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“VISION 2030”: ACCESS TO MANEUVERS IN THE UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN CONFLICT

Submission Date: December 01, 2024, Accepted Date: December 06, 2024,

Published Date: December 11, 2024

Crossref doi: <https://doi.org/10.37547/ijhps/Volume04Issue12-05>

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ABSTRACT

The article provides an interpretation of the domestic and foreign policy activities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia within the framework of the national program “Vision 2030” It presents information on measures taken in the country in various areas in response to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, as well as efforts to improve national economic sectors, increase the potential of the chemical industry, and strengthen the country’s defense capabilities. Additionally, based on an analysis of emerging processes, the article offers insights into the justification for collective initiatives of Central Asian countries and the pragmatic actions of the Republic of Uzbekistan in ensuring national and overall regional security.

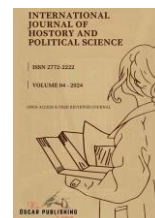
KEYWORDS

National program, policy, visa-free regime, potential, defense complex, Vision-2030, the G20, mediator, humanitarian contribution, non-oil sector, strategic partnership, proactive diplomacy, armed conflict and sanction.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s era of intensifying globalization, relations between nations are more closely intertwined than ever before. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is not only a major political actor in the Middle East but also a leading state in resolving international issues and conflicts. Historically, the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has implemented a number of projects aimed at developing the country and enhancing

regional security. In light of ongoing global events, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is implementing active measures to enhance the country’s potential in various areas through the national program “Vision 2030”. Among other spheres, special attention is given to regulating migration processes, developing the chemical industry, and improving the defense complex.



MAIN PART

Vision 2030 is prominently associated with King Salman's son Mohammed bin Salman – or “MBS” – newly promoted to crown prince as of June 2017. The strategy has helped to brand MBS as a figure of considerable influence both within Saudi Arabia and internationally.[1] But if it is seen as unsuccessful, existing criticisms of his individual leadership style are likely to deepen among those who resent his rapid rise. Personality politics within the royal family could thus end up being a distraction from the fundamental need to implement economic diversification.

One way to understand many of Saudi Arabia's recent policy innovations is through the lens of Saudi Vision 2030, the crown prince's flagship development initiative launched in 2016. MBS announced his new strategy soon after his father came to power in 2015 and named him deputy crown prince, head of the newly created Council of Development and Economic Affairs and minister of defense . Today, MBS is both crown prince and prime minister. His success as a leader – at least during the present period – is being judged in large part by his ability to see Saudi Vision 2030 to fruition.

The central goal of Saudi Vision 2030 is to better position Saudi Arabia to weather the global transition to clean energy through economic diversification. The realization that the country must reduce its dependence on hydrocarbon sales is not new – oil makes up 74 per cent of all exports – but the urgency has grown acute after the global economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, when oil prices fell to record lows. [2] The diversification mindset has persisted even following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which pushed global energy prices to new highs, leading to record profits in 2022 for Saudi Aramco, the state oil company.

Riyadh is therefore significantly expanding its non-oil economic activity. It plans to do so by, for example, bolstering religious and non-religious tourism. It hopes to attract foreign residents and capital through mega-projects like Neom Line, a linear city no more than 200m across that will stretch for 170km along the Red Sea coast, run on renewable energy and accommodate nine million people.[3] Vision 2030 will also draw on Saudi Arabia's \$700 billion sovereign wealth fund to make unprecedented investments in developing non-oil sectors, such as renewable energy, sports and entertainment, and artificial intelligence.

When it comes to political rights, however, the situation remains grim. MBS has maintained an absolute monarchy, ruling with an iron fist and leaving no space for dissenting political views. Saudi Arabian citizens face arrest for social media posts that mildly criticize government policies. In a prominent recent case, Saudi authorities sentenced to death a retired teacher (and the brother of a dissident living in exile in the UK), Mohamed Elghamdi, for calling out corruption to his dozen or so followers.[4] This punishment is the most severe they have handed down for social media activity. Other citizens who have used such platforms to voice disapproval of government policies have received long prison terms, ranging between twenty and 45 years.

