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Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Under MBS: Transition from Defensive Realism to Offensive Realism (2016-2023)

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Abstract

This study seeks to elucidate the underlying factors driving Saudi Arabia's shift from defense realism to offensive realism, focusing on MBS's authoritarian rule and structural reforms aimed at minimizing bureaucratic hurdles in security and defense decision-making. The research examines the kingdom's transition from conservative foreign policies to a more activist stance, illustrated by its support for Palestine and its adoption of non-conventional approaches to address emerging challenges. Adopting the John Scott document analysis model and utilizing secondary data, this study delves into the nuances of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy shift under MBS's leadership. It examines how his leadership style, combined with Vision 2030 goals and objectives, reflects a post-ideologically motivated transition that seeks to assert power and influence in the Middle East. The research explores the potential implications of this shift on regional security, including the Yemen civil war, balance of power realignment, and Saudi Arabia's relationships with Western partners.

Keywords: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, The Defense-to-Offense Overhaul, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Saudi Regional Geopolitics Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This study seeks to elucidate the underlying factors driving Saudi Arabia's shift from defense realism to offensive realism, focusing on MBS's authoritarian rule and structural reforms aimed at minimizing bureaucratic hurdles in security and defense decision-making. The research examines the kingdom's transition from conservative foreign policies to a more activist stance, illustrated by its support for Palestine and its adoption of non-conventional approaches to address emerging challenges. Adopting the John Scott document analysis model and utilizing secondary data, this study delves into the nuances of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy shift under MBS's leadership. It examines how his leadership style, combined with Vision 2030 goals and objectives, reflects a post-ideologically motivated transition that seeks to assert power and influence in the Middle East. The research explores the potential implications of this shift on regional security, including the Yemen civil war, balance of power realignment, and Saudi Arabia's relationships with Western partners.

Keywords: [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman](#), [The Defense-to-Offense Overhaul](#), [Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030](#), [Saudi Regional Geopolitics](#) [Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy](#)

Introduction

The MBS Vision 2030 has influenced a shift in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy from a defensive to an offensive approach, reflecting the kingdom's evolving stance on regional matters as well as the domestic level (Fraught, [2022](#)). As a leading

Muslim nation, Saudi Arabia has played a crucial role in advocating for Palestinian rights and supporting the Palestinian cause diplomatically and financially since its beginning such as in the era of King Faisal 1964-1975 and after that, OIC was also made for this matter but with the passage of



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times per the (Gause III, [2018](#)). The evolving stance on the Palestine issue under Vision 2030 showcases Saudi Arabia's fence sitter role in the matter of Palestine under the vision of 2030 but also its commitment to regional stability and its efforts to address complex geopolitical challenges in the Gulf (Hubbard, [2020](#)). Vision 2030, led by (MBS), outlines a comprehensive plan for Saudi Arabia's transformation across economic, political, and social spheres. Economically, the vision seeks to diversify the nation's economy away from oil dependency, with initiatives like tourism promotion pivotal in showcasing Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage and natural beauty to international visitors. From a political perspective, decentralization and reduction of opacity are to strengthen the private sector, and, thus, to encourage foreign investments. On social there are improvements in women's rights for them and in opportunities for them, as well as easing restrictions on non-Muslims entering Madinah and hosting cultural events. Some of the main programs under Vision 2030 are developing Al-Ula as a cultural tourism hub, and NEOM as a modern city that will be an icon of modern technology, environmental preservation, and economic diversification. Through transforming the country to generate new revenues and employment through knowledge economy and skill development especially through education and vocational training among the Saudi youths, vision 2030 seeks to transform Saudi Arabia's image as a dynamic and progressive nation well-fitted in global markets for innovative and progressive enterprise and inclusive growth. It also seeks to establish other streams of income that will help it to gradually decrease its boot that it receives from oil and in the same process, rebound the economy by diversifying the sectors in which it invests. Vision 2030 enshrines one of the main goals to also create jobs for Saudi nationals, especially through a skill-based approach. MBS invests a lot of money in education and training perspectives that will enable the young Saudis to face the modern-day job market. Efforts such as the National Transformation Program (NTP) include developing the skills of Saudi nationals with the view of preparing them for employment in technological, healthcare, tourism, or hospitality industries. MBS Vision 2030 pledged to facilitate

the role of the private sector will promote job creation because doing business is easy and promoting entrepreneurship. Expanding the Saudi economy's diversification and promoting new sectors apart from oil helps the country develop a more favorable and dynamic employment system and gives Saudi nationals the chance to work and create value in accordance (Raid, [2024](#)).

Historical Background

MBS's foreign policy has been characterized by economic pragmatism, leveraging Saudi Arabia's economic resources to enhance its influence and implement Vision 2030 goals. This includes significant investments in infrastructure, technology, and entertainment, aimed at opening up the Saudi economy and reducing its reliance on oil. Overall, the foreign policy before 2017 was more conservative and stability-focused, relying on diplomacy and economic leverage without direct confrontation. In contrast, the post-2017 era under MBS is marked by a proactive, ambitious, and sometimes aggressive approach, seeking to assert Saudi Arabia's regional dominance, diversify its economy, adapt to a changing global geopolitical landscape, and start a new era of policy's and shift from defensive approach to offensive approach, toward the regional geopolitics and also long-standing dispute of Palestine a complex and longstanding conflict, stems from competing claims to the land dating back to the early 20th century. In 1928, tensions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine began escalating due to the Jewish movement's goal of creating a separate homeland. Western powers, notably Britain, expressed support for this endeavor through the Balfour Declaration of 1917, further exacerbating tensions. Arab Palestinians, viewing the land as their ancestral home, opposed the Zionist presence, fearing loss of land and identity. This conflict led to protests and uprisings against Jewish settlers (Kenyon, [2023](#)). In 1947, the United Nations proposed a partition plan dividing Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem under international administration. Jewish leaders agreed to the plan, but Arab nations and Palestinian leaders did not, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. This war led to the creation of Israel and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. History, various global

