

MS THESIS

**CHINA-SAUDI ARABIA RELATIONS UNDER XI JINPING:
AN ANALYSIS**



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DEDICATION

This MSPS thesis is a tribute to my parents, siblings and husband whom I love, for being so kind, inspiring, and always there for me while I studies.

Thank you for making this possible for me.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that work in this thesis titled “**China Saudi Arabia Relations under Xi Jinping:An Analysis**” is my work and that data has been collected from authentic source and according to the rule provided by the International Islamic University Islamabad for the award of MS degree, This work has not been presented for any assessment.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to thank Allah, the Most Gracious and Merciful, for helping me study and finish this thesis. I'm very thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Asma Rashid, for always being there for me and helping me with my MS. MS would have been a far-off dream without their help. I'm also very thankful to Pakistani expert, professors, and former top officials for taking the time to talk me, give me advice and give me useful information. Family support was also very good; their mental and emotional support was a big part of why I was able to reach this goal.

ABBREVIATIONS

BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
US	United States
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ME	Middle East
MSRI	Maritime Silk Road Initiative
SREB	South Regional Education Board
PRC	People’s Republic of China
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
WSSD	World Summit for Social Development
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
GSI	Global Security Initiative
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System Airplanes
CNNC	China National Nuclear Corporation

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolving dynamics of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia under the leadership of Xi Jinping. Over the past few decades, China's unprecedented industrial growth and surging energy demands have reshaped its foreign policy priorities, prompting a strategic reassessment of the Middle East. The study delves into the historical context, highlighting China's traditionally cautious global engagement and the limited attention given to the Middle East due to prevailing U.S. influence. Against this backdrop, President Xi Jinping's nuanced approach not only focuses on economic considerations but also showcases China's capacity for cooperation with countries holding diverse social and ideological beliefs. The diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia serve as a microcosm of this broader shift, marked by remarkable and steady development across various fields. The analysis emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the China-Saudi Arabia relationship, encompassing economic collaboration, energy security, and a demonstration of coexistence amidst ideological differences. This study will analyze and provide insights into the recalibration of China's foreign policy in the Middle East under Xi Jinping, shedding light on the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia in this evolving geopolitical landscape. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricacies characterizing China-Saudi Arabia relations and their implications for regional and global dynamics.

CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has always been an important place for countries around the world to be interested in, but in recent decades, China has become one of the most important players in this area (Mousa, 2001). China's economic growth and rising energy needs have led to a change in its foreign policy towards the Middle East. This is because China is one of the world's biggest energy users and biggest producers of goods. Since the start of the 21st century, China has put more effort into making sure it has enough energy. This is because of economic concerns and a more practical change in China's foreign policy (Mousa, 2001). The Arab Spring in the late 1970s was a major factor in bringing China and Middle Eastern countries closer together. This led to a less idealistic and more practical approach to foreign policy. China's rising economy, greater reliance on oil, and a move towards more open and practical policies under Deng Xiaoping's leadership all helped to speed up this change (Mousa, 2001). The Arab Spring has made China more involved with the Middle East, especially in trade and economic relations, with a focus on essential energy products (Abbas, Habib, & Behan, 2021). This is in spite of past limitations caused by U.S. dominance and China's selective "going-out" engagement strategy. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to stronger business links with Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia. This involvement is especially clear in this area (Moonakal, 2022). Saudi Arabia and China formed a complete strategic relationship in 2016. This has made their cooperation even stronger, especially in important areas like energy, technology, and infrastructure (Moonakal, 2022). Even though China is becoming more powerful in the area, geo-economic interest, trade, and investment are still the major topics of discussion (Abbas, Habib, & Behan, 2021). The changing situation in Saudi Arabia also affects this relationship. The kingdom is looking for new allies because of economic problems, falling oil prices, and a desire to modernise its government (Madawi, 2018). Longtime friend Saudi Arabia and the United States are having trouble getting along, which gives China a chance to build a better relationship (Freidin, 2022). China has become more politically involved in the area thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and diplomacy tools like dispute resolution and mediation (Abbas, Habib & Behan, 2021). As economic and political ties grow, China has been working to strengthen its strategic position in the Middle East by forming complete strategic partnerships with a number of states (Xuejing, 2017). As the world's politics change, especially since Russia's attack

of Ukraine, links between China and Saudi Arabia are likely to become more important, bringing new challenges and chances for both countries (Freidin, 2022). The main goal of this study is to break down the many complicated parts of the growing partnership between China and Saudi Arabia. It will look at the economic, military, and strategic aspects that support this changing relationship.

1.1. Rationale of the Study

This research looks into the complicated workings of China's growing relationship with Saudi Arabia. The goal is to fully comprehend the methods used to actively build and strengthen political, economic, and military links. The study focuses on the economic and strategic importance for China and tries to find the benefits that come from the growing relationship, such as economic gains, better energy security, and global power. The study helps us understand how global alliances change by looking at the effects of this alliance on regional and global dynamics. The results may help lawmakers and researchers make decisions. The study also looks at the need for a more nuanced and up-to-date look at the partnership between China and Saudi Arabia. It aims to fill in gaps in the existing research and give a full picture of this important international relationship in a world where politics are always changing.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The link between China and Saudi Arabia is getting deeper and broader, which makes the global situation more complicated and calls for a close look. A detailed analysis is missing from the current body of research, which makes it harder for lawmakers and researchers to understand the complex processes at play. Also, it's still not clear what affects this rising union will have on regional and global dynamics, which makes people wonder about possible changes in power and influence. This study aims to fill in these gaps by looking at the relationship between China and Saudi Arabia in more detail. It will put light on the many sides of it and help the field of international relations talk about it more accurately.

1.3. Objective of the Study

1. To explore China and Saudi Arabia's current Diplomatic, Economic, and Strategic Partnership.
2. Assess China's Tangible Gains from the Deepening Partnership with Saudi Arabia.

3. Examine the Geopolitical Implications of China-Saudi partnership on the Middle East.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How are China and Saudi Arabia actively cultivating and broadening their diplomatic, economic, and strategic relationships in the current geopolitical landscape?
2. In what ways does China stand to gain significant advantages from the deepening partnership with Saudi Arabia, particularly in terms of economic, energy, and geopolitical benefits?
3. How does the evolving China-Saudi Arabia partnership impact the balance of power and influence in the Middle East, and what potential implications might it have for regional stability?

1.5. Significance of Study

The study holds academic significance by contributing to the existing literature on international relations, particularly in the context of China-Saudi Arabia relations. By delving into the multifaceted aspects of diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties, the research enhances scholarly understanding of the evolving dynamics in global geopolitics. It adds nuance to the discourse surrounding China's foreign policy strategies and sheds light on the intricate mechanisms influencing diplomatic partnerships in the contemporary world. Scholars, researchers, and students in the fields of international relations, political science, and global studies can benefit from the in-depth analysis of this crucial international relationship. The practical significance lies in providing actionable knowledge that can inform real-world decision-making processes.

1.6. Delimitation of the Study

This study will explore the China-Saudi Arabia partnership under Xi Jinping era and will cover the time frame between 2013 to till now 2023. It will examine this case through the lens of Complex Interdependence.

1.7. Literature Review

This book, which is titled "China-Saudi Arabia Relations, 1990-2012: Marriage of Convenience or Strategic Alliance?" investigates the intricate dynamics of the connection between Saudi Arabia, which is the biggest oil exporter in the world, and China, which is the second largest economy in the world. The rationale that drove both countries to form this strategic partnership is

painstakingly investigated in this book, with a special focus placed on the mutually beneficial nature of their friendships and mutually beneficial relationships. According to Saudi Arabia, China is both an expensive market and a key trade partner. Saudi Arabia is a reliable source of oil, and China is seen as both of these things by Saudi Arabia. Al-Tamimi (2014) published a book that not only goes into the historical framework of the alliance but also illustrates the huge potential for effective cooperation between these two prominent countries (Al-Tamimi, 2014).

The article titled "Islam Energy, and Development: Taiwan and China in Saudi Arabia" provides the reader with an introduction to the history of ties between China and Saudi Arabia, including those that exist between the years 1949 and 2013. Additionally, in order to provide a more true depiction of the growth of bilateral connections, he included three themes in this article: development, energy, and Islam. Both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China participated in activities with the intention of establishing bilateral contact by capitalising on the pilgrimage of Chinese Muslims to Mecca (Yamada, 2015).

