

Saudi Arabia as a Regional Collaborator -2015) (2022

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Abstract

Based on its strategic, historical, and religious location, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia constitutes a model of a state whose regional environment constitutes a clear determinant of its foreign policy because it reveals broad areas of movement and mutual influence. The study aims to determine the Kingdom's role as a regional collaborator from 2015-2022. The importance of the study stems from the fact that the regional role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has become more effective after the launch of Vision 2030, which aims to bring about a comprehensive renaissance that enhances the effective influence of the Kingdom regionally and internationally. The study uses both the inductive approach, the descriptive analytical approach, and the case study approach to analyze the regional role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as a regional collaborator. The study concluded several results, the most important of which is that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is important in the regional environment religiously, politically, economically, and security as well. The study's results also showed that international and regional transformations affected the effectiveness of the Kingdom's regional role in its various dimensions. In addition, the outcome of the study provides scientific material for practitioners and concerned officials in government institutions related to the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is useful in setting policies, making appropriate decisions, and taking measures to deal with regional and international variables that concern the Kingdom. The study presented several recommendations, the most important of which is paying more attention to everything that would enhance the regional political role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, especially in the context of the Kingdom's Vision 2030.

Keywords: The Regional Role, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Terrorism, Isis, The International Coalition

Introduction

The course of a nation's international relations policy is greatly influenced by its regional environment, which includes its geographic, ethnic, and historical dimensions. One of the most notable examples of a country whose regional environment clearly determines its international relations policy is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as it has shaped history on both a regional and global scale and reveals extensive areas of movement and mutual influence. Due to its strategic, historical, and religious location, the Kingdom is qualified to play the role of the leading regional power in its geographical, regional, and even international surroundings. This is why it has worked to build peace, open relations, and a zero-problem relationship with its neighbors. However, the recent changes have also forced it to pay attention to what is going on, play a crucial regional role in preventing any form of security threat from reaching it, and play a major role in resolving regional and international conflicts and disputes (Al-Dosari, 2017).

The definition of hegemony in international relations is a topic of complex and continuous theoretical dispute, although analysts generally agree that for an actor to be truly dominating, two requirements must be met. Perhaps the most frequently used term in international politics is hegemony. These days, it's common to refer to conflicts over local issues or balance of power as wars for domination. This definitely applies to the discussion of the Middle East. However, a deeper comprehension of hegemony and the Middle East's reality would demonstrate that no regional power, not even a superpower like the United States, can construct a hegemonic system in the area. This includes Saudi Arabia. One structural aspect of Middle Eastern foreign politics is instability. Even while this instability varies in severity, it cannot be "resolved" by actual hegemonic authority over the area (Habash, 2021).

Since 2011, Saudi Arabia has become increasingly involved in the region. Its noteworthy actions include broad support for the Syrian rebels in addition to its participation in Bahrain and the anti-IS coalition. To fight terrorism, the kingdom declared in December 2015 that a powerful 37-member Islamic military alliance had been formed (Tuwaijri, 2015).

The interpretation of foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia, has frequently relied on conventional factors like the threat balance and new realistic balance of power techniques. The realist school's physical skills were inextricably linked to intellectual aspects of danger perception. The idea of holistic balance, which raises the system's security level, was then used to support these strategies (Aradi, 2021).

These theories, which view both internal and external security as major forces shaping foreign policy, are still the most widely accepted reasons for why Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and relations with other countries in the Persian Gulf have been more active in recent years. Since 2011, the region has seen a dramatic geopolitical reorganization that has altered the framework for regional security and created new avenues for regional actors to become more active (Ben Mihoub, 2020). Consequently, an alternative perspective or analysis of the Kingdom's actions beyond the conventional ones previously stated is required.

However, there are two main issues with Saudi Arabia's ability to rule the region. First, Saudi Arabia's balance ally against Iran, the United States, a traditional hegemon, is no longer able or willing to fulfill this role. The political will in the United States to participate is waning, notwithstanding the presence of military bases.

Barack Obama and Donald Trump, as presidents, have both promoted policies advocating for "Asianism," or isolationism, or moving away from the Middle East and Europe. Second, the ideological roadblocks that result in "imbalance" make it difficult to draw in regional allies for

the goal of balancing (such as the inability of many regional states that view Iran as a threat, such as Israel, Egypt, Turkey, or Sunni states in general).

