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THE MAKKAH JOINT DEFENCE AGREEMENT AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF DETERRENCE: CONNECTING SOUTH ASIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN SECURITY COMPLEXES

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Abstract

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement represents an important development in the evolving security architecture linking South Asia and the Middle East. Bringing Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye into a more structured framework of defence cooperation, the agreement has implications that extend beyond conventional military collaboration to questions of deterrence, strategic alignment, and cross-regional security interdependence. This study examines how the agreement may reconfigure existing deterrence relationships by connecting security dynamics traditionally analysed within separate South Asian and Middle Eastern security complexes. Drawing on Deterrence Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory, the paper analyses the strategic motivations of the participating states, the emerging logic of collective deterrence, and the interaction between regional threats and changing great-power alignments. It particularly explores Pakistan's position as a nuclear-armed South Asian state with expanding defence partnerships in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia's pursuit of greater strategic autonomy and security diversification, and Türkiye's growing role as an independent regional security actor. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on document analysis of official statements, defence agreements, strategic documents, and relevant secondary literature. It argues that the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement reflects an emerging pattern of cross-regional deterrence, in which security calculations in South Asia and the Middle East are becoming increasingly interconnected. However, the effectiveness of this arrangement will depend on the credibility of collective defence commitments, threat convergence among participating states, operational coordination, and their ability to manage relations with existing regional and global partners. The study concludes that the agreement may contribute to a gradual shift from geographically confined deterrence structures toward a more interconnected security architecture spanning South Asia and the Middle East.

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1. Introduction

The international security landscape is changing rapidly, with established partnership networks, deterrence pacts, and strategic relationships reconfiguring to the new realities of a world where multipolarity is becoming a defining feature of the international security environment. Increasingly, classic security arrangements based on great-power assurances are complemented by partnerships within and across regions to respond to evolving threat perceptions and security uncertainties. Greater strategic autonomy and diversification of defence relations have been promoted by the spread of military capabilities, the increasing regional rivalry, the technological revolution and the doubts of the long-term security guarantees provided by external actors. Such geographically limited rivalries or formal alliances thus no longer define deterrence; instead, deterrence increasingly is driven by overlapping security partnerships between states in different regional security environments. These are especially evident throughout South Asia and the Middle East where new developments in geopolitics are forming new forms of strategic dependence.

Deterrence is traditionally defined as thwarting hostile action by assuring would-be aggressor that the costs of aggression would outweigh the benefits (Schelling, 1966). Its effectiveness relies on the credibility, communication and willingness of a state to follow through on its threats or promises. Cold War deterrence literature was dominated by nuclear weapons and great power rivalry, and today deterrence has become more multi-dimensional inclusive of conventional, missile, emerging technologies, alliances, defence partnerships, and extended security guarantees. Likewise, the arrangements of alliances are becoming more flexible; states are looking for strategic partnerships that do not necessarily break with current partnerships. This change is especially pertinent in areas where there is no certainty about the future of traditional security arrangements and an increasing demand for increased regional responsibility for defence and stability.

South Asia and the Middle East traditionally have been studied as separate regional security complexes. According to the Regional Security Complex Theory, in general, the larger the geographic proximity of states, the greater the extent of their security interdependence because threats and vulnerabilities tend to pass more rapidly over shorter distances (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This has resulted in India – Pakistan rivalry, nuclear deterrence, territorial and conventional military imbalances, and increasing great power engagement as the dominant security dynamics in South Asia. The security environment in the Middle East, on the other hand, has been affected by intra-regional antagonisms, foreign military operations, the security of the Persian Gulf, the Iran-Israel conflict and the shift in relations between Middle East and world powers. However, the lines between these security complexes have grown increasingly blurry. There has been an increased strategic interaction between South Asia and the Middle East, due to energy security, maritime routes, defence cooperation, military technology, economic connectivity, political partnerships, and shared concerns about the stability of the region.

Pakistan plays an integral part in this developing security interaction. While its core deterrence needs have traditionally been in South Asia, especially vis-à-vis India, Pakistan has also had wide-ranging political, economic, military and security ties with Middle Eastern nations. This longstanding defence partnership with Saudi Arabia has encompassed military training, defence consultations, capacity building, and overall strategic cooperation. Türkiye also has historical and strategic ties with Pakistan, and has also been increasingly influential in the security field throughout the Middle East and its neighboring regions. Saudi Arabia, on its part, has sought to diversify its partnerships in the international arena, and to enhance its strategic autonomy in an evolving regional context. Recent literature has

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thus started conceptualizing the Pakistan–Saudi security cooperation as part of a vast rearrangement of West Asian security than just a traditional bilateral relationship (Saleem et al., 2025).

As these relationships were evolving over time, the groundwork was laid for more formal collaborations between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye. In fact, the formal agreement followed some informal coordination among the key regional countries, which had already been discussed the feasibility of establishing a new regional security framework. For instance, Telci (2026) noted that coexistence and coordination in the engagements of Türkiye, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other regional actors have increased as a result of shifts in threat assessments, doubts about the security guarantees provided by current actors, and the desire to achieve strategic autonomy in the region. As such, these developments reflect that regional powers do not necessarily seek to replace their existing ties with the global powers, but rather continue to diversify their security arrangements. This signals a significant shift in alliance politics as states are increasingly setting up overlapping networks of cooperation instead of binding alliance structures only.

The most notable institutional manifestation of this emerging strategic convergence is the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement signed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye on 7 August 2026. According to the agreement, an armed attack against any of the three participating states will be considered an attack against all and that it is clearly aimed at enhancing collective deterrence against external aggression (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan [MOFA], 2026). The official statement also highlights increased defence cooperation and mutual efforts to promote peace, security, and stability in the region. Pakistan has made it clear that the agreement is of defensive nature in line with the principle of collective self-defence in the United Nations Charter (Article 51) and it is not an alternative to the existing bilateral and multilateral arrangements of the participating states (MOFA, 2026). The same is critical due to the fact that Türkiye still has a firm place within the NATO security umbrella, while Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have long-term strategic ties with the major powers. The deal thus seems to be more of a diversification than a simple rejection of current partnerships.

The Makkah Agreement has a much broader meaning than simply military coordination. The deal could shift the geography in which deterrence calculations are done, as it links a nuclear armed South Asian state with a powerful Gulf power and a transregional militarily capable state, which has an advanced defence industry. Pakistan brings vast military experience and proven strategic capability, Saudi Arabia economic resources and strong political influence in the Arab and Islamic world and Türkiye has strong conventional military capability, defence technology and experience in NATO and regional security scenarios. The reported emerging implementation plans include political-military coordination, joint exercises, defence-industrial cooperation, and technology transfer as well as cooperation in conventional and new military areas (Reuters, 2026). This could be a step-by-step process in order to give the collective defence commitment institutional and operational substance.

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement may thus be interpreted as a possible development of cross-regional deterrence, where security commitments and deterrence considerations are no longer limited to the traditional confines of the security complexes of each region. This study does not necessarily say that South Asia and the Middle East have formed a "single security complex," but that the agreement establishes an institutional framework that provides a "bridge" through which events in one region can increasingly affect strategic thinking in the other. In the Middle East security environment, Pakistan's role is crucial in linking the South Asian deterrence dynamics and Saudi Arabia and Türkiye further project the framework. It is a shift from bilateral defence

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cooperation to collective deterrence and even to a more integrated security structure. But its longterm impact will be contingent on the credibility of collective pledges, the alignment of threat assessments, coordination of operations, institutionalization and the capacity of the involved states to reconcile the new system with their regional and global partnerships. It is therefore a significant example of how traditional deterrence is now becoming more cross-regional and integrated as opposed to geographically based security partnerships.

