BHARATI INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (BIJMRD)

(Open Access Peer-Reviewed International Journal)

DOI Link : https://doi.org/10.70798/Bijmrd/04090001

Available Online: www.bijmrd.com | BIJMRD Volume: 4 | Issue: 09 | September 2026 | e-ISSN: 2584-1890

Strategic Autonomy and the Emerging Multipolar Order: Explaining the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Turkey Trilateral Defense Framework

Ambrues Monboe Nebo

Ph.D. Student, Security Studies with an Emphasis on International Security, Hill-City University, Republic of Benin

Abstract: *The contemporary international security environment is shaped by multipolarity, strategic uncertainty, and flexible security partnerships among regional and middle powers. This study examines the strategic and geopolitical factors underlying the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework and assesses its significance as an emerging form of minilateral security cooperation. Guided by Strategic Autonomy, Multipolarity, and Minilateralism, the study employs a qualitative case-study approach based on policy documents, official statements, reports, and scholarly literature. Findings indicate that the framework is driven not by identical threat perceptions or complete strategic alignment, but by converging interests in deterrence, security diversification, defense cooperation, and strategic flexibility. The study argues that the framework represents collective strategic autonomy through minilateral cooperation, enabling the three states to diversify security relationships while maintaining existing alliances. It concludes that the arrangement demonstrates the growing capacity of regional and middle powers to enhance strategic agency and shape an increasingly multipolar security architecture.*

Keywords: *Strategic Autonomy; Multipolarity; Minilateralism; Collective Defense; Security Cooperation.*

1.0. Introduction: Contemporary international security is undergoing a significant transformation as the post-Cold War order becomes increasingly contested, fragmented, and multipolar. The war in Ukraine, intensifying U.S.–China strategic competition, instability in the Middle East, disruptions to maritime security in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, and growing European efforts to assume greater responsibility for defense illustrate an international environment in which established assumptions about power, alliances, and strategic dependence are increasingly uncertain. The war in Ukraine has highlighted both the continuing importance and limitations of established alliance systems, while debates over European defense responsibilities reflect concerns about long-term dependence on external security guarantees (Reuters, 2026). At the same time, Türkiye and other regional powers have increasingly pursued strategic autonomy by diversifying partnerships and expanding their room for maneuver beyond traditional alignments (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2026). These developments suggest that contemporary security can no longer be understood solely through traditional alliance structures or a hierarchy dominated by a single hegemonic power. Instead, states are increasingly diversifying partnerships and constructing overlapping security relationships to enhance strategic flexibility.

This transformation reflects a broader redistribution of economic, military, technological, and diplomatic capabilities. Although the United States remains a preeminent global power, the growing influence of China, Russia, Türkiye, India, Saudi Arabia, and other regional actors has contributed to an international

environment characterized by multiple centers of power. Wijaya and Jayasuriya (2024) argue that emerging multipolarity involves not only the rise of additional powers but also changes in state forms, economic relations, and the distribution of political and economic agency. For middle and regional powers, this environment creates opportunities to diversify external partnerships and reduce excessive dependence on any single major power.

Within this context, strategic autonomy has become increasingly important in international security and foreign-policy scholarship. Strategic autonomy refers broadly to the capacity of states to formulate and pursue foreign and security policies with sufficient independence to protect national interests without being excessively constrained by another power or alliance. It does not necessarily require neutrality or withdrawal from existing alliances; rather, it may involve partnership diversification, hedging, selective cooperation, defense-industrial development, and alternative security arrangements. Aydın-Düzgit et al. (2026) demonstrate this complexity in the Turkish case, emphasizing that strategic autonomy has become increasingly relevant under multipolarity while cautioning that autonomy cannot simply be equated with hedging. Its effectiveness depends on political motivations, structural conditions, and the material capabilities necessary to sustain independent strategic choices.

The changing security environment has also encouraged states to reconsider their reliance on established alliance structures. The post-1945 international order was characterized by extensive U.S.-led alliances that provided mechanisms for deterrence, military access, intelligence cooperation, and collective defense. Although these alliances remain significant, debates surrounding burden-sharing, changing strategic priorities, and the distribution of security responsibilities have encouraged states to diversify their security relationships. Carson et al. (2025) note that alliances have historically functioned both as instruments of collective defense and as mechanisms for projecting U.S. military and intelligence capabilities. The emerging trend, therefore, is not necessarily the decline of traditional alliances but their coexistence with increasingly diversified and overlapping security partnerships.

One important manifestation of this development is the growth of minilateral security arrangements. Unlike broad multilateral institutions, minilateral arrangements involve smaller groups of states cooperating around specific strategic interests. Initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), AUKUS, and other trilateral arrangements illustrate the growing preference for more flexible and strategically focused forms of security cooperation. Korolev(2025) identifies strategic minilateralism as an increasingly important component of regional security architecture, while Heiduka and Wilkins (2024) demonstrate that minilateral arrangements can evolve along different institutional trajectories, including toward more formal alliances or cooperative security governance. Their significance lies in their ability to provide states with greater strategic selectivity, flexibility, and responsiveness than some traditional multilateral arrangements.

It is within this changing international security environment that the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework becomes particularly significant. On August 7, 2026, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Pakistan signed a joint defense agreement in Mecca under which an armed attack against any one of the three states would be regarded as an attack against all three (Al Jazeera Staff & Reuters, 2026). The agreement represents a significant development in regional security cooperation because it transforms previously bilateral defense relationships into a formal trilateral security commitment. It also builds upon the September 2025 Saudi Arabia–Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement, which strengthened defense cooperation and established a reciprocal commitment in the event of aggression against either state (Nawaz, 2025).

The trilateral framework is particularly important because the three states occupy distinct geopolitical positions and face different security priorities. Saudi Arabia is a pivotal Gulf power that remains connected to the U.S.-led security architecture while simultaneously expanding relations with China, Türkiye, Pakistan, and other international actors. Pakistan is a nuclear-armed South Asian state whose security calculations are

shaped by its rivalry with India, relationship with China, historical ties with Saudi Arabia, and broader regional interests. Türkiye, meanwhile, is a NATO member that has increasingly pursued a diversified and more autonomous foreign-policy orientation, including expanded defense cooperation beyond traditional Western partners (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2026). Their convergence within a single defense framework is therefore analytically significant precisely because their strategic interests are not identical.

This convergence creates the central research puzzle of this study: Why have Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye institutionalized a trilateral defense framework despite their different geographical security environments, threat perceptions, foreign-policy priorities, and relationships with major powers? Conventional alliance explanations might anticipate cooperation where states confront a common threat or share strong ideological, geographic, or strategic interests. Yet the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye relationship does not fit neatly into any single category. The three states are geographically dispersed and maintain important relationships with major powers whose interests may not always converge. Their institutionalized cooperation therefore raises questions about the strategic calculations and geopolitical conditions that have made trilateral defense cooperation attractive at this particular juncture.

