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## **Saudi Arabia's Diplomacy and the Changing World Order**

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## **Saudi Arabia's Diplomacy and the Changing World Order**

Amid a rapidly changing and unpredictable geopolitical landscape, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone a recalibration of its foreign policy, including adopting a bold 'multi-alignment' strategy. Overall, Saudi Arabia is reshaping its role on the regional and world stage in an attempt to navigate the complexities of great power rivalries while at the same time reducing its dependence on traditional global powers, including the United States. Riyadh's approach includes taking a lead in diplomatic initiatives, fortifying economic partnerships, and playing an active role in conflict mediation, all while using its influence to redefine the political and security dynamics of the broader Middle East. As the international order transforms, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy thus balances economic interests, security concerns, and regional leadership ambitions. This piece delves into the pivotal diplomatic, economic, and mediation strategies driving the Kingdom's evolving position in global affairs.

### **Formation of the Kingdom and 80 Years of U.S.-Saudi Relations**

The capture of Riyadh in 1902 was the first major step in King Abdulaziz's campaign to reclaim control over the Najd region. Through military prowess, tribal alliances, and religious legitimacy, he successfully unified much of the region, including the Najd, the Hejaz (home to the holiest Islamic cities, Mecca and Medina), and other key territories. This unification culminated in the official declaration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. While the early years of King Abdulaziz's rule were focused on internal consolidation and state-building, his foreign policy approach became crucial as global geopolitical dynamics evolved, particularly with the discovery of vast oil reserves in the country.

A defining moment in Saudi foreign policy occurred on February 14, 1945 in the historic encounter between King Abdulaziz and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt aboard the USS Quincy in the Suez Canal, which set the stage for a long-lasting strategic relationship between the two nations. In exchange for U.S. military protection and support for the Saudi monarchy, King Abdulaziz granted the United States access to Saudi oil reserves, recognizing the importance of energy security in shaping global power dynamics. This oil-for-security arrangement became a cornerstone of U.S.-Saudi relations, establishing Saudi Arabia not only as a crucial player in global energy markets but also positioning the Kingdom as a key ally in the broader strategy to contain Soviet expansion during the Cold War. With 2025 marking the 80th anniversary of the Roosevelt-King Abdulaziz summit, it is important to stress that the ties to Washington remain a cornerstone of Saudi foreign



policy with a direct influence on the political and economic landscape of the Middle East and beyond. At the same time, as the global scene has begun to experience shifts in its overall order, new factors have resulted in a re-examination of the pillars that define Saudi Arabia's outlook.

Saudi international relations have never been confined to ties with the United States, nor will they be in the future. Guided by the principle of diplomatic balance, the Kingdom has pursued a policy of rapprochement, fostering friendly relations and mutual benefits with three major international blocs that often serve as counterweights to U.S. policy—the European Union, China, and Russia. Saudi diplomacy has consistently worked to strengthen these relationships, ensuring ongoing dialogue and securing political, economic, and security interests with each of these key partners.

### **King Salman's Ascension to the Throne and Saudi Arabia's Diplomatic Strategies**

King Salman's ascension to the throne in January 2015 set in motion the shift that Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is currently undergoing with an emphasis on strategic diversification. Vision 2030, spearheaded by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, has emerged as the foundation of the Kingdom's long-term strategy to reduce oil dependence and enhance global economic engagement. The strategy involves increased investments in global infrastructure, stronger ties with emerging markets, keeping pace with the global energy transition, as well as fostering a more conducive environment for innovation and investment in workforce skills that complement its diversification agenda. Additionally, the Kingdom is leveraging its economic strength to enhance its geopolitical influence, using trade, investment, and energy diplomacy to shape regional and international dynamics in its favor.

It can therefore be argued that Saudi Arabia upholds a constructive and evolving view of the global order by broadening its international partnerships and spearheading an array of diplomatic and mediation initiatives. Particular emphasis is given to resolving long-running conflicts within and beyond the Middle East pushed forward by an acknowledgment that new approaches to such conflicts are urgently needed. Riyadh is thus actively engaging in global diplomacy by forming comprehensive strategic partnerships that extend beyond traditional oil cooperation to encompass energy, infrastructure, finance, and technology. This marks a departure from past alignments, showcasing a more pragmatic and adaptable stance in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy.