and regional actors have played significant roles in shaping the Palestine issue. Western powers, particularly Britain, supported the Zionist movement's aspirations, while Arab nations opposed Israel's establishment and supported Palestinian aspirations. The United Nations has been involved in proposing peace plans and resolutions, but implementation has been challenging due to geopolitical tensions. Saudi Arabia, as a leading Muslim nation, has traditionally backed the Palestinian cause and supported a two-state solution with East Jerusalem as Palestine's capital. The Kingdom's influence in the region, along with its diplomatic initiatives and alliances, shows its role as an important player in seeking a fair and lasting solution to the conflict. Balancing regional dynamics and diplomatic efforts remains crucial in addressing this multifaceted issue (Kamal, 2015). Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 wants to make Saudi Arabia's economy, society, and government more modern. This includes changing how Saudi Arabia deals with countries in the Middle East and Europe. This shift is influenced by the desire to diversify alliances, align with economic interests, and address security concerns. Saudi Arabia underscores the need for a comprehensive foreign policy approach that aligns with the goals of economic diversification, regional stability, and modernization. Economic diversification, aimed at reducing dependence on oil revenue, requires a stable and globally integrated foreign policy to attract investments and foster growth. Additionally, Saudi Arabia wants to encourage peace and stability in the Middle East so that it's easier for countries to grow their economies. The ambitious goals of Vision 2030 necessitate a supportive regional environment, emphasizing the importance of aligning foreign policy with the socio-economic reform objectives mentioned in (Al-Rasheed, 2023). They thus seek to lessen dependency on oil bases and transform the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into an international hub for investments with the view of creating partnerships from all over the world by diversifying its economy. This process of modernization needs a liberal and dynamic foreign policy to get recognition from the world community for making Saudi Arabia more attractive to investors.

Research Question

1. How has Mohammad bin Salman's leadership style and behavior impacted Saudi Arabia's foreign policy goals, since his rise to power?
2. What are the primary factors behind Saudi Arabia's foreign policy change under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman?
3. What are the implications of MBS's led foreign policy shift on regional geopolitics of the Middle East?

Objectives

- To understand how Mohammad bin Salman's leadership style and behavior impacted Saudi Arabia's foreign policy goals, since his rise to power.
- To explore the primary factors behind Saudi Arabia's foreign policy shift under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.
- Assessing the Implications of Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Shift Toward the Gulf Countries on Regional Geopolitics.

Significance of Study

Commonalities of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy have gone through many transformations in the era of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). Before he assumed leadership in Vegas, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy was polite and conservative. The policy of the kingdom was quite reactionary, the major goals of which comprised the promotion of influence within the region and the safeguarding of domestic interests by means of the establishment of various unions and agreements. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia itself rarely engaged, in aggressive military operations, instead used political and economic power to control crisis situations. The kingdom had a friendly relationship with the USA, depended on it for security and military, and aimed to establish an equilibrium in the region goodwill moderate Arab states, and was against radical or fundamentalism. This approach which manifested itself under the leadership of King Abdullah and now King Salman focused on stability and continuity and depicted Saudi Arabia as a moderate and peace-supporting power in the region. It was mostly a defensive policy in nature, which promoted low-profile

diplomacy along with providing great sums of money to influence political loyalties without explicitly demanding it (Stoddard, 2019). While till 2017, Saudi Arabia relied on a passive approach, at least in terms of goals and objectives, the change came with the Muhammad bin Salman administration. MBS, with these reform measures, has assumed a proactive policy approach, described as assertive aggressive assertiveness, and readiness to take risks to assert Saudi power. These changes include; the perceived threat from Iran, diversification from oil through Vision 2030, and leadership change generational change. One of the significant shifts was the assertive policy of the kingdom against Iran in Yemen, rising engagement in Yemen, and a more assertive regional policy overall. Moreover, MBS has engaged intensively in economic diplomacy, which is a clear deviation from the traditional Arab stance and shows that MBS is ready to recast regional relationships (Chi-Wei, 2019).

Literature Review

MBS's political regime and its consequences for Understanding Saudi Arabia's foreign policy are crucial if we are to view how the role of this country in the world is evolving. The literature review will focus on the following research questions concerning Saudi Arabia's The literature will examine how decisions about Saudi Arabia's foreign policy are made and how The literature will also sample: How has leadership by MBS influenced these decisions and Consequently, this literature review will focus on the country's foreign policy decisions and their impacts on the region and the rest of the world. Previous to the existing realpolitik climate in Saudi Arabia, the kingdom's overall approach to foreign relations decision-making was primarily dominated by the ruling palace and powerful royal consultants, following a centralized power and authority architecture. As postulated by (Haimer, 2020). The political decisions were made in a narrow circle of the ruling elite, the king, and the top officials excluding large groups and institutions and civil society actors, and above all did not fully subscribe to institutional rules and regulations. This traditional approach was coupled with an emphasis on stabilizing the region, safeguarding the feudal Al Saud dynasty's interests, and given the Sunni sectarian orientation

of the Saudi state. However, at the same time, assertiveness under the MBS reign has prompted new risks and controversy, mainly in Yemen that attracted international disapproval and attention following Hubbard, 2020. However, they still largely determine Saudi foreign policy, and thus the stability of the kingdom and the wider region (Gause III, 2018).