"Saudi Regimes Stability and Challenges" is the name of a chapter that can be found in the book titled Salman's Legacy: the Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia. Upon taking office in 2015, Saudi King Muhammad bin Salman had a number of challenges, which are extensively discussed in this chapter. A regional and global response is required from the leadership of King Salman in order to address the drop in oil prices. This chapter also investigates the historical backdrop of Saudi Arabia, as well as the growth of the kingdom's economic connections and relations with the United States as a consequence of the advent of Mohammed bin Salman, a futuristic and reformist leader who brought new ideas to the nation. In addition, this chapter explores the historical framework of Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2018).

An article with the headline "Slowly but Surely: Growing Relationship between Saudi Arabia and China" discussed the ways in which China was expanding its connections with Saudi Arabia and the ways in which the kingdom was engaging in anti-terrorism drills in addition to other important concerns such as security, energy, and the economy and how China was doing so. The developing business links between Saudi Arabia and China, as stated by the author of the article, do not have a detrimental influence on Saudi Arabia's political and security relationships with the United States. The growth of better diplomatic connections over the last several decades has also been aided by the occurrence of high-level events and the establishment of agreements

for increased cooperation. Most of these success stories have centred on expanding economic and commercial ties as their primary emphasis. China has been providing Saudi Arabia with armament, notably systems that other suppliers would not offer because to nonproliferation restrictions and pressure from Israel, among other causes. This has been the primary aspect of Saudi Arabia's cooperation with China in terms of security.

A significant amount of ballistic missiles called CSS-2 and DF-3 were supplied by Saudi Arabia in the year 1988. In 2007, Saudi Arabia also delivered DF-21 ballistic missiles. Saudi Arabia may have also supplied cruise missiles, as well as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that are used for surveillance and assault, which are now being used in the battle in Yemen. A further in-depth analysis of this circumstance demonstrates that this is the case. Nevertheless, the market for Chinese security exports to Saudi Arabia is still very small in general. With the exception of a small but substantial strategic import from China, Saudi Arabia has received the majority of its weaponry from the United States and the United Kingdom during the course of its history (Orion and Guzansky, 2017).

It is the contention of the author of the piece titled "Implications of Greater Chinese Involvement in the Mideast" that the power dynamic in the area will not undergo a sudden reset. Israel and the other countries in the Middle East, on the other hand, have to take into consideration the likelihood that China may someday get more involved in local affairs. Israel need to keep working towards the goal of strengthening its economic and political connections with China; yet, it should also keep in mind that the United States and China are still engaged in competition with one another. China seems to be cultivating a greater interest in the Middle East for the aim of doing business at the current time. China, on the other hand, is likely going to emerge as a more significant player in the long run. It is also going to be ready to display its military power in the area in order to protect its interests and keep the flow of oil to China unimpeded (Levkowitz, 2016).

The author of the article titled "Saudi Arab and China: a blossoming friendship" discusses the connection between Saudi Arabia and China, as well as how this relationship influences relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia. As relations between the United States of America and Saudi Arabia, two countries that have been friends for a very long time, continue to worsen, China may deepen its connections with the kingdom in the Middle East. China's President Xi Jinping and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) have just met and confirmed

China's commitment to maintain its purchase of Saudi oil. They also reaffirmed China's aspirations to grow trade, cooperate in technology, and construct infrastructure. Infuriated by the Kingdom's participation in the civil war and starvation in Yemen, as well as the breaches of human rights that it has committed, the government and people of the United States are growing more and more outraged. One of the top three nations in the world for Chinese development projects is Saudi Arabia, which is also intimately connected to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Vision 2030 is a significant strategic plan being implemented by Saudi Arabia with the objective of diversifying the country's economy and decreasing its dependency on oil. (Freidin, 2022).

The author of the article titled "China engagement with MENA region under Xi Jinping: Trends and challenges" discusses how China's ascent to power has transformed it into a key participant in international politics, with interests and functions that are now global in scope. Beginning at the beginning of the twenty-first century, China has been looking to the Middle and North Africa Region (MENA) for its economic roots of origin. China has never shown any interest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area, and this is partially because to the powerful influence of the United States of America, as well as to China's knowledge of and selective approach to its global participation. Within the context of the Xi Jinping administration, this article discusses the new cooperative measures and rhetoric that have been implemented. It provides an explanation of the nature of the connections, as well as the obstacles that Chinese interests and aspirations entail in the area. Xi's China has a vision and a strategy to completely create bilateral and multilateral relations with the countries of the area, despite the fact that there are obstacles that prevent it from participating in the region (Habib, Abbas & Behan, 2021).

The writer of the piece titled "Development of Sino-Arab relations and the evolution of China's Middle East policy in the new era" provides an explanation of the situation. There are 22 Arab nations that together span more than 14.26 million square kilometres, which is equivalent to 9.5% of the total area of the earth. The majority of these countries are situated in West Asia and North Africa. About 270 million individuals, or four percent of the total population of the globe, are members of this group. For a very long time, the Arab world has been a key battlefield for power struggles and rivalries. This is simply due to the fact that it is strategically located and has huge oil and gas resources. The author of this paper also notes that the beginning of a new chapter in Sino-Arab ties occurred in 1956 when China established diplomatic relations with Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. This event marked the beginning of a new chapter in relationship between China and

Arab countries. In general, there have been four phases in the relationship between China and Arab countries during the course of the last fifty years. People's Republic of China (PRC), which had just been established at the time, had a significant diplomatic breakthrough with the Arab world in the 1950s. Over the course of its history, China has maintained cordial connections with the nations of the Arab region. They came a long way in terms of their political collaboration with one another throughout the time of the Cold War. China's policy towards the Middle East has not stayed unchanged; rather, it has undergone rapid reorientations, which have contributed to the beneficial growth of the bilateral relationship between China and Arab countries (Yao, 2007).

While focusing on the economic and developmental goals of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Saudi Vision 2030, the author of the article "Situating Saudi Arabia in China's Belt and Road Initiative" investigates the economic and mutual interest of China in expanding its ties with Saudi Arabia. This is done in order to take advantage of the United States' commitments to local security in the region. By virtue of its geostrategic position, regional power status in the Middle East, and ambitious Saudi Vision 2030 development plan, China, which is Saudi Arabia's biggest economic or trade partner, considers Saudi Arabia to be an important partner in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Despite the fact that they share similar objectives, the United States' hegemonic position in the Persian Gulf area necessitates that the relationship between China and Saudi Arabia be handled in such a way as to avoid direct confrontation with the United States (Fulton, 2020).

1.8. Research Methodology

A research methodology is a set of procedures for determining the outcome of an investigation into a particular issue, sometimes called a research topic. In methodology, researchers use many criteria to address the study topic at hand.

The researcher will follow the qualitative research approach, utilizing in-depth case studies, content analysis, and document reviews. Qualitative analysis will allow us for a nuanced understanding of the evolving China-Saudi Arabia partnership. Primary data will be collected from the experts on the China -Saudi Partnership working in academia and think tanks. All issues related to topic will be carefully analyzed. Purposive sampling method will be utilized for the selection of respondents for face-to-face interviews, online interviews, and emailed interviews/questionnaires.

The research will rely upon primary sources of data collection methods i.e. face to face-to-face interviews, online interviews from scholars having expertise on the subject and secondary

sources i.e. books, journals published, and online reports related to China Saudi Arabia relations under Xi Jinping. Data would be collected from primary (Official documents, Treaties) and secondary sources (Journals, Newspaper articles, books and other authentic internet sources). The purpose of the research is to explore and analysis China and Saudi Arabia relations under Xi Jinping. In research Utilize qualitative data analysis techniques, such as thematic coding, to identify patterns, trends, and themes emerging from interviews, case studies, and content analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

1.9. Theoretical Framework

The theory of international relations put out by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in 1977 is known as the Theory of Complex Interdependence. The notion of complex interdependence highlights the intricate ways in which transnational players become reliant on, and sensitive to, one another as a consequence of their increasing connections. When the interests of states are positively and directly linked, so that a shift in one state's stance impacts the positions of other states in a similar manner, we say that these states are interdependent. Using variables like dependency, interest fluctuation, and information certainty, interdependence theory examines human connections through the lens of scenario structure. In addition to outlining the consequences of scenario structure for intrapersonal and interpersonal processes, the theory suggests taxonomy of interdependent scenarios. Cognitive, affective, and motivating processes are adaptive to the interpersonal reality that occurs within scenario structure.

This study revolves around the Complex Interdependence theory as it illuminates the reinforcement of ties driven by individual or mutual interests. China's active development and expansion of relations with Saudi Arabia can be interpreted through this lens, as both nations engage in a strategic partnership based on shared interests. China, as a rising power, seeks to cultivate relationships aligned with its economic and political interests, while Saudi Arabia, in turn, pursues connections with China for economic, political, and defense-related reasons. Historically, the Middle East region struggled to attract Chinese attention, partially due to overwhelming U.S. influence. The study recognizes the transformative trajectory of China-Saudi Arabia relations under the guiding principles of Complex Interdependence, emphasizing the

remarkable and steady development achieved for the mutual benefit of both nations and their peoples.