One possible explanation is that the framework represents an emerging form of collective strategic autonomy. Rather than replacing existing alliances, the three states may be seeking to expand their strategic options by developing an additional security mechanism capable of strengthening deterrence, diversifying defense relationships, and increasing their collective bargaining power. From this perspective, the agreement reflects a broader logic of multipolarity in which states increasingly construct overlapping networks of cooperation rather than relying exclusively on a single alliance or security provider.

However, an important scholarly gap remains. Existing research on strategic autonomy has examined Türkiye and other states seeking greater independence within a changing international system (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2026), while scholarship on minilateralism has focused substantially on arrangements such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS) security partnership, comparatively limited attention has been given to minilateral security cooperation beyond the Indo-Pacific (Heiduka& Wilkins, 2024; Wilkins, 2025). In particular, emerging security linkages among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye remain underexamined, especially in relation to broader debates over strategic autonomy and the transformation of the international order. Examining this trilateral defense framework therefore provides an opportunity to extend the minilateralism literature beyond its predominant Indo-Pacific focus while connecting debates on strategic autonomy, regional security cooperation, and changes in the contemporary international order within a single case.

This study addresses this gap by examining the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye defense framework as an emerging form of minilateral security cooperation within a changing multipolar order. Rather than assuming that the agreement constitutes either an anti-Western alliance or a straightforward response to a common external threat, the study examines the strategic calculations, security interests, institutional incentives, and geopolitical conditions underlying the partnership. It specifically considers whether the framework represents an effort to enhance strategic autonomy, diversify security dependencies, strengthen collective deterrence, or reshape regional security architecture.

The study therefore situates the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework within the broader transition from relatively hierarchical alliance structures toward increasingly networked, diversified, and minilateral forms of security cooperation. Beyond its implications for the three signatories, the framework provides a valuable contemporary case for examining whether regional and middle powers are acquiring greater strategic agency in a multipolar international system. The case consequently offers an opportunity to assess whether emerging multipolarity is merely redistributing power among major states or is also enabling regional powers to construct alternative security arrangements through which they can exercise greater autonomy, flexibility, and influence over the evolving international security architecture.

The article is divided into three interrelated subsections. The first, which encapsulates the introduction,presents the research puzzle, research objective, research questions, significance of the study, and the delimitation of the study.

The second subsection features the literature review, which also includes the framework and the national security interests of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye. It continues with the research gap, conceptual framework, and the theoretical framework with emphasis on Neoclassical Realism as the primary theory complemented by Balance of Power theory and Institutional and Minilateral Cooperation, theoretical integration, and methodology.

Finally, section three provides the analysis/findings that address the research questions guided by the theoretical framework, synthesis of the findings, discussion of the study, followed by the conclusion.

1.1. Research Puzzle: The central puzzle of this paper lies in the institutionalization of defense cooperation among three strategically diverse states with different regional priorities, threat perceptions, and geopolitical orientations. Existing alliance explanations centered primarily on common threats or strategic alignment may not fully account for this development. The case may instead reflect a broader effort to enhance strategic flexibility through security diversification and minilateral cooperation. Recent scholarship suggests that contemporary minilateral arrangements can complement existing institutions while also generating new forms of regional security governance (Biba, 2026; Wilkins, 2025). The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework therefore provides an opportunity to examine whether minilateral defense cooperation can serve as an instrument of strategic autonomy.

1.2. Research Objective: The primary objective of this study is to examine the strategic and geopolitical factors underlying the emergence and institutionalization of the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework and assess its significance as an emerging form of minilateral security cooperation within a multipolar international order. Specifically, the study seeks to assess the framework's contribution to the strategic autonomy of the participating states, its potential to facilitate security diversification and collective deterrence, and its implications for the evolving security architecture of the Middle East, South Asia, and the wider international system.

1.3. Research Questions: To achieve the study's objective, the analysis is guided by four interrelated research questions. These questions examine the emergence and institutionalization of the trilateral framework, its contribution to strategic autonomy, its relationship to multipolarity and minilateralism, and its broader implications for regional and international security. Together, they provide an analytical basis for assessing the strategic rationale and wider significance of the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye defense framework.

1. What strategic and geopolitical factors explain the emergence and institutionalization of the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework?
2. To what extent does the framework enhance the strategic autonomy of the three participating states?
3. How does the framework reflect the relationship between multipolarity and contemporary minilateral security cooperation?
4. What implications does the framework have for the evolving security architecture of the Middle East, South Asia, and the wider international system?

1.4. Significance of the Study/Contribution to Knowledge: This study contributes to scholarship on strategic minilateralism by examining the emerging Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework, an arrangement that remains comparatively underexplored in the literature. While existing

research has focused largely on Indo-Pacific arrangements such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and AUKUS (Heiduk& Wilkins, 2024; Wilkins, 2025), this study extends the geographical scope of minilateralism to the intersection of the Middle East and South Asia.

Conceptually, the study connects strategic minilateralism with strategic autonomy and international-order transformation. It examines how states may use flexible, limited-membership security arrangements to diversify strategic partnerships, strengthen defense cooperation, and reduce dependence on traditional alliance structures. Empirically, the study provides insight into the strategic motivations and security implications of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye's emerging cooperation. More broadly, it contributes to understanding whether the proliferation of such arrangements reflects a broader transformation toward more flexible, overlapping, and interest-driven forms of regional security governance.

The study also offers practical value by providing policymakers and security practitioners with a framework for assessing emerging trilateral defense partnerships and their implications for regional stability, strategic balancing, and evolving international security architecture.

1.5. Delimitations of the Study: This study is deliberately delimited to the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework and its significance within the changing international security environment. Conceptually, the study focuses specifically on the interrelationship among strategic autonomy, multipolarity, and minilateralism, with particular attention to how these concepts explain the participating states' national security interests, strategic diversification, and collective defense cooperation. Geographically, the analysis is limited to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye, while considering their implications for the broader Middle Eastern, South Asian, and international security environments. Temporally, the study focuses primarily on the period surrounding the institutionalization of the trilateral defense framework in 2026, while drawing selectively on earlier developments necessary to establish its strategic context. Methodologically, the study is delimited to qualitative analysis of relevant scholarly literature, official statements, policy documents, and credible contemporary reports. It does not seek to evaluate the military effectiveness of the framework through classified intelligence, battlefield data, or long-term operational outcomes, which remain beyond the scope of a newly established arrangement.

2.0. Literature Review

2.1. Scholarship on Strategic Minilateralism: Strategic minilateralism has emerged as an important feature of contemporary international security, referring to selective cooperation among a small number of states around shared strategic objectives. Recent scholarship has particularly examined how arrangements such as the Quad, AUKUS, and the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue have become additional layers of the Indo-Pacific security architecture (Biba, 2026; Wilkins, 2025). Wilkins (2025) further conceptualizes strategic minilateralism as a flexible form of security cooperation that can complement or modify existing alliance and multilateral structures. Recent analysis, however, suggests that minilateral arrangements do not have a uniform effect on established regional institutions; their consequences may range from complementarity to competition (Biba, 2026).

