's on the Eastern Mediterranean, and Pakistan's on India and its western border (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2026)—as well as in their appetite for risk. Pakistan has explicitly distinguished rhetorical support for Saudi Arabia from any commitment to military action (Institute for National Security Studies, 2026). Egypt's participation in preparatory talks without signing the final agreement further illustrates this divergence.

Constraints on institutionalization. Beyond the absence of command structures and standing forces, the agreement's practical trigger mechanism remained untested throughout most of the study period. In mid-September 2026, after Saudi Arabia accused the Houthis of attempting a drone attack on Mecca—an accusation the Houthis denied—amid wider Houthi missile and drone attacks on Saudi territory, Turkish and Pakistani officials stated that they had received no Saudi request for support, while Pakistan clarified that a military response was "not currently under discussion" (NPR, 2026; The Week, 2026). This demonstrates that the clause had not been operationalized as of mid-September 2026; it does not establish how the coalition would respond in a future or more severe contingency.

Implications for regional deterrence and security cooperation. Taken together, these findings indicate that the coalition currently functions primarily as a means of diversifying its members' security partnerships rather than as a proven deterrent instrument. It signals reduced reliance on any single external guarantor without severing existing ties with Washington (Cook, 2026; Atlantic Council, 2026), while also deepening defense-industrial and diplomatic cooperation among its members. Its contribution to concrete deterrence, however, remains unverified in practice, because no member has yet invoked, or been asked to invoke, the mutual-defense clause in response to an armed attack.

Discussion

Building on the results reported above, this section interprets those findings through five RSCT constructs in sequence—regional security structure, threat interdependence, patterns of amity and enmity, external penetration, and institutionalization of defense cooperation—before drawing out their combined implications for the regional security architecture.

Regional security structure. The Middle East constitutes a security structure historically organized around competing sub-complexes—the Gulf, the Levant, and, through Türkiye, an overlapping Eastern Mediterranean/NATO periphery—with no unifying polarity since the erosion of unmatched U.S. primacy (Kamrava, 2016; Roberts, 2025). Pakistan sits outside this structure proper, as a dominant unit within an adjacent South Asian complex; its formal inclusion in the Mecca pact extends the boundary of the Middle Eastern security structure to incorporate a cross-complex actor, precisely the configuration that this study's literature review identified as under-examined.

Threat interdependence. RSCT holds that units within a complex are bound by mutual security interdependence: a threat to one is experienced, directly or indirectly, by others. As the strategic drivers reported above indicate, the three states face formally distinct threat profiles centered on Iran, the Eastern Mediterranean, and India/Afghanistan, respectively. The three governments' own joint statement is explicit on this point: it states that "any armed attack against any one of the three states shall be regarded as an attack against them all" (Saudi Press Agency, 2026), a documented commitment, rather than an inference, that converts three separate threat exposures into a single interdependent security unit. Commentators have widely characterized this clause as modeled on NATO's Article 5 (Breaking Defense, 2026); that characterization is an analytical comparison rather than language used in the official text itself, and Pakistani officials have specifically cautioned against treating the pact as equivalent to NATO (PBS News, 2026). A related but analytically distinct claim—that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal now functions as an extended deterrent for its partners—remains unconfirmed. A Pakistani cabinet minister's suggestion of a "nuclear umbrella" was publicly retracted within days, and whether such an arrangement exists in any form remains, on the available evidence, an open question rather than a documented fact (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2025).

Patterns of amity and enmity. The coalition also reconfigures the complex's patterns of amity and enmity. Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have set aside a rivalry rooted in competing claims to

regional and Islamic leadership; Saudi Arabia and Pakistan build on a security relationship dating back to the 1960s; and Pakistan's enmity with India, together with Türkiye's and Pakistan's more ambiguous relations with Iran, is imported into the coalition's threat calculus even though neither India nor Iran is named as an adversary in the agreement's public text (Institute for National Security Studies, 2026). This selective, undeclared enmity is itself diagnostically significant: RSCT expects patterns of amity and enmity to be relatively durable, and the pact's refusal to name a common adversary suggests that the underlying pattern has been managed rather than transformed.