Given the above, it is imperative that this topic be researched, examined, and the Saudi Arabian government's position in regional politics clarified in light of the swiftly evolving global landscape. The study's main issue was that, as the location of two holy mosques and the center of Islamic sanctities, Saudi Arabia's international relations will be impacted on many levels by the changes that took place in the world between 2015 and 2022. This is particularly true of the Kingdom's political role in these relations.

Given the developments occurring in the Middle East, the study's significance comes from emphasizing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's role as a regional partner. The role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a regional collaborator is the subject of this study in the field of international relations. The study's present time frame is from 2015 AD to 2022 AD since throughout this time there were regional and global developments that had an impact on the Kingdom's regional position and its relationships at all levels, both directly and indirectly. The capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, serves as the regional and global diplomatic missions' headquarters. It also encompasses the Kingdom's surrounding regions.

The goal of the study is to provide an answer to the following query: What elements have influenced Saudi Arabia's standing as a Middle Eastern regional partner?

Finding indicators that represent Saudi Arabia's function as a regional partner is the study's main goal.

Saudi Arabia's function as a regional collaborator

In international politics, the phrase "regional power" has been used since the late 20th century to describe a sovereign state that has significant control inside a certain geographic area. It is widely accepted that these states must possess more valuable resources than other states in the region in order to be able to provide a regional "power cover."

The United States' withdrawal from many parts of the world and the 'West's' weakening at the start of the twentieth century created fresh room for regional actors and was the fundamental factor connected with power changes. Although the end of the Cold War freed some regions from the two superpowers' overwhelming influence and gave regional powers more leeway, regional powers have lately emerged in various parts of the world (Nolte, 2011). Since they are expected to maintain stability and productive regional collaboration in a world that is becoming harder to control, for example, regional powers are seen as contributors to the regional and global order. While some regional powers, like Saudi Arabia or Turkey, are working to become regional powers, others, like Brazil or South Africa, appear to have lost importance in recent years. Demands on regional and global policy are conflicting for regional authorities.

Being at the crossroads of regional and global politics presents unique difficulties that frequently result in hesitant, ambiguous, and perhaps contradictory policy decisions (Chakraborty, 2018).

The significant domestic obstacles that both established and emerging regional powers must contend with include significant economic downturns, corruption, diminished state mobilization capabilities, rising populist sentiment, and even a turn toward authoritarianism. Their foreign policies are disrupted by these problems, which also provide significant difficulties for research and policymaking because of their unpredictable nature. Nonetheless, by emphasizing the regional aspect of international politics, "regional powers" remain a helpful analytical notion that helps explain some of these tendencies (Hazbun, 2018).

A deeper comprehension of regional dynamics and conflicts is required in light of the evolving global order. Given the occasionally low level of regional integration in this environment, regional powers do not always act in their regional surroundings. Their capacity and inclination to sway their neighbors may alter over time in response to shifts on the global stage.

Depending on the subject matter and point of view, regions' significance in world politics fluctuates (Flemes, 2016).

Expressions of Saudi Arabia's cooperation in the area

The Kingdom's involvement in the global alliance against the Islamic State (IS)

With a population greater than Sweden, the Islamic State, often known as ISIS, has managed to seize control of an area in Syria and Iraq that is larger than Great Britain. In order to confront this, a multinational coalition led by the United States and comprising over sixty countries was formed in order to drive the extremist group out of the cities under its control. While some nations have clamped down on the flow of foreign fighters and money to ISIS, others, including the United Kingdom, Australia, France, and a few other regional powers, have assisted in the launch of airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Others have given arms and training to fighters on the ground, provided refuge for refugees, or provided humanitarian aid (Abdulrahman and Omar, 2020).

Thousands of civilians were killed and entire cities were destroyed during the battle, which came at a high cost. More artillery shells were fired by the US during the fight for Raqqa, the de facto capital of the Islamic State, in Syria than at any other time since the Vietnam War. The Islamic State is still a menace to the world even though it no longer holds territory in Syria and Iraq. Many of its members have fled from custody and gone back to the group's original hit-and-run operations in the area, numbering in the hundreds or even thousands.

In the meantime, new ISIS affiliates are still planning, organizing, and carrying out assaults in West Africa, Afghanistan, Libya, Sri Lanka, and other countries (Abdulrahman and Omar, 2020).