1.10. Organization of Study

This study has been divided into the following chapters:

- Chapter One will elaborate the topic and will provide a brief introduction about the way through which this research thesis is going to be conducted.
- Chapter Two will present a detail about the historical background of emerging China-Saudi Arabia relations.
- Chapter Three will highlight China-Saudi Arabia diplomatic, economic and strategic relationships under Xi Jinping and Analysis.
- Chapter Four will elaborate the geo political implications of China-Saudi Arabia relations. This chapter would also discuss the challenges faced by China and Middle East region.
- Chapter Five will be the crux of whole research project which will conclude or summarize the whole research.

CHAPTER 2

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

China has become an international powerhouse in the last ten years, outpacing all other countries in terms of energy consumption and product exports due to its rapid industrialization and skyrocketing energy demand. Recently, China has turned its attention to the Middle East in its foreign policy.

A lot of people think that China's active Middle East policy started with the first encounter between Chinese and Arab officials, which happened at the Bandung Conference in April 1955. Following this conference, Peking and a number of Arab countries forged economic, cultural, and political connections. Chinese communists' Middle Eastern policy began in the early 1940s, despite the PRC and the Bandung Conference taking place much later in history.

2.1. The Origins of China's Middle Eastern Policy

During WWII, Mao and his associates were acutely aware of the Middle East's strategic significance. They first realized in 1941-2 that hostile forces' control of this territory may decide the destiny of the globe, the survival of the Chinese communist cause, and China's future as a sovereign and independent country. Despite seeming isolated from the rest of the world in Yenan's caverns and focused with the Japanese and the Kuomintang (KMT), Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders studied the international situation very attentively.

2.2. Informal Governmental Relations

Prior to the Bandung Conference, there were few formal diplomatic ties between the People's Republic of China and the countries in the Middle East, despite China's strong interest in the region dating back to the early 1950s. No branch of China's Foreign Ministry was principally responsible for Middle Eastern affairs. The Department of Asian Affairs, whose director, Ch'en Chia-k'ang, later served as China's first ambassador to Egypt, was in charge of the Middle East. The Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and non-communist South-east Asia were all assigned to the Second Department of Asian Affairs when this department was reorganized in early 1955. China primarily engaged in informal "people's" diplomacy with the Middle East in the early 1950s. Beijing was only able to build relationships with opposition and leftist leaders, some of whom were in exile,

since most, if not all, Middle Eastern nations had adopted a generally negative attitude towards the PRC. Private industrial and commercial interests were the only means of conducting economic connections with Arab countries, particularly Egypt.

Throughout those years, there were indications that the Chinese were willing to formalize different kinds of connections with the Middle Eastern bourgeois-nationalist and feudal reactionary governments, notwithstanding their misgivings and cynicism about them. However, the response to China's approach was cautious and, in fact, unfavorable. The incident with Israel, where the Chinese had an early but fruitless dialogue, is the most vivid example.

2.3. Explorations with Israel

Israel was the first country in the Middle East to recognize the PRC on January 9, 1950. He sent Chou En-lai the following cable: "It is my pleasure to inform Your Excellency that the Government of Israel has decided to recognize your Government as the de facto Government of China." Please allow me to take this chance to wish You, Your Excellency, the best of luck with the future of the Chinese people.

There was no sign in the recognition cable that there were plans to make formal ties with China. Chou En-lai's return wire also didn't talk about this option. The Chinese, on the other hand, seemed to think that Israel had indirectly said it wanted to have full formal ties with China. They kept saying this while negotiating with Israel until early 1955. In the early 1950s, China was mostly interested in Israel for practical reasons. It wasn't even official until Mao and the rest of China's communist leadership said they were ready to start formal ties with any government as long as it cut ties with the Chinese patriots and became friends with the PRC.

Israel has never had a relationship with the KMT, so recognizing them was an act of friendship. People in China have always known that Israel has ties to the US, but this didn't worry them too much for a number of reasons. First, the Chinese never thought that governments in the Middle East (or anywhere else) had to be anti-American before they could start formal ties with the United States. They did this even though they kept encouraging anti-American views. China kept formal ties with countries that were clearly part of the American area of influence. These countries, unlike Israel, even joined American military pacts in both Europe and Asia (for example, Pakistan). Secondly, the Chinese, like the Soviets, saw Israel as a country that had won a bloody national liberation war and won its freedom from Western imperial rule. By the end of 1949,

Moscow had changed how it felt about Israel. China, on the other hand, started to be much more open-minded towards national-bourgeois states, including Israel. But China's main goal in trying to start a conversation with Israel over and over again was to get political backing, formal relations, and acceptance (mostly in the UN). After the Korean War, when China became more alone in the world, this goal became even more important. In the years between April 1950 and August 1955, no other country recognized the PRC. Six countries had recognized China as early as 1950, but they did not start formal ties. This list had Britain, Sri Lanka, Norway, Israel, Afghanistan, the Netherlands, and Israel. At that time, one of China's key foreign policy goals was to establish friendly ties with those countries so that China could have more official representations around the world.

2.4. China Ideology (1964-1975)

China's adherence to communist ideology has led to negative perceptions of the nation among the populace of Saudi Arabia. Faisal bin Saud, monarch of Saudi Arabia from 1964 until 1975, vehemently opposed communist ideologies due to their foreign origins, propensity to incite unrest and political transformation, and lack of alignment with Islamic principles. During the first two decades of the People's Republic of China's independence, Saudi Arabia had a negative perception of China. This was mostly due to China's strong relations with the Soviet Union, its revolutionary policies, and its treatment of the Muslim community. Saudi Arabia was significantly concerned about the potential indirect danger posed by extremist ideologies propagated by the Soviets and Chinese in the region. The severe repression of Muslims in China throughout the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution exacerbated Saudi Arabian animosity against China. Mao Zedong initiated the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to safeguard communism and eradicate capitalism, a longstanding aspect of Chinese society.

China recognizes that Saudi Arabia is a conservative nation opposed to communism; however, Chinese policymakers want to maintain amicable relations with Saudi Arabia for many reasons. Unlike several other Arab powers, Saudi Arabia did not assert that the PRC was assaulting Korea.

1. Saudi Arabia opposed the U.S.-supported initiative to defer any potential actions on Taiwan's expulsion from the UN.

2. In October 1955, Saudi Arabia and Egypt entered into a mutual defence agreement, and Saudi Arabia collaborated with Nasser.
3. In September 1955, Saudi Arabia supported Nasser's initiative to negotiate an arms agreement with the Soviet Union. The Chinese significantly contributed to this agreement (Levanon, 1988).
4. Saudi Arabia supported the Imam of Yemen's assertion about the British Colony of Aden and assisted the Omani insurgents in their struggle against the British-supported ruler for a while (Levanon, 1988). Consequently, the Chinese government perceives Saudi Arabia as having an independent foreign policy distinct from that of the West (Levanon, 1988).

Zhou Enlai, China's leader, established the use of the Islamic card with Saudi Arabia at the Bandung conference. Zhou accompanied two prominent Chinese Muslims to the conference. The conference indicated that the Chinese government aimed to use Chinese Muslims to establish connections with the broader Muslim world. Zhou and a contingent of Muslims met with Prince Faysal ibn Sa'ud, the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia. The issue of permitting Chinese Muslims to undertake the pilgrimage to the kingdom for the first time was raised (Shichor, 1989). The Saudi authorities prohibited Chinese Muslims from entering for trips till that time. Subsequent to the conference, the Saudi authorities resolved to let twenty Chinese Muslims to undertake pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia annually (Shichor, 1989). With the expansion of Islam in China, it emerged as a significant instrument for the government to engage with Muslim nations and disseminate Mao's ideologies to the vast Muslim populations in Asia and Africa (Behbehani, 1981). Chinese Muslims have gained more autonomy in practicing their faith. They rebuilt mosques, restored property to Muslims, and appointed Muslim leaders to prominent governmental posts (winter, 1979). Muslims in China played a significant role in establishing governmental connections between China and Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and several other nations. From 1955 until the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1964, the China Islamic Association (CIA) facilitated annual trip groups to Saudi Arabia, which thereafter ceased operations. The Cultural Revolution was an intense struggle for dominance inside the Chinese Communist Party. Mao's radical faction opposed the pragmatic leadership of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, its primary objective was to eradicate four antiquated ideas, practices, morals, and traditions. The CCP used severe measures against minority groups, including Muslim

minorities and religious communities like as Tibetans and Mongols, to address national issues and promote ethnic homogeneity in China.

