

Analysis of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Iraq's Security Agreements with Emphasis on Institutional, Intelligence, Border, and Political-Economic Dimensions

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Iraq's regional security over the past two decades has been directly influenced by the consequences of the 2003 war, the emergence of ISIS, and extra-regional interventions, making it one of the central themes of Middle Eastern security studies. The present study aims to identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of Iraq's security agreements with its neighboring countries in four dimensions—institutional, intelligence, border, and political-economic—and seeks, through a descriptive-analytical approach, to evaluate the effectiveness of these agreements in achieving the goals of collective security and regional cooperation. The research data were collected through documentary analysis and a researcher-made questionnaire. The statistical population consisted of 80 professors, experts, and specialists in international relations and security, whose opinions were assessed using a five-point Likert scale. Statistical results indicated that the overall mean effectiveness of Iraq's security agreements was 3.39 out of 5; the intelligence dimension obtained the highest mean score (3.51), whereas the border dimension received the lowest (3.31). The qualitative analysis of the data revealed that the strengths of these agreements lie in the establishment of institutional frameworks, the creation of joint intelligence centers, and the relative improvement of regional relations. However, the main weaknesses are rooted in the absence of enforcement guarantees, mutual distrust, weak surveillance technology, corruption, and conflicting geopolitical interests. Overall findings demonstrate that despite progress in institutional development, Iraq's security agreements have not yet achieved functional institutionalization or consistent implementation. Therefore, the limited effectiveness of these agreements stems from the gap between institutional structure and executive capacity within Iraq's security governance system. Based on the findings, the successful implementation of security cooperation requires the establishment of a permanent Regional Security Coordination Council, a system for evaluating agreements, and mechanisms for intelligence-based trust-building. In summary, the study concludes that the future of Iraq's regional security depends on transitioning from a political-symbolic level to an institutional-functional one, and on strengthening three fundamental components—trust, transparency, and institutionalization—in security agreements.

Keywords: *Iraq's security agreements; regional security; bilateral and multilateral cooperation; institutional and intelligence dimensions*

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1. Introduction

Iraq's regional security has become one of the central topics in security and international relations studies over the past two decades. The developments resulting from the 2003 war and its aftermath transformed Iraq into a focal point of security, political, and social crises that not only destabilized its internal order but also directly affected the architecture of regional security (M. Faust, 2023). Many scholars argue that the Iraq War and its consequences fundamentally altered regional security structures, prompting both regional and extra-regional actors to redefine their interests and strategies toward Iraq (J. Faust, 2023). This situation became even more complex with the emergence of ISIS and the subsequent international and regional efforts to combat terrorism, as Iraq turned into a field of direct and indirect foreign intervention, and its security autonomy faced serious challenges (Matisek & Fowler, 2020).

After 2003, Iraq's political and institutional structures experienced a form of fragility that limited its ability to manage and effectively utilize security agreements (Esmail, 2025). This fragility, intertwined with internal ethnic and sectarian diversity, deepened social and political divisions and created barriers to the effective implementation of security pacts with neighboring countries. In this context, Iraq's security agreements were established with goals such as combating terrorism, controlling borders, addressing organized crime, and strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation. However, in practice, due to institutional weakness, external pressure, and political differences, the outcomes diverged from what was envisioned in official documents (Nouri, 2022).

The discrepancy between the official objectives of these agreements and the actual results reveals a fundamental gap that forms the core issue of this research. While the declared goals of these agreements have focused on establishing collective security and enhancing regional coordination, their practical outcomes—owing to the absence of mutual trust, weakness in executive mechanisms, persistent border threats, and continued interventions by extra-regional actors—indicate a failure to achieve these objectives (Mohammad Turki Bani & et al., 2022). In other words, there exists a significant gap between the intended aims and the

realized outcomes, which calls for precise analytical examination.

Iraq's security agreements encompass multiple dimensions. In the military-security dimension, they emphasize joint responses to threats; however, they have remained ineffective due to inadequate operational coordination. In the intelligence dimension, data exchange and intelligence cooperation have not been fully realized, and Iraq continues to lack well-established joint structures. In the border dimension, despite formal commitments, insecurity and armed group movements persist. At the institutional and structural level, limited organizational capacity and dependence on external support have led to the underperformance of these agreements in achieving their goals (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Hettne, 2001).