2. Research Problem

Today's security landscape is more defined by transboundary strategic engagement, diversified defense partnerships and overlapping threats. Yet much of the literature on security has still seen South Asia and the Middle East as fairly separate security region complexes. Furthermore, security studies in South Asia are still largely dominated by issues of Indian–Pakistani rivalry, nuclear deterrence, conventional asymmetry, and strategic stability, with security studies in the Middle East focussed on Gulf security, Iran–Israel competition, regional conflicts, and the role of external powers (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This regional division now offers a less and less complete account of the new security architectures linking states and security concerns in both regions.

This traditional analytical distinction is challenged by the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. The accord has created a "collective defence" obligation among three key states in distinct security spheres, which could broaden the notion of deterrence beyond its traditional definition. Pakistan continues to be a mainstay of the South Asian deterrence architecture, Saudi Arabia has a key role in security in the Gulf and the Middle East, and Türkiye is a unique transregional state that straddles the Middle East and the security architecture of European and wider Eurasia. Their increased strategic co-operation is significant because it calls into question whether deterrence is shifting from mainly national and regionally-based deterrence to more interdependent forms of collective and cross-regional deterrence.

Although this development is of strategic importance, little academic research investigates the impact such a structure might have on the dynamics of separate regional security complexes. There is a significant body of deterrence literature regarding nuclear deterrence, conventional deterrence, extended deterrence and collective deterrence (Schelling, 1966) and there is also an explanation of the geographical concentration of security interdependence in the Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). But there has been a lack of focus on the deterrence signals, security concerns and strategic calculations that may spread from one region to another through structured defence relationships. Furthermore, given the recent nature of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, there is an element of uncertainty about how threat perceptions are aligned between the signatories, the extent to which they are willing to commit and how they will coordinate their efforts on the ground, as well as its impact on their current regional and global agreements.

The central research question, thus, is if the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement is simply an institutionalization of the existing defence cooperation or is it an emerging security alliance that can link South Asian and Middle Eastern security dynamics. To tackle this issue, the strategic rationale behind Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye's defence pledges, their credibility, and the operational basis of their joint defence must be assessed, as well as how security developments in one region could increasingly impact strategic considerations in the other. The transformation is relevant not only in terms of an evaluation of the future of the agreement, but also in explaining the transformation of deterrence and regional security structures in the context of rising multipolarity and cross-regional strategic interdependence.

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3. Research Questions

Main Research Question

How does the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement reconfigure deterrence by connecting the security dynamics of South Asia and the Middle East?

Sub-Questions

What strategic factors motivated Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye to establish the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement?

How does the agreement alter the deterrence calculations of the three participating states?

To what extent does the agreement connect the South Asian and Middle Eastern regional security complexes?

What factors will determine the credibility and effectiveness of the emerging collective deterrence arrangement?

What are the wider implications of the agreement for regional and global security alignments?

4. Research Objectives

To examine the strategic motivations behind the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement.

To analyse its implications for collective and extended deterrence among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye.

To assess how the agreement connects South Asian and Middle Eastern security dynamics.

To evaluate the credibility, limitations, and operational challenges of the emerging collective defence arrangement.

To examine its implications for wider regional and great-power security relationships.

5. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement as an emerging development connecting the security dynamics of South Asia and the Middle East. In terms of academic research, it is a paper that opens up deterrence thinking about the geographic scope of collective defence commitments. It also relates to Regional Security Complex Theory by looking at the way that two traditionally separate security complexes (buzan & Wæver, 2003) are becoming increasingly interdependent.

The key conceptual insight of the study is the notion of 'cross-regional deterrence' – deterrence where defence commitments, capabilities and strategic signals affect security calculations across regions. The study offers insights on the credibility of collective defence commitments, threat convergence, operational coordination from a policy perspective, and implications for existing regional and global partnerships. In a larger sense, it can be used to describe the formation of flexible security policies and strategic autonomy of the emerging regional powers in the context of the new multi-polar international security framework.

6. Literature Review

6.1 Evolution of Deterrence Theory

Deterrence theory has changed significantly over time as a result of alterations in warfare, military technology, nuclear force, alliance, and the international security environment. The idea of deterrence is simply to discourage an opponent from pursuing an action that is not desired by making them aware that the costs and risks to that opponent of taking the action are likely to be greater than the benefits. The field of classical deterrence scholarship was very strong during the Cold War and focused on the four elements of capability, credibility, communication, and rational calculation. Schelling (1966) proposed that military force need not only be used to defeat an enemy, but it could also be used to shape his decision-making by the credible threat of force. This fact introduced the concept of deterrence as a key issue in the field of strategic studies and gave intellectual support to the subsequent discussion on nuclear, conventional, extended, and collective deterrence.

The advent of the nuclear weapon made a revolution in the theory of deterrence. Nuclear deterrence transformed strategic thinking from victory in war to the avoidance of war, for as long as there was a credible prospect of an unacceptable retaliatory response. The notions of second-strike

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capability, mutual vulnerability, escalation, and strategic stability were key components of nuclear strategy. But, in the current scholarly world, the nuclear deterrence paradigm is becoming more complex than the bipolar Cold War. In a recent article, Narang and Sagan (2022) contend that the present nuclear landscape features multiple nuclear actors, evolving doctrines, technological advances, and growing risks of escalation. Michaels (2024) also notes that deterrence studies have become more important recently, with the return of great-power competition and because deterrence now takes place across domains, such as nuclear, conventional, cyber, space, and other strategic fields.

Conventional deterrence has grown up alongside nuclear deterrence and aims to stop aggression by means of credible non-nuclear military force. Conventional deterrence does not require the threat of catastrophic nuclear retaliation, but can be based on deterrence by denial – that is, dissuading an opponent from successfully pursuing military goals – or on the threat of heavy conventional punishment. In the changing strategic landscape, the two arms—conventional and nuclear—must increasingly be integrated, and cannot be kept completely distinct tools of deterrence. Peters, Anderson, and Menke (2018) stress that the interaction of conventional and nuclear forces is becoming more integral in today's strategic competition, and Jansen (2024) points out that today's deterrence concepts have to address multiple threats, multiple escalation scenarios, and more and more complex military capabilities.

The concept was further expanded by the concept of extended deterrence, which was the extension of commitments to deter beyond the territory of the state providing the deterrent. In extended deterrence, a state tries to dissuade aggressions toward an ally or a strategic partner by conveying its intent to mobilize its own means to protect that ally or partner. The problem is credibility: The guarantor has to be willing to assume significant costs and risks to defend another state, and the other state has to believe this is the case. Recent studies show that having more nuclear weapons does not necessarily make such commitments more credible. For instance, Suh (2026) argues that nuclear superiority by a protecting power does not always diminish challenges against its allies, and extended deterrence is more than just a quantity of nuclear weapons.

The idea has been extended to collective deterrence, where multiple countries unite their promises and means against aggression against signatories to a security pact. Collective deterrence is different from simply bilateral extended deterrence in that it serves to share the responsibility for maintaining deterrence among participating states. It is therefore effective only when threats converge, when there is political unity, when military forces are available, when there is institutional coordination, and when there is credibility in collective responses. Recent studies also focus on the institutional aspect of collective deterrence, as decision-making processes may impact the credibility of retaliation and risk of unintended escalation (Aambø, 2026).

From classical deterrence to nuclear, conventional, extended, and collective deterrence, it is evident how deterrence can be a flexible strategic concept rather than a doctrine of the Cold War. Deterrence today is often a mix of capabilities and partnerships, institutions and strategic commitments, and involves more than just individual states. The significance of this evolution is in the context of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, which pledges collective defence cooperation between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, raising the question of whether collective deterrence can be built beyond the framework of existing regional borders. The pact could thus be interpreted as a continuation of the trend toward cross-regional deterrence, where the capabilities and security guarantees provided by different regional security complexes can help shape the decision making of other states' adversaries in more than one strategic area.