Over 40,000 foreign fighters from 110 countries joined terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq between 2011 and 2017, among them the Islamic State. Western-backed forces have taken thousands of foreign soldiers and their families into massive detention centers after mostly defeating Islamic State on the battlefield. Numerous European nations decline to send their citizens back home.

since they frequently lack the evidence necessary to prosecute these combatants in European courts, despite their fear of the dangers they bring. Turkey has started forcibly repatriating scores of former fighters from areas it controls inside Syria to Europe, despite opposition from Europe. The other option is to deport foreign nationals from Iraq and Syria and try them in local tribunals, where several have received death sentences in wildly criticized unfair trials. Thousands of people, including women and children who were coerced into joining ISIL, languish in jails and displacement camps with no prospect of a court case (Abdulrahman and Omar, 2020).

The Arab nations taking part in the coalition led by the US against the Islamic State (IS) were Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Morocco. Airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria were conducted by the coalition.

The Kingdom's assistance to the Syrian opposition in its conflict with President Bashar al-Assad's regime

The Syrian crisis has become one of the most complex in the world over the last ten years, with a bewildering mix of regional and international forces, opposition groups, proxies, local militias, and extremist groups all playing comparatively distinct roles. The Syrian people have suffered greatly; there have been close to 500,000 fatalities, 12 million forced to escape their country in search of safety, and widespread destitution and starvation. Meanwhile, attempts to mediate a political agreement have failed, solidifying the Assad government's hold on power (Mazzetti, and Apuzzo, 2016).

The Riyadh government, along with authorities in Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, backed President Bashar al-Assad's regime throughout the initial months of protests and the uprising against it in Syria. Senior Syrian and Saudi officials met multiple times in April 2011, and the Saudis even sent Syria aid worth 275 million riyals. Furthermore, even after the US deemed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to be illegitimate, Saudi media stayed silent on Assad and his government.

Two factors contributed to Saudi Arabia's support: First, any developments that can cause instability in the region are feared by the Saudis. Despite all of its shortcomings, Riyadh also thinks that the fall of the Assad regime might lead to much worse and more catastrophic things. The Saudi administration had anticipated that Assad would implement changes, defuse tensions, and put an end to the uprisings against him. Second, Riyadh needed Damascus to act as a mediator with the Iranians in order to quickly end the crisis and prevent it from turning into an all-out conflict that would have hurt the kingdom and the Gulf states, given what was happening in Bahrain, where Shiite protests were growing and Saudi Arabia had to send troops to help manage the unrest in Manama (Mazzetti and Apuzzo, 2016).

Riyadh chose to quicken its actions in this regard as soon as it decided to openly criticize Assad. With Saudi support, the Arab League backed peace measures in November and December 2011 to bring order back to Syria. At first, Damascus was open to suggestions for putting an end to the bloodshed, including the evacuation of its security and military personnel from areas of population, the prompt release of all political detainees, talks between the opposition and the regime, and the sending of an observer from the Arab League to Syria. On January 22, 2012, Saudi Arabia returned its delegates from the observer mission after learning that Assad had broken the agreement twice and had not taken any steps to make things better. Six days later, the remaining monitors departed Syria.

Since at least 2013, Saudi Arabia has been a party to the Syrian war, giving financial and military support to rebel organizations opposing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In the spring and summer of 2011, the United States and its closest European allies increased the pressure on the Assad administration by implementing a number of sanctions and demanding that Assad resign. The Syrian opposition received thousands of tons of military hardware in 2012 from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey.

The Saudis didn't stop there; they also took additional, more useful actions. In an effort to incentivize Assad's men to defect, Riyadh agreed in May 2012 to give paychecks to FSA fighters. The needs of the rebels were discussed during a meeting between members of the Syrian opposition and Saudi intelligence agents in Europe and Turkey in April 2012. Riyadh ignored opposition-affiliated Syrian merchants in the Gulf who were gathering capital to purchase weapons and ammunition, which were subsequently smuggled into Syria by forces sympathetic to Saudi Arabia in Lebanon (Mansour, 2020).

The declaration of loyalty to Salman bin Abdulaziz as king and the demise of King Abdullah in January 2015, over ten years after he had held the throne, signaled a significant shift and the start of the third stage of Saudi policy toward the Syrian government. In order to coordinate positions and plan cooperative operations in the various Syrian combat zones, the kingdom pursued deeper ties with Turkey and Qatar under Salman and his son Mohammed, the new defense minister (Dahnoun, 2018).