In the late 1960s, the Saudi leadership had an alternative perspective about the threat to its own security (Levanon, 1988). The Cultural Revolution and China's backing of the liberation struggle in the region severed the only direct connection between China and Saudi Arabia. For the second occasion, the Saudi regime saw China as an adversary of Islam and a catalyst for turmoil and radical transformation in the region (Quandt, 1981). China attempted to foster political relations with the Saudi regime by using Islamic affiliations; nevertheless, this strategy proved ineffective. The Saudi leadership is disinclined to enhance ties with China because to China's mistreatment of its Muslim population and its support for the Marxist insurgency in South Yemen and Oman.

2.5. China Changing Policy (1970s)

Due to its oppressive treatment of Muslims and revolutionary groups in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula area, China is unable to establish direct contacts with these states, as discussed above. The countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf began to get China's more favourable foreign policy treatment in the 1970s. U.S. engagement with Gulf and Peninsula countries became a priority as attention turned to that country. Fears of Soviet expansionism prompted China to shift its attention. China has made a concerted effort to start a dialogue with the monarchy and has been using the following tactics to foster ties with the kingdom since the late 1970s:

- **Abandoning its Revolutionary Stance**

China ceased its support for the insurrection in Oman and established diplomatic relations with the Omani government. Furthermore, it has limited its support to the South Yemen administration and accelerated its political and economic ties with North Yemen.

- **Implement Similar Policies**

China highly esteemed the perspectives of Saudi leaders and endorsed several Saudi policies, particularly those related to the Arab-Israeli issue and the security of the Gulf and Peninsula area. Numerous pieces were disseminated in the Chinese media to apprise the people of Saudi Arabia's sentiments.

The Peking Review reprinted an interview with Prince Fahd ibn Abd al-Aziz, the Second Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom, conducted by the Lebanese newspaper Al Anwar, in which he discussed the oil embargo strategy (Peking Review, 1975). The Chinese government commended the Saudi government's initiatives to promote unity among Gulf nations aimed at establishing a ceasefire in Lebanon and facilitating a peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict through an eight-point proposal (Fahd Plan) intended to secure peace between Iran and Iraq and address the Soviet presence in Afghanistan (Beijing Review, 1981). China endorsed Saudi Arabia's intention to acquire airborne warning and control system aircraft (AWACS) from the United States and condemned the U.S. for its protracted decision about the sale of these aircraft to the kingdom. Beijing Review, 1981. The Chinese see an escalating Soviet danger to the region via South Yemen, East Africa, and Afghanistan, advocating for U.S. cooperation to safeguard the area against Soviet influence.

- **Inviting for Good Offices**

China wants to leverage certain Gulf nations already having diplomatic ties with the PRC to use their good offices to bring peace between China and Saudi Arabia back. According to Hashim Behbehani (1981), China attempted unsuccessfully to utilise Kuwait as a springboard in its quest for Saudi recognition. Behbehani claims China kept pushing the Kuwaiti government to use its good offices to generate Saudi recognition (Behbehani, 1981). On May 2, 1979, China Ambassador Ting Hao in Kuwait informed the Kuwait newspaper As-Siyassah that his nation would like to create official ties with Saudi Arabia. He told that China and Saudi Arabia maintain identical viewpoints on different international issues (Beijing Review, 1989). In November, 1981 the vice-director of China National sports commission, Xu Yunsheng met the Saudi Minister of Social Affairs and Vice-president of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation in Malaysia and both expressed their hopes for improving the two countries relations with each other.

2.6. Setting the Pattern

China has used its growing relationships with Gulf and Peninsula countries to show Saudi Arabia that it can live with countries that have different social and political views. The South China Morning Post said on October 31, 1978, that talks were quietly beginning to set up formal ties

between the two countries. China had already established formal ties with Oman, according to reports from June 1978. China had also started talks with Saudi Arabia to make those ties official. Leader Zhao and Crown Prince Fahd shook hands at the North-South Summit in Cancun on November 17, 1981. Since this was the first official meeting between the two countries, there wasn't much foreign news coverage. In 1985, Chinese Vice-Premier Yao Yilin went to the UAE and spoke at the airport about China's long-term goal of improving its relationship with Saudi Arabia. In 1985, while in the UAE, Wu Xueqian, the foreign minister of China, gave an interview in which he said that his country wanted to start formal ties with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain. Besides that, he said, China does not have any problems with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or Bahrain because it agrees with them on things like Afghanistan the Iran-Iraq war and ME issues. Saudi Arabia was a strong anti-communist country during the Cold War. It wasn't until the late 1980s that it made formal ties with China. It strongly backed Taiwan's conservative government. A secret sale of weapons between the two countries sparked the desire to build links. Arabia thought it was in danger from Iran and Israel in the middle of the 1980s. Iraq invaded Iraq in September 1980, which was the start of the Iran-Iraq War. Saudi Arabia helped Iraq and gave it money. When President Saddam Hussein met with King Fahd in Taif in August, he made hints about the war that was to come. Very fast, the war turned against Iraq, and Iran promised to attack Iraq many times in the 1980s. Israel showed off its long-range military power by destroying the offices of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Tunis in 1985 and Iraq's Tuwaitha nuclear plant in 1981. The Saudis wanted medium-range ballistic missiles to keep Iran and Israel from attacking, but their usual Western arms traders wouldn't send them.

Fahd and Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who was his security minister, chose to talk to China. Sultan used two of his sons: Prince Bandar bin Sultan Al Saud, who was Saudi Arabia's minister to the US, and his brother, who was in charge of the country's air defence. After starting talks with Beijing, Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al Saud plans to sneak weapons into the country and put them in place. Early in 1988, the CIA found the missile site in Saudi Arabia. This immediately caused a crisis between Washington and Riyadh. President Ronald Reagan told Fahd to get the missiles out of there right away, but Fahd refused. The Saudis were scared that Israel would attack the spot. Bandar asked Reagan's national security director, Colin Powell, to ensure Israel that the missiles were only meant for protection. Powell remembers that the scene was very stressful

afterwards. Chinese experts would have died along with Saudis if Israel had attacked the missile base. But Israel gave in after Reagan put a lot of pressure on them.

The missile deal led to the creation of formal ties between Saudi Arabia and China during Bandar's second trip to Beijing in July 1990. It did not, however, lead to more big sales of war gear. There have never been any confirmed rumours of another sale of CSS-5s, which are more modern missiles. The Saudis bought drones in China and use them in Yemen. For its air force, Saudi Arabia still uses American and British planes. Its army uses American tanks, and its National Guard uses Canadian ground battle vehicles. The deal was even less clear because China put nuclear weapons on the CSS-2.

2.8 Using of Islam

China once again turned to the use of Islam as an important tool to gain its foreign policy goals and objective regarding Saudi Arabia. The China Islamic Association major tasks to the use of Islam to develop relations with other countries. In 1982 during second session of CIA which was attended by several CCP leaders China promised to continue to develop friendly relation with other Muslim countries in order to promote mutual understanding and friendship.

2.9 China Engagement with Saudi Arabia

People's Republic of China (PRC) and Saudi Arabia have different faith beliefs and are in different parts of the world, but they are growing their relationship because they both have interests in it. However, the leaders of the PRC were unable to build a relationship with Saudi Arabia because of problems and issues in the country and a higher level of hunger in the region. These included a weak agricultural economy, Japan's occupation of China, and the ongoing Civil War in the country. Since they started working together, the PRC and Saudi Arabia have been in four different times.

In 1955, the Bandung Conferences were a success, which pushed the five principles of coexistence and built diplomatic ties between China and Saudi Arabia. However, relations between China and Saudi Arabia did not change much until the 1970s. This was because Mao was in charge of China at the time, and he did not do anything to help China with its needs or goals in the region. However, Deng Xiaoping took over China after Mao's death in 1978. Deng putting in place big

economic plans and changes. In the Middle East, mostly in Saudi Arabia, Deng changed China's foreign strategy.

2.10. 9/11 Attack

In the greatest terrorist attack in U.S. history, 19 al-Qaeda fighters take control of four commercial planes and crash two into the World Trade Centre buildings in New York City and one into the Pentagon outside of Washington, DC. The fourth plane crashes in rural Pennsylvania as people try to take control again. Over a decade, Osama bin Laden worked to attack American soldiers and citizens, and his extreme Islamist beliefs led to the strikes that killed 2,977 people.