Iraq's security and its role in the regional equations of the Middle East constitute one of the key elements in explaining the region's order and stability. The importance of this issue primarily arises from Iraq's geopolitical position—a country located at the heart of the Middle East, directly neighboring several influential regional states. Such a position means that any security transformation in Iraq generates implications extending beyond its national borders and affects the entire region (Soderbaum & Hettne, 2016). Therefore, studying Iraq's security not only contributes to understanding its internal dynamics but is also essential for analyzing broader security trends in the Middle East.

This research is further significant as it examines Iraq's security pacts and agreements with its neighboring states—an area that, despite its importance, has been rarely and inadequately explored independently. Focusing on this topic helps bridge existing gaps in international relations and security studies literature and offers an analytical framework for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of regional security cooperation.

From an applied perspective, the importance of this study lies in its potential to guide policymakers, decision-makers, and relevant institutions in Iraq and other regional countries. In a world where security threats have transnational characteristics, no state can manage security crises alone. Hence, assessing the efficiency or inefficiency of Iraq's security agreements can help design more effective mechanisms for bilateral and multilateral cooperation, ultimately contributing to regional stability.

Moreover, the importance of this study is also linked to its modeling aspect. Iraq's experience can serve as an example for other regional countries facing similar security challenges. Analyzing Iraq's security agreements can clarify both successful and unsuccessful patterns and assist in developing strategies that not only enhance internal security but also foster more sustainable cooperation among regional states.

Accordingly, the central issue of the present study is to explore why Iraq's security agreements with its neighbors—despite being designed with the philosophy and objectives of strengthening security and regional cooperation—have failed to achieve the desired level of effectiveness, and in which areas or dimensions this inefficiency has manifested. Within this framework, the main research question can be stated as follows: *What are the most significant challenges and deficiencies in Iraq's security agreements with its neighboring countries, and how can identifying the specific dimensions of inefficiency help propose strategies to enhance the effectiveness of these agreements and strengthen Iraq's regional security?*

2. Research Methodology

The nature of this study, which focuses on examining Iraq's security agreements with its neighboring countries and analyzing the challenges associated with them, required that the research be conducted within an applied framework using a descriptive-analytical approach. From the perspective of research type, this study falls under applied research, as its purpose was not merely theoretical development but rather the formulation of practical recommendations and strategies to improve Iraq's security cooperation with its surrounding environment. Methodologically, the study was based on documentary content analysis and a case study design. Documentary content analysis was selected because most data related to security agreements exist in the form of official documents, statements, and research center reports. The case study approach was appropriate since the research concentrated on Iraq as a key state in the Middle East and examined its security interactions with neighboring countries, providing a suitable framework for analysis. In this study, data were collected through library and documentary methods. Authentic and valid sources included Iraq's security treaties with neighboring

countries, official statements, domestic laws, international organization reports, and related academic research. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and were categorized and coded based on the main themes of the study, including objectives, functions, challenges, and strengths and weaknesses. This process enabled the identification of common patterns and fundamental differences within the security agreements. In addition to official documents, reports from regional and international research centers, academic articles, and relevant theses were also utilized. Moreover, to the extent possible, limited interviews with experts in the fields of security and international relations were conducted as supplementary sources.

In the quantitative section, the data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire designed according to the study's objectives. The questionnaire included questions related to the effectiveness of the security agreements, their challenges, and strategies, with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale. The data collected in this section allowed for a more objective analysis and complemented the qualitative findings.

The population and scope of this study were designed to provide a clear picture of Iraq's security dimensions and its relations with neighboring countries. In the quantitative part, the statistical population consisted of university professors, researchers, international relations experts, and security specialists who were directly or indirectly familiar with the subject of Iraq's security agreements. To determine the sample size, Morgan's table was used. Based on an estimated population of approximately 100 individuals, a sample size of around 80 participants was deemed appropriate. The sampling method was purposive (available sampling) to ensure that experts and relevant individuals were specifically selected, thus ensuring that the responses were closely aligned with the objectives of the study.