2.2. Minilateral Security Cooperation Beyond the Indo-Pacific: Although the Indo-Pacific dominates contemporary minilateralism scholarship, emerging research suggests that the phenomenon is increasingly relevant beyond that region. Thakur (2025) argues that the rise of minilateral arrangements is associated with geopolitical fragmentation, the growing influence of Global South states, and perceived limitations of traditional multilateral institutions. This development suggests that minilateralism should not be treated exclusively as an Indo-Pacific phenomenon.

In the Middle East, changing power distributions and dissatisfaction with traditional security arrangements have encouraged states to diversify their strategic partnerships and security relationships. Recent scholarship

identifies significant transformations in Middle Eastern security dynamics and emphasizes the emergence of more flexible approaches to regional security (Alakel& Arab, 2025; Yazdani et al., 2025). However, systematic academic examination of Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye as an emerging minilateral security arrangement remains limited. This constitutes an important geographical and empirical gap.

2.3. Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye Security Relations: The security relationships among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye have historically developed through bilateral defense cooperation, military training, diplomatic coordination, and shared regional interests. More recent developments indicate movement toward greater trilateral defense coordination. Türkiye's expanding regional security role and its pursuit of greater strategic flexibility provide an important context for understanding this development (Luleci Sula, 2025).

The significance of the relationship has become particularly evident with the 2026 Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, signed by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye on August 7, 2026, establishing a collective-defense commitment in which an attack on one is treated as an attack on all three. Because this development is extremely recent, peer-reviewed scholarship has not yet had sufficient time to assess its strategic implications. The present study therefore addresses a significant emerging empirical case rather than claiming that an extensive literature already exists on the trilateral framework.

2.4. The Framework and the National Security Interests of the Three States: The trilateral defense framework also reflects the distinct national security interests of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye. Although the three states do not share identical threat perceptions, the agreement provides each with strategically relevant benefits. For Saudi Arabia, the framework offers an additional mechanism for strengthening deterrence, broadening its defense partnerships, and reducing excessive reliance on any single external security provider. This is particularly significant given the Kingdom's exposure to regional instability and its continuing efforts to develop a more diversified security and defense posture.

For Pakistan, the agreement has important implications for both national and regional security. Its longstanding defense relationship with Saudi Arabia provides Pakistan with strategic access to the Gulf, while the inclusion of Türkiye expands the geographical and institutional scope of that relationship. The framework may consequently strengthen Pakistan's ability to diversify its external security partnerships while enhancing its role in an emerging cross-regional security network. It also provides Islamabad with an opportunity to deepen defense cooperation with two states possessing significant economic, military, and diplomatic resources.

For Türkiye, participation advances several interconnected national security interests. The framework expands Ankara's strategic presence in the Gulf and South Asia, creates additional opportunities for defense-industrial cooperation, and strengthens its capacity to pursue a diversified foreign and security policy. This is consistent with Türkiye's broader effort to maintain strategic flexibility while remaining embedded within established institutions such as NATO. Recent scholarship characterizes this approach as part of Türkiye's continuing search for strategic autonomy amid increasing international and regional uncertainty (Aran et al., 2026).

The agreement therefore produces an important convergence between national security interests and collective strategic interests. Saudi Arabia seeks stronger deterrence and security diversification; Pakistan seeks enhanced strategic relevance, defense cooperation, and diversified partnerships; and Türkiye seeks greater regional influence, defense-industrial opportunities, and strategic flexibility. These interests are not identical, but they are sufficiently complementary to support institutionalized cooperation.

2.5. Strategic Autonomy and Emerging Regional Powers: Strategic autonomy provides an important conceptual lens for understanding why states increasingly diversify their security partnerships. Aydın-Düzgit et al. (2026) demonstrate that strategic autonomy has become increasingly important as states navigate an

international system characterized by multipolarity and geopolitical uncertainty. Their analysis of Türkiye is particularly relevant because it demonstrates how autonomy can function as a foreign-policy objective while remaining constrained by competing strategic interests.

For Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye, minilateral cooperation can consequently be examined as a possible instrument for enhancing strategic flexibility, diversifying external partnerships, and reducing excessive dependence on established security providers. The literature therefore suggests a potential relationship between multipolarity as the structural context, strategic autonomy as the strategic objective, and minilateralism as an instrument of cooperation.

2.6. Research Gap: The literature reveals three interconnected gaps. First, scholarship on strategic minilateralism remains disproportionately concentrated on the Indo-Pacific, particularly the Quad, AUKUS, and related arrangements (Biba, 2026; Wilkins, 2025). Second, comparatively limited research examines how minilateral security cooperation is developing in the Middle East–South Asia strategic space. Third, insufficient attention has been given to how emerging trilateral arrangements may serve the pursuit of strategic autonomy amid an increasingly multipolar international order.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye defense framework as an emerging case of strategic minilateralism beyond the Indo-Pacific. It specifically investigates how the three states' cooperation reflects strategic-autonomy objectives, responds to changing regional security dynamics, and potentially contributes to the transformation of the contemporary international security order.

2.7. Conceptual Framework: This study conceptualizes the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework through the interconnected concepts of strategic autonomy, multipolarity, and minilateralism. Together, these concepts provide an analytical basis for examining why states pursue limited-membership security arrangements and how such arrangements may influence regional security and the evolving international order.

2.7.1. Strategic Autonomy: Strategic autonomy connotes a state's capacity to formulate and pursue its security and foreign-policy interests without excessive dependence on a single external power or alliance structure. It does not necessarily imply isolation or complete self-reliance; rather, it involves maintaining sufficient strategic flexibility to diversify partnerships and make independent policy choices. Recent scholarship shows that strategic autonomy has become increasingly significant as states respond to geopolitical uncertainty and the movement toward multipolarity (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2025; Juncos & Vanhoonacker, 2024).

2.7.2. Multipolarity: Multipolarity refers to an international system characterized by the distribution of significant political, economic, and military capabilities among multiple major and influential states rather than domination by a single hegemonic power. For this study, multipolarity is understood not simply as the number of powerful states but as a changing strategic environment in which middle and regional powers possess greater opportunities to diversify partnerships and pursue independent strategic interests. The contemporary shift toward multipolarity provides an important structural context for the growing pursuit of strategic autonomy (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2025).

2.7.3. Minilateralism: Minilateralism connotes cooperation among a small and selective group of states designed to address specific strategic or security objectives. Unlike broad multilateral institutions, minilateral arrangements generally emphasize flexibility, limited membership, strategic convergence, and practical cooperation. Recent scholarship identifies the proliferation of minilateral arrangements as an important feature of contemporary regional security governance (Biba, 2026; Wilkins, 2025).