The literature suggests that MBS leadership has brought about a greater emphasis on seeking heterodox solutions in Saudi foreign policy (Fraught, 2022). Unlike his predecessors, who often adhered to conservative and risk-averse strategies. MBS has shown a willingness to pursue unconventional approaches to regional challenges MBS's decision to intervene militarily in Yemen in 2015 represented a departure from Saudi Arabia's traditional reliance on diplomacy and proxy warfare (Mabon, 2016). MBS is working to make Saudi Arabia's economy more varied by starting projects like Vision 2030, demonstrating a willingness to explore non-traditional avenues for achieving foreign policy objectives (Mazzetti, 2016). A report by the (IISS) says that under MBS's leadership, Saudi Arabia has spent a lot more on defense. This has made the kingdom one of the biggest buyers of weapons in the world. (Hokayem, 2022). According to the Stockholm (SIPRI), Saudi Arabia's spending on the military almost doubled from 2015 to 2020, reaching \$61.9 billion. (SIPRI, 2023). Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) has a unique approach to foreign policy. MBS has taken a tough stance against Iran in Saudi Arabia's relations with the country. He sees Iran as a big danger to the kingdom's safety and stability. (Lima, 2023). However, recent reports suggest that Saudi Arabia and Iran have made an agreement with the help of China to fix their relationship after seven years of problems. Saudi Arabia wants to make sure its country is safe from attacks by Houthi rebels and maybe even stop a civil war in its southern neighbor (Fraught, 2022). Military limitations Based on the provided sources, it is evident that Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) recognizes the limitations of military solutions despite Saudi Arabia's substantial military spending (Lima, 2023). The conflict in Yemen has highlighted the challenges of achieving decisive victories through military force alone. MBS's approach reflects a strategic shift towards seeking heterodox solutions

and focusing on protecting the kingdom from foreign domination SIPRI provides data on military expenditure, including Saudi Arabia's military spending, which consistently ranks among the top countries globally. In 2020, Saudi Arabia was the fourth-largest military spender in the world, allocating approximately \$61.9 billion to defense this military spending is significant as per the (SIPRI, 2023). The literature suggests that MBS acknowledges the limitations of military solutions despite the substantial military spending (Stoddard, 2019). The conflict in Yemen has shown the challenges of achieving decisive victories through military force alone, indicating the need for alternative strategies and solutions in addressing complex regional dynamics. Conflict in Yemen: The conflict in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia has been involved since 2015 provides a relevant case study according to (Lima, 2023). Despite Saudi Arabia's considerable military capabilities and spending, the conflict has proven to be protracted and challenging to resolve through military means alone. This is evidenced by the ongoing nature of the conflict, Acknowledgment of Military Limitations While Saudi Arabia has employed military force in Yemen, there are indications that MBS recognizes the limitations of solely relying on military solutions to achieve strategic objectives this acknowledgment may be inferred from statements made by Saudi officials, observations of Saudi Arabia's evolving strategy in Yemen, or assessments by military analysts and observers as per the (Kenyon, 2023). In the broader Middle East, MBS has been active in promoting Saudi Arabia's interests and influence. This includes his drive to normalize relations with Israel which he sees as a means of securing a broader security agreement with the United States (Fraught, 2022). MBS has also been involved in efforts to build financial and investment ties with Iran and with the Houthis, in the hope that such vested interests may eventually shield the kingdom from their aggressive acts (Al-Rasheed, 2023). Overall, MBS's foreign policy decisions reflect a willingness to seek heterodox solutions and a focus on protecting the kingdom from foreign domination (Haimer, 2020). The Middle East has some big countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Israel, all trying to be the most powerful. Saudi Arabia, led by Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), wants to be a

strong country in the Middle East. Historically, the Palestinian cause has been central to Arab identity and unity, and by aligning with Palestine, Saudi Arabia aims to bolster its regional influence and leadership role among Arab nations in recent years, Saudi Arabia has been engaging in an intense effort to protect or enhance its position in the region, especially during big changes like the Gulf War in 1990-91, the Iraq War in 2003, and the Arab Spring as per the (Altunisik, 2014) The Middle East has been going through a lot of changes, which has made people look more closely at how Saudi Arabia reacts to the problems in the region. This is also influenced by new leaders in Saudi Arabia since 2015. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is complicated, focusing on what's really happening in the region (Ehteshami, 2018). Since new leaders took over in Saudi Arabia in 2015, the country has become more active and has grown its role as a strong power in the region, especially since 2017 under MBS's leadership. Saudi Arabia has been making friends with China, the European Union, India, and Russia, as well as keeping its strong relationship with the United States for security (Ehteshami, 2018). Saudi Arabia's policies are heavily influenced by energy, which is a strong tool the country uses in its strategies (Anoushiravan, 2019). Saudi Arabia has been trying to reach out more than the United States in its plans, aiming to strengthen its goals in the region against Iran. It also wants to show that it's the most powerful Arab country by spending a lot on its military, consistently being one of the top countries in the world for this (Anoushiravan, 2019). In 2020, the kingdom was the fourth-largest military spender in the world, allocating approximately \$61.9 billion to defense MBS acknowledges the limitations of military solutions, as shown by the challenges of achieving decisive victories through military force alone in the conflict in Yemen according to the (Policy, 2024).

The Palestinian cause has been central to Arab identity and unity, and aligning with Palestine can bolster Saudi Arabia's regional influence and leadership role among Arab nations. MBS has pursued ambitious domestic reforms Under Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is working to make its economy more varied and not rely so much on oil (Jacobs, 2023). Embracing the Palestinian cause can be seen as a strategy to garner domestic support and deflect