External penetration. The Middle East's security complex has long been penetrated by external powers, principally the United States. The coalition's formation is best interpreted as a response to declining confidence in that external penetration following the 2026 Iran war rather than as its replacement. Türkiye remains a NATO member, while Pakistan's and Türkiye's defense-industrial capabilities partly derive from cooperation with China and other external suppliers. External penetration is therefore redirected and diversified rather than eliminated (Atlantic Council, 2026; Cook, 2026).

Institutionalization of defense cooperation. RSCT treats the degree of institutionalization, rather than the mere existence of an agreement, as decisive for the durability of a security arrangement. The institutional characteristics and constraints reported above—a mutual-defense clause without a joint command, standing forces, or a publicly available treaty text, together with a trigger mechanism left untested by the September 2026 Houthi episode—place the coalition, by this criterion, at an early and still reversible stage of institutionalization rather than at the threshold that RSCT associates with a durable security arrangement.

Implications for regional security architecture. Taken together, structure, interdependence, amity/enmity, external penetration, and limited institutionalization point toward a common conclusion: the coalition is best understood as a minilateral security overlay nested within, rather than a replacement for, the Middle East's fragmented regional security architecture. It compensates for the institutional gaps left by the GCC and the Arab League without resolving them, an empirical finding to which the remainder of the discussion and the conclusion now turn.

Conceptual classification of the coalition. Judged against the five-part typology developed in the literature review, the coalition is best classified as a nascent collective-defense alliance rather than as collective security, mere security cooperation, or informal strategic alignment. It exceeds strategic alignment and ordinary security cooperation because it codifies a binding mutual-defense obligation rather than leaving cooperation discretionary. It falls short of collective security because its obligations apply only among three named parties rather than universally to any act of aggression. It also does not yet fully satisfy the operational threshold of collective defense achieved by highly institutionalized alliances such as NATO because, as the analysis of institutionalization above shows, it lacks a joint command, standing forces, and a publicly available treaty text. The coalition therefore occupies an intermediate position: it constitutes a collective-defense alliance in its declared legal form, but one whose practical institutionalization has not yet caught up with that classification. This conceptual distinction directly addresses the study's second research question and refines its central claim: trilateral cooperation of this kind can advance the region toward collective defense, but its contribution to collective security in the stricter, universalist sense remains, on the present evidence, aspirational.

Relation to previous studies. These findings speak differently to the three strands of literature reviewed above. They confirm Kamrava's (2016) and Gause's (2022) diagnosis that the region's security institutions remain structurally fragile: the Mecca pact's limited institutionalization and its untested response to the September 2026 Houthi attacks reproduce, rather than resolve, the pattern of nominal commitment without operational capacity that these authors identify in the GCC and Arab League. They modify Roberts's (2025) account of informal, capability-based middle-

power alignment: unlike the loosely coordinated alignments described in that literature, the coalition codifies a binding mutual-defense clause, placing it further along the collective-defense end of this study's conceptual continuum than earlier informal-alignment cases. They also extend Buzan and Wæver's (2003) RSCT beyond its conventional single-complex applications: whereas RSCT scholarship has typically analyzed the Gulf and South Asian sub-complexes separately, this case presents a security instrument deliberately designed to span both, a configuration that existing applications of the theory have rarely addressed. Finally, measured against Adler and Barnett's (1998) security-community benchmark, the coalition falls well short, as expected, because it was never presented as an attempt to render war unthinkable among its members but rather as a narrower instrument of collective deterrence.