2.7.4. Analytical Relationship among the Concepts: The framework proposes that multipolarity creates the structural conditions, strategic autonomy provides the underlying state objective, and minilateralism

represents a practical mechanism for pursuing that objective. In an increasingly multipolar environment, states seeking greater strategic flexibility may use minilateral arrangements to diversify security partnerships, enhance defense capabilities, and reduce dependence on established power blocs. The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral framework is therefore examined as a potential manifestation of this relationship, linking changing international power distribution with state efforts to enhance strategic autonomy through selective security cooperation. This approach is consistent with recent scholarship showing that minilateralism can reshape, rather than simply complement, existing regional security architectures (Biba, 2026).

2.8. Theoretical Framework: This study is anchored primarily in Neoclassical Realism, complemented by Balance-of-Power Theory and Institutionalism. Together, these perspectives provide a coherent explanation of how changes in the international distribution of power influence state behavior, why emerging regional powers pursue strategic autonomy, and how such objectives may be translated into selective minilateral security cooperation.

2.8.1. Neoclassical Realism: Neoclassical Realism emerged within the discipline of International Relations in the late 1990s and early 2000s as an attempt to bridge the systemic emphasis of structural realism with the domestic-level variables emphasized by classical realism. Gideon Rose (1998) is widely credited with introducing the term neoclassical realism, while subsequent contributions by Randall Schweller (2004), Fareed Zakaria (1998), and Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro (2009) developed the approach by demonstrating how systemic pressures are filtered through domestic political and institutional structures.

Neoclassical Realism maintains that the international distribution of power constrains states, but does not mechanically determine their foreign-policy behavior. States interpret systemic opportunities and pressures through domestic institutions, leadership perceptions, state capacity, and political considerations. This makes the theory particularly relevant to the present study because Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye may respond differently to similar systemic conditions while pursuing varying degrees of strategic autonomy. Recent scholarship on Türkiye similarly demonstrates how strategic autonomy is shaped by the interaction between multipolar systemic conditions and domestic political considerations (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2026).

2. 8.2. Balance-of-Power Theory: Balance-of-Power Theory, principally associated with the Realist tradition of International Relations, has deeper historical roots. Although the balancing principle can be traced to classical European statecraft, its systematic development in modern IR is strongly associated with Hans J. Morgenthau (1948) and subsequently with structural realism, particularly Kenneth Waltz (1979). The theory holds that states seek to prevent the emergence of overwhelming concentrations of power by balancing internally through the development of capabilities or externally through partnerships and alliances.

For this study, Balance-of-Power Theory provides a useful explanation of why regional powers may diversify strategic partnerships in response to changing distributions of power. The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework can therefore be examined as a possible mechanism of strategic balancing, soft balancing, or partnership diversification within an increasingly multipolar international system. Importantly, the framework does not assume that the trilateral relationship is directed against a particular state; rather, it examines whether cooperation enhances the strategic position and autonomy of its participants.

2.8.3. Institutionalism and Minilateral Cooperation: Institutionalism developed prominently within International Relations as a response to the Realist emphasis on conflict and competition. Its intellectual development is associated with scholars such as Robert Keohane (1984) and Keohane and Nye (1977), whose work demonstrated that international institutions could facilitate cooperation even under conditions of anarchy and competing state interests. The approach is closely associated with International Relations and International Political Economy.

Institutionalism is relevant to this study because minilateral arrangements provide institutional mechanisms through which states can coordinate policies, reduce uncertainty, exchange information, and pursue shared security interests. Unlike broad multilateral institutions, minilateral arrangements generally involve a small number of strategically aligned states and can therefore provide greater flexibility and responsiveness. Recent research demonstrates that minilateral arrangements can reshape existing regional security architectures rather than merely supplement them (Biba, 2026).

2.8.4. Theoretical Integration: These theories are integrated rather than treated as competing explanations. Neoclassical Realism provides the principal explanatory framework, linking systemic change with domestic and state-level responses. Balance-of-Power Theory explains the strategic logic of partnership diversification and balancing, while Institutionalism explains how states translate convergent interests into structured cooperation through minilateral arrangements.

This integrated framework provides a basis for examining whether the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework represents a strategic response to changing power configurations, an instrument for enhancing strategic autonomy, and an emerging form of regional security governance.

2.9. Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative case-study design to examine the emergence, strategic rationale, and security implications of the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework. A case-study approach is appropriate for examining complex, contemporary, and context-dependent security phenomena within their real-world setting (Younas & Inayat, 2025). Data are drawn primarily from documentary and secondary sources, including official government and defense documents, policy statements, scholarly literature, and credible international security reports. Where appropriate, insights from purposively selected security and foreign-policy experts are incorporated to provide informed perspectives on the framework's strategic objectives and implications. Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for qualitative inquiry where participants are selected based on relevant expertise and knowledge (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). The collected evidence is analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns concerning strategic motivations, defense cooperation, strategic autonomy, regional security, and international-order transformation. Triangulation across documentary evidence and expert perspectives is used to strengthen the credibility and interpretive depth of the findings.

3.0. Analysis/Findings: The analysis identifies four interconnected findings corresponding to the study's research questions. First, the institutionalization of the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye defense framework is driven less by a single common enemy than by converging interests in deterrence, security diversification, and strategic flexibility. Second, the arrangement has the potential to enhance the strategic autonomy of all three states, although its contribution differs according to their respective capabilities and dependencies. Third, the framework illustrates how multipolarity can encourage states to employ minilateral arrangements as instruments of strategic adaptation rather than as substitutes for existing alliances. Finally, the agreement has implications extending beyond the three signatories because it may contribute to the emergence of a more networked and regionally driven security architecture.

3.1. Strategic and Geopolitical Drivers of Institutionalization: The first finding is that the trilateral framework is best explained by converging strategic interests rather than identical threat perceptions. The three states bring complementary capabilities and strategic assets to the arrangement. Saudi Arabia contributes substantial economic resources, geopolitical weight, and a strategically important geographic position; Pakistan contributes extensive military experience and a long-established defense relationship with Saudi Arabia; and Türkiye contributes an increasingly sophisticated defense-industrial base and military capabilities. The agreement therefore creates a degree of strategic complementarity that bilateral relationships alone cannot fully provide (Fraser& Ahmed, 2026).

The institutionalization also represents an extension of an already developing Saudi–Pakistan security relationship. The September 2025 bilateral Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement created a foundation for reciprocal defense commitments, while subsequent developments expanded security interaction between the Gulf and South Asia. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS, 2026) observes that the earlier agreement created new security linkages between the two regions, although important details concerning its practical implementation remained unclear. The incorporation of Türkiye subsequently transformed this bilateral foundation into a broader trilateral arrangement.