attention from domestic issues by appealing to religious and nationalist sentiments among Saudis according to (Jacobs, 2023). MBS runs Saudi Arabia like a king, with very strict rules and no tolerance for people disagreeing with him. Saudi citizens are closely watched and controlled, and they can't speak out against the government or say what they think freely. (Al-Rasheed, 2023). MBS's domestic policies have been characterized by a focus on economic development and modernization; while maintaining a tight grip on political power. The Palestinian cause has been a significant factor in Arab politics and identity. By aligning with Palestine Saudi Arabia can bolster its regional influence and leadership role among Arab nations as per the (Salerno-Garthwaite, 2023). MBS supports the Palestinians to get more support from people in Saudi Arabia and to distract them from problems at home. He does this by appealing to religious and patriotic feelings among Saudis (Jacobs, 2023). MBS's foreign policy has caused a lot of damage to Saudi Arabia's domestic politics. He's been behind Saudi Arabia's increase in fighting in Yemen and made a mess of a problem with Qatar. The crackdown this weekend is just one of the many things MBS has done since becoming crown prince in June to make sure he stays in charge of Saudi Arabia's plans for the rest of his father's time as king (Beauchamp, 2017). The aim seems to be changing the way Saudi Arabia's government works. Before, it was about everyone in the royal family agreeing and making deals with religious leaders. Now, they want to have more power in one place. MBS start camp again to gain dominance in the local politics by doing such steps. In terms of domestic politics. However, his domestic policies have been characterized by a focus on economic development and modernization, while maintaining a tight grip on political power. MBS arrest and detention of several Islamic scholars and activists in Saudi Arabia. For instance, Sheikh Al-Hawali, a religious scholar linked to the Sahwa Movement, was arrested in July 2018 along with some of his sons because of his views on the government's policies (Rashid, 2018). Several days after he published a book titled "Muslims and the Western Civilization," Al-Hawali was arrested for challenging the Saudi ruling family and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi. This is in addition to other essential Islamic scholars and

activists, such as preacher Awad Al-Qarni and broadcaster Ali al-Omari, who have been arrested by MBS's government (Rashid, 2018). As was noted by the United Nations, the important human rights non-governmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International the arrests of Gao and Hzel are not correctly conforming to human rights (Rashid, 2018). In this issue, MBS stated that the Palestinian problem can still be considered as the most pressing concern for Arabs, while Saudi Arabia places the Palestinian issue as its top priority. Many Palestinians have appreciated this stance because Saudi Arabia has been seen as a crucial partner in the fight for Palestinian independence there have been growing fears over the government's stance on the issue, and critics have accused MBS of dumping the Palestinians (Gause III, 2018). However, MBS has continued to emphasize the importance of the Palestinian issue and has taken steps to support the Palestinian people (Jazeera, 2023). He has talked with Jason Greenblatt and Jared Kushner, who are advisors chosen by U.S. President Donald Trump to work on peace in the Middle East. They discussed ways to help people in the Gaza Strip with things like food, medicine, and other basic needs. This move has been welcomed by many Palestinians, who view it as a positive step toward addressing their humanitarian needs (Jazeera, 2023)

Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of MBS, has faced international scrutiny and criticism for its human rights record and involvement in conflicts like the Yemeni Civil War. By aligning with Palestine, as per CNN Saudi Arabia can attempt to improve its international image and portray itself as a champion of a just cause, deflecting attention from its own internal issues. MBS, Mohammed bin Salman, has faced criticism for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. He has been an important person in making decisions about Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. according to the (Jamal, 2020). Since assuming power as per the (NEWS LINE MAGZINE). MBS has been very active in foreign affairs, trying to make Saudi Arabia one of the most powerful countries in the region. However, he's faced criticism for how his government deals with human rights issues. Saudi Arabia has faced significant condemnation from various international organizations and governments. For

instance, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have consistently reported on issues such as arbitrary arrests, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the lack of due process in Saudi Arabia. Regarding conflicts, Saudi Arabia's involvement in the Yemeni Civil War has drawn widespread criticism (Jacobs, 2023). The United Nations has documented numerous civilian casualties and human rights violations resulting from the Saudi-led coalition's military campaign in Yemen. Despite these criticisms, MBS has actively supported Palestine (Muslu, 2018). This support has included diplomatic statements, financial aid, and political backing for Palestinian causes and initiatives. The Palestinian cause has indeed been central to Arab identity and unity for decades. Palestinians have long sought independence and statehood facing challenges such as Israeli occupation, settlement expansion, and restrictions on movement and access to resources (Zahid, 2023). Saudi Arabia's alignment with Palestine reflects its historical commitment to the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination (Simonelli, 2023). This support is seen as crucial within the Arab world and among Palestinians themselves, bolstering Saudi Arabia's regional influence and leadership position. Saudi Arabia's alignment with Palestine has been a long-standing policy, reflecting the kingdom's commitment to principles of justice, self-determination, and the rights of oppressed peoples (Gause, 2023). Historically Saudi Arabia has provided diplomatic, financial, and humanitarian support to Palestinians, viewing the Palestinian cause as integral to Arab and Islamic solidarity. The kingdom's long-term agenda of achieving economic stability and reducing reliance on oil will shape its course of action in the current conflict by supporting Palestine. Saudi Arabia can attempt to deflect international criticism and portray itself as a defender of a just cause potentially improving its image on the global stage according to the Foreign Affairs (FA). The shift in US policy under the Trump administration, particularly its support for Israel and the decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem may have influenced Saudi Arabia's position on the Palestine issue (Ben, 2024). The Saudi government, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has historically been a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause,

viewing it as integral to Arab and Islamic solidarity (Fraught, 2022). Saudi Arabia is now moving towards getting closer to the Palestinian Authority (PA) according to (Ben, 2024). At the Munich Security Conference on February 19, 2024, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said that the Palestinian Authority can handle the West Bank and Gaza Strip with help from other countries. He said this needs to happen for a Palestinian state to be created. But he also said that there needs to be a clear plan for making a Palestinian state (Al-Rasheed, 2018). The conflict in Gaza has led Saudi Arabia to shift its stance on a deal with Israel. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) is now taking a tougher position. Saudi Arabia is moving closer to supporting the Palestinian Authority (PA) and expects the PA to eventually govern Gaza with international support. Saudi Arabia's strategic approach to regional geopolitics and its stance on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Saudi Arabia is adopting a hedging strategy, meaning it's pursuing different initiatives to minimize risks and maximize benefits for its Vision 2030 plan one aspect of this strategy is military consolidation, even without a declared enemy, as well as increased participation in cooperative efforts with other countries as per the (Ben, 2024). Regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict, Saudi Arabia is trying to balance its interests. Vision 2030 and Domestic Reforms MBS has been pursuing an ambitious plan for domestic reforms according to the (AL Jazeera). This plan includes modernizing the country's infrastructure, promoting tourism, and expanding the private sector. However, these reforms have been accompanied by authoritarian control and limitations on political expression. Authoritarian Control and Limitations on Political Expression MBS has been criticized for its authoritarian approach to governance, the Saudi government has been accused of human rights abuses, such as arresting and detaining political activists, journalists, and religious scholars. This includes suppressing dissent and limiting political freedoms (Gause III, 2018). The murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and critic, in 2018 caused a lot of countries to criticize Saudi Arabia and worry more about MBS's controlling ways. Balancing Modernization with Societal Constraints MBS has been navigating a delicate balance between modernization and societal constraints in

