



## Saudi Arabia's Growing Role in Diplomacy

### *GRC Commentary & Analysis*

August 2023

Amnah Mosly\*



*Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Türkiye's President in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, July 2023*

Source: [Arab News](#)

In July 2023, the Gulf Research Center published its Annual Strategic Review, which explained that the GCC states are firmly establishing themselves as important political and economic power brokers at the international level. In recent years, Saudi Arabia, especially, has emerged as a key player in global diplomacy, gradually expanding its influence and assuming a more

prominent role on the international stage. Recent steps taken underline this development including the rapprochement with Iraq, Türkiye, and Iran, pushing for Syria to rejoin the Arab League, and negotiating with Yemen. Beyond its regional influence, Saudi Arabia has sought to expand relations with more diverse partners outside the traditional U.S. and European partnerships it has relied on in the past. This includes a wide effort such as deepened ties with China, as well as potential membership in the BRICS grouping. The recent visit of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio as well as the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the Kingdom illustrate the key aspects of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy.

One crucial component of Saudi Arabia's growing role in diplomacy lies in its economic power. As a leading oil exporter, the Kingdom has significant influence in terms of global economics. [According to](#) Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy, "Saudi is Japan's biggest oil exporter fulfilling 40 percent of its total needs" and "relations with Japan in the field of energy for more than 50 years are solid and continue to grow and diversify" as the Kingdom continues to "guarantee oil supply to Japan and maintain [its] position as the most reliable partner."

During the Crown Prince's meeting with Mr. Kishida, the Japanese Prime Minister reiterated Japan's "unwavering support" for the Kingdom and agreed to expand further cooperation in various fields such as political, diplomatic, security, healthcare, and next-generation fuel and mineral resources. The two leaders discussed ways to increase collaboration and strengthen ties under Saudi-Japan Vision 2030 (SJV 2030) signed in 2016 between the Crown Prince and then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The two sides also established regular strategic dialogue at the foreign ministerial level. The above contributes to the Kingdom's aim to provide overall security and economic stability regionally and internationally. By pursuing its economic diversification goals, the Kingdom continues to strengthen its diplomatic position by forging global economic alliances and partnerships.

It is important to note that Saudi Arabia's economic influence now extends beyond the mere export of oil, as it actively invests in sectors such as technology and infrastructure. The Japanese Prime Minister also participated in a Saudi-Japan roundtable with Minister Khalid al-Falih, the



Kingdom's Minister of Investment, where [discussions](#) were focused on collaboration in different sectors, particularly investment opportunities in clean energy, mining, healthcare, and digital technologies. The Saudi Minister [stated](#) that "Japan is the third largest trading partner of the Kingdom." As a result of the meeting, the two countries signed [26 cooperation and investment agreements](#) in different sectors such as health, entertainment, culture, traditional energy, green energy, chemicals, manufacturing, machinery, and equipment, as well as cooperation in the financial, technical, agricultural, environmental, and real estate sectors.

Saudi Arabia and Japan have also announced the "Manar" initiative, a new joint effort to promote clean energy. Under this initiative, the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC) in Saudi Arabia and the Institute of Energy Economics, Japan (IEEJ) signed an agreement to establish the Saudi-Japan Lighthouse Initiative for Clean Energy Cooperation. The visit thus marks a significant milestone in the evolving relationship between Saudi Arabia and Japan, paving the way for enhanced cooperation on shared goals.

Another notable meeting that took place was Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's to Saudi Arabia, which highlighted the importance of increasing bilateral cooperation on trade and investment, focusing on security and defense. The two countries released a joint statement, [stressing](#) the "importance of increasing the pace of cooperation in the commercial and investment sectors, and their keenness to support opportunities for economic integration in a number of targeted sectors" as well as activating the Saudi-Turkish Coordination Council which was established in 2016.

Leaders of the two countries also discussed increasing cooperation and coordination in the defense and military sectors. While the Turkish President signed several agreements with Saudi Arabia during his visit, the most significant one is the pivotal defense cooperation deal for the supply of drones. The agreement was made between Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Defense and Türkiye's defense firm Baykar. Haluk Bayraktar, the CEO of Baykar, [explained](#) that the agreement was the "largest defense and aviation export contract signed by a Turkish company to date." The Kingdom [emphasized](#) that the deal aims to "enhance the readiness of the Kingdom's



armed forces and bolster the country's defense and manufacturing capabilities" as Saudi Arabia aims to localize over 50% of its military industry by 2030.

The two visits underline that Saudi Arabia's growing role in international diplomacy is marked by economic influence, strategic partnerships, and proactive diplomatic initiatives. Continuing on this path, the Kingdom's evolving role in diplomacy will have a widening impact on the trajectory of international relations.

*\*Amnah Mosly is a Researcher at the Gulf Research Center*