A second driver is the changing regional threat environment. The security shocks affecting the Gulf, including missile and drone attacks and instability surrounding maritime routes, have increased the value of collective deterrence. Pakistan itself has faced the dilemma of becoming more deeply involved in conflicts affecting Saudi Arabia while attempting to preserve diplomatic flexibility. Reuters reported in July 2026 that attacks on Saudi Arabia had intensified concerns in Islamabad about being drawn into wider regional conflict. The trilateral arrangement consequently provides a mechanism for sharing security risks while potentially increasing the costs of aggression against any one member.

A third driver is the desire to institutionalize cooperation that had previously been conducted largely through bilateral channels. The 2026 agreement is significant not merely because it adds another defense partnership but because it establishes a formalized three-state security mechanism. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated that the pact resulted from more than two years of diplomatic efforts and includes plans for a ministerial committee and a general secretariat (Reuters, 2026). This indicates that institutionalization, rather than symbolic political alignment alone, is an important component of the emerging framework.

The evidence therefore suggests that the framework is neither a purely threat-driven alliance nor simply an expression of ideological solidarity. It is better understood as a strategic convergence produced by complementary capabilities, regional insecurity, and the perceived value of institutionalized cooperation.

3.2. The Framework and Strategic Autonomy: The second finding concerns the extent to which the trilateral arrangement enhances strategic autonomy. The evidence suggests that it has the potential to do so, but not through the abandonment of existing alliances. Rather, autonomy is being pursued through diversification.

This distinction is particularly important in the Saudi and Turkish cases. Saudi Arabia has historically relied heavily on external security relationships, especially with the United States, but has increasingly sought to expand its range of strategic partnerships. Recent research describes Türkiye's foreign-policy trajectory in similarly autonomy-seeking terms, emphasizing diversification and greater freedom of action amid regional and global uncertainty (Aran et al., 2026). The trilateral framework therefore fits a broader pattern in which states seek to increase their strategic options without necessarily severing established relationships.

For Saudi Arabia, the arrangement potentially reduces the risks associated with excessive dependence on a single external security provider by adding two militarily significant partners. For Pakistan, the agreement strengthens its strategic position in the Gulf while reinforcing its longstanding defense relationship with Saudi Arabia. For Türkiye, participation provides a mechanism for expanding its strategic influence into the Gulf and South Asia while linking its defense-industrial capabilities to two strategically important partners.

The autonomy effect is therefore asymmetric but complementary. Saudi Arabia gains additional security options; Pakistan gains greater regional strategic relevance; and Türkiye gains expanded geopolitical and defense-industrial reach. The framework consequently demonstrates that strategic autonomy need not be an exclusively national project. It can also emerge through collective capability-building and partnership diversification.

However, the findings do not support interpreting the agreement as complete strategic independence. None of the three states is abandoning its existing international relationships. Türkiye remains a NATO member, Pakistan maintains extensive relations with China and other partners, and Saudi Arabia continues to engage the United States. The more defensible interpretation is therefore relational strategic autonomy: increasing freedom of action by maintaining multiple security relationships rather than replacing one dependency with another.

3.3. Multipolarity and Minilateral Security Cooperation: The third finding is that the trilateral framework illustrates how multipolarity can encourage minilateral rather than exclusively multilateral security responses. The participating states appear to be exploiting a strategic environment in which several centers of power and influence coexist. This allows them to construct a limited-membership arrangement tailored to their particular interests.

The significance of this development lies in its institutional flexibility. A three-state arrangement allows Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye to coordinate defense policy without requiring the extensive consensus associated with larger multilateral institutions. Recent scholarship on Türkiye's strategic autonomy similarly emphasizes the importance of navigating an increasingly fluid international environment through diversified partnerships (Aran et al., 2026). The wider literature on strategic minilateralism also identifies smaller security groupings as increasingly significant components of contemporary regional security architecture (Heng, 2026).

The Saudi–Pakistan–Türkiye case nevertheless differs from many established minilateral arrangements because its geographical scope crosses conventional regional boundaries. It connects the Gulf, South Asia, and Türkiye's wider Eurasian strategic space. This makes the framework particularly significant for understanding how minilateralism can operate across rather than within a single regional security complex.

The agreement should therefore not automatically be characterized as an "Islamic NATO." Such a characterization risks overstating its institutional maturity and obscuring the continuing importance of the three states' existing alliances and partnerships. The more analytically useful interpretation is that it represents an emerging minilateral defense mechanism with collective-defense characteristics. The agreement's "attack on one, attack on all" principle resembles NATO's collective-defense logic, but its long-term effectiveness will depend on implementation, command arrangements, military interoperability, resource commitments, and the willingness of the members to act collectively during an actual crisis. Reuters reports that the Turkish foreign minister described the commitment as technically equivalent to NATO's Article 5, while also emphasizing its defensive character (Reuters, 2026).

Thus, the findings support the proposition that multipolarity creates opportunities for strategically diverse states to construct selective security partnerships that supplement, rather than necessarily replace, established alliances.

3.4. Implications for Regional and International Security Architecture: The fourth finding concerns the broader implications of the framework. Its most immediate significance is the potential emergence of a more networked regional security architecture. Rather than security being organized primarily through one dominant external provider or a single regional institution, the Saudi–Pakistan–Türkiye arrangement adds another layer of cooperation involving states from different strategic regions.

The framework could facilitate greater defense-industrial cooperation, military interoperability, intelligence exchange, training, and coordinated deterrence. The economic and technological complementarity among the three states is particularly relevant: Saudi financial resources and defense investment can intersect with Türkiye's defense-industrial capabilities and Pakistan's military expertise. Reporting by the Financial Times

indicates that defense-industrial cooperation, including Saudi investment in Turkish defense companies, was already developing alongside broader bilateral relations.

The framework may also have an important signaling function. By institutionalizing collective defense, the three states communicate that attacks against them may generate a broader strategic response. This could strengthen deterrence without requiring the immediate deployment of large permanent forces. The agreement is therefore significant not only for its operational provisions but also for the strategic uncertainty it creates for potential adversaries.

At the same time, the arrangement introduces potential risks. Collective-defense commitments can generate entrapment, whereby one member's conflict creates pressure on the others to intervene. The different threat perceptions of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye could therefore become a source of internal tension. The framework's effectiveness will ultimately depend on whether the members can reconcile divergent national interests during an actual crisis.

There is also a question of institutional durability. The agreement is new, and its practical architecture remains under development. Consequently, it would be premature to conclude that it has already transformed the regional balance of power. What can be established at this stage is that it creates a new institutional pathway through which the three states can coordinate their security policies. Its long-term significance will depend on whether this commitment develops into sustained military interoperability, joint capabilities, regular institutional consultation, and credible collective-defense planning.