Saudi Arabia. MBS has been pushing for social reforms like allowing women to drive and relaxing restrictions on entertainment, he has been cautious not to go too far and upset the conservative elements in Saudi society (Beauchamp, 2017). In terms of foreign policy, MBS has been keeping Saudi Arabia's stance on the Palestinian issue which has historically been a central concern for the Arab world (Imad, 2024). While Saudi Arabia has traditionally been a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause, despite the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians. This shift in foreign policy has been influenced by several factors, including the changing regional dynamics, this shift has been driven by regional dynamics, as well as recent developments and statements regarding Palestinian statehood. Under MBS, Saudi Arabia has adopted a more pragmatic approach to the Palestinian issue focusing on strategic considerations and regional dynamics (Katulis, 2021). This shift has been influenced by the changing regional landscape, including the Trump administration's support for Israel and the potential benefits of a regional mega-deal that would involve Israeli concessions to the Palestinians and US security guarantees and civilian nuclear assistance for Saudi Arabia according to the (Gause, 2023). Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), Saudi Arabia is making domestic reforms while maintaining strict control. The country is balancing its strategic interests with its historical commitments, which affects regional stability and Saudi Arabia's role in the Middle East. Contrasting domestic reforms with continued authoritarian control Under MBS, Saudi Arabia has implemented ambitious domestic reforms, However, these reforms have been accompanied by continued authoritarian control, with MBS consolidating power and suppressing dissent. Although the recent domestic reforms signify a partial liberalization in MBS's political regime according to the Freedom House report, the government ever shows its zeal to keep an authoritarian polity as shown in the above findings pertaining to this research question push for modernization. In 2017 the government arrested over 200 people, most of them clerics, activists, as well as intellectuals for opposing the government. This was succeeded by the incidence of the arrest of several women rights

activists in 2018 in a campaign for the right to drive as provided in (Rich, 2019) The government is also said to be using security laws to suppress opposers and prohibit expression and speech. One of these includes concern over the fairness and lack of proper trial in such cases Saudi Arabia too under the regime of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman MBS has adopted a foreign policy that balances strategic opportune and traditional alliances. Although MBS has acted less belligerently towards Israel than other Saudi kings and has supported Israel it remains crucial for MBS to uphold historic Saudi obligations to the Palestinian cause (Kouleas, 2023)

For the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the idea of how to combine its current and future strategic goals with past obligations became a cornerstone of its foreign policy. This way, it maintains the strategic balance for the kingdom regulating multilateral relations and preserving its hegemonic position in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia currently enjoys a strategic relationship with the United States which has been founded on common grounds in the areas of mutual interests such as energy security and mutual hostility towards the same enemies. (George, 2023). The relationship has been apparent over defense cooperation, security, and sharing of intelligence information as well as military cooperation. However, according to the sources, this interaction has shifted towards a utilitarian kind of cooperation, whereby both interactants look for certain gains from each other depending on their respective interests (Juil, 2021). alternatively, Saudi Arabia has proved its sense of history and involvement within the Middle East region especially on the Palestinian issue. The sources mention Saudi Arabia's involvement in diplomatic efforts related to the Palestinian issue, including offering aid to the Palestinian President and engaging in discussions around a two-state solution (Ashford, 2018). This commitment to the Palestinian cause reflects Saudi Arabia's historical role in the region and its support for Palestinian statehood. In navigating its foreign policy, Saudi Arabia under MBS is faced with the challenge of balancing its strategic interests, such as aligning with the United States and engaging with emerging global powers like China, with its historical commitments to regional issues like the Palestinian

cause. This delicate balance requires Saudi Arabia to carefully manage its relationships with various stakeholders while advancing its national interests and regional stability as per the report of the Freedom House. The change in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards offensive realism has big effects on how stable the region is and Saudi Arabia's role in the Middle East according to the report of Global Affairs, Saudi Arabia's pursuit of power maximization through aggressive actions can lead to greater instability in the region.

Methodology

This research adopted John Scot's model of documentary as the methodology. Data will be collected from primary and secondary sources. Data analysis involves examining, refining, adjusting, and understanding data to find useful insights and draw firm conclusions. And aid decision-making. It's a crucial step in research, helping researchers and analysts grasp the significance of the data they've collected. When data is collected through primary and secondary sources by applying the John Scott model that determines the authenticity of data sources, the next stage involves data analysis in the John Scott model.