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6.2 Regional Security Complex Theory

The study of regional security threats and strategic relationships is concentrated in a geographical manner and can be understood through the lens of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which was mainly developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. Buzan and Wæver (2003) argue that states within the same region tend to be more closely security dependent due to the relative ease of transnational diffusion of threats and the extent to which neighbouring states are directly impacted by each other's political and military actions. This means that the regional security complexes are defined by amity and enmity, power distribution, historic enmity, territorial disputes and by how domestic, regional and global security dynamics interact. Despite the fact that the relevance of RSCT has been demonstrated in recent applications to understand the evolution of regional security dynamics in South Asia and the Middle East, recent developments seem to indicate growing interconnections between the previously differentiated regional complexes (Botić, 2026; Terbec, 2025).

South Asia is one of the most apparent regional security interdependences. The regional complex has traditionally been based on the India–Pakistan rivalry that had its origins in Partition, territorial conflicts, conflicting national identities and especially the unresolved Kashmir conflict. The nuclearization in 1998 further entrenched the strategic dynamics between India and Pakistan and changed the regional security ecosystem as the nuclear umbrella came in addition to the already ongoing conventional rivalry. Botić (2026) notes that despite the expansion of the South Asian Regional Security Complex's security concerns today owing to instability in Afghanistan, terror, drone warfare, technological advancements, and growing Chinese engagement, India–Pakistan rivalry remains at its core. The area is thus characterized by continuity and change: the traditional rivalry structure is still at the heart of it, but new actors and technologies are now having an impact on regional states' security calculations.

The Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex is far less monolithic and has multiple, rather than one, centres of power. Historically, its security dynamics have been influenced by Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran-Arab competition, sectarian and ideological differences, intra-Arab competition, weak state, non-state armed actors and the high level of involvement of global actors. The Middle East is a 'security complex' in which the 'deep-rooted patterns of insecurity' assume significant importance, alliances shift and there is considerable 'penetration' by outside actors (Terbec, 2025). The recent expansion of the Gaza conflict in the region and also the direct confrontation between the Israeli and Iranian troops are also evidence of the interdependence of Middle East security. During 2024–2025, conflicts increasingly spread beyond borders and became intertwined with the broader Israel–Iran duel, underscoring how the dynamics in one region of the Middle East can quickly impact the security considerations of nations across the region, as the International Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS) (2025) highlights.

The external penetration is also an important aspect of RSCT as patterns of regional security are often shaped by great powers and powerful states outside the immediate complex. South Asia is the region in which the United States, China and other increasingly powerful countries have shaped the regional balance with strategic partnerships, military cooperation, technology transfers and diplomacy. Traditionally in the Middle East, the most important external security player has been the United States, and more recently Russia and China have increased their political and strategic presence in the region. At the same time, regional states are gaining more autonomy and are seeking more diversified security relationships. As uncertainty about great power pledges has grown, Hamzawy and Ji (2024) note that Middle Eastern countries have become more flexible with competing great powers. The interplay of external penetration and regional powers' increasing autonomy is especially relevant to new

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configurations like the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye are not severing existing global partnerships but are establishing new security ties that could more and more facilitate a greater integration of the regional security complexes of South Asia and the Middle East and help build a more cross-regional security architecture.

6.3 South Asian Deterrence Architecture

The strategic deterrence architecture in South Asia continues to be mostly oriented towards the historical strategic rivalry between India and Pakistan. The two states have fought several wars, had several military crises, territorial disputes and never stopped competing on Kashmir since their independence in 1947. This rivalry was changed by the overt nuclearization of both countries in 1998 and the creation of a nuclear deterrence relationship, which lowered the chance of an unrestricted conventional war but not the possibility of lower-level conflict or crisis instability. Deterrence, escalation control, and crisis management remained pertinent in South Asia during the 2025 India–Pakistan crisis. Deterrence, the stability-instability paradox (SIP), escalation dynamics, standoff weapons, and crisis management, Newman (2025) claims, are essential to comprehend the current crises in India–Pakistan relations. In the same vein, Clary et al. (2025) describes the 2025 clash as "one of the most severe military confrontations between the two nuclear powers in recent decades."

The process of nuclear deterrence strategy in Pakistan was initiated mainly in the wake of the increasing conventional strength and nuclear capability of India. As a result, Pakistan's nuclear weapons have been the focus of its strategy to deter major conventional attack and preserve strategic balance in the face of structural inequalities in terms of economic size, military spending and conventional forces. Pakistan then went on to formulate the concept of Full Spectrum Deterrence to cover threats at various levels of conflict and fill in the perceived gaps that could allow limited conventional military action short of nuclear use. The deterrence environment will remain complex and inherent because both nations will want to preserve credible deterrent capabilities and try to create room for conventional military responses. Hussain (2025) also highlights nuclear posture, conventional asymmetry, crisis escalation, political decision-making process, and changing military technologies as key factors in the strategic stability between India and Pakistan.

Conventional asymmetry continues to be an important element of the South Asian security dilemma. India has a long way to go in terms of conventional advantages over Pakistan because of its bigger economy, its increasing defence budget, modernization plans, its air and naval superiority, and its increasing defence cooperation with other countries. Pakistan has tried to bridge this gap by means of nuclear deterrence, conventional modernization, force preparedness and strategic partnerships. But conventional precision-strike capabilities can develop an incentive for limited military action, and can raise questions about escalation thresholds. Further, the 2025 crisis underscored the growing importance of long-range precision weapons, drones, missile defence, and stand-off capabilities in shaping the military exchanges between the two nations. Pant and Patil (2025) believe that the crisis brought about important changes in the operational environment, and raised new questions about escalation and strategic stability; Hussain (2025) also points to the conventional military asymmetry as one of the factors influencing stability perceptions.

The deterrence architecture in the South Asian region is further changing with the rise of emerging technologies. AI, autonomous systems, cyber, hypersonic, advanced surveillance, missile defence, MIRV and increasingly sophisticated command and control can enhance military effectiveness, however it can also lead to less and less time for decision-making and greater uncertainty during crisis situations. New

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challenges for deterrence in South Asia are emerging as a result of new technologies, which are altering the nature of warfare, as Babar and Abbasi (2024) contend. In a similar vein, Akhtar and Mahmood (2025) argue that AI-enabled surveillance, autonomous weapons, and hypersonic systems have the potential to alter the dynamics of deterrence by altering perceptions of vulnerability and escalation. Advancements in missile technology, such as India's MIRV, submarine-based ballistic missiles, and hypersonic programmes, add to strategic considerations (Khan, 2025). This means that the deterrence structure in the South Asian context is shifting from the nuclear-conventional face-off to a multidomain space, wherein technology, information systems, cyber and precision weapons are having an ever-growing impact on strategic stability.

6.4 Changing Middle Eastern Security Architecture

The security architecture of the Middle East has traditionally been based on the strong security guarantees of external parties such as the US. After the 1990–91 Gulf War, the United States became the major external military protector for numerous Gulf states through expansion of military bases, defence agreements, arms sales and security partnerships. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait forged broad defence ties with Washington and heavily depended on U.S. military forces to ward off potential threats. However, recent years have brought new uncertainties about the sustainability and adequacy of these systems. The sparse U.S. reactions to the Saudi Arabia and UAE attacks helped fuel a sense of no longer being able to rely solely on an external security umbrella in the Gulf states, according to Baabood (2024). The United States continues to be the cornerstone of Gulf security but regional states have increasingly been looking for ways to complement or rather than replace American guarantees.

The rivalry with Iran continues as one of the key factors affecting Middle Eastern security. The missile and drone arsenal, the ability to support allied non-state actors, and the influence in the region have historically raised concerns among the Gulf states and Israel. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf neighbors have been trying to engage Tehran diplomatically to defuse the tensions and bring more stability to the region. This double approach of deterrence and accommodation was demonstrated in the Saudi–Iran rapprochement of 2023. But in 2024, Iran directly attacked Israel via missiles and drones and the escalation of Israel–Iran confrontation highlighted the still high risks of Gulf security in the wider region. According to Baabood (2024), these advancements compelled the Gulf nations to redefine what national security means since missile, drone, airspace, maritime, and cyber threats are increasingly crossing borders. The IISS (2025) also flags the direct confrontation between Israel and Iran, and the decline of Iran-aligned actors, as two of the key factors that are reshaping the strategic environment in the Middle East.