3.5. Synthesis of Findings: Taken together, the findings provide an integrated answer to the study's central puzzle. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye have institutionalized defense cooperation not because their strategic interests are identical, but because their differences are accompanied by significant areas of complementarity. The framework allows each state to obtain strategic benefits that exceed what could readily be achieved through isolated bilateral relationships.

The analysis consequently supports the interpretation of the trilateral framework as an emerging instrument of collective strategic autonomy. Its purpose is not necessarily to replace U.S., NATO, Chinese, or other established security relationships, but to increase the participating states' strategic options within a more plural international environment. In this respect, the framework represents a form of strategic diversification through minilateralism.

In summary, the evidence indicates that the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework should be viewed not merely as a replacement for existing alliances but as an additional layer of strategic cooperation emerging from a more diversified international security landscape. Its significance lies in this hybrid nature: it blends elements of collective defense with strategic diversification and minilateral institutionalization. Consequently, this case exemplifies how regional and middle powers can enhance their strategic agency by forging overlapping security partnerships while remaining engaged with established international institutions.

3.6. Discussion: Taken together, the findings support the central argument that the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework represents an institutionalized form of collective strategic autonomy pursued through minilateral cooperation within an increasingly multipolar international system. This does not imply the abandonment of existing alliances or external security partnerships. Rather, the framework appears to provide the three states with an additional layer of security cooperation through which they can diversify strategic relationships, strengthen collective deterrence, and expand their respective room for maneuver. Its significance therefore lies not in replacing established security structures, but in adding a new institutional layer to an increasingly networked international security architecture. The agreement's commitment to regard an armed attack against one member as an attack against all three, together with plans

for a ministerial committee and a general secretariat, provides an initial basis for interpreting the arrangement as more than an informal diplomatic partnership (Azhari et al., 2026; NBC News, 2026).

3.6.1. Strategic Convergence without Complete Strategic Alignment: The findings challenge explanations of alliance formation that assume that states must possess highly similar threat perceptions or identical geopolitical objectives before institutionalizing defense cooperation. The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye case suggests instead that strategic complementarity can generate cooperation even where strategic priorities remain differentiated. The three states occupy distinct geopolitical environments and maintain different relationships with major powers, yet their capabilities and interests create areas of mutual utility.

This distinction is important because the framework does not appear to depend exclusively on a single common adversary. Although the agreement emerged amid serious regional instability, Türkiye's foreign minister has explicitly characterized it as defensive rather than directed against a particular state (Reuters, 2026). The findings therefore suggest that the framework should be understood as a mechanism for managing uncertainty and strengthening deterrence rather than simply as an instrument of balancing against one identified enemy.

The case consequently extends the analytical meaning of security cooperation. States may cooperate not because they face precisely the same threat, but because they perceive benefits in sharing capabilities, distributing risks, and increasing the costs of aggression. This is particularly relevant to contemporary security environments in which threats are increasingly multidimensional and regional crises can generate consequences beyond their immediate geographical locations.

3.6.2. Strategic Autonomy as Diversification Rather than Independence: The second major implication concerns strategic autonomy. The findings support a conception of autonomy based on strategic diversification rather than complete independence. Recent scholarship on Türkiye demonstrates that strategic autonomy has developed as a contested and evolving foreign-policy objective rather than as a straightforward withdrawal from established alliances (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2025). The Turkish case is particularly relevant because the country continues to operate within NATO while simultaneously expanding its relationships with non-Western and regional actors.

The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework fits this broader pattern. None of the three states is required to abandon its existing security relationships to participate in the new arrangement. Instead, the framework provides an additional strategic option. This suggests that autonomy in a multipolar environment may increasingly involve the ability to choose among multiple security relationships rather than choosing between dependence and independence.

This interpretation also helps distinguish strategic autonomy from simple hedging. Hedging generally refers to maintaining multiple relationships in conditions of uncertainty, whereas the present case involves the institutionalization of a specific reciprocal defense commitment. The trilateral framework therefore moves beyond passive diversification toward an effort to create a durable mechanism for collective security.

3.6.3. From National to Collective Strategic Autonomy: The findings further suggest that strategic autonomy need not be exclusively national. The trilateral framework points toward what this study conceptualizes as collective strategic autonomy: the pursuit of greater strategic freedom through institutionalized cooperation among states.

This represents an important extension of the strategic-autonomy concept. A state can increase its autonomy by developing indigenous military capabilities, reducing external dependencies, or diversifying its foreign partnerships. However, it can also increase its strategic capacity by pooling complementary resources with selected partners. In the present case, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye bring different forms of strategic

value to the arrangement. The resulting cooperation may therefore create capabilities and options that are difficult for any one participant to generate independently.

The concept should nevertheless be treated cautiously. Cooperation can enhance autonomy, but it can also create new obligations. A reciprocal defense commitment may increase a state's strategic options while simultaneously creating expectations that it will support its partners during a crisis. The relationship between autonomy and interdependence is therefore not necessarily contradictory. Rather, the case suggests that strategic autonomy may be achieved through managed interdependence.

3.6.4. Minilateralism as an Instrument of Strategic Autonomy: The findings also contribute to the contemporary literature on minilateralism. Recent research demonstrates that minilateral arrangements do not have a uniform relationship with existing security institutions: they can complement, compete with, or reshape established regional security structures (Biba, 2026). Similarly, recent scholarship on strategic minilateralism emphasizes the growing importance of small-group arrangements in contemporary regional security architecture (Wilkins, 2025).

The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework expands this discussion beyond the predominantly Indo-Pacific cases that have received considerable scholarly attention. Its geographical composition is particularly significant because it connects the Gulf, South Asia, and Türkiye's wider Eurasian strategic environment. This suggests that minilateralism is not simply an institutional response to Indo-Pacific great-power competition but may represent a more general strategy through which regional and middle powers organize security cooperation.

The small number of participants is also analytically significant. A three-state arrangement can permit more focused coordination than broad multilateral institutions while still providing greater strategic resources than purely bilateral cooperation. The framework therefore occupies an intermediate institutional space between bilateral defense relations and large multilateral organizations.

3.6.5. Multipolarity as an Enabling Environment: The findings further indicate that multipolarity should be understood not simply as a structural condition involving multiple great powers, but also as an environment that can expand the strategic choices available to regional and middle powers. The emergence of multiple centers of economic, technological, military, and diplomatic influence provides states with greater opportunities to diversify their external relationships.

This does not mean that multipolarity automatically generates minilateralism. Rather, multipolarity creates conditions under which states can pursue multiple partnerships without necessarily aligning exclusively with one dominant power. The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework represents one institutional response to these conditions.

The case therefore adds an agency-centered dimension to the study of multipolarity. Much of the debate surrounding multipolarity focuses on competition among major powers. The present findings suggest that an equally important question is how regional and middle powers exploit the strategic space created by systemic diffusion of power. The trilateral framework illustrates how such states can move from being objects of great-power competition toward becoming active participants in shaping regional security arrangements.