Accordingly, the population and scope of the study were delineated in such a way as to maintain both sufficient breadth to cover Iraq's security developments and adequate focus to enable precise analysis of regional security agreements.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative) to examine the various dimensions of Iraq's security

agreements with neighboring countries from multiple perspectives. In the qualitative section, qualitative content analysis was employed. All official documents, scientific articles, and related research reports were considered the main units of analysis. In the first step, extracted data were organized into data recording sheets that included information such as the type of agreement, the year of signing or implementation, the parties involved, the area of security cooperation, executive mechanisms, and potential obstacles.

Subsequently, the data were categorized through initial coding. The initial codes were defined based on key concepts such as “agreement objectives,” “functions,” “challenges,” “implementation mechanisms,” and “regional outcomes.” In the next stage, similar codes were merged, and main and subcategories were extracted. For example, within the “challenges” category, subcategories such as “political disputes,” “weak executive mechanisms,” “lack of intelligence cooperation,” and “intervention of external actors” were identified. In the “functions” category, aspects such as “strengthening border control,” “combating terrorism,” and “countering smuggling” were emphasized.

In the quantitative section, data were analyzed using the researcher-made questionnaire, which included questions concerning the effectiveness of the security agreements, challenges, and future strategies. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. The Concept of International and Regional Security Agreements

In general terms, *security agreements* refer to any form of legal instrument or institutional arrangement between states whose declared objective is to reduce threats, manage conflicts, build trust, and organize cooperation in areas such as border control, information exchange, counterterrorism, and combating organized crime (Aust, 2007; Kolb, 2016). From a legal perspective, this category includes treaties, conventions, agreements, and softer instruments such as memoranda of understanding, which may be binding or non-binding depending on the intent of the parties. A precise explanation of treaty law concepts shows that a *treaty* is a legally binding instrument under international law, while some *agreements* or *memoranda of understanding*

may, depending on intent and implementation practice, have a non-binding character; nevertheless, even non-binding instruments often play a real role in shaping security policies and guiding state behavior (Abu Hayf, 1992; Lian Khalil Hussein, 2015).

In classical international public law, the definition and legal effects of these instruments are understood within the principle of state consent and the rule of *pacta sunt servanda* (obligation to honor commitments). Therefore, differentiating among various types of agreements is essential for assessing their security implications (Abu Sa'd, 2015; Al-Atiyyah, 2015).

At the institutional level, *international security agreements* manifest primarily in two forms: broad, universal arrangements (such as arms control treaties or counterterrorism regimes) and *regional arrangements* recognized under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, which are entrusted with contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security (Alagappa, 1998; Rivlin, 1992). The legal logic of Chapter VIII is that the UN can draw upon the capacities of regional institutions for prevention, mediation, and even conditional enforcement actions. Accordingly, a *regional security agreement* is generally based on a defined geographic area and seeks to manage shared threats in that environment more closely, cost-effectively, and with higher socio-political legitimacy (Bailes & Cotti, 1992; Soderbaum & Hettne, 2016).

Practical experiences demonstrate that a well-designed division of labor between the United Nations and regional arrangements can enhance crisis management efficiency and lead to the development of more stable behavioral norms (Alagappa, 1998; Rivlin, 1992).

From the standpoint of regional security theory, a *regional security agreement* is part of a broader architecture where patterns of threat and cooperation are predominantly formed at the regional level. In other words, the intensity of *security interdependence* among neighboring states is greater than that with distant actors, which makes both the political economy of cooperation and the institutional design of agreements regionally oriented (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Morgan, 1997).

The *regional security complex theory* explains why states facing proximate threats turn to specific regional rules and arrangements, and how power distribution, friendship-enmity patterns, and socio-identity ties

shape the design and implementation mechanisms of these agreements (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Lake, 1997). Within this framework, a regional security agreement is not merely a legal document but the outcome of structural, institutional, and perceptual interactions in which *monitoring, verification, and confidence-building capabilities* are vital for sustaining cooperation (Bailes & Cotti, 1992; Prugner et al., 1996).

The conceptual distinction between *international* and *regional* security agreements is meaningful not only in geographical scope but also in functional and institutional dimensions. Global international agreements typically establish general standards—such as prohibitions on certain weapons or broad counterterrorism norms—and rely on universal oversight and reporting mechanisms. In contrast, regional agreements often focus on specific, proximate threats and require operational mechanisms, joint intelligence centers, and mission-based structures for effective implementation (Aust, 2007; Kolb, 2016).