At the start of the 21st century, the 9/11 terrorist attack made the West want to gain more power even more. It was the problems that the Middle East had to deal with. At that time, the US made deals with Australia and Japan to make allies, and NATO grew to include more countries in the east. China is not happy about the growth of NATO and the US's new partnership with other countries. India's rise is also a threat to China's situation. There is also a lack of power in the international order because of the new threat.

As China's power grew and ties between the U.S. and China got better after 9/11, it supported the war on terror, the invasion of Afghanistan, and sharing more information. Because of this, China was able to step up its own fight against terrorism against internal resistance groups like Uyghur rebels without any help from the US.

China's decision to host a senior delegation from the Taliban in July has prompted a reevaluation of its relationship with the group in light of the United States' disengagement from Afghanistan. China is apprehensive that the Wakhan Corridor, which borders Afghanistan, could serve as a rear base for ethnic Uyghur separatists, some of whom have been known to join the Taliban. China's willingness to grant the Taliban the international recognition they desire will be contingent upon the resolution of their security concerns.

2.11 Development of China-Arab Relations in a New Historical Stage

The impact of extraordinary events on the shift from the old to the new century has resulted in notable and fascinating changes in the global society. A wave of terrorist attacks that targeted the American heartland on September 11, 2001, shocked the whole world. The United States launched a war in Afghanistan to exact revenge for this act of terrorism, blaming al Qaeda for the

9/11 tragedy. More disruption and instability occurred throughout the world in 2003 when the United States and the United Kingdom launched an invasion of Iraq. Globalization seems to have had both positive and negative effects on the world economy, increasing the wealth gap between rich and poor people worldwide. While many who are unable to take advantage of opportunities have been brutally abandoned, those who are astute enough to do so may find their lives much improved. Such a complex and challenging evolutionary process gives rise to new trends in global power patterns. A new global financial crisis broke out in September 2008, impacting the global economy and creating issues and repercussions in many countries. China and the Arabs should work together more in such a situation so that they can respond to challenges more effectively. First and foremost, China and the Arabs should continue to support one another as devoted friends. The Islamic religion has been the target of animosity and malice since 9/11, with Arab countries being the first to experience unfair and unwelcoming treatment. China has taken three actions to fortify its long-standing relations in response to this situation. (a) In order to facilitate non-official contacts and exchanges between the two sides and to channel aid to Arab countries, the Chinese-Arab Friendship Association was established at the end of 2001. (b). In order to mediate between the various key players in the Arab-Israeli conflicts that have afflicted the region for more than 50 years and to clarify Chinese views on Middle Eastern issues, the post of Chinese Special Envoy for Middle East Affairs was created in 2002. (c). The establishment of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in 2004 provided a more adaptable and extensive platform for reciprocal engagements and exchanges across a range of fields. Unlike some other purported forums, this one hasn't turned into a blank statement paper. The framework this forum developed has seen a great deal of work on a wide variety of official and informal connections problems, such as contacts and exchanges in the fields of politics, economics, culture, and humanitarianism. The following examples show how both parties help one another politically: (a). China and the Arabs share the primary goals of the opposition party. While China supports the Middle East peace process and the establishment of a Palestinian state in accordance with the Arab peace plan, the Arabs uphold the idea of one China. (b). In response to anti-Arab sentiment after 9/11, both parties stressed that they "condemn any form of terrorism and oppose any tendency to associate terrorism with specific ethnic groups or religion." (c). Both China and the Arabs said that they "respect and support the self-made choice of a development model based on one's own domestic conditions" when the United States began its "Great Middle East Initiative" in 2004 by forcing Arab countries to adopt

its principles. (d). Both sides agree that "the Iraqi people should have full self-determination over their own future, and Iraq's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity should be fully respected." In addition to serving both parties' fundamental interests, these sincere mutual aids also promote stability in the area. This has always been the manner of the old China-Arab connection.

The democratisation of international relations is a top priority for both parties, and they both oppose unilateral dominance in international affairs with the clear intention of creating a new political system and a kind of equitable cooperation among varied states. Several parties have offered a range of viewpoints in an attempt to choose the best philosophy to lead the hotly debated new world political order, including the Arab and Chinese ideas of equality and democratization. Proponents of hegemony create and put into practice the ideas of "unilateralism," "preemptive action," and "overthrow of rogue regimes." China came up with its own idea in 2005: the creation of a "Harmonious World," which is in line with the trend towards peaceful development. Additionally, the Arab world has made a number of recommendations for changing the global order.

In an attempt to mend the rift between the United States and the Arab world, President Obama has often expressed his intention to reject US "unilateralism" in favors of attentive listening and conversation. In a speech at Cairo University on June 4, 2009, Obama expressed his willingness to begin a new chapter of friendship between the US and the Muslim world. Obama also gave a good speech to Iran in the Iranian New Year of 2009, although he is adamant about the US's position on Iranian uranium concentration. The lack of notable progress in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Iran is regrettable. The Arab-Israeli issue, meantime, nevertheless makes it difficult for the US to mend its relations with countries in the Middle East. In actuality, it directly affects the possibility of beginning over. The U.S.-Arab relationship has improved. Obama said in his speech that Israel and Palestine had to respect one another's right to life. Additionally, he promoted increased efforts to put into practice the internationally recognized coexistence approach between an Israeli and a Palestinian state.

For a considerable amount of time, the world has recognized the successful coexistence of an Israeli and a Palestinian state as crucial. Few in the international community, nonetheless, have offered any workable strategies or concepts for implementing this plan. As recommended by UN Resolution 242 a few decades ago, Israel has really been urged to cease establishing residential

settlements for a considerable amount of time, and the call for support for the Palestinian nation-building process has been going on for a long time. However, there has been no notable advancement in that resolution over the last 50 years. Muslims place a great deal of importance on the Palestine-Israel dispute because they believe it is the root cause of all Middle Eastern strife and instability. Given the strong ties between the US and Israel, they have great expectations for US support in resolving this issue. The United States will thus be impossible to gain the trust of the Islamic world, establish a new beginning for US-Arab relations, or promote peace in the Middle East until it significantly contributes to the settlement of this issue. Third, there is a good chance that bilateral economic ties will continue to increase.

Their bilateral commercial partnership is one of the most notable and has drawn a lot of attention in the context of China-Arab economic relations. Bilateral trade was only about 789 million US dollars when China started reforming and opening up in 1979, but by 2004, when the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum was established, it had grown to 36.71 billion US dollars. The amount of bilateral commerce exceeded the 100 billion dollar threshold in 2008, reaching 132.8 billion dollars. As China's economy grows quickly, it is typical for its oil needs to grow as well, which inevitably leads to a rise in the amount of bilateral commerce. It took China 11 years to reach its first 100-million-ton increase in oil imports, as the country became a net importer of oil in 1993 and its oil imports surpassed 100 million tonnes in 2004. It imported 196.8 million tonnes of oil in 2007, which is about 200 million tonnes. China thus completed its second spike in oil imports of 100 million tonnes in only three years, with half of those purchases coming from Arab countries.

There has been constant promotion of mutual investment in addition to trade. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are collaborating with Chinese companies to construct new oil refineries in Tianjin and Zhanjiang, each project costing over 10 billion RMB. Since they scaled down their investments in the United States due to the 2008–2010 financial crisis, Gulf investors have really been searching for new investment targets. They believe that China is the ideal place for financial adventures for "win-win programs." Because these oil-rich countries in the Persian Gulf can provide superior oil refining technology and guarantee a consistent supply of raw materials for cooperation projects, China also sees collaboration with them as profitable. For instance, the Saudi Basic Industry Company provides 10 million tonnes of crude oil annually to SINOPEC as part of its collaboration program centered in Tianjin.

There will always be conflicts and frictions as a consequence of closer economic and commercial connections, but they will not have an adverse effect on the general trend of bilateral relations. The massive losses brought on by the global financial crisis that broke out in September 2008 did not spare Arab countries. In March 2009, the Asia Development Bank projected that the total value of financial assets worldwide may have declined by about \$5 trillion. The chairman of the Arab Association of Industry, Commerce, and Agriculture, Kasaer, said at an international financial conference in April 2009 that "the loss that Arab countries suffer on their overseas investment has exceeded 2.5 trillion US dollars." A financial crisis and declines in oil prices worsened their losses in local markets, which totalled more than 600 billion US dollars. The total losses incurred by Arab countries, both domestically and internationally, were close to \$3 trillion.

Even though Egypt's economy is not solely dependent on oil sales, it has suffered losses as a result of a drop in foreign exchange earnings from Egyptians living abroad, the financial crisis's effects on travel, and a dip in Suez Canal revenue. Egypt's income from the Suez Canal has been falling since 2009, according to the official census. In April 2009, for instance, they made 340 million US dollars from the Suez Canal, which was 22.9% less than the same month the year before. Due to a drop in global trade, just 148 vessels passed through the Canal during that month, a 13.4% decrease from the same period the year before. The financial crisis has prompted a variety of measures from different governments.