3.6.6. The Emergence of a Networked Security Architecture: The findings also suggest that contemporary security architecture is becoming increasingly networked rather than exclusively hierarchical. Rather than organizing security around one dominant alliance or external guarantor, states increasingly maintain overlapping relationships that serve different strategic purposes. Minilateral arrangements can become additional nodes within this network rather than direct substitutes for existing institutions (Biba, 2026).

The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework fits this pattern. Its institutionalization adds a new cross-regional layer to existing bilateral and multilateral relationships. The agreement could eventually facilitate defense-industrial cooperation, intelligence coordination, military training, interoperability, and joint deterrence. However, these should presently be treated as potential consequences rather than demonstrated outcomes.

This distinction is particularly important because the agreement is extremely recent. Although the parties have established a mutual-defense principle and discussed institutional mechanisms, its long-term effectiveness cannot yet be determined. Reuters (2026) reports that the framework is intended to develop institutional structures, including a ministerial committee and a general secretariat, while Turkish officials have suggested that the arrangement could eventually expand to include other states. The durability of the framework will therefore depend upon whether these institutional commitments translate into operational cooperation.

3.6.7. Collective Defense and the Autonomy Paradox: The findings also reveal an important tension between collective defense and strategic autonomy. The framework may increase the strategic freedom of its members by strengthening deterrence and diversifying their security relationships. Yet reciprocal defense obligations can simultaneously constrain individual freedom of action by creating expectations of mutual support.

This produces what may be termed the autonomy paradox: the same institutional arrangement that expands collective strategic autonomy may constrain individual strategic autonomy during a crisis. If one member becomes involved in a conflict that the other two regard differently, the collective-defense principle could generate pressure for intervention. The durability of the arrangement will consequently depend not only on the existence of formal commitments but also on the members' ability to manage divergent interests.

This is particularly important given the distinction between the political symbolism of collective defense and its operational credibility. The Turkish foreign minister has described the pact as technically comparable to NATO's Article 5, but formal similarity does not automatically establish equivalent institutional capacity, military interoperability, command arrangements, or political willingness to use force (Reuters, 2026).The agreement should therefore be regarded as an emerging collective-defense mechanism, rather than prematurely characterized as an established military alliance equivalent to NATO.

3.7. Theoretical Contribution: The study makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it extends the strategic-autonomy literature by demonstrating that autonomy may be pursued through collective institutional mechanisms, rather than exclusively through national self-reliance. Second, it broadens the minilateralism literature by applying the concept to an emerging Middle East–South Asia security arrangement rather than limiting analysis to Indo-Pacific cases. Third, it contributes to the study of multipolarity by emphasizing the strategic agency of regional and middle powers in constructing new security institutions.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye defense framework should not be interpreted simply as a new alliance or as an attempt to create an "Islamic NATO." Such labels risk overstating the arrangement's current institutional maturity and overlooking the continuing external relationships of its members. The more analytically defensible interpretation is that it represents an emerging form of collective strategic autonomy institutionalized through minilateral defense cooperation.

Its importance lies precisely in this hybrid character. The framework combines elements of collective defense, security diversification, strategic autonomy, and minilateral institutionalization while remaining compatible—at least at this stage—with the participants' existing international partnerships. This

interpretation is consistent with recent scholarship showing that minilateral arrangements can coexist with established institutions rather than necessarily displacing them (Biba, 2026).

The broader theoretical implication is therefore that multipolarity can create the structural space for collective strategic autonomy, while minilateralism provides an institutional mechanism through which autonomy can be pursued. The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework offers an important contemporary case of this process. Whether it ultimately develops into a durable security institution will depend on institutionalization, military interoperability, resource commitments, and the political willingness of the three states to honor their collective-defense commitment during future crises.

Thus, the study's central contribution is not the claim that a completely new security order has already emerged, but that the case provides evidence of a transition toward a more diversified, networked, and agency-driven security architecture, in which regional and middle powers increasingly construct additional layers of cooperation to manage strategic uncertainty and reduce excessive dependence on any single security relationship.

3.8. Conclusion: This study examined the strategic and geopolitical factors underlying the institutionalization of the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework and assessed its significance as an emerging form of minilateral security cooperation within a multipolar international order. The findings demonstrate that the framework is not adequately explained by a single shared threat or complete strategic alignment among the three states. Rather, it reflects the convergence of distinct but complementary national security interests involving deterrence, security diversification, defense cooperation, strategic flexibility, and broader geopolitical influence.

The study concludes that the framework represents an institutionalized form of collective strategic autonomy pursued through minilateral cooperation within an increasingly multipolar international system. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Türkiye are not abandoning their existing alliances or external security partnerships; instead, they are expanding their strategic options by creating an additional layer of reciprocal defense cooperation. In this respect, the framework demonstrates how states can pursue greater strategic autonomy through managed interdependence and partnership diversification rather than complete strategic independence.

The analysis further concludes that the national security interests of the three states provide an important foundation for their cooperation. Saudi Arabia seeks stronger deterrence and greater diversification of its security partnerships; Pakistan benefits from enhanced defense cooperation, strategic relevance, and stronger connections across the Gulf and South Asia; while Türkiye gains additional regional influence, defense-industrial opportunities, and strategic flexibility. Although these interests are not identical, their complementarity provides sufficient incentives for institutionalized cooperation.

The framework also illustrates the growing importance of minilateralism in contemporary international security. Rather than replacing established alliances and multilateral institutions, the trilateral arrangement adds another layer to an increasingly networked security architecture. Its emergence demonstrates that multipolarity can provide regional and middle powers with greater opportunities to construct selective security partnerships and exercise greater agency over their security environments.

Nevertheless, the study recognizes that the framework remains an emerging security arrangement, and its long-term effectiveness cannot yet be determined. Its durability will depend on the development of institutional mechanisms, military interoperability, resource commitments, intelligence cooperation, and the political willingness of the three states to uphold their collective-defense commitment during future crises. Accordingly, the agreement should not yet be regarded as equivalent to a mature military alliance.

Ultimately, the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye framework provides important evidence of a broader transformation in international security: states are increasingly constructing overlapping and complementary security relationships to manage uncertainty, diversify dependencies, and expand strategic choice. The case therefore suggests that the emerging multipolar order is not merely redistributing power among major states; it is also creating greater space for regional and middle powers to shape the security architecture within which they operate.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated organization, institution, or employer. All content provided is for academic and informational purposes only. The author makes no representations as to the accuracy, completeness, suitability, or validity of any information contained herein and will not be liable for any errors, omissions, or delays in this information or any losses, injuries, or damage(s) arising from its display or use. Readers are advised to verify any information before acting upon it.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for this research.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the research, analysis, or preparation of this manuscript.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate: No ethical approval is required for this study.