These changes in the regional environment of the Kingdom coincided with the adoption of the Kingdom's ambitious Vision 2030, which aims to make the Kingdom “a successful and leading model in the world at all levels”, as stated in King Salman's presentation of the vision, and to be at the “forefront of the countries of the world”, as expressed by the Crown Prince in his presentation of the vision.[5]

International strategic partnerships are one of the most prominent pillars of the Kingdom's Vision 2030,



which requires an active Saudi foreign policy and open to all potential partners away from alignment and axes, and this explains the Kingdom's keenness to upgrade its relationship with China, Russia, India, and several other countries to the level of partnership, while maintaining its traditional relationship with the West without allowing it to be an obstacle to these partnerships.

In addition to these two main factors: (1) changes in the regional environment, (2) a new leadership that harbors different perceptions, other factors have also contributed to activating Saudi foreign policy to play regional and international roles, which raised expectations of it as an important player to address many regional and international issues:

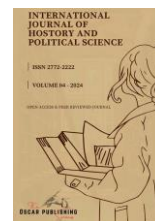
Firstly, the Ukraine conflict and the unprecedented sanctions imposed by the West on Russia and their impact on the restoration of oil after failed Western efforts to bypass it using the pretext of climate change. Western countries have tried to convince the Kingdom to participate in the sanctions on Russia and abandon its coordination with Moscow through OPEC+, to deprive Russia of its most important sources of income, but they were surprised by the Kingdom's refusal to get involved in the game of energy policy, despite its condemnation of the use of force to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.[6] The Kingdom's refusal to participate in the sanctions reflects two things: (1) the Kingdom's keenness to partner with Russia and (2) the Kingdom's interest and the success of Vision 2030 requires coordination with Russia and the rest of the oil-producing countries, and production and price policies cannot be subjected to narrow Western political calculations.

Secondly, Repeated statements by successive US administrations that the Middle East has lost its importance, and that it has regressed in US priorities,

which have shifted eastward to focus on confronting China as a rising great power. This trend has strengthened the conviction of the Kingdom and the rest of the region of the need to diversify partners, as the interests of the region and its countries require not relying on the historical Western partnership at a time when Western countries are going through transformations in their international orientations and internal conditions that weaken confidence in them as reliable partners.

Thirdly, The weakness caused by the events of the Arab Spring to many Arab countries such as Iraq and Syria and the retreat of regional powers such as Egypt, has increased the responsibility of countries with capabilities and prestige such as the Kingdom to bear the burden of restoring stability in the region, preventing further deterioration and maintaining Arab cohesion in the face of fierce regional interventions, especially from Iran, and confronting extremist militias and terrorist organizations.[7] It is evident from this that KSA is currently advancing a series of initiatives aimed at mitigating and ending the Russia-Ukraine war, based on the framework of the Vision 2030 project.

A political settlement, while undoubtedly complicated and requiring difficult compromises from all parties involved, is the only responsible path forward not only for Russia and the West but for the entire world. Putin's threat serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of peace in the 21st century and the urgent need for dialogue and cooperation on the global stage.[8] The prospect of a Donald Trump comeback seems to motivate President Joe Biden and the G7, as seen in their last meeting to ensure sustained support for Ukraine. Unfortunately, many consider this statement to supply Ukraine with weapons as a sign that the conflict's end is not coming soon.



It is important to acknowledge the significant diplomatic efforts by actors like Saudi Arabia to mediate and de-escalate the conflict in Ukraine. Saudi Arabia is emerging as a potentially acceptable mediator for both Ukraine and Russia in the ongoing conflict. During his visit to the Kingdom on June 12, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that he had held “productive” talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.[9] These discussions focused on the Peace Summit in Switzerland (held June 15-16, 2024) and on strengthening bilateral ties.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s proactive diplomacy stems from a deep understanding of global security’s interconnected nature and the recognition that prolonged fighting inflicts devastating human costs while exacerbating existing tensions and fueling instability far beyond the original conflict zone.[10] Based on these efforts, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a strong candidate to resolve the conflict in Ukraine and is increasingly becoming an important player in the new world order.[11] As an influential middle power in the evolving international landscape, Saudi Arabia’s role would positively affect not only Europe but also extend to the Middle East and beyond.

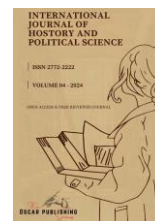
Maintaining and strengthening regional stability has been a consistent trend in Saudi foreign policy over the decades, based on a firm belief in the impact of the stability of the region on the internal stability of all its countries. The Kingdom has confronted all extremist trends that may threaten security and peace in the region and has made continuous efforts to contain differences and resolve disputes between the countries of the region and prevent their development into armed conflicts.[12] As a result of the Kingdom’s keenness on the policy of calm and containing crises, it has always been classified as a “Status quo state”.