While maintaining its traditional alliance with countries like the United States, Saudi Arabia has taken steps to develop a greater understanding of regional and international issues by formulating pragmatic partnership with countries across the globe, including China and Russia and the wider region referred to as the Global South. Within the span of only a couple of days, the Kingdom saw the visits of the foreign ministers of Russia, India, and Brazil to Riyadh in September 2024, followed by the visit of Chinese Premier Li Qiang for the fourth meeting of the High-Level Saudi-Chinese Joint Committee on cooperation and coordination. Saudi-China relations are underpinned by energy trade but their partnership extends to infrastructure, technology, and investment, and some defence cooperation that is supported by initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Saudi Vision 2030. In addition, as major oil producers, Russia and Saudi Arabia collaborate to stabilize global oil markets within the OPEC+ framework. By balancing its relationships with the U.S., Russia, and China as much as possible, Saudi Arabia's strategy allows the Kingdom to protect its economic interests while enhancing regional stability.

### **Responding to Shifting Power Dynamics in the Middle East**

A key aspect of Saudi Arabia's approach is to calm regional tensions and provide pathways to resolve the long-running conflicts that have fueled the volatility in the Middle East over the past decades. At the forefront stands a rapprochement with its neighbor, Iran, which culminated in the agreement to re-establish diplomatic ties brokered by China in March 2023. Since then, institutional ties between the two sides have strengthened, enabling regular exchanges between their respective leaderships. However, full economic cooperation remains limited due to sanctions on Iran.

Saudi Arabia's regional de-escalation efforts have been shaped by a pragmatic approach that balances diplomacy with security concerns. The Kingdom has sought to stabilize Yemen by engaging in dialogue with the Iran-backed Houthi group while maintaining its broader regional strategy of mitigating threats to its security and economic interests. These direct talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi group, along with discussions between the Kingdom and Yemen's legitimate government also led to ceasefire negotiations in Riyadh in September 2023. This marked a step in Saudi Arabia's efforts to achieve a lasting political resolution to the conflict.

However, the escalation of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, particularly in the wake of the events of October 7, 2023 and Iran's stance on the Gaza War, has reinforced





Saudi concerns over Iran's regional ambitions and its ability to influence proxy groups. Despite these challenges, Saudi Arabia remains committed to diplomatic engagement and conflict resolution, working closely with international partners to push for a comprehensive peace framework that ensures stability in Yemen and safeguards regional security.

In Sudan, Saudi Arabia has been mediating between the opposing parties since the civil conflict started in April 2023, conducting several rounds of talks in an effort to bring about reconciliation. In July 2024, Sudan's Transitional Sovereignty Council and Saudi Arabia held discussions aimed at ending Sudan's ongoing civil war through renewed efforts to revive the peace talks.

Saudi diplomatic efforts have been evident across other multiple critical issues concerning the security, stability, and unity of the Arab region. This includes Saudi Arabia's investment in Egypt's security and stability, providing political and economic support to safeguard Egyptian society and prevent internal divisions and conflicts. Saudi Arabia has embraced Syria throughout its internal crisis, offering support both before and after political transitions. It has prioritized preventing chaos, limiting foreign interference, ensuring the country's security and stability, and assisting in its reconstruction efforts.

In Iraq, Saudi Arabia has worked to reinforce and restore Arab national identity after years of sectarian divisions, foreign influence, and the erosion of state sovereignty. Similarly, Saudi diplomacy has been actively engaged in efforts to restore stability in Lebanon, reinstating legitimacy and state authority, preserving its sovereignty, strengthening its national armed forces, and supporting the selection of national leaders capable of steering the country away from foreign interventions that have undermined its security, prosperity, and stability. Furthermore, Saudi diplomacy has played a pivotal role in maintaining Gulf unity, ensuring the cohesion of the GCC, and reinforcing a unified Gulf stance in addressing regional challenges while promoting collective Gulf interests.

The Palestine issue is the top priority and the Kingdom views implementing the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) rulings in the Gaza crisis as critical to adhering to international law and upholding the international rules-based order. This approach emphasizes ending the occupation and advancing the two-state solution as the cornerstone for achieving lasting peace. The Palestinian cause also remains intrinsically tied to broader regional and global priorities, underscoring the necessity of resolving the conflict. There is a firm belief that the Palestinian issue must be addressed within the framework of proactive, multilateral diplomacy as without a



permanent, viable resolution it will continue to threaten the stability of the region and prevent a stable order from being established. In response to the proposal by U.S. President Trump to take over the Gaza strip and resettle its 2 million Palestinian inhabitants, Riyadh stated that its support for a Palestinian state was “firm and unwavering,” calling this position “non-negotiable.” The Kingdom remains committed to an independent Palestinian state based on the June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