Acknowledgement: I express my sincere gratitude to the editors of this journal and the anonymous reviewers for their careful evaluation of this manuscript and for their constructive comments and insightful suggestions, which have contributed significantly to strengthening its clarity, analytical depth, and scholarly rigor.

I also pay tribute to the late Dr. Joseph Saye Guannu, a distinguished Liberian historian, educator, and scholar, whose mentorship and unwavering commitment to academic excellence profoundly shaped my intellectual development, critical thinking, and approach to scholarly inquiry. His enduring intellectual legacy continues to inspire my commitment to rigorous, ethical, and impactful research.

I further acknowledge the valuable assistance of artificial intelligence–assisted language editing tools, including Grammarly Gen AI and ChatGPT, which were used solely to improve the manuscript's grammar, language, readability, sentence structure, and overall presentation. These tools did not contribute to the study's conceptualization, theoretical framework, research design, evidence selection, analysis, interpretation of findings, or conclusions. The author independently reviewed and verified all editorial suggestions and assumes full responsibility for the content, accuracy, interpretations, arguments, and conclusions presented in this article.

Finally, I acknowledge the invaluable contributions of scholars whose research informed the theoretical and analytical foundations of this study. Their scholarship on strategic autonomy, multipolarity, minilateralism, international security, alliance politics, regional security cooperation, and the evolving role of regional and middle powers provided important intellectual foundations for examining the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye trilateral defense framework. This study builds upon and engages with these scholarly contributions while advancing its own interpretation of the relationship between national security interests, collective strategic autonomy, minilateral cooperation, and the changing international security architecture. All interpretations, analyses, conclusions, and any remaining errors are solely the responsibility of the author.

References

- Azhari et al, (2026). Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan Pledge Mutual Defense as Middle East Turmoil Escalates. https://gvwire.com/2026/08/07/saudi-arabia-turkey-pakistan-pledge-mutual-defense-as-middle-east-turmoil-escalates/

- Alakel, M., & Arab, A. N. A. (2025). The changing power and security dynamics in the Middle East. İmgelem, 16, 203–240. https://doi.org/10.53791/imgelem.1601955

- Aydın-Düzgit, S., Kutlay, M., & Keyman, E. F. (2026). Strategic autonomy in Turkish foreign policy in an age of multipolarity: Lineages and contradictions of an idea. International Politics, 63, 184–205. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00638-w

- Aran, A., Altunisik, M., & Kutlay, M. (2026). Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy in the Middle East and the Black Sea regions: Navigating uncertainty amid regional and global flux. International Politics. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-026-00751-y

- Ahmad, M., & Wilkins, S. (2025). Purposive sampling in qualitative research: A framework for the entire journey. Quality & Quantity, 59, 1461–1479. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-024-02022-5

- Al Jazeera Staff and Reuters(2026). Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye sign defence deal amid regional turmoil. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/7/saudi-%E2%81%A0arabia-pakistan-and-turkiye-sign-defence-deal-amid-regional-turmoil?

- Biba, S. (2026). 'Is it good or is it bad?': minilateralism and its effects on the Indo-Pacific security architecture. The Pacific Review, 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2026.2614596

- Carson, A., Metz, R., & Poast, P. (2025). Allies and access: Implications of an American turn away from alliances.

- International Organization, 79(S1), S103–S116. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818325100982

- Fraser, S. & Ahmed, M. (2026). Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan have signed a key defense agreement.

- https://apnews.com/article/saudi-arabia-turkey-pakistan-defense-agreement-58048d4a100befd4d2c18e0cbae58b7c

- Heiduk, F., & Wilkins, T. (2024). Minilateralism and pathways to institutional progression: alliance formation or cooperative security governance? Australian Journal of International Affairs, 78(6), 808–827. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2024.2416566

- Heng, Y.-K. (2026). Strategic minilateralism and the regional security architecture of the Indo-Pacific: The Quad, AUKUS, and the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, by Thomas S. Wilkins. Asian Politics & Policy, 18(2), e70078. https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.7007

- International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2026). The Pakistan–Saudi Arabia defence relationshipVolume 32, Comment 2.

- https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2026/the-pakistansaudi-arabia-defence-relationship/

- Juncos, A. E., & Vanhoonacker, S. (2024). The ideational power of strategic autonomy in EU security and external economic policies. Journal of Common Market Studies, 62(4), 955–972. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13597
- Keohane, R. O. (1984). After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy. Princeton University Press.
- Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1977). Power and interdependence: World politics in transition. Little, Brown.
- Morgenthau, H. J. (1948). Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Luleci Sula, C. (2025). Türkiye's national security and the Middle East. International Journal of Social Inquiry, 18(1), 17–32. https://doi.org/10.37093/ijsi.1651258
- Nawaz, N. (2025). Understanding the Pakistan–Saudi Defense Agreement
- https://globalsecurityreview.com/understanding-the-pakistan-saudi-defense-agreement/
- NBC News (2026). Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan pledge mutual defense as Middle East turmoil escalates.https://www.nbcnews.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-turkey-pakistan-pledge-mutual-defense-rcna591330
- Reuters (2026).Rubio and Miliband discuss Ukraine war, boosting Europe's role in its own security.
- https://www.reuters.com/world/rubio-miliband-discuss-ukraine-war-europe-taking-greater-role-its-own-security-2026-08-05/
- Reuters (2026). Turkish FM says defense pact with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia is technically same as NATO's Article 5. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/turkish-fm-says-defense-pact-with-pakistan-saudi-arabia-is-technically-same-as-natos-article-5/
- Reuters (2026). Analysis-Pakistan worries about being drawn into US-Iran conflict after Houthis attack Saudi Arabia
- https://www.investing.com/news/world-news/analysispakistan-worries-about-being-drawn-into-usiran-conflict-after-houthis-attack-saudi-arabia-4796201
- Reuters (2026). Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan pledge mutual defence as Middle East turmoil escalates.
- Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy. World Politics, 51(1), 144–172. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100007814
- Thakur, H. K. (2025). Restoring multilateralism: The challenge from the Global South and the rising minilaterals.
- The Round Table, 113(6), 556–581. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2024.2439673
- Wilkins, T. S. (2025). Strategic minilateralism and the regional security architecture of the Indo-Pacific: The Quad, AUKUS, and the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-4791-0
- Wijaya, T., & Jayasuriya, K. (2024). A new multipolar order: Combined development, state forms and new business classes. International Affairs,

- 100(5), 2133–2152. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae135
- Waltz, K. N. (1979). Theory of international politics. Addison-Wesley.
- Younas, A., & Inayat, S. (2025). Choosing an analytical approach in case study research. Creative Nursing, 31(1), 90–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/10784535241306773
- Zakaria, F. (1998). From wealth to power: The unusual origins of America's world role. Princeton University Press.

Citation: **Nebo. A. M.,** (2026) "Strategic Autonomy and the Emerging Multipolar Order: Explaining the Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Turkey Trilateral Defense Framework", *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-09, September-2026.