At the Arab Summit for Social and Economic Development in Kuwait in January 2009, delegates decided to establish a \$2 billion Arab Development Fund to support Arab countries financially.

Fourth, the ongoing and steady expansion of China-Arab relations has led to the writing of new chapters in friendship. Despite its 18-fold GDP growth during the last 31 years of reform and opening up, China is still a developing country. China's aim to strengthen and broaden ties with Arab countries, one of the largest groups of developing nations, demonstrates that it will see these relationships as the cornerstone of its diplomacy. At the establishment of the China-Arab States collaboration Forum in 2004, China and the Arab nations decided to establish a new kind of partnership based on equality and all-encompassing collaboration. The following characteristics characterize this cooperation's new quality in comparison to earlier global collaborations: (a) There is no dominance or popularity between the two parties; they are equal. (a) In order to introduce their equal relations paradigm to the global society, both parties are attempting to

democratize international relations. (c) Both sides work to eradicate international crimes and invasions while promoting global peace and security. (d) To attain shared prosperity and power, both parties will increase their bilateral financial, trade, and economic cooperation. (e). In order to increase understanding and goodwill between China and Arab countries, humanistic interactions will get particular attention. Since its founding, the Cooperation Forum has sponsored two friendship assemblies and three inter-civilization discussions. The development of a new kind of collaboration has advanced significantly as a consequence of teamwork.

CHAPTER 3

3. CHINA-SAUDI ARABIA RELATIONS UNDER XI JINPING

Under the guidance of Xi Jinping, China's role in the Middle East has grown, especially in Saudi Arabia. President Xi Jinping has been in charge of the People's Republic of China since 2013 and is the seventh president. China's many BRI projects opened up new ways for the two countries to work together. President Xi Jinping announced the BRI project in 2013. In the past, China and Saudi Arabia's only interaction was trading energy resources and goods needed for everyday life. China is set to build infrastructure and spend more in trade with Saudi Arabia after the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project makes ties between the two countries stronger. China is also building stronger ties with the Middle East, especially with Saudi Arabia, because China helps the nuclear power industry, space satellites, and new ways to make energy. In exchange for economic growth, Saudi Arabia meets China's energy needs.

3.1 Approach of New Relationship

China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping is grounded on the "New Type of International Relations," which prioritizes the nation's core interests and introduces a new strategy for the Middle East, particularly focusing on Saudi Arabia. China endured colonial domination for a century before achieving independence as the People's Republic of China. Since that time, it has endeavored to counter hegemonies and imperialism (Jinping, 2014).

China's foreign policy is founded on the principle of a community of shared destiny, asserting that areas in the global south have analogous development obstacles and need cooperative endeavors to advance along their own development trajectories. The Chinese notion of common destiny focuses on communal fate and shared commonality. In several lectures, Xi Jinping articulated the core principle of this discourse as mutual respect, collaboration, and cooperation on diverse global concerns, contrasting it with the traditional model of relations linked to a Cold War mindset (Jinping, 2013).

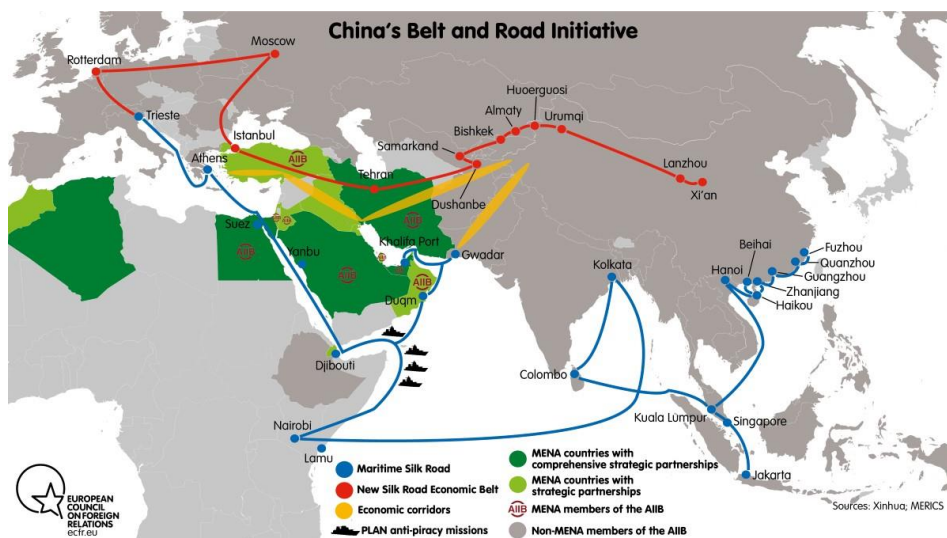
The energy-abundant Middle East is seen as a critical element in China's energy needs and a strategic resource in the case of a confrontation with the United States. China's principal aim is to strengthen its ties with this area. The formation of bilateral and multilateral relations with the area is essential for China's geopolitical and economic objectives. It is essential to neutralize the

states under American influence to safeguard itself from the United States and to pursue its energy and economic interests peacefully.

The relationship between China and Saudi Arabia is characterized as a partnership, stemming from shared prospects for collaboration in vital sectors such as energy commerce and commercial growth. The two countries possess aligned goals for economic advancement and prosperity.

3.2 Economic Ties

The prospective Belt and Road Initiative has given the People's Republic of China and Saudi Arabia new ways to work together on business issues. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is helping China's economy grow and develop at the same time that all three countries are still playing a key geostrategic role for China's trade and growth. The People's Republic of China (PRC) wants to reach a number of goals through this work. For starters, it wants to help the region's economy grow by making relationships stronger, which will make more people want to buy Chinese goods. Second, To make the BRI work, there needs to be strong infrastructure and development programmes, as well as close coordination with local governments. The Malacca Strait is a strategic problem because 80% of the oil that the People's Republic of China buys go across it. The goal of this strategy is to make that problem better. In 2018, China set aside \$3 billion for the banking industry as part of \$20 billion in loan packages for rebuilding in the region (Staff, 2018).



https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east/

In order for Saudi Arabia to achieve its economic and geopolitical objectives, it is essential for the kingdom to build global strategic alliances, particularly its link with China. In large part, China and Saudi Arabia are cooperating with one another because of their respective roles as significant oil suppliers and consumers on the world stage. The Saudi Arabian government intends to diversify its economy away from oil and to leverage Chinese investment and expertise to boost its vision 2030 project, which aims to increase oil earnings. This economic engagement is crucial since Saudi Arabia is working towards these goals. In order to fulfill its goals of increasing its worldwide stature, achieving sustainable development, and managing its wider economic and geopolitical issues, Saudi Arabia's overall strategy must provide a higher priority to the improvement of its relations with China. Bandar Alkhorayef, the Saudi Arabian minister of industry and natural resources, recently gave an interview to the Chinese business and finance site Caixin Global. In his interview, he said that the reason for the increased collaboration between China and Saudi Arabia is not politics but rather business. The economic world, in my view, is ultimately the one that dictates politics, rather than the other way around. According to Zhang and Xu (2024), China has a lot to teach us about the degree to which all of us are capable of integrating. During his time at the World Economic Forum, the minister made his comments after taking part in a panel discussion on industrial policy.