With the adoption of Vision 2030, the Kingdom’s conviction of the importance of restoring regional stability has increased; because achieving this vision requires a stable regional environment that attracts investments and international companies, which is necessary for the success of multiple development projects.

During the last eight years, Saudi foreign policy has adopted a broad concept of security that is not limited to just restoring stability and containing crises but goes beyond it to achieve development and prosperity for all peoples of the region because of the organic relationship between security and development, as the state of turmoil suffered by many countries in the region is due to the failure of development, widespread poverty, the state of despair and hopelessness.

This new Saudi vision for security in the region is reflected in the crown prince’s famous 2018 statement that “the Middle East will be the new Europe” and his conviction that this goal is achievable and that he does not want to “die before he sees the Middle East globally advanced.”[15] This vision is not just a passing talk but has turned into initiatives, the foremost of which is the Middle East Green Initiative, funding its programs, establishing centres, and forming a permanent secretariat to coordinate efforts to achieve this goal.

Today, the Saudis believe that there is a need to adopt a comprehensive vision of regional security that is not limited to mere balances of power, the expansion of influence, and increased military capability, but aims to create an enabling environment for development and prosperity and aims to create a decent life for all peoples of the region.[14]



The first step towards this goal is to move from the narrative of conflict and confrontations to the narrative of construction and development, creating new perceptions and concepts about the real challenges facing the region that will hopefully help decision makers get rid of the inevitability of the zero-sum game and replace it with a belief in collective gain.[15]

Today, armed militias represent one of the dangerous challenges that the region faces that requires collective efforts to dismantle them and restore state control and monopoly over the means of violence. These armed militias deplete capabilities and threaten the cohesion and survival of states, and countries in the region will not be able to invest their resources, grow, maintain civil peace, and move effectively in the international arena without their total elimination. This is the first step towards building stable and prosperous societies and advancing toward a new Middle East.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of available materials, it is considered advisable to conclude that the internal and foreign policy maneuvers of the KSA are aimed primarily at strengthening geopolitical positions on a regional and international scale, for which the Vision-2030 creates favorable access.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has played a notable role in international efforts to address the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, reflecting its strategic interests and diplomatic ambitions on the global stage. As a key player in the Middle East and a member of the G20, Saudi Arabia has sought to position itself as a mediator and facilitator of dialogue, emphasizing its commitment to peace and stability.

Saudi Arabia's approach has been characterized by several key initiatives. Firstly, the kingdom has engaged in diplomatic outreach, hosting discussions and summits aimed at bringing together various stakeholders. By facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties, KSA aims to create an environment conducive to negotiations and conflict resolution. This reflects a broader strategy to enhance its diplomatic clout and showcase its ability to mediate complex international issues.

Secondly, KSA has demonstrated a commitment to humanitarian assistance in response to the crisis. The kingdom has provided financial aid and support to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the war, particularly in Ukraine. This humanitarian approach not only addresses immediate needs but also reinforces Saudi Arabia's image as a responsible global actor committed to humanitarian values.

Moreover, KSA's efforts can be seen within the context of its broader foreign policy objectives. By engaging in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Saudi Arabia seeks to balance its relationships with both Western nations and Russia. This balancing act is crucial for maintaining its strategic interests, particularly in energy markets and regional security dynamics.

Saudi Arabia's involvement in efforts to stop the Russia-Ukraine war highlights its aspirations for greater influence in global affairs and its commitment to peace and humanitarian principles. While the path forward remains fraught with obstacles, KSA's diplomatic initiatives and humanitarian contributions represent significant steps toward fostering dialogue and addressing the consequences of the conflict. As the situation evolves, KSA's continued engagement will be crucial in shaping the trajectory of international responses to the war and reinforcing its role as a key player on the world stage.

Traditionally Saudi Arabia, like most other Gulf petromonarchies, initially maintained neutrality at the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Riyadh refused to join western sanctions against Russia and was even accused of being pro-Russian. However, after more than a year of war, it appears that the Saudi kingdom has managed to strike a delicate balance in its relations between the United States and Russia.[16] At the same time, it has maintained a cordial relationship with Ukraine, to whom it provided a financial aid package of 400 million US dollars on February 26th.

Such a development of processes fully coordinates the foreign policy activities of international law functionaries from Central Asia, including the Republic of Uzbekistan, justifies, if necessary, any of their initiatives in the field of ensuring national and regional security.

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