Will the arrangement institutionalize? Whether the coalition evolves from flexible strategic cooperation into an institutionalized collective-defense mechanism or remains a largely symbolic overlay cannot yet be determined from the available evidence. Several considerations support each possibility without resolving the question. In favor of institutionalization, all three states share a durable incentive to reduce dependence on external guarantors, Türkiye's domestic ratification process could strengthen the agreement's legal standing once completed, and the pact's stated openness to additional members could generate momentum toward a standing coordination body if other states accede (Saudi Press Agency, 2026; The Week, 2026). Against institutionalization, the divergent threat priorities identified in the Results section remain without an agreed mechanism for resolution, the September 2026 Houthi episode showed that member states did not treat an alleged attack on a partner as an automatic trigger for action, and none of the three governments has proposed a joint command or standing force since the agreement was signed (NPR, 2026; The Week, 2026). On the present evidence, the coalition is more accurately described as retaining both possibilities than as following a predetermined trajectory toward either. Its future institutionalization should therefore be treated as a testable hypothesis for subsequent research rather than as a conclusion that this dataset can establish.

Conclusions

Answers to the research questions. The three research questions posed in the Introduction can now be answered directly. First, the coalition's formation was driven by eroding confidence in U.S. security guarantees following the 2026 Iran war and by the complementary capabilities contributed by each state: Saudi capital, Turkish defense-industrial capacity, and Pakistani military manpower and deterrence capabilities. Second, the alliance displays institutional features that go beyond informal strategic alignment—most notably, a codified and binding mutual-defense clause—but falls short of the level of institutionalization associated with established collective-defense arrangements such as NATO. It is therefore best classified as a nascent collective-defense alliance. Third, its evolution into a durable security framework is constrained by the members' divergent threat priorities, the absence of a joint command or standing forces, and an untested trigger mechanism, as illustrated by the September 2026 Houthi episode.

Principal findings. Consistent with the Results and Discussion sections above, four findings summarize the study without introducing new claims. The coalition responds to a documented erosion of external security guarantees rather than to a single named adversary. Its three members bring differentiated and complementary capabilities rather than duplicating one another's contributions. Its institutionalization remains limited: there is no joint command, no standing multinational force, no publicly available treaty text, and ratification remained incomplete as of September 2026. Finally, its practical value as a deterrent remains empirically unverified, because no member has yet invoked, or been asked to invoke, the mutual-defense clause in response to an armed attack.

Theoretical contribution. The study extends Regional Security Complex Theory beyond its conventional single-complex applications by analyzing a security instrument deliberately designed to span the Middle Eastern and South Asian security complexes. It also develops a five-part conceptual continuum—strategic alignment, security cooperation, defense alliance, collective defense, and collective security—that provides a reusable framework for classifying minilateral security arrangements whose public framing, such as "collective security" or "collective deterrence," may exceed their actual level of institutionalization.

Practical and policy implications. For policymakers and regional analysts, the findings caution against treating the coalition's declared mutual-defense clause as evidence of an operational collective-defense capability. On the available evidence, a substantial gap remains between codified commitment and demonstrated institutionalization. The study's five-part typology, together with five observable indicators of institutional development—joint command, standing forces, a publicly available treaty text, an agreed common threat, and a demonstrated response to an actual attack—provides a practical framework that regional governments, allied states, and analysts can use to assess whether the coalition is becoming more institutionalized over time rather than relying on declaratory language alone.

Limitations. As detailed in the Materials and Methods section, the study's conclusions are qualified by its reliance on official summaries and secondary reporting in the absence of a publicly available treaty text; by an evidentiary base that draws more heavily on policy and journalistic sources than is typical in peer-reviewed security studies because of the coalition's recent formation; and by a single-case design whose findings are not intended to be generalized to trilateral security arrangements as a class.

Directions for future research. Three extensions follow directly from these limitations. Comparative research could test the study's five-part typology and RSCT-based indicators against other minilateral security arrangements to assess their generalizability. Follow-up research should revisit this case once the text of the Mecca agreement is published or Türkiye's ratification process is completed to determine whether institutionalization has advanced. Finally, longitudinal analysis of the coalition's responses to future regional crises would provide the empirical test—unavailable at the time of writing—needed to determine whether the mutual-defense clause functions as more than a declaratory commitment.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors confirm that no artificial intelligence tools or applications were used in the design, analysis, or writing of this study.

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