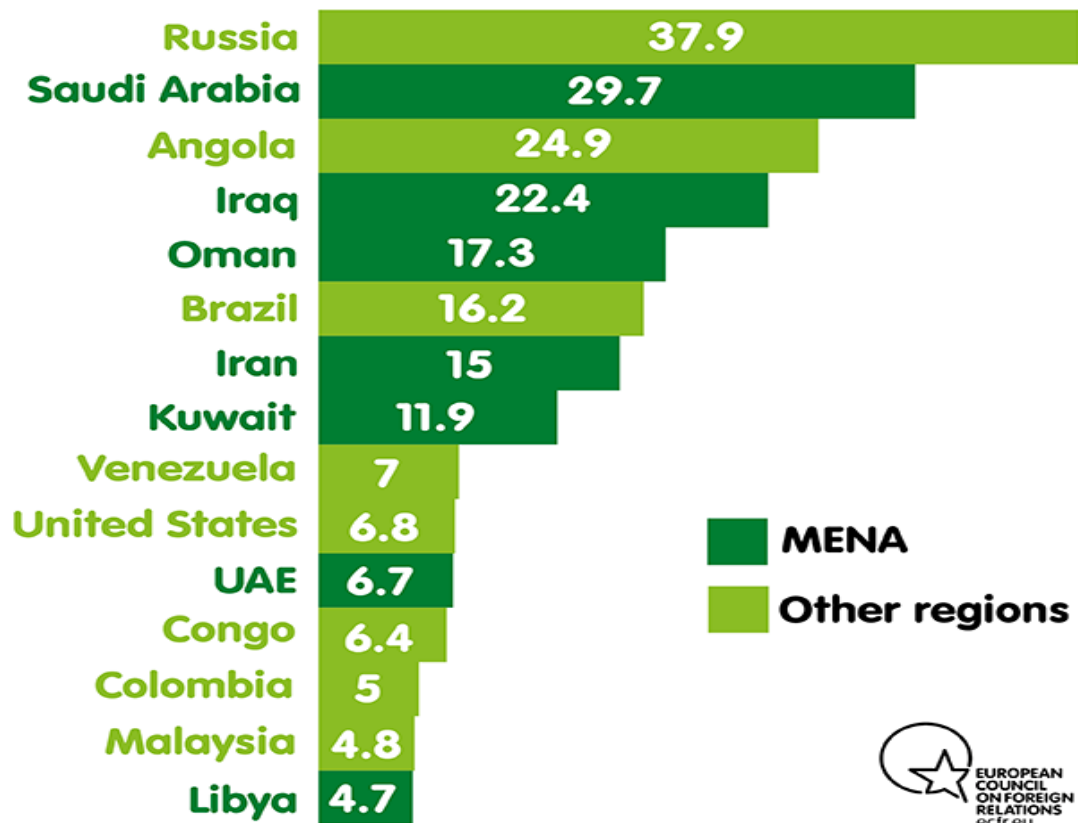
At this point in time, the Saudi Arabian economy is very reliant on oil exports, and the Chinese market is extremely important to that economy due to the enormous quantity of oil that China gets. Oil prices have remained stable as a result of China's need, which also provides Saudi Arabia with a reliable market for its key export that is oil. During the year 2023, the World Monetary Fund reported that China was the recipient of more over a quarter of Saudi Arabia's oil exports. As a result of China's fast economic growth and expansion in the modern age, connectivity with the global economy has been a driving factor behind these developments. Among the numerous types of collaboration that comprise China's economic links, cultural exchanges and cooperative security operations are only two examples of the many different kinds of cooperation. In this area, we include things like the development of infrastructure, the exchange of currencies, and the signing of trade and investment agreements. The economic dependence of other nations on China's market is a necessary condition for the formation of partnerships between China and other nations.

Marks (2020) uses the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as an illustration of a paradigm in which China provides financial incentives to other countries including the United States and other countries. Over the course of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China and Saudi Arabia have been collaborating since 2013, while Xi Jinping was serving as president, in order to create new chances for projects that include collaboration. It is important to note that China's involvement in the Middle East may be broken down into four basic levels: relationships with smaller governments, comprehensive strategic partnerships, innovative comprehensive collaborations, and strategic partnerships with numerous medium-sized nations. Several countries, including Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, have come together to build comprehensive strategic partnerships.

The following are instances of creative comprehensive relationships: strategic alliances with a number of medium-sized states, including as Israel and Turkey; bilateral contacts with Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar; and diplomatic ties with Qatar. The fourth tier includes linkages with Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Bahrain, in addition to Syria (Chaziza, 2020). China and Saudi Arabia have both eclipsed one another as key trade partners in recent years. Saudi Arabia and China are working together to give each other a boost to their respective economies. China is now in the process of participating in the building and development projects that are taking place in Saudi Arabia. In return, Saudi Arabia provides China with refineries and petrochemical production facilities. China obtains these facilities.

Saudi Arabian government officials are gradually coming to the conclusion that China is and will continue to be their most important oil market in the immediate future. This demonstrates the importance of establishing strategic links with this emerging economic force. "When we think of Saudi Arabia, images of an oil kingdom with enormous oil and gas reserves, a country with a rich history that includes being the birthplace of Islam, and the breathtaking setting sun against the vast desert come to mind," says Xi Jinping, the President of China (China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). "Saudi Arabia is a country that has a rich history..."

Top 15 crude oil exporters to China, 2018 (\$bn)



https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east/

For the first time since 2018, Russia passed Saudi Arabia as China's main source of crude oil in 2023, making up 19% of China's total. China's total oil imports went down from 17% in 2022 to 15% in 2023. In order to increase oil exports to China, Saudi Arabia has agreed to send up to 690,000 barrels of oil to two Chinese plants every day (Cang and Martin, 202) and many more chemicals and processing projects by Saudi Aramco and Sabic.

China has been buying oil since 1993, and by 2023, it will have used almost sixteen percent of the world's oil. Because it can produce and sell a lot of goods and has huge crude oil supplies, Saudi Arabia has become the Centre of PRC economic action in the Middle East. In fact, more than 20 years ago, trade with China made up only about 10% of all trade between Saudi Arabia and the US and EU. But it has slowly grown every year.

ITC (2023) says that China will buy about \$54 billion worth of oil from Saudi Arabia in 2023. This is more than 83% of all the oil that China buys from Saudi Arabia. In 2023, trade

between the two countries was worth \$107.33 billion a year. There were only \$418 million in foreign links in 1990, so this is almost 257 times more money (Al-Tamimi, 2014).

By going beyond the oil business, Saudi Arabia also wants to bring in foreign funding and bring its economy up to date. Vision 2030, the plan by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to change the kingdom's economy from what he calls a "addiction to oil" (kingdom of Saudi Arabia), needs more local industry.

China's investments and contracts in the region help Saudi Arabia the most. The PRC has put more money into the Middle East and North Africa than any other country since 2005. In Saudi Arabia alone, they have signed deals and contracts worth about \$60 billion. In 2022, FDI in Saudi Arabia was only \$11 billion. In 2023, it rose to \$28.8 billion. About 15% of Saudi Arabia's capital inflows in 2023 came from the original equipment manufacturing (OEM) business for cars (Dettoni, 2024). Chinese companies have put a total of \$5.6 billion, \$5.5 billion, and \$4.26 billion into Saudi Arabia's metal, electronics, and auto businesses, respectively. A Chinese company called Human Horizons (AL Rashid, 2024) spent \$5.6 billion in the auto industry to set up a joint partnership for study and production of cars. Beyond oil, Saudi Arabia wants to expand its economy by making more than 300,000 electric cars every year by 2030 (Fusheng, 2022).

The president of the People's Republic of China visited Saudi Arabia in December 2022. While there, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan stressed that the kingdom would remain open to the US and the rest of the West. No doubt that working together with the world's second-largest economy is important for Saudi Arabia's growth, but that doesn't mean we can't keep working with the world's biggest economy (Demongeot and Bakr, 2023)." This comment shows that Saudi Arabia is trying to keep the economy in balance while also improving its ties with other countries like the PRC. In his speech, prince Faisal talks about how the kingdom plans to handle its complicated foreign relationships while still reaching its goal and securing its place as a major player on the world stage.

3.3 Political Ties

China is still primarily on the fringes of the political scene in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf. Its long-term significance could be much higher than Russia's, yet its involvement in the Middle East attracts less attention. Political ties between China and Saudi Arabia are founded on mutual avoidance of contentious issues to focus on points of consensus. As demonstrated by China's persistent refusal to develop a thorough regional policy, strong position on controversial

issues, and support of one side in wars, and this deliberate balancing act has been rather successful. This strategy helps China to avoid drawing pressure, especially from the United States, on Beijing and its Gulf Arab allies. Like the Arab League, these countries maintain significant business and trade ties with Taiwan even under the One China policy. Likewise, Saudi Arabia, like other Arab Gulf states, refrains from commenting or expressing opinions on issues that can shame China and generate external pressure, especially internal ones. Saudi Arabia understands Chinese sensitivities and knows that such behavior would destroy the fabric of a relationship strategically vital to it. It thus refrains from commenting on China's human rights situation and denouncing its treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjiang Province, which has worsened since 2016, when about one million Uyghur's were sent to "re-education" camps. Moreover, although Saudi Arabia, the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," is active and worried about Muslim minorities all over the world, including outside the Middle East, when bin Salman visited Beijing in February 2019, the Saudi Crown Prince defended Beijing's treatment of the Uyghur's, saying that "China has the right to take anti-terrorism and de-extremism measures to safeguard national security." In addition, Saudi Arabia was one of 37 countries that wrote to the United Nations in July 2019 supporting China and commending it for "notable accomplishments in the field of human rights." At the same time, a Chinese delegation from the Council for Promoting South-South Cooperation travelled to Riyadh to explore how to boost Chinese investment in the Kingdom. Apart from the increasingly frequent reciprocal visits by heads of state, China and Saudi Arabia have enhanced their political ties in other industries. Relations between the countries were raised to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in 2016, a somewhat symbolic label indicating a development of long-term connections. Apart from its political and financial influence, China is allocating resources to increase its cultural presence. Regionally, China is trying to maintain parallel ties and is doing all in its power to avoid having to "choose sides." For instance, China's security cooperation with Iran involves the shipment of weapons Tehran may use against the Gulf States. Though without condemning Saudi Arabia against Houthi insurgents linked to Iran, Beijing has urged an end to the bloodshed in Yemen and expressed concern over the humanitarian condition. Moreover, Beijing keeps sending Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) attack drones for use in Yemen, especially for precise strikes. Under this Chinese plan, increased Gulf tension since May 2019 when Iranian attacks on oil tankers and Saudi oil facilities directly affected one of China's main allies and Chinese economic interests went uncontested by Beijing. China officially condemned