Even when two agreements share similar titles, differences in operational settings, institutional capacity, and trust patterns can lead to markedly different outcomes. The literature on *overlapping regional institutions* highlights that coexistence of multiple organizations and agreements in the same region may create both synergies and frictions (Soderbaum & Hettne, 2016; Wiffen et al., 2013).

International law also teaches that the *form* of an agreement does not alone determine its full effects; the parties' intent, subsequent practice, and implementation or dispute resolution mechanisms, alongside the legal language of the text, shape its binding nature and enforceability (Aust, 2007; Kolb, 2016). Classical Arabic legal texts similarly emphasize that although the terminological distinctions between "treaty," "agreement," and "memorandum of understanding" are important in terms of formalities and legal solidity, their security functionality ultimately depends on institutional design and the political will of the parties during implementation (Abu Hayf, 1992; Abu Sa'd, 2015).

In regional studies, there are numerous examples of arrangements that, despite being legally non-binding, have produced practical results owing to geographical proximity, converging threat perceptions, and lower

coordination costs (Bailes & Cotti, 1992; Espehani, 1984).

Security policy literature emphasizes the *monitoring and verification capacity* of regional security agreements, as sustained cooperation is difficult without reducing uncertainty and creating tangible evidence of reciprocal compliance. Mechanisms such as joint data centers, on-site inspections, technical sensors, and reciprocal reporting help bridge trust gaps and restrain incentives for defection (Bailes & Cotti, 1992; Prugner et al., 1996). Moreover, the *networked nature* of security agreements—horizontal linkages among bilateral and multilateral pacts within an overlapping regional architecture—enhances the resilience of security orders, since the failure or suspension of one link does not necessarily collapse the entire system and alternative channels of coordination remain (Alagappa, 1998; Wiffen et al., 2013).

At the theoretical level, *realist perspectives* interpret regional security agreements as instruments for managing balance of power and deterring threats, focusing on power distribution and collective deterrence. In contrast, *liberal institutionalist* approaches emphasize cost reduction, information transparency, and repeated interactions to build cooperative habits (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Morgan, 1997).

Constructivist approaches contend that security and threat perceptions are, to some extent, socially constructed; thus, agreements endure only when aligned with regional norms and identities—otherwise, even robust legal texts remain unimplemented (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Soderbaum & Hettne, 2016).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that defining a *security agreement* must go beyond its legal text to encompass networks of actors, threat perceptions, and operational and monitoring capacities (Lake, 1997; Morgan, 1997).

Functionally, international and regional security agreements can be *normative, operational, or hybrid*. Normative agreements establish general standards and norms; operational agreements define specific missions and field arrangements to counter threats; hybrid forms attempt to bridge both by embedding mission mechanisms within normative texts (Aust, 2007; Kolb, 2016).

Empirical evidence from different regions shows that the stronger the link between norm-setting and operational capacity, the greater the likelihood of durability and effectiveness—particularly when monitoring and dispute-resolution mechanisms are efficiently designed (Bailes & Cotti, 1992; Prugner et al., 1996).

Ultimately, the concept of international and regional security agreements rests simultaneously on three pillars: (1) the *legal pillar*, derived from treaty law and the binding intent of the parties; (2) the *institutional pillar*, rooted in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter and regional organizational frameworks; and (3) the *structural-perceptual pillar*, which explains threat and cooperation patterns in regional security theories.

Understanding this triad clarifies why some agreements, regardless of title, are stable and effective, while others—despite strong legal form—remain fragile in practice. Therefore, evaluating any security agreement must encompass its text, institutional context, and regional perceptual environment (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Wiffen et al., 2013). This conceptual framework forms the foundation for analyzing Iraq's security agreements with its neighbors in subsequent chapters, allowing for a systematic examination of the relationship between legal formulation, institutional capacity, and the regional threat landscape (Abu Hayf, 1992; Lian Khalil Hussein, 2015).