According to Dahnoun (2018), the strategy of perseverance persisted on both fronts in the early months of 2016, when Adel al-Jubeir, the new foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, stated that the defeat of ISIS required the removal of Assad. Additionally, the Saudis have suggested that as part of the global coalition against ISIS, they send foot soldiers to Syria. But it's also evident that Riyadh intended to curtail Iranian influence in Syria and had its eyes set on Assad's army.

Saudi Arabia's humanitarian aid program demonstrates the country's aim to advance stability in the area. It has provided \$2.7 million a month through the Saudi Embassy in Lebanon and the International Islamic Relief Organization of Saudi Arabia to Syrian refugee initiatives in Jordan and Syria. The emergence of extreme Islam and its propagation via ISIS and other groups throughout Iraq and Syria is a further reason for Saudi Arabia's participation in the region. As the violence raged, the kingdom worried that Saudis who had sided with rebels in Syria would return home emboldened by their combat experience and radicalized Islamic beliefs, which they may use to overthrow the government. About a quarter of the 1,200 fighters who had participated in the battle against Assad's army had returned to Saudi Arabia, according to information provided to Saudi officials in late March 2014. It was a rerun of what transpired following the return of the mujahideen from the Afghanistan War and the departure of Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda and a Saudi national, who openly opposed the royal family. The Saudi government has implemented various measures to deter youth from joining the Syrian conflict.

Assad's Russian and Iranian allies have counter-escalated by strengthening their backing for his regime, despite Saudi Arabia's leadership of regional and international assistance. The commitment of anti-Assad powers waned as Syria turned into a chaotic and sectarian civil war accompanied by growing regional instability and Islamist extremism, and international focus shifted toward resolving the war's aftereffects (Blanga, 2017).

Islamic Military Coalition Against Terrorism

A 'military alliance' of thirty-four nations with a majority of Muslims was announced by Saudi Arabia in December 2015 as a means of counterterrorism. His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, announced that the coalition's primary goal is to coordinate the efforts of Islamic nations against terrorism, which sparked the coalition's formation.

At the March 2016 meeting in Riyadh, the Chiefs of Staff of the Islamic countries emphasized the need to step up efforts to combat terrorism by working together, taking into account each member state's capabilities and willingness to participate in coalition initiatives or programs within the framework of their respective national policies and procedures, all without compromising their sovereignty (Al-Ghaith and Abdulaziz, 2023). The Coalition's strategic vision is exemplified by its leadership in the global war on terror and its position as the front-runner in international initiatives to uphold peace and security. The Coalition's goal is to combat terrorism by partnering with friendly nations and international organizations and by efficiently and effectively coordinating member states' military, media, intellectual, and

counterterrorism efforts. This is all done within the framework of the Coalition's strategic vision. Within the same framework, the alliance's ideals encompass perseverance, solidarity, flexibility, and initiative (Al-Ghaith and Abdulaziz, 2023).

According to Al-Ghaith, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, 2023, the Saudi initiative is a reflection of the Kingdom's growing apprehensions about the Middle East's developments, beginning with the Arab Spring and continuing with the threats posed by ISIS in the north, Iran in the east, and Shiite rebels and al-Qaeda in Yemen in the south. The coalition led by Saudi Arabia to assist Yemen's legitimate government and the Arab League's plan to create a joint Arab force can both be considered as precursors to the proposed coalition in Riyadh.

Conclusion

During the current study period, which runs from 2015 to 2022, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has established itself as a regional collaborator by joining the Global Coalition to Fight Daesh, coordinated efforts to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime with the support of many other countries in the region, founding and leading the Arab Coalition to Support the Legitimate Government in Yemen, and efforts to bring about a democratic transition in Sudan through the Kingdom's membership in the Quartet and Troika countries. Norway, Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

The Russian-Ukrainian War was the primary catalyst for Saudi Arabia's emergence as a prominent regional partner, as the Kingdom's strategic resources—particularly its oil reserves—became increasingly valuable to the international community in the wake of the conflict's impact on the world energy market. The 2022 visit of Chinese leader Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden to Riyadh serves as further evidence of the strategic significance of Saudi Arabia's role in the region.

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