Mohammad bin Salman's Leadership Style and Behavior

MBS's time in power has focused on centralizing control within Saudi Arabia, there has been a discernible shift in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy decision-making dynamics (Muslu, 2018). MBS has sought to further centralize power and consolidate control over key decision-making bodies, including the security and defense apparatus, introducing structural reforms aimed at streamlining processes and reducing bureaucratic hurdles. Under MBS's leadership, there has been a departure from conservative and risk-averse strategies, with a greater emphasis on seeking heterodox solutions to regional challenges (Bernard, 2024). Shift in Foreign Policy Dynamics Under MBS's leadership, Saudi Arabia has adopted a This shift is exemplified by MBS's assertive and proactive approach to foreign policy, such as the military intervention in Yemen in 2015 which diverged from traditional reliance on diplomacy and proxy warfare as per the (Haimer,

2020). Additionally, MBS's initiatives like Vision 2030 demonstrate a willingness to explore non-traditional avenues for achieving foreign policy objectives. Focus on Protecting Saudi Arabia MBS's foreign policy approach prioritizes protecting Saudi Arabia from external threats and influences. He's open to trying unconventional solutions and focuses on protecting Saudi Arabia from being controlled by other countries. This is clear in how he deals with the Palestinian issue instead of just relying on traditional allies (Muslu, 2018) MBS has been working on building financial and investment connections with Iran and the Houthis, who are often seen as threats (Hokayem, 2022). He hopes that having these economic ties might help shield Saudi Arabia from its hostile actions. However, MBS isn't blind to the dangers his country faces. He knows that his enemies want to harm Saudi Arabia, and he's aware of their capabilities (Lima, 2023). That's why he doesn't only rely on military force. He also sees the importance of forming strong partnerships with powerful countries like the United States (Fraught, 2022). According to the (IISS) MBS's leadership has led to a significant increase in Saudi defense spending kingdom has become one of the world's biggest buyers of weapons as per the (Junyent, 2023) Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has changed, showing a readiness to try new approaches and focus on protecting the country from foreign control (Bernard, 2024). Palestine Issue MBS's stance on the Palestine issue serves multiple strategic purposes. By aligning with Palestine, he seeks to appeal to Saudi Arabia's conservative religious base and portray himself as a defender of Islamic values. This move helps to garner domestic support and deflect attention from internal issues. Additionally, by positioning himself as a champion of the Palestinian cause, MBS aims to bolster Saudi Arabia's influence and leadership role among Arab nations.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy from Defense Realism to Offensive Realism

Foreign policy behavior under MBS within the framework of offensive realism with substantial emphasis on the fact that the Saudi Arabia Bureau of International Cooperation has changed its vector since MBS ascended to power in 2017. Before the coming of MBS, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy position could be categorized as defensive realism,

Saudi was more of a status quo that aimed at protecting itself without striving for the further penetration of its influence. Offensive realism is a sub-domestic construct of realism in the discipline of international relations that argues that states seek to attain as much power and security as possible in a structure that lacks superior sovereignty, most often through aggression and force. The planning for a transition of Saudi Arabia from a defensive to an assertive type of realism started with the rise of MBS to power. MBS provided an aggressive agenda for the reformation of the kingdom's decision-making structure, and economic categorization and tried and create Saudi Arabia's different economy through Vision 2030. These reforms demonstrate an active promotion of domestic problems and the increase of Saudi Arabia's impact on the world. Offensive realism is further developed by a proponent known as John Mearsheimer, an international relations professor. To some extent, Mearsheimer's work highlights power and security for states in driving the competitive nature of their interaction in international systems. Offensive realism argues that countries seek to be more powerful than everything else and as such seek to pursue systematic means of achieving relative gains. Many of the strategic goals and ambitions pursued by MBS can be discussed in terms of the methodology of Offensive Realism.

He is more aggressive and assertive in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, elements that are manifested by Saudi Arabia's military budget and its interference in Yemen among other countries shows the intention of Saudi Arabia to increase its hegemonic power in the region. Second, MBS's search for non-military partnerships and his readiness to approach possible foes, like investing in Iran, match the prospects of offensive realism. The led foreign policy change of MBS has important consequences for the geopolitics of the Middle Eastern region. Saudi Arabia under the leadership of MBS has become more aggressive and expansionist unlike before, and has shifted from purely defensive realism to offense realism in geopolitical games for the kingdom to dominate not only the gulf but the Islamic world as well. This shift is defined by the intelligentsia saying that Saudis are now seeking power maximization through assertive actions implying that this may

well result in even more turmoil in the region and under the MBS multifaced FP policy. Another important feature of MBS's foreign policy is shifts in the nature of the kingdom's partnership with regional and world actors. Previously, Saudi Arabia had a long-standing relationship with America, however in recent years kingdom shifted their allegiance to Russia and China; though this has a strategic cooperation kind of relationship wherein both parties receive definite gains from each other reflecting their interests. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has also shown commitment to historical relations and involvement in Middle Eastern affairs for instance in concerns to the Palestine issue. The kingdom has been playing a role in the international relation concerning the Palestinian issue such as providing assistance to the Palestinian President and participating in the debate on the solution of the two-state model.

With regard to foreign policy, Saudi Arabia under MBS faces the following problem: How best to pursue the kingdom's interests and values at the same time? This balance is a complex that makes Saudi Arabia weave through several stakeholders as it furthers its national interests and regional stability As nice as it sounds it has also brought about risks and controversies as seen in the MBS foreign policy shift, particularly in the Yemen journey case and most recently in the gruesome murder of Jamal Khashoggi. This move towards causing politics or offense realism may well presage the likelihood of more struggles. As the MBS's vision switches to adopting a more aggressive and expansionist stance, Saudi Arabia may find itself provoking new conflict or aggravating an existing one (Rich, 2019). This could cause a wider regional crisis leading to serious regional conflict with its impacts. Their regional implication also affects Gulf dynamics For instance, Saudi Arabia's Recent decision-making and noncommitment to multilateralism as evidenced by the Qatar crisis not only threaten to pull apart the GCC but also erode the joint security structure in the region (Anoushiravan, 2019). This could further complicate the ties between the Gulf states and make it difficult to forge unity in order to address some of the emerging common issues and threats in the region that play a role in power balance. The change to the Offense Realism may significantly change the power balance in the

Middle East and Saudi Arabia aims at reigning over its neighbors. This can awaken new competition and rivalry between regional actors such as Iran, Turkey, and other Gulf states as explained in (Muslu, 2018). Extinguishing the gulf line politics, Saudi Arabia has recently adopted a very vigorous

foreign policy that may lead to a rift between the two countries. Power considering most along with stability might deteriorate relationships and cooperation with main partners, which is definitely problematic for Saudi Arabia's status on the global stage (Ashford, 2018).