3.2. Characteristics and Functions of Regional Security Agreements

Regional security agreements possess a set of attributes that distinguish them from other forms of international cooperation. The first characteristic is their *regional orientation*: they primarily address shared and immediate threats within a specific geographical area, which grants them greater legitimacy and effectiveness among regional states (Bailes & Cotti, 1992; Kakouich & Press-Barnathan, 2016). Unlike global treaties that typically focus on general and abstract principles, regional agreements address concrete problems such as terrorism, border control, drug trafficking, or the management of internal and cross-border conflicts (Alagappa, 1998).

Another defining feature is their *multidimensional functionality*. These agreements are not limited to military matters but encompass political, social, economic, and even identity dimensions. Research

indicates that regional security organizations must establish mechanisms for confidence-building, information exchange, dispute resolution, and even post-conflict reconstruction to function effectively (Abass, 2004; Kirschner & Domínguez, 2013).

This multidimensional nature enables regional security agreements to serve both as instruments of deterrence and as tools for fostering positive cooperation among states. Functionally, they play a key role in *strengthening collective security*, based on the premise that a threat against one member constitutes a threat to the entire group. Regional agreements replicate this logic on a smaller and more practical scale through commitments to joint defense or cooperation against transnational threats (Mohammad Turki Bani & et al., 2022; Mohsen Abdul Hamid, 1999).

Indeed, such agreements can create a sense of shared security destiny and prevent weaker states from becoming isolated in the face of threats (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Stewart-Ingersoll & Frazier, 2012). Another important role lies in *conflict management and mediation*. Many regional organizations have contributed to reducing conflict intensity through institutional mechanisms, political dialogue, and peacekeeping missions (Barnett, 1995; Dembinski & Schott, 2014).

These agreements also promote the *diffusion of norms* and behavioral rules among member states—particularly concerning respect for national sovereignty and the prohibition of the use of force (Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic, 2018; Hettne, 2001).

Structurally, one of their essential features is *institutional flexibility*. Unlike global institutions characterized by lengthy and complex decision-making processes, regional agreements tend to have simpler and more dynamic structures that can adapt swiftly to changing security environments—an especially vital advantage in volatile regions such as the Middle East (Andrew & Hawkins, 2013; Kakouich & Press-Barnathan, 2016).

Another key function is the *creation of operational cooperation networks*. Regional security agreements provide a foundation for establishing joint institutions, information-exchange centers, joint military exercises, and even shared border mechanisms (Keane, 2018; Narin, 1998). Such arrangements ultimately enhance

states' capabilities to confront transnational threats such as terrorism and organized crime.

Finally, regional security agreements perform a *confidence-building* function. Through mechanisms of transparency, monitoring, and verification, they reduce mistrust among states. Without such functions, implementation and long-term cooperation become difficult (Adler & Barnett, 1998; Bailes & Cotti, 1992).

In sum, regional security agreements are characterized by regional orientation, multidimensional scope, institutional flexibility, and functional roles such as deterrence, confidence-building, conflict resolution, norm promotion, and operational networking. These

features and functions affirm their status as indispensable instruments for managing regional security and mitigating shared threats (Hettne, 2001; Mohammad Turki Bani & et al., 2022).

4. Findings

Descriptive statistics are used to analyze the quantitative data. Indicators such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation are calculated to obtain a clear picture of respondents' views. The results are presented in tables and charts to facilitate better interpretation and comparison.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (persons)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	54	67.5
	Female	26	32.5
Age	Under 30	10	12.5
	30–40	34	42.5
	Over 40	36	45.0
Education	Bachelor's	20	25.0
	Master's	42	52.5
	PhD	18	22.5
Organizational Position	Expert	30	37.5
	Middle Manager	32	40.0
	Senior Manager	18	22.5

Out of 80 respondents, the majority are men (67.5%). Approximately 87.5% of participants are over 30 years of age, indicating considerable experience in security and executive domains. More than half of the respondents hold a master's degree, with the PhD share also notable

(22.5%). Regarding organizational position, there is a relatively balanced distribution between experts (37.5%) and managers (62.5% at middle and senior levels), which ensures diversity of analytical perspectives in the study's data.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Dimensions (N = 80)

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum
Institutional	3.38	0.84	4.80	1.90
Intelligence	3.51	0.77	4.90	2.10
Border	3.31	0.81	4.70	2.00
Political-Economic	3.37	0.79	4.80	2.00
Overall Security Agreements	3.39	0.80	4.85	1.90

Based on data collected from 80 respondents, the highest mean belongs to the intelligence dimension (3.51), indicating a relatively favorable assessment of Iraq's intelligence cooperation with neighbors. The institutional (3.38) and political-economic (3.37)

dimensions follow, while the border dimension (3.31) has the lowest mean, reflecting practical challenges in border control and management.