the assaults on the oil infrastructure only in September 2019, after a direct attack on Saudi Aramco facilities; he did not identify which country was to blame. Moreover, Beijing saw the US proposal to form a coalition to protect Gulf tankers as an attempt to impose additional sanctions on Iran and create a "Arab NATO" in the Gulf. Though there are no indications right now that Beijing plans to deviate from it, it is unclear how long China will be able to maintain its "balancing" approach. Regarding relations between major powers, Saudi Arabia has been able to preserve positive ties with the United States while increasing its commercial ties with China. This is mostly due to China's ongoing refusal to adopt unambiguous opinions on controversial issues and open support of any party engaged in conflicts and public disagreements, all under a policy loaded with inconsistencies and contrasts. China, with all the related responsibilities, cannot and does not want to take the United States' place as a strategic guarantee for the security of the Arab Gulf countries. But Beijing might use Saudi worries about its historical ally, the United States, to create division between them, trying to close the gap and strengthen relations with Riyadh at the expense of the US. PRC and Saudi Arabia have been collaborating more and more on Middle East issues as well as regional and international initiatives. While steering clear of subjects that may cause a conflict, such as human rights problems or remarks regarding internal matters, they have focused on items of mutual interest. China guarantees security and peace by enlisting regional foes as BRI partners and fostering good relationships with them, so enabling China to influence the ME area, especially Saudi Arabia. China's efforts to mediate regional conflicts show her desire to promote peace among the competing forces in the region. China, Israel, and Palestine all have equal ties. China is a strong supporter of Palestine and has substantial business and scientific ties with Israel. PRC President Xi Jinping proposed a four-point strategy in 2017 to strengthen relations between the two rival countries (staff, 2017). Saudi Arabia claims that with a strong emphasis on economic growth and a leadership role in worldwide energy and oil imports, China will one day be the largest economy in the world. China, with the largest military force in the world, is a major nuclear power spending second only to the United States on defense and its military technology is fast expanding. As its economic and military might has expanded, China's political influence has much increased. Saudi Arabia wants to increase its strategic independence and sees China as a major partner in doing so. As any negative states or regional development might compromise her national goals and interests, including the BRI located in the region, China also sought to resolve issues between Assad's government and the Syrian opposition in 2016. The US in 2013 addressed issues in South Sudan

to protect the economic system of the nation and ensure political stability. China has consistently tried to fund South Sudan's oil reserves and provide peacekeeping forces to preserve peace (Nyabiage, 2020).

President Xi Jinping of China met with Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Agreements reached include alternating biennial head of state meetings between the two nations, raising the China-Saudi Arabia high-level joint committee to the level of prime ministers, matching China's Belt and Road Initiative with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, and enhancing Chinese and Arabic language education in both nations (China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). A research conducted by Arab Centre Washington DC in collaboration with the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies in 2024 reveals that the majority of Saudis doubt the sincerity of the United States in supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state. With 78% seeing the U.S. reaction as very poor and 13% as poor, overall Saudi Arabian public opinion on the U.S. reaction to the Israeli assault on Gaza is very unfavorable (Arab Centre Washington DC, 2024). Though they do not give commercial ties with Iran any thought or importance, the PRC is Saudi Arabia's main economic partner (Riadel, 2020).

US-Saudi ties fell significantly as a consequence of many events including the Arab Spring, Iran's expansion, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine after China and Saudi Arabia built close ties. Though the connection endures, it is marked by declining confidence and largely driven by common wants (Bohl, 2023).

3.4 Strategic Ties and Military Cooperation

As economic and political ties between China and other countries have grown, the country has focused on and tried to improve strategic ties in the Middle East, especially with Saudi Arabia. China has made a lot of deep strategic cooperation deals with governments in the region, including those of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. Since 2010, they have met once a year at the cabinet level to talk about their plans. The PRC is the second-largest nuclear power in the world, after the US. It is building the world's largest military and spending a lot on security. It is also quickly improving military technologies. China has been in the shade of the US, UK, and Russia, which are all big arms suppliers to the Middle East, for a long time. Compared to these countries, China doesn't sell many weapons in this area. In fact, only 6.1% of its defense exports go to the Middle East. The United States and the United Kingdom make most of the weapons used in the Arab Gulf. Their armies are built around these weapons, including all of their

support and logistics systems, advisers, and training. This makes it hard to use Chinese systems in the future. While China's needs for security have caused its army to grow and its security businesses to thrive, the Middle East and the Gulf in particular have become more interested in buying one-of-a-kind systems. At the same time, Arab Gulf countries have been increasing their military spending for the past ten years, even though oil prices have been going down. This is because they are facing more threats. Beyond its close strategic ties with the US, Saudi Arabia has limited interactions with China because it believes that the US will continue to be its security blanket.

When Saudi Arabia buys weapons, it's trying to strengthen its ties with Beijing in order to gain power over the US. This is partly because the US won't give Saudi Arabia specific systems and wants to reduce its reliance on a single source. When troops buy weapons from many sources, they have to deal with matching parts, special training, and a different way of keeping the guns in good shape. But decentralizing buying makes countries less reliant on the US and more likely to be able to make their own decisions. This may continue if worries about the US's Middle East policy don't go away. In the past few years, China has increased its security presence in and around the Gulf. Chinese naval forces were sent to the Gulf of Aden to fight maritime piracy, Chinese ships visited Gulf ports, China opened its first naval and air support base outside of China's borders in Djibouti, China took over management of a sea port in Pakistan, and China held joint military drills with Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

China and Saudi Arabia are also working together on security issues in new ways. As Riyadh's interest in unmanned aerial vehicles has grown, and the US has refused to give them certain capabilities (mostly offensive vehicles) because of policy restrictions, export controls, and the need to protect Israel, they have had to buy these capabilities from China. People think that Chinese platforms aren't as good as Western ones, but they seem to be fine, and it's clear that the quality is always getting better. The domestic nuclear industry is another place where China and Saudi Arabia work together. As a response to Iran's nuclear project and to concerns about its own reputation and growing energy needs, Saudi Arabia has recently started to look into its nuclear possibilities. The Kingdom has said it wants to start a nuclear project to make energy and remove salt from water. Riyadh is already getting ready and has signed a number of deals with other countries to work together in the field. In 2012, Saudi Arabia and China signed a number of memorandums of understanding that strengthened their nuclear ties. One of these agreements

allowed the establishment of a branch of the China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) in Riyadh. As a neutral country in the ME, China has shown that it is "the friend of everyone and the enemy of none," since it works with everyone in the area. China's armed influence in the Middle East has grown over the past few decades. The US helped keep the peace in South Sudan by sending 700 military soldiers there and passing new laws to handle anti-terrorism activities in the area (Smith, 2014). Through both one-on-one and international relationships, China has a big impact on the Middle East. By making smart links, especially in business ties, China is increasing its global power on both sides. The PRC put a lot of stress on "strategic partnerships," with "comprehensive strategic partnerships" reserved for countries with a lot of economic or political power around the world (Ward and Curtis, 2022).

China set up its first permanent presence in Djibouti in 2017 to oversee a wide range of tasks, such as military cooperation, joint exercises, protecting Chinese citizens living abroad, emergency rescue operations, and keeping international strategic seaways safe (Xuejing, 2017). China places a lot of value on Saudi Arabia in the Islamic world and the Middle East for three main reasons: it is the birthplace of Islam and home to two holy cities; it is a major oil producer and an important player in the Middle East; and China wants to strengthen their relationship with Saudi Arabia in order to make it a more comprehensive strategic partnership (Niu and Wang 202?). Joint training and drills, counterterrorism efforts, sales of certain weapon systems, and the production of armed drones together (Jiayao, 2023) are the main areas where Saudi Arabia and China work together on security. China has been a small source of arms to Saudi Arabia. In the