All of the above developments have presented Saudi Arabia with both challenges and opportunities to navigate a complex security landscape while preserving its strategic autonomy and reinforcing its regional leadership. Overall, U.S. support for Israel has strained relations with Arab and Muslim-majority countries, complicating diplomacy in the region. Yet, Saudi Arabia, in its role as Chair of the Arab-Islamic Ministerial Committee on Gaza - which includes Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Palestine, Qatar, Turkiye, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and with the support of European Union and Norway - spearheaded the launch of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2024. The alliance—comprising key regional and international actors, represents a renewed commitment to resolving the Palestinian issue. By addressing the root causes of the conflict and ensuring adherence to international law, the alliance aims to establish a pathway toward lasting peace and stability in the Middle East by working towards an action plan for the creation of an independent Palestinian state and calling on other countries to join the international consensus already reached by 149 countries that recognize Palestine.

### **Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Policy Principles in an Age of Global Shifts**

Due to both the continued volatility at the regional level and the shifts occurring globally, Saudi Arabia sees the commitment to mediation, conflict resolution, and multi-alignment as critical for the way forward. Saudi Arabia has prioritized de-escalation and the promotion of regional stability. This proactive approach aims to prevent conflict, reduce tensions, and foster cooperation among neighboring states. Saudi Arabia believes that sustained peace can only be achieved through dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect for the sovereignty of all nations. By focusing on de-escalation and avoiding confrontation, Riyadh is reinforcing its reputation as a stabilizing force in the Middle East, playing a pivotal role in shaping regional security frameworks that are inclusive and cooperative rather than divisive or exclusionary.



This philosophy extends beyond the Middle East, positioning Saudi Arabia as a leader in global diplomacy. The Kingdom's emphasis on stability, peace, and sovereign independence has helped it foster relationships with major global powers, creating a network of partnerships that support its broader vision of a peaceful and secure world. This includes Riyadh's readiness to host peace talks and serve as a platform for engagement among opposing parties.

The Kingdom's policy of balanced neutrality, grounded in respect for all parties' interests and adherence to international law, has enabled Saudi Arabia to engage with both Moscow and Kyiv in the Russia-Ukraine war while maintaining strong ties with its Western allies. Maintaining energy cooperation with Russia through OPEC+, Saudi Arabia has also reassured Ukraine and its Western partners of its commitment to global stability. At the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Saudi Arabia has consistently supported resolutions that call for an end to hostilities, upholding state sovereignty, and rejecting Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territories. Beyond diplomacy, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) partners have provided extensive humanitarian aid and financial assistance, as well as support for prisoner exchanges to Ukraine and the return of children displaced by the ongoing conflict. The Kingdom's approach has subsequently allowed it to facilitate high-stakes negotiations without direct involvement in disputes, as evidenced by the hosting of U.S.-Russia talks on February 18, 2025, led by the Saudi Foreign Minister and National Security Advisor. The meeting resulted in the creation of specialized committees to structure future negotiations on the Ukraine conflict.

At the core of Saudi foreign policy lies a commitment to non-aggression, non-interference, and respect for state sovereignty. These values form the foundation of Riyadh's approach to regional and global issues, ensuring that its diplomatic efforts always align with its long-term interests and regional stability. The Kingdom has consistently adhered to the principle that states should have the autonomy to determine their internal affairs without foreign interference, a stance that underpins its interactions with both regional and global partners.

Saudi Arabia remains resolute that its role as a mediator should not be used as leverage to extract concessions on security matters. The Kingdom rejects any attempt to exploit mediation efforts to pressure it into policies that could jeopardize its national security or broader strategic objectives. Whether concerning conflicts in the Middle East or broader geopolitical tensions, Saudi Arabia insists that its neutrality and commitment to peacebuilding should not be construed as a vulnerability or opportunity for coercion. The Kingdom has made it clear that it will



not accept unilateral pressure that could undermine its sovereignty or the integrity of its security decisions.

In conclusion, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has evolved from a reliance on economic diplomacy to a dynamic strategy of multi-alignment and diversification. This transformation has reinforced its leadership in the Gulf, Arab, and Islamic spheres, solidifying its role as a key regional and international player. By strengthening ties with both long-standing allies and emerging powers while actively promoting conflict resolution, Saudi Arabia is shaping its future and asserting its influence in an increasingly complex world. Its strategic flexibility and ability to adapt to evolving regional and global dynamics ensure its continued leadership in maintaining regional stability and advancing international cooperation.

*Arabic and English version of this article has been co-published with 'Majalla' and can be accessed [here](#)*





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