4.1. *Assessment of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Iraq's Security Agreements with Neighbors*

Iraq's security agreements with neighboring countries—despite shared objectives such as counterterrorism, border control, combating organized crime, and expanding intelligence cooperation—have, in practice, produced outcomes that diverge from initial expectations. An analytical review shows that their performance can be categorized across four dimensions: institutional, intelligence, border, and political-economic. This assessment indicates that, within each dimension, a set of structural and operational strengths and weaknesses co-determine agreement effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

4.1.1. *Institutional Dimension*

Strengths: One of the most important advantages of Iraq's security agreements with neighbors has been the creation of initial institutional frameworks for cooperation. After 2003, Iraq sought to move security cooperation from the level of political dialogue to a more institutional and stable level by forming joint security committees, coordinating bodies, and permanent contact centers. In some cases—such as Iraq-Iran joint committees for border management and coordination against terrorist groups—these structures have facilitated information exchange and decision-making (Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic, 2018). Moreover, multilateral agreements in the form of regional counterterrorism meetings or coalition-based cooperation have enabled Iraq to participate in regional security decision-making networks and avoid isolation (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; M. Faust, 2023).

Weaknesses: Nonetheless, fundamental weaknesses in Iraq's executive capacity and institutional stability have left many of these mechanisms on paper. Lack of cohesion in command structures, discord among military and security forces, and sometimes conflicting interests among state bodies (e.g., interior, defense, and national security) have prevented full implementation of joint decisions (Esmaeil, 2025). In addition, many agreements lack enforcement guarantees or performance monitoring and evaluation bodies. Consequently, even when an agreement is signed at the political level, follow-up at the institutional level stalls. Theoretically, this reflects weak

security institutionalization in Iraq that has not yet become durable (Aust, 2007; Kolb, 2016).

Overall, in the institutional dimension, Iraq has created formal cooperation platforms but has not converted them into sustained operational mechanisms; that is, institution-building has occurred, but institutionalization has not.

4.1.2. *Intelligence Dimension*

Strengths: In the sphere of intelligence exchange, Iraq's security agreements have led to a relative improvement in intelligence communications with neighbors. Following the emergence of ISIS, the urgent need for data sharing prompted Iraq and neighboring states (especially Iran and Turkey) to establish protocols for sharing information on terrorist groups, smuggling routes, and the movement of non-state armed actors. The creation of "joint intelligence exchange centers" among Baghdad, Damascus, Tehran, and Moscow during 2015–2016 is one example that accelerated field-level information flows and reduced operational errors (Matisek & Fowler, 2020). In institutionalist security literature, such arrangements are seen as an important step toward enhancing transparency and practical trust (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Weaknesses: However, intelligence cooperation remains selective and episodic. Many countries are reluctant to share sensitive data due to concerns over political misuse or leaks. Furthermore, the absence of integrated technical systems, disparities in intelligence technology, and weak data security standards have kept exchanges limited and low-level (Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic, 2018; M. Faust, 2023). In some instances, intelligence rivalries among neighbors—for example, Turkey's concerns about Iran's influence in Iraq's intelligence structures or Saudi sensitivities toward Baghdad's cooperation with Damascus and Tehran—hinder sustained collaboration. As a result, intelligence cooperation often remains at the level of "ad hoc exchanges" rather than becoming a stable network. In sum, the strengths of this dimension lie in "establishing communication mechanisms," while its weaknesses stem from "a lack of mutual trust and technical standards."

4.1.3. Border Dimension

Strengths: Border control and the management of cross-border movement have been central objectives of Iraq's security agreements. Iraq's bilateral accords with Iran, Turkey, and Jordan on border cooperation have increased operational coordination in some frontier areas. For example, joint border patrols with Iran in Diyala and Wasit, and the establishment of control stations along the Turkish frontier to counter the infiltration of Kurdish armed groups, are positive outcomes (Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic, 2018; M. Faust, 2023). Border agreements with Kuwait and Jordan have also improved the flow of goods and reduced border tensions. Theoretically, these measures exemplify "operational regional security," which rests on direct, in-the-field cooperation among forces (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Weaknesses: Despite this, Iraq's borders remain among the country's most vulnerable points. Long and difficult frontiers with Syria and Iran, the presence of transnational armed groups, and logistical weaknesses of border forces complicate effective implementation of agreements. In some areas, borders are effectively beyond the control of the central government, with non-state actors playing dominant roles (Esmail, 2025). Moreover, coordination between Iraqi border forces and neighbors tends to occur at the tactical level and lacks strategic planning. The absence of modern surveillance technologies—such as UAVs, ground sensors, and smart border-control systems—also hinders full implementation of commitments. Consequently, border agreements have tended to carry more political and symbolic weight than sustained operational utility.

4.1.4. Political–Economic Dimension

Strengths: Although Iraq's agreements with neighbors are ostensibly security-focused, they have had important political and economic effects in practice. Politically, they have served as tools of de-escalation and regional confidence-building. After years of war and occupation, these agreements enabled Iraq to reopen channels of engagement with neighbors and to project an image of a "rebuilding, engagement-oriented state" (J. Faust, 2023; Stewart-Ingersoll & Frazier, 2012). Economically, achieving relative stability at borders and countering smuggling and terrorism created conditions for expanded trade and investment. Notably, in Iraq–Iran and Iraq–Jordan agreements, security clauses appear alongside economic cooperation, reflecting the growing linkage between security and development (Keane, 2018; Nouri, 2022).

Weaknesses: This dimension also faces deep challenges. Geopolitical rivalries among neighbors (Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) sometimes turn security agreements into arenas for competing influence. In some cases, each country seeks to leverage security cooperation to entrench its political or economic sway in Iraq (M. Faust, 2023). As a result, agreements may be perceived as lacking neutrality and can trigger opposition from political groups inside Iraq. Economically, weak infrastructure and administrative corruption have prevented parts of the intended security–economic benefits from materializing. Hence, the synergy between security and the economy—a key objective of these agreements—has not yet been fully achieved (Mohammad Turki Bani & et al., 2022).

Table 3

Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses of Iraq's Security Agreements with Neighbors Across Four Main Dimensions

Security Agreement Dimension	Strengths	Weaknesses
Institutional	Formation of joint security committees and bodies; creation of a formal cooperation framework	Absence of monitoring bodies and enforcement; weak coordination among Iraq's domestic institutions
Intelligence	Establishment of data-exchange channels and joint intelligence centers; relative improvement in field communications	Selective and episodic cooperation; mutual distrust and weak technical infrastructure
Border	Joint patrols; operational coordination in some areas; relative reduction of border tensions	Extensive borders; penetration by non-state actors; weak surveillance technology and logistics
Political–Economic	Improved regional relations; linkage of security with development and cross-border trade	Rivalry for influence among neighbors; corruption and weak infrastructure; unrealized security–economy synergy

Analysis of the four main dimensions shows that Iraq's security agreements with neighboring countries have been established at a structural level but implemented incompletely at the operational level. In the institutional dimension, the core problem is institutionalization and continuity; in the intelligence dimension, trust and technology; in the border dimension, execution and geographic coverage; and in the political-economic dimension, conflicts of interest and weak synergy.

In other words, the strengths of these agreements can be found in creating cooperation frameworks, initial institution-building, and increased regional interaction, while their weaknesses can be summarized as instability, weak implementation, lack of trust, and geopolitical constraints.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that Iraq's security agreements with its neighbors—despite their initial objectives to strengthen security, enhance border coordination, improve intelligence cooperation, and reduce transnational threats—are, in practice, confronted with structural and operational deficiencies and incoherences. A comprehensive analysis of the four dimensions—institutional, intelligence, border, and political-economic—revealed that the core problem does not lie in the absence of instruments or a lack of political will to sign them, but rather in weak institutionalization and the failure to sustain these forms of cooperation. In other words, although Iraq has managed since 2003 to establish a network of formal agreements with its neighbors, this network still lacks the institutional solidity, performance evaluation, and executive capacity necessary to become an effective regional mechanism.