Figure 1

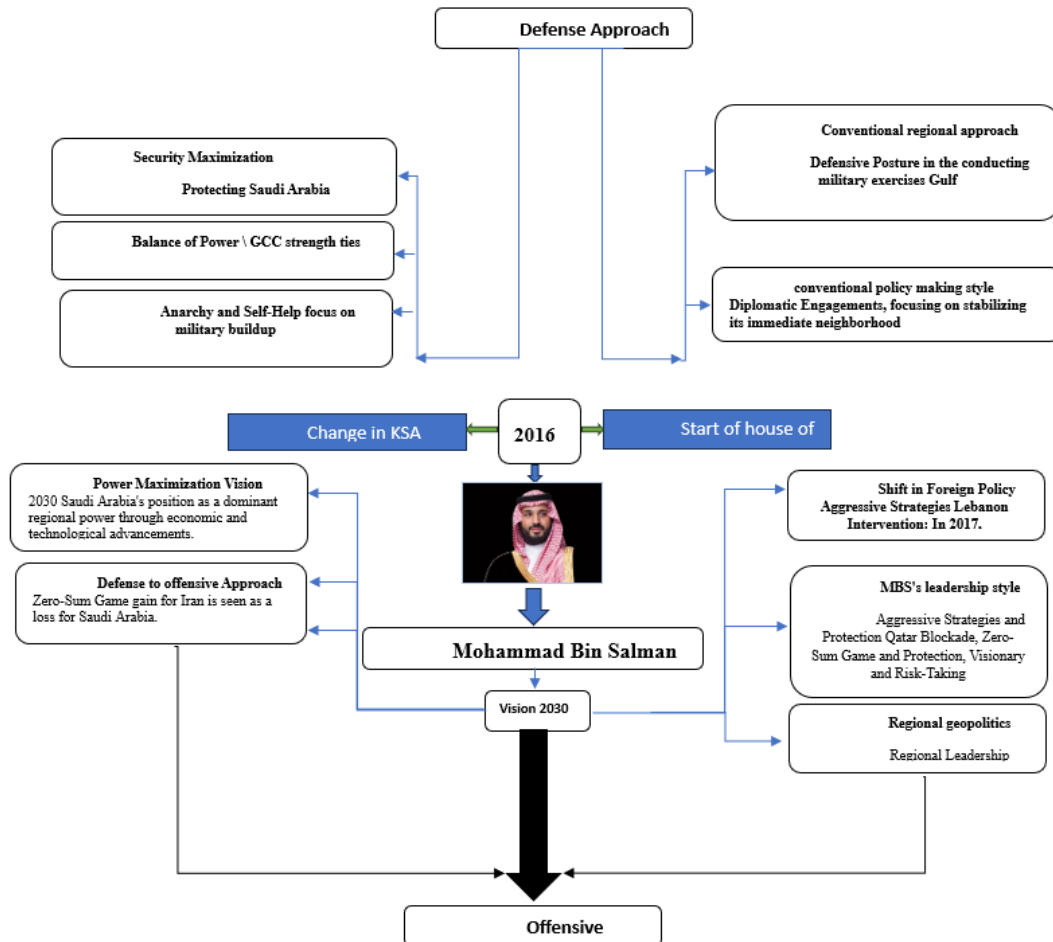


Figure 1 explains Saudi Arabia, under MBS, has implemented a multifaceted strategy that includes Vision 2030 and a shift towards offensive foreign policy strategies. Vision 2030 aims to secure Saudi Arabia's position as a dominant regional power through significant economic and technological advancements. This ambitious vision is complemented by a strategic shift in foreign policy, marked by aggressive strategies such as the 2017 intervention in Lebanon and a broader defense-to-offensive approach. Central to this strategy is the concept of a zero-sum game, where gains for Iran are perceived as losses for Saudi Arabia. MBS's leadership style is characterized by aggressive

strategies and a focus on protection, as evidenced by the Qatar blockade. His visionary and risk-taking approach is aimed at reinforcing Saudi Arabia's regional leadership aspirations within the complex landscape of regional geopolitics. Through these initiatives, Saudi Arabia seeks to solidify its influence and power in the Middle East.

MBS Foreign Policy and New Plan for the Country

The change in Saudi Arabia's policy under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) is due to several reasons, including how decisions are made, regional power shifts, and domestic politics. The

changing regional power. Changes in the Middle East has also influenced Saudi Arabia's shift in policy on many matters including domestic and Palestine cause, MBS made a clear stance on the Palestine issue, The Palestinian cause is very important and emotional for many Muslims, including Saudis as per the (Ahmad, 2023). According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), The issue holds a special place in the hearts of Muslims due to its religious significance and the historical injustices faced by the Palestinian people MBS, has been actively supporting Palestine, which has helped him appeal to Saudi Arabia's conservative religious base and portray himself as a defender of Islamic values as per the (NEW line magazine). This stance has been welcomed by many Saudis, who view the Palestinian cause as a critical issue that needs to be addressed in a speech at the Arab League summit in 2023 according to the (SPA) MBS reiterated his commitment to Palestinian statehood and emphasized the importance of the Palestinian issue for Arab countries.

Domestic politics has played a big role in Saudi Arabia's policy change under MBS. He has pursued major domestic reforms with his Vision 2030 plan to diversify the economy. Over the years MBS has amassed a lot of influence cutting a figure of an autocratic leader, with all decision-making powers with him as a king being represented by his ailing father. He has made sure of this by removing the religious police right to arrest, having his father fire the former Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Nayef, and conducting an anti-corruption crackdown, which saw rivals arrested. His domestic policy is an effort to change and update Saudi Arabia's, many times in defiance of the clergy. Another reason for the policy change in Saudi Arabia is MBS's change of leadership and the way of dealing with foreign policy. MBS has been identified as being willing to take novel approaches to address regional issues and has quietly been trying to establish Financer and investment ties to Iran and the Houthis as well as transitioning from defensive realism to offensive realism.

MBS hopes that having these economic ties might help shield Saudi Arabia from its hostile actions. Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, has been leading the country since 2017, and his regime has been characterized by a more proactive approach to foreign policy, Saudi Arabia has been a vocal

supporter of the Palestinian cause, viewing it as integral to Arab and Islamic solidarity as per the (Esber, 2023). The kingdom has provided diplomatic, financial, and humanitarian support to Palestinians over the years. However, under MBS, Saudi Arabia's approach to the Palestinian issue has evolved, reflecting the kingdom's strategic priorities and regional dynamics as per Saudi Arabia's alignment with the Palestinian Authority (PA)

Research Findings

- **Concentration of Power:** MBS concentrates all the authority within a clique as opposed to the typical encompassing royal family approval.
- **Assertiveness in Foreign Policy:** MBS's foreign policy is indeed more belligerent, especially in Yemen, than Saudi Arabia's traditional foreign policy orientations would.
- **Military Spending:** Such expenditure has been notably ramped up by the MBS regime to make Saudi Arabia one of the world's top arms importers.
- **Economic Diversification:** Vision 2030 of MBS spells the diversification of the Saudi Arabian economy away from complete reliance on oil.
- **Relations with Iran:** MBS does not want much to do with Iran but there is a recent attempt to better relations with China as the mediator.
- **Yemen Conflict:** It's important to note that Saudi Arabia is in a long, inconclusive war in Yemen means that as much as he favors military solutions, he is forced to
- **Human Rights Criticism:** Turkish authorities accuse MBS of human rights violations including the death of Khashoggi.
- **Domestic Reforms:** MBS's domestic policies are rejuvenation and economic progress plus authoritarianism.
- **Support for Palestine:** MBS continues to support the Palestinian cause to assert a stronger position regionally and to ward off criticism, domestically or internationally
- **Strategic Alliances:** Saudi Arabia manages its relations with the US, China, the European Union, and regional neighbors to upgrade its geopolitical position.
- **Proxy and Direct Conflicts:** Through proxy wars and direct interventions MBS has

formulated a foreign policy that involves Yemen and Qatar among other nations.

- Humanitarian Concerns in Gaza: Recent Saudi initiatives to support Gaza reveal that Riyadh has not withdrawn support of Palestinians due to new realignments in the Mid
- Authoritarian Crackdowns: The regime at MBS is one that includes the detention of activists, scholars, and critics for political reasons.
- Energy Policy: Thus, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy goals consist dominantly of energy policies to maintain its position as the biggest exporter of oil.
- Defensive to offensive approach: within the context of the change in Saudi Arabian strategy from defensive to offensive realist policy under MBS.

Summary

This recommendation emphasizes the importance for scholars of IR and Pakistan's policymakers to pay closer attention to the emergence of the new foreign policy orientation of Saudi Arabia toward Israel, especially under the reign of MBS. Researchers are thus advised to unravel more on the power relations concerning the Saudi/Israeli relations, the fallout of these relations to the political stability of the region, the part played by domestic politics in decision-making on the side of the Saudis, and the religious extremism that the Saudis harbor. Further, studies should investigate the impact of Saudi relations with Israel on the conventional Middle Eastern alliances, security organizations, the standing of the Palestinian issue, and Saudi Arabia's relations with other Arab nations. In addition, Pakistani policymakers suggest that, Changing policies in Saudi Arabia under the MBS must be evaluated. It is important for Pakistan to remain aligned with the kingdom and therefore, they should be aware of the implications of support to Saudi's policies towards Palestine and the mutual goals Pakistan would like to achieve within the Muslim world. While learning more about the Saudi Arabian approach towards Israel, and maintaining Pakistan's stance in support of the Palestinian cause at the same time, one has to try to establish a positive dialogue about the situation. Furthermore, the current work invites

scholars and policymakers to also focus on what is happening in Saudi Arabia's internal politics, especially within the Saudi ruling family. This paper suggests that a serious study of internal dynamics is necessary to gain a detailed appreciation of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy options, including its policies towards Israel, and the potential global ramifications of such decisions. In addition, a qualitative research study utilizing the John Scott model of documentary analysis is proposed to explore the intricacies of Saudi Arabia Under MBS. Foreign policy and regional relations in the 21st century: a new approach. This study therefore seeks to understand the rationale behind the changes in Saudi Arabian foreign policy; the power struggles in MBS, structural reforms, and change of gear from traditional right-winged foreign policies this work aims at detailing the effects of the Shifts in Saudi Arabian foreign policy on Middle Eastern politics. It also explores the multifaceted link between domestic politics, regional politics, and international politics giving out a comprehensive outlook on how Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has changed under MBS rule.

Conclusion

During MBS's time in Saudi Arabia, much of his focus has been geared towards the centralization of authority including power in security and defense leading to structural changes that sought to remove bottlenecks in decision-making. This change has brought the end to prude and cautious approaches in foreign policy that MBS replaced with non-conventional approaches to regional crises different from the usual diplomacy and puppet wars. Vision 2030 indicates a desire to seek unconventional means to advance foreign policy interests, although the maintenance of the external threats to Saudi Arabia has always remained a priority, as seen by recent boosts in spending on defense and forging financial ties with potential foes, such as Iran and Houthis. However, the recognition of the need for sound partnership, including with the United States, MBS's active stance regarding regional issues, such as cooperation with Palestine, can be explained by multiple objectives, including stirring up the religious sentiments of Saudi Arabia's conservative population and supporting the implementation of

top-priority domestic reforms. However, the transition to the principle of offense has nonplussed such places like Yemen and strained relations with the Western powers and such unipolar efforts like the Qatar crisis may lead to

fractalization of the regional groups which may change the traditional Saudi Arabian position as a leader of the region in the delicate changes of the role brought by the "Abraham agreement".

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