At the same time, Israel is playing a growing role in regional deterrence considerations. Historically it has been a very strong deterrent due to its high conventional capabilities, missile-defence capability, technological edge and the credibility of a potential nuclear option. But the Gaza war and ensuing regional escalation have proved that Israel's security policies are not just about its immediate border. Growing interwoven theatres of competition involve military clashes between Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iran, Syria, and other regional players. The direct Israel-Iran conflict is a particularly significant shift, since it has shifted a previously indirect rivalry to an overt interstate military confrontation. Hamzawy and Brown (2025) contend that the instability in the Middle East in the modern era has revealed the lack of effective regional security talks and collective action. This has provided a motivation for the regional states to look for new cooperative formats

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that will help to mitigate vulnerabilities and offer further tools for deterrence and crisis management. As a result, Gulf and other Middle Eastern states have tried to diversify partnerships and move towards strategic autonomy. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been developing ties with China, Russia, Türkiye and others, and have retained close defence ties with the United States. This is a diversification strategy, comprising enhanced indigenous defence capability and regional cooperation, defence-industrial development and flexible international defence partnerships, says Baabood (2024). Hamzawy and Brown (2025) also highlight the increasing motivation for regional states to establish regional collective action arrangements, and Carnegie research indicates that Saudi Arabia has also sought to enhance U.S. assurances and expand its economic and strategic ties with China and Russia (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2025). Such a quest for strategic autonomy is not necessarily one of anti-alliance as much as a shift towards multipolarity in which states are looking for multiple security options. The newfound interest in deeper Pakistan–Saudi Arabia–Türkiye defence cooperation comes in the context of this shift. Thus, the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement is an element of a Middle East security architecture in which regional states are progressively seeking to leverage traditional external security guarantees and to establish regional and cross-regional defence agreements.

6.5 Pakistan–Saudi Arabia Defence Relations

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have traditionally had good and close defence relationship over the years and both countries have close political, economic and strategic linkages. Traditional military cooperation has always involved training of Saudi personnel, advisory assistance, military exchanges, as well as regular interaction between the armed forces. Pakistan has also provided the Saudi military with professional expertise and Saudi Arabia has been a significant economic and diplomatic partner of Islamabad. These ongoing contacts developed institutional confidence between the two military forces and slowly started to broaden their involvement from military exercises to strategic coordination (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IIS] 2025).

As the region's stability was undermined by new security challenges, including regional instability, terrorism, Gulf security issues, and evolving great-power involvement, the relationship took on new strategic significance. The strategic significance of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan has been enhanced by its political and economic importance, and Pakistan's military capabilities and experience have made it an important defence partner for the Saudi Arabia. There have been some occasional disagreements over regional matters but overall, the two countries have enjoyed close defence ties and high-level political and military contacts. Their ties, therefore, extend beyond just conventional military aid and are now characterized by shared interests in regional security and stability (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan [MOFA], 2025).

In September 2025, a significant institutional development was marked by the signing of the Pakistan–Saudi Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement. The pact stipulated that aggression against one country would be deemed aggression against both and was aimed at bolstering mutual deterrence against third parties (MOFA, 2025). It thus shifted bilateral relations from the old defence cooperation to the idea of a "mutual-defence" commitment. The agreement also coincided with Saudi Arabia's efforts to diversify its security alliances in the face of uncertainty in the Middle East security landscape (Reuters, 2025). The 2025 bilateral agreement then was a significant stepping stone towards further cooperation with Türkiye. The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, signed in August 2026, extended the concept of mutual defense to a trilateral arrangement of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. This development shows a significant institutional change from the longtime bilateral military relations to bilateral collective deterrence and ultimately to trilateral defence cooperation.

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Defence cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia can thus be considered as one of the key pillars of the new cross-regional security architecture of South Asia and the Middle East (MOFA, 2026).

6.6 Türkiye's Emerging Strategic Role

Türkiye is in a unique situation in the shifting regional security landscape. It has been a member of NATO since 1952 and is deeply embedded in the Euro-Atlantic security system, and has gradually developed an autonomous regional foreign and security policy. It is also strategic in its geographical location which is between Europe, Middle East, the Black Sea and the Caucasus. Thus, Türkiye exists at the intersection of multiple security domains, instead of just one (IISS, 2025). Strategic autonomy is one of the key elements of the security policy of contemporary Türkiye. Ankara has demanded more flexibility in its ties with the United States, Europe, Russia, China and regional powers, but it has kept its NATO ties. This doesn't require a retreat from existing alliances; rather, it is an attempt to boost decisions made outside of these partnerships and expand strategic alliances. Türkiye's participation in Syria, Iraq, Libya, the Caucasus and the Eastern Mediterranean indicates the extent to which it has adopted a role as a regional security provider (IISS, 2025).

Türkiye's growing domestic defence industry offers a key material base for this strategic autonomy. It has matured considerable expertise on drones, missiles, naval platforms, electronic warfare, armoured systems, aerospace and other military technologies. This has made defence exports, joint production and technology transfers significant tools of the Turkish foreign, and security policy. Thanks to these capabilities, Türkiye can integrate military and technological cooperation with political influence to various regions (Presidency of Defence Industries, 2025).

Türkiye also has solid defence ties with Pakistan and is growing its strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia. The military activities, training, high-level defence dialogue, naval cooperation, and defence-industrial projects, including the MILGEM programme, are among the components of the cooperation between Pakistan and Turkey. The political normalization, economic cooperation, and defence-industrial interaction are other areas of the expansion of Türkiye–Saudi relations. These bilateral relationships paved the way for Türkiye's involvement in the Makkah framework and enhanced its position as a mediator between existing pacts and new regional security frameworks (Reuters, 2026).

6.7 Emerging Pakistan–Saudi Arabia–Türkiye Strategic Triangle

The emerging Pakistan–Saudi Arabia–Türkiye strategic triangle is built upon well-established bilateral relationships. For decades, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have military ties; Pakistan and Türkiye have close military relations as well as strong military defence ties; and in recent years, the relationship between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia has been strengthened significantly. These bilateral foundations have led to political trust and institutional experience, which in turn have paved the way for closer trilateral cooperation (MOFA, 2026).

All three States also have complementary strategic capabilities. Pakistan brings a wealth of military know-how and established strategic competencies, Saudi Arabia has enormous economic wealth and political leverage in the Gulf and across the Arab world, and Türkiye has a robust conventional military force and developed defence industries. These strengths offer possibilities for cooperation with regard to training, military technology, defence production, intelligence and operational coordination. This means that their capabilities give an important material basis to the collective deterrence.

Strategic convergence has been further fueled by shifts in regional and global circumstances. Saudi Arabia is diversifying its security partnership, Türkiye is seeking more strategic autonomous security posture while Pakistan extends its defence

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diplomacy beyond South Asia. While they have different threat perceptions, all three want more security flexibility in a growing multipolar world that is more uncertain than ever. The convergence is defined as an institutionalized commitment through the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, which is a collective agreement against external aggression (MOFA, 2026).

In the future, the credibility of the arrangement will be of paramount importance and defence-industrial cooperation, military exercises, training and political coordination in particular will be very important. Joint exercises are planned on land, air, naval, and cyber space, as well as cooperation in the development of unmanned systems, AI, electronic warfare, joint production, and technology transfer (Reuters, 2026). These mechanisms may over time shift political commitments to capabilities.

The strategic triangle is especially significant in terms of a link between various regional security environments. Pakistan continues to exist as largely a part of the South Asian security architecture, Saudi Arabia is one of the key players in the Gulf and Türkiye is active in security complex in the Middle East, Europe and Eurasia. This could therefore enable their institutionalized defence cooperation to carry security commitments and deterrence signals across traditional regional lines. The Makkah framework can then be seen as a new version of cross-regional deterrence, but its success will hinge on threat convergence, institutionalization, operational coordination, and the credibility of collective commitments.

6.8 Research Gap

Although there is a vast literature on deterrence, alliances and regional security, security dynamics in South Asia and the Middle East are usually analyzed as distinct fields of strategic relations. Research on South Asia mostly centers on Indian–Pakistani nuclear deterrence, conventional asymmetry, crisis stability, and new military technologies, while research on the Middle East primarily focuses on security in the Gulf, Iran–Israel competition, external security guarantees, and shifting regional alliances (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; IISS, 2025). This divide offers a partial insight into increasing security ties between the two regions.

Likewise, a review of the literature on Pakistan–Saudi Arabia, Pakistan–Türkiye and Saudi Arabia–Türkiye relations would reveal that the majority of studies cover the bilateral relations among these states. Less has been written about the prospect of their growing defence cooperation having a combined effect on deterrence on both sides of the border. The recent formation of the Makkah Joint Defence pact thus establishes a new analytical matrix in which Pakistan's South Asian strategic outlooks directly overlap with Saudi and Turkish security concerns in the Middle East.

To fill this void, this study proposes cross-regional deterrence as a concept for analysis in understanding how collective defence commitments, military capabilities, strategic signalling, and threat perceptions can bind otherwise disjointed regional security complexes. The study does not take for granted that South Asia and the Middle East are becoming one security complex, but seeks to understand if the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement is establishing an institutional security "bridge" between the two. In so doing, it takes the application of Deterrence Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory to the new paradigm of cross-regional defence cooperation.

7. Theoretical Framework

7.1 Deterrence Theory

Deterrence Theory provides the first theoretical foundation for analysing the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement. Deterrence refers to preventing an adversary from undertaking an undesirable action by convincing it that the expected costs will outweigh the potential benefits. Classical deterrence scholarship identifies capability, credibility, communication, resolve, and perception as essential components of an

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effective deterrent relationship (Schelling, 1966; Morgan, 2003). Capability concerns whether a state possesses sufficient military means to impose costs or deny an adversary its objectives, while credibility concerns whether the adversary believes those capabilities will actually be employed. Communication is necessary to convey commitments and red lines, whereas resolve reflects the political willingness to fulfil those commitments. Deterrence ultimately operates through perception because even substantial military capabilities may fail to deter if an adversary doubts either the willingness or ability of a state to respond. Contemporary deterrence scholarship further emphasizes that these elements increasingly operate through combinations of nuclear, conventional, technological, and allied capabilities rather than through a single military instrument (Narang & Sagan, 2022; Michaels, 2024).

These concepts provide a direct framework for examining the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye possess different but potentially complementary capabilities: Pakistan provides significant conventional and strategic capabilities, Türkiye contributes substantial conventional forces and defence-industrial capacity, while Saudi Arabia contributes military resources, economic capacity, and regional strategic influence. The study will assess whether combining these capabilities creates a credible collective deterrent and whether the commitment that aggression against one member will be treated as aggression against all is sufficiently communicated and politically credible (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan [MOFA], 2026). Particular attention will therefore be given to capability, credibility, resolve, communication, and external perceptions of the agreement. This approach will help determine whether the Makkah framework represents primarily political signalling or whether it is developing the institutional and operational foundations necessary for effective collective deterrence.

7.2 Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides the second theoretical foundation of the study. Buzan and Wæver (2003) argue that security interdependence tends to be strongest among geographically proximate states because threats, conflicts, and vulnerabilities travel more readily across shorter distances. Regional security complexes consequently develop through durable patterns of amity and enmity, distributions of power, regional rivalries, domestic vulnerabilities, and relationships with external powers. Regional powers play particularly important roles in shaping security dynamics, although external actors can penetrate regional complexes through military alliances, bases, defence partnerships, arms transfers, and political intervention. RSCT also recognizes that regional complexes are not completely isolated from one another and that major political or strategic developments can create security spillovers across regional boundaries (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

RSCT is particularly relevant to this study because Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye occupy different but increasingly interconnected strategic environments. Pakistan's principal security calculations remain embedded in the South Asian security complex, particularly through its deterrence relationship with India. Saudi Arabia is primarily located within the Middle Eastern security complex, where Gulf security, Iran, Israel, and regional instability shape strategic calculations. Türkiye occupies a more complex transregional position because its NATO membership connects it to European security while its geography and security engagements connect it strongly with the Middle East and neighbouring regions (IISS, 2025). The Makkah Agreement may therefore create a structured mechanism through which security concerns and commitments originating in one regional complex generate consequences in another. RSCT will consequently be used to examine regional interdependence, amity and enmity, regional-power behaviour, external-power penetration, security spillovers, and the growing

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interaction between South Asian and Middle Eastern security dynamics.

7.3 Integrating the Two Theories: Cross-Regional Deterrence

Neither Deterrence Theory nor RSCT alone fully explains the strategic implications of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement. Deterrence Theory explains how capabilities, threats, credibility, communication, and commitments influence adversarial behaviour, but it provides a more limited explanation of how these processes interact across separate regional security environments. Conversely, RSCT effectively explains the geographical concentration of security interdependence but gives less attention to how formal collective-defence commitments may deliberately transmit deterrence effects across regional boundaries. Integrating the two theories therefore provides a stronger analytical framework for examining the Makkah Agreement. This study conceptualizes the development as a progression from national deterrence → bilateral deterrence cooperation → collective deterrence → cross-regional deterrence. National capabilities initially provide individual security; bilateral defence cooperation connects the capabilities and commitments of two states; collective deterrence expands these commitments across several participating states; and cross-regional deterrence emerges when such commitments begin to influence strategic calculations beyond their original regional security complex.

Within this study, cross-regional deterrence refers to a situation in which defence commitments, military capabilities, strategic signals, and perceptions involving states embedded in different regional security complexes become sufficiently interconnected that a threat or conflict affecting one region influences deterrence calculations in another. The Makkah Agreement provides a relevant case because Pakistan links the framework directly to South Asian strategic dynamics, Saudi Arabia anchors it within Gulf and Middle Eastern security, and Türkiye adds a transregional dimension through its Middle Eastern role, NATO membership, and broader strategic engagements. The agreement's collective-defence commitment potentially creates an institutional mechanism through which aggression against one participant could activate security calculations involving actors from another regional environment (MOFA, 2026). The study will therefore assess whether the agreement remains primarily a trilateral political commitment or represents an emerging form of cross-regional deterrence capable of connecting South Asian and Middle Eastern security complexes. Its development will be evaluated through the credibility of commitments, convergence of threat perceptions, operational coordination, strategic signalling, and the extent to which developments in one regional security complex begin to affect the calculations of states and adversaries in the other.

8. Research Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research approach is used that consists of exploratory and analytical case study to analyse the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement and its implications of deterrence in the region. The case-study method is suitable as the agreement is a recent and developing security agreement that needs to be examined in detail in its broader geopolitical and strategic context. It examines the current and possible links between defence cooperation between South Asian and Middle Eastern security dynamics, with a focus on Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye. The research is guided by Deterrence Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory and the concept of cross-regional deterrence is used to determine if collective defence commitments are having deterrent effects outside of the traditional region.

Primary Documentary and Secondary sources are used in the study. The sources include official statements on the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, joint communiques, statements of the ministries of foreign affairs and defence, speeches of political and military leaders and related national security and defence policy documents of

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Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Secondary data comes from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, strategic studies publications, reputable think-tank reports and credible policy analysis. Qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis is done on the collected material. The documents are coded on key themes such as threat perception, collective defence, deterrence credibility, strategic autonomy, defence cooperation, regional security interdependence, great-power alignment, strategic capabilities and operational coordination. To ensure reliability and balance in the analysis, triangulation is employed between official documents and academic and independent policy sources.

The analytical framework measures the level of agreement along five interrelated dimensions: Motivation, Capability, Commitment, Credibility, Regional Impact. Motivation explores the strategic interests that could drive the three states towards increasing cooperation; capability reviews the military, strategic, technological and defence industrial assets they possess; commitment reviews the nature and extent of collective-defence commitments; credibility reviews their political will, communication and whether commitments will be acted upon; and regional impact considers how it could affect South Asian and Middle Eastern security complexes. The study has its limitations in the recentness of the Makkah Agreement, the lack of operational and classified information and the use of mostly publicly available material. Furthermore, implementation is still in its early stages and separating long-term operating commitments from political and strategic signals is difficult. The results thus evaluate the deterrence architecture as a nascent security architecture and do not presume that a fully institutionalised cross-regional deterrence architecture has been formally established.

9. Makkah Joint Defence Agreement: Evolution and Strategic Motivations

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement was the result of existing bilateral defence ties between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Pakistan has had decades-long military ties with Saudi Arabia, including military training, advisory services, joint exercises, and military coordination. In a similar vein, Pakistan and Türkiye have established robust defence relations through joint military training, exercises, navy cooperation and defence-industrial projects, such as MILGEM. The political and defence ties between Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have also been bolstered as a result of the recent relations between the two countries. These bilateral relationships established political trust and institutional framework for trilateral security cooperation (IIS, 2026).

A significant shift took place with the signing of the Pakistan – Saudi Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in September 2025, where aggression against either of the two countries was considered aggression against both the countries (ISSI, 2025). This bilateral commitment was extended in the framework of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement of 7 August 2026, which is a collective-defence agreement among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. The pact also stipulates that an armed attack on one member will be treated as an attack on all and aims to bolster collective security. It thus marks a step towards a more formal trilateral deterrence framework, moving away from bilateral defence cooperation.

9.2 Strategic Motivations

Pakistan's involvement is a testament to its growing defence diplomacy and push for enhanced strategic relations outside the South Asian region. India's military strength is a primary part of Pakistan's deterrence strategy but Islamabad has had longstanding security, economic and political interests in the Middle East. The collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enables Pakistan to enhance strategic reach, foster key defense partnerships, and play a more proactive role in regional security. As a result, Pakistan can play significant strategic roles in South Asian deterrence and the emerging Middle East security framework (IISS, 2026).

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The agreement is a security diversification, and security autonomy for Saudi Arabia. In spite of regional uncertainty, Riyadh has been reinforcing its defence ties with a range of partners while continuing to hold robust security ties with the United States. Cooperation with Pakistan and Türkiye gives extra security, technical, and strategic options, which do not need to replace ongoing relationships with the West. Pakistan's military capabilities complement Saudi Arabia's endeavours to enhance the country's defence and decrease overreliance on a single external security provider, while Türkiye's emerging defence-industrial sector also plays a role in this. (IISS, 2026).

Türkiye's involvement is also driven by its desire for strategic autonomy, regional influence, and the development of defence industries. Türkiye, as a NATO member state, has forged new and multiple security relationships in the Middle East, Asia and other parts of the world. Its expanding capabilities in drones, missiles, naval systems, electronic warfare and other defence systems offer a critical material foundation to cooperating with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The coming together of these motivations renders the Makkah Agreement relevant to this study, as it turns conventional bilateral relationships into a collective one which can pave the way for deterrence commitments to be extended across the security environments of South Asia and the Middle East, thus laying the groundwork for a cross-regional deterrence.

10. Reconfiguration of Deterrence: From Collective to Cross-Regional Deterrence

10.1 Collective Deterrence under the Makkah Agreement

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement represents a shift from conventional defence cooperation toward a more explicit form of collective deterrence. Its central provision—that an armed attack against one participating state will be regarded as an attack against all—seeks to increase the expected costs of aggression by extending the potential response beyond the directly targeted state (Saudi Press Agency [SPA], 2026). In deterrence terms, the agreement combines the capabilities and political commitments of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye. Pakistan contributes significant conventional and strategic capabilities, Türkiye provides substantial conventional forces and a growing defence-industrial base, while Saudi Arabia contributes considerable military resources, financial capacity, and regional influence (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2026).

However, collective deterrence depends on more than combined military capabilities. Its effectiveness requires credibility, political resolve, communication, and operational preparedness (Schelling, 1966; Morgan, 2003). Potential adversaries must believe that the three states are willing and able to fulfil their mutual-defence commitments during a crisis. Regular strategic consultations, joint exercises, intelligence cooperation, defence planning, and military coordination would therefore strengthen the credibility of the agreement. The Makkah framework can consequently be understood as an emerging collective deterrence arrangement whose effectiveness will depend on whether its political commitments are translated into credible operational mechanisms.

10.2 Connecting South Asia and the Middle East

The wider significance of the agreement lies in its potential to connect two traditionally distinct security environments. Pakistan provides the principal South Asian strategic link, as its security policy and deterrence posture remain strongly shaped by India–Pakistan strategic competition. Saudi Arabia serves as the Gulf anchor, bringing the agreement into a Middle Eastern security environment shaped by regional rivalries, Gulf security concerns, and changing external-power involvement. Türkiye adds a transregional dimension because it simultaneously operates within NATO, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and wider Eurasian security environments (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; IISS, 2026).

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This configuration potentially enables security commitments to move beyond traditional regional boundaries. A serious security threat involving one member may increasingly become relevant to the strategic calculations of the other two, even when the original threat originates outside their immediate regional environment. This does not mean that South Asia and the Middle East have become a single regional security complex. Rather, the Makkah Agreement may function as an institutional bridge between them. In Regional Security Complex Theory terms, such an arrangement can strengthen security interdependence and create spillover effects through which developments in one regional complex influence perceptions, commitments, and strategic calculations in another (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

10.3 Emerging Cross-Regional Deterrence

The Makkah framework can therefore be understood through an evolutionary sequence: Defence Cooperation → Collective Deterrence → Cross-Regional Deterrence. The first stage is represented by the long-standing bilateral military relationships among the three states. The second emerges from the formal mutual-defence commitment that seeks to combine their capabilities against external aggression. The third, cross-regional deterrence, would emerge if these commitments become sufficiently credible and institutionalized that potential adversaries begin incorporating the capabilities and likely responses of partners from another regional security complex into their strategic calculations. In this sense, cross-regional deterrence does not require the merger of South Asian and Middle Eastern security complexes; rather, it involves the transmission of deterrence effects between them.

Whether this transformation occurs can be assessed through six interconnected factors: threat convergence, capability, commitment, credibility, strategic signalling, and operational coordination. The three states must possess sufficient common perceptions of major threats; their combined capabilities must provide meaningful deterrent value; political commitments must be clear; and potential adversaries must regard those commitments as credible. Strategic signalling must communicate the circumstances under which collective responses could occur, while military coordination must demonstrate that the agreement can function operationally rather than remaining primarily declaratory. At present, therefore, the Makkah Agreement is best understood as an emerging rather than fully established form of cross-regional deterrence. Its long-term significance will depend on whether collective commitments become institutionalized and whether security developments in South Asia and the Middle East increasingly shape the strategic calculations of all three participating states (IISS, 2026; SPA, 2026).

11. Regional and Global Implications

11.1 South Asian Implications

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement adds a new layer of complexity to the strategic considerations of South Asian countries, given that Pakistan's defence ties with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have now been tied up in a formal collective-defence pact. India-Pakistan deterrence has historically been driven to a greater extent by bilateral nuclear and conventional forces, but Pakistan's involvement in a broader defense paradigm could impact the perceptions of strategic depth, diplomatic support, and defense-industrial cooperation. Thus, one wonders if the strategic thinking of India will also seek to look into the possibility of any further cooperation between Pakistan and Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, whether it can strengthen the military prowess or the political credibility of Pakistan in the event of a future crisis (Abbas, 2026). But the India–Pakistan deterrence balance will not automatically shift with the agreement, especially given that its operational details and how it will be applied in any future regional war are unclear.

The strategic consequences are therefore unclear. However, more solid external ties could bolster

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Pakistan's deterrence by raising the political and strategic stakes against a major aggression. On the other side, the reasons for Saudi Arabia and Türkiye to be called upon in case of a South Asian crisis and their level of involvement are uncertain, which could add extra layers of complexity to escalation considerations. There too, however, are outstanding questions about the extent to which the collective-defence pledges will be put into practice. (IISS 2026). Thus, it is important not to read too much into the arrangement and treat it not as proof of a change in the fundamentals of deterrence in the region, but as a further factor to take into account.

11.2 Middle Eastern Implications

The deal could have more immediate consequences for the security climate in the Middle East, where recent wars have raised questions about the vulnerability of the region. With Saudi Arabia's involvement, the deal has been thrust into Gulf security calculations and with Türkiye's involvement into the wider Middle East. The signatories have stated that the accord is 'defensive' and not aimed at any specific country, Iran and Israel will have to evaluate the accord in terms of its impact on their security interests in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan [MOFA], 2026). The agreement comes at a time when the three states are increasingly concerned about Iranian and Israeli military operations, though not always in the same way, notes ISSA (2026).

The framework offers opportunities and uncertainties for Iran. While Tehran might not want to see Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and nuclear-armed Pakistan become more closely militarily aligned, it might also see a security framework driven by its neighbors, with no formal U.S. presence, as preferable to a more explicitly U.S.-led agreement. Israel could also look to see if more defence-industrial, intelligence and military ties between the three countries could affect the regional balance. But it should not be assumed that Iran or Israel will necessarily respond. The degree to which the agreement is institutionalized, the extent of operational coordination, and how the participating states develop converging threat perceptions, will determine the actual impact of the agreement (Alhasan & Wajid, 2026).

On a larger scale, the Makkah deal could stimulate discussion on the need to create new regional security structures and mechanisms other than the bilateral relationship and the present Gulf set-up. It may gain greater meaning as more states join in, and if the three members devise regular military exercises, consultation mechanisms, intelligence cooperation, and joint defence planning. On the other hand, divergent interests over Iran, Israel, Yemen and other regional issues may limit cooperation. The agreement consequently could be a significant development in the security of the Gulf, although its long-term regional impact will rely on implementation rather than the declaration of mutual defence.

11.3 Great-Power Implications

The pact signals a newfound inclination of regional powers to diversify their security arrangements and take responsibility for their own security in the case of the United States. But this is not a sign of the United States being ousted from the Middle Eastern security structure. Saudi Arabia has extensive security ties with Washington, Türkiye is a NATO member and Pakistan has important diplomatic and security ties with the United States. The Makkah framework is best thought of as strategic diversification, not strategic replacement. Alhasan and Wajid (2026) contend that while the pact grants regional actors more security choices, it is doubtful whether it will soon supplant their existing defence ties with the United States.

The deal could be seen as a strategic move by China. Beijing has developed close ties with Pakistan, significant economic and energy ties with Saudi Arabia and commercial ties with Türkiye. Such a degree of regional stability could benefit Chinese economic interests, connectivity initiatives and energy security. Meanwhile, China

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would be weighing any evolution that would create new military alliances or impact its ties to Iran, India, and Gulf nations. The deal is thus not a pro-China or anti-China move, but rather a sign of a growing assertiveness of regional powers in a more multipolar international landscape.

Türkiye's involvement also gives rise to questions about NATO, but at this stage it cannot be thought of as an alternative to NATO. The Makkah framework, for now, is similar to NATO's Article 5 in the sense that it is based on mutual-defence, but lacks NATO's decades of joint defence planning, interoperability, and extensive institutional mechanisms (Alhasan & Wajid, 2026). Türkiye could also adopt both models as part of its overall strategy of diversified partnerships and strategic autonomy.

In general, the Makkah Agreement reflects a larger shift towards a more multipolar and networked security structure. Middle powers are building new bilateral, minilateral and cross-regional partnerships while at the same time maintaining existing alliances. This is not about immediately replacing the current regional or global security arrangements, but rather it is about showing that Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye are interested in having more strategic agency. The extent to which this evolves into a lasting regional dynamics reconfiguration will hinge on the credibility of the commitments, institutional development, military coordination, and reactions from regional and global actors (Yusuf, 2026; IISS, 2026).

11. Challenges and Future Prospects

Although it is a significant agreement from a defensive point of view, the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement has a few issues that could have an impact on its ability to serve as a deterrent framework. The most significant is the divergent threat perception that might exist among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. The central security concerns of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are linked to South Asian and strategic rivalry with India, while the Saudi Arabian security calculation has a greater influence on the Gulf and Middle Eastern developments. Türkiye, on the other hand, is a country that has a presence in several security areas such as NATO, Middle East, Mediterranean and Eurasia. As a result, another member might not view a problem as an immediate security threat when it is for the others. Geographical and strategic variations can limit the extent of security interdependence between regions, as indicated by Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The second challenge is that of collective commitments to be credible and operationally implemented. The "one for all, all for one" principle is an important deterrence signal; however, potential adversaries must believe that the principle will be carried out in order for it to be an effective deterrence (Schelling, 1966; Morgan, 2003). The political will, clear responsibilities, military readiness and coordination will thus be key to credibility. As of now, significant issues still have to be addressed that include command structures, joint defence planning, crisis consultation, intelligence exchange, interoperability and the conditions in which collective assistance is to be provided. In its absence, the pact could prove more symbolic than substantive.

The complexity of existing alliances and strategic partnerships also comes into play. Türkiye is a member of NATO, Saudi Arabia has extensive defence relations with the U.S. and other Western countries, and Pakistan has strategic relations with China and defence relations with a number of countries. Thus, the Makkah framework should be a complement to existing commitments, not a standalone approach. This may be a strategic option, but may also pose some problems if members external partnerships or regional interests differ. The potential risks of the agreement are also entrapment and escalation, as if one member becomes involved in a conflict, others expect military participation. Effective consultation processes and well-defined commitments will thus be essential to avoid

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unnecessary escalation of local or bilateral crises into regional crises.

Its institutionalization may be the key to the future importance of the agreement. A declaration of intent may over time evolve into a tangible and credible security arrangement through regular political and military consultations, joint exercises, intelligence cooperation, interoperability, defence-industrial collaboration, crisis-management mechanisms, and more. There is potential for deeper cooperation, particularly in drones, missile defence, cyber security, artificial intelligence, electronic warfare and collective defence production, to further strengthen the material basis of collective deterrence. But institutional development will have to be balanced with the increased coordination with the varying strategic priorities and commitments of the three states.

The potential for future expansion may bring added regional importance to the agreement, but it may also create more difficulties in achieving consensus. There is scope for more states with similar security concerns to become part of, thereby extending its geographical footprint and strengthening its cross-regional nature. However, if expansion is too fast and lacks necessary threat convergence and institutional capacity, it could lead to loss of cohesion and credibility. The most likely short-term course is thus a progressive deepening and not a quick growth. The Makkah Agreement could, over time, become more than an emerging collective-defence pact and develop into a form of cross-regional deterrence that connects security dynamics in South Asia and the Middle East if Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye manage to create credible coordination mechanisms and deal with divergent interests and existing partnerships.

12. Discussion

The results indicate that the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement needs to be read in the light of the joint application of Deterrence Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). According to Deterrence Theory, capability, credibility, communication, resolve, and perceptions are all important factors to consider in determining whether security commitments can affect an adversary's calculations (Schelling, 1966; Morgan, 2003). RSCT, on the other hand, clarifies that security threats and relationships are typically localized geographically, but that external penetration and security complexes' interaction are possible (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Together these theories show that the importance of the Makkah Agreement is not just about a merger of military power, but to some degree about security guarantees that could be expanded beyond traditional regional boundaries.

One interpretation could be improved defence ties. The agreement from this angle is mostly a framework institutionalization of already existing bilateral relationships. Decades of military cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, extensive defence and defence-industrial cooperation between Pakistan and Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have further improved their strategic relations in recent years. The deal could thus be seen as merely formalising and co-ordinating existing relationships and not establishing a new security architecture. This is reflected in the fact that many mechanisms of the agreement for its operation and implementation are still at an early stage.

The second case is that of collective deterrence. The mutual-defence agreement is much more than a typical defence cooperation pact as an armed attack against one of the members is considered an attack against the entire three (Saudi Press Agency [SPA], 2026). In a deterrence context, the strategic and conventional power of Pakistan, conventional and defence industrial strength of Türkiye and military and economic capabilities of Saudi Arabia may add up to make the potential costs of an aggressor higher. But the credibility of the collective deterrence will require political will, coordination, interoperability, strategic communication and willingness of all three states to act in case of a real crisis. Therefore, the pact

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sets the groundwork of collective deterrence, and its credibility has yet to be fully worked out.

The third and potentially most important is cross-regional deterrence. Pakistan continues to be a part of the South Asian security complex, Saudi Arabia continues to be a part of the Gulf and Middle East security environment and Türkiye continues to be a transregional security actor, with Middle East, European and Eurasian security structures. The collective-defence dimension brings into being a way in which a security crisis in one regional complex could have implications for the strategic calculations of states connected to another regional complex. Does not mean that South Asia and the Middle East have become one regional security complex. Instead, the accord establishes a new institutional pathway that will see an increased flow of capabilities, commitments, perceptions, and deterrence signals move across regional lines.

Thus, the available evidence allows for the best interpretation of the Makkah Agreement as an evolving collective deterrence system that could evolve towards cross-regional deterrence. It has definitely gone beyond simply bilateral defence cooperation, and the signs are emerging, but we still don't have enough material to talk of a cross-regional deterrence architecture. The future evolution of this will be determined by threat convergence, institutionalization, operational coordination, credibility and if potential adversaries start to factor in the capabilities and likely reactions of all three members into their strategic calculus. It is therefore reasonable to interpret the agreement as an interim security measure, with its most significant theoretical implication being that it could lead to defence cooperation → collective deterrence → cross-regional deterrence.

13. Policy Implications

13.1 Institutionalize Trilateral Strategic Dialogue

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye should institutionalize regular strategic dialogue involving political, diplomatic, and military leadership. A permanent consultation mechanism would help identify common threats, reconcile different security priorities, coordinate strategic positions, and ensure that the Makkah Agreement develops from a political commitment into a sustainable security framework.

13.2 Establish Defence Coordination Mechanisms

The three countries should establish formal mechanisms for defence coordination, including regular meetings among defence ministries and military leadership. Such mechanisms should focus on defence planning, interoperability, preparedness, and coordination during security crises. Institutionalized coordination would strengthen implementation of the agreement and improve the credibility of collective defence commitments.

13.3 Conduct Regular Joint Military Exercises

Regular trilateral military exercises should be conducted across land, air, maritime, cyber, and other relevant domains. Joint exercises would improve interoperability, operational familiarity, and military preparedness among the three-armed forces. They would also provide a visible but defensive demonstration of collective capability and strengthen the credibility of deterrence.

13.4 Strengthen Intelligence and Threat-Information Sharing

A secure trilateral intelligence-sharing mechanism should be developed to exchange information on terrorism, cyber threats, maritime security, missiles, drones, and emerging regional risks. Improved information sharing would strengthen early warning, facilitate coordinated responses, reduce strategic uncertainty, and enable the three countries to develop more consistent assessments of common security challenges.

13.5 Expand Defence-Industrial Cooperation

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye should expand joint defence research, production,

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investment, and technology transfer. Cooperation could prioritize drones, electronic warfare, cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, missile defence, and naval technologies. Combining Türkiye's technological capabilities, Pakistan's defence expertise, and Saudi Arabia's investment capacity could strengthen collective self-reliance and strategic autonomy.

13.6 Establish Crisis Consultation Mechanisms

A dedicated crisis consultation mechanism should enable rapid communication among political and military leadership during regional emergencies. Hotlines and predetermined consultation procedures could reduce misunderstanding and facilitate timely decision-making. Such arrangements are particularly important because crises originating in one region could potentially create security implications for partners located in another.

13.7 Clarify Collective Defence Procedures

The three states should gradually clarify the procedures governing collective defence, including consultation requirements, decision-making processes, and possible forms of assistance during aggression. Greater clarity would strengthen credibility and reduce uncertainty among members and potential adversaries. However, sufficient strategic flexibility should be maintained to prevent automatic involvement in unnecessary conflicts.

13.8 Preserve the Defensive Character of the Agreement

The Makkah Agreement should consistently be presented as a defensive arrangement intended to deter aggression rather than target particular countries. Clear strategic communication regarding its defensive objectives would reduce misperceptions, reassure neighbouring states, and strengthen international legitimacy while allowing the participating countries to protect their security interests through credible collective deterrence.

13.9 Prevent Unnecessary Regional Escalation

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye should combine stronger deterrence with continued diplomatic engagement with neighbouring states. The agreement should not contribute to new bloc formation or intensified regional polarization. Confidence-building measures, dialogue, and crisis communication can help prevent security dilemmas while ensuring that enhanced defence cooperation contributes to regional stability rather than confrontation.

13.10 Balance New and Existing Strategic Partnerships

The three countries should ensure that the Makkah framework complements rather than unnecessarily competes with their existing international partnerships. Türkiye's NATO membership and the members' relationships with the United States, China, and other powers require careful management. Strategic diversification should strengthen autonomy while preserving beneficial relationships within the wider international security architecture.

14. Conclusion

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement is a significant step towards strengthening security ties between South Asia and the Middle East. The pact represents a more formalized collective-defence arrangement, and also signals the broader trend of regional powers towards diversified security ties and increased strategic autonomy in the context of ongoing and growing bilateral defence ties between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Not only does it create greater military cooperation, but it could also have implications for the geographical area in which deterrence can be effective.

The study concludes that the agreement can be seen as an evolving "collective deterrence" arrangement with the potential to evolve into "cross-regional deterrence." Pakistan provides the strategic links to South Asia, Saudi Arabia anchors the framework in Gulf security, and Türkiye contributes the transregional role which has an

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extensive conventional and defence-industrial capability. Their joint efforts can mean that security policies in one regional context can have growing impact on security policies in another. But this is not to say that South Asian and Middle Eastern security complexes have melded together; it can rather be seen as a sort of institutional connection between the two.

All the collective commitments, convergence of threat perceptions, political will, coordination of operations, intelligence sharing, joint exercises and defence-industrial cooperation will determine the effectiveness of the agreement in the future. Development may be limited due to divergent strategic priorities, international partnerships in place, and potential entrapment or escalation risks. Therefore, the agreement should retain the defensive nature and enhance institutional arrangements and positive ties with neighboring countries and international parties.

Conceptually, the study advances deterrence and regional security literature by developing a concept of "cross-regional deterrence" as a way to think about security arrangements that convey capabilities, commitments, and strategic signals across the recognized regional boundaries. The Makkah Agreement is one example of the possible trajectory from bilateral defence cooperation to collective deterrence to cross-regional deterrence. Whether or not this change is sustainable will be dependent on its implementation, but the deal represents a good example of how regional powers can have an increasing influence on a multipolar and interconnected security architecture.

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