At the institutional level, the agreements have succeeded in creating formal templates and joint security committees and have played an intermediary role in strengthening linkages among defense and security bodies. However, in the absence of enforcement guarantees, with insufficient coordination among relevant ministries and institutions, and with excessive reliance on external support, these achievements have not yielded durable, self-sustaining results. This indicates that political institution-building in Iraq has not yet translated into “security institutionalization,” and, consequently, security agreements have been

affected by fundamental shortcomings in national security governance.

In the intelligence dimension, although the establishment of joint data-exchange centers and counterterrorism cooperation during 2014 to 2018 produced tangible results, the degree of mutual trust, the level of technical intelligence capabilities, and the political will to ensure data transparency are still insufficient to generate continuous intelligence cooperation. The quantitative data showed that the mean level of intelligence cooperation (3.51 out of 5) is higher than in other dimensions; nevertheless, fragile trust among actors and ongoing geopolitical rivalries remain the principal obstacles to transforming intelligence cooperation into a stable network. This finding is consistent with the classical institutionalist explanation that the durability of cooperation depends on the formation of “institutional trust and verification mechanisms.”

In the border dimension, Iraq's bilateral agreements with Iran and Turkey have to some extent led to field-level coordination and joint patrols, but logistical weaknesses, extensive borders, and limited central government control have impeded the achievement of stable security. The persistence of smuggling, the penetration of non-state groups, and the shortage of surveillance equipment indicate that border control has been consolidated symbolically rather than reaching operational effectiveness. The recorded mean (3.31) suggests that border control has remained a “secondary priority” and is influenced more by Iraq's internal security and political conditions than by the agreements themselves. In this context, the country has managed to establish better operational coordination with Iran along some eastern axes, whereas structural weaknesses remain evident along northern and western axes.

In the political-economic dimension, security agreements have simultaneously served as instruments of diplomacy and de-escalation and as arenas for competition over influence. Through these agreements, Iraq was able to project, to some degree, an image of an engaged and rebuilding state in the region, even as it became entangled in rivalries among regional powers over influence and the political exploitation of security cooperation. The study's data showed that weak infrastructure, administrative corruption, and conflicting political interests have posed serious

obstacles to realizing security–development synergy. In practice, rather than functioning solely as instruments of cooperation, the agreements have at times become theaters of strategic competition among Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. This situation has prevented a substantial portion of the agreements’ economic effects from materializing, leaving the linkage between security and development more declarative than concrete.

Overall, the study indicates that Iraq’s security agreements with its neighbors suffer less from design weaknesses than from deficiencies in implementation and evaluation. Weak oversight institutions, the absence of performance measurement systems, dependence on ad hoc decisions by political authorities, and a lack of continuity in executive will have meant that, although a cooperation framework exists, its operational content remains unstable. Theoretically, one can say these agreements adhere to the logic of institutionalism in form, but have not yet reached the stage of “functional institutionalism” in practice; that is, the agreement exists, but behavior consistent with it has not become steady.

Based on the combined qualitative and quantitative findings, it can be concluded that the future of Iraq’s regional security depends largely on the country’s ability to achieve durable institution-building, increase transparency, and strengthen trust with its neighbors. Without establishing self-monitoring institutions, reforming internal coordination processes, and expanding mechanisms of mutual confidence, security agreements will continue to cycle between signature and suspension. Therefore, the path of reform must begin with the reconfiguration of institutional structures—whereby Iraq can compensate for structural weaknesses by creating a permanent Regional Security Coordination Council, instituting an agreement-evaluation system, and allocating stable resources.

In conclusion, the reality of Iraq’s regional security reflects the political system’s difficulty in generating institutional cohesion and executive adherence. The existing security agreements possess the latent capacity to become levers of regional stability, but this potential will only be actualized by moving from the political to the institutional level and from episodic measures to strategic ones. To achieve this objective, Iraq must lay the groundwork for a comprehensive strategy of security governance in which trust, transparency, and

institutionalization serve as the principal pillars of implementation. Until these three components are balanced and institutionalized, Iraq’s security agreements—however numerous and diverse—will remain functionally fragile and unstable.

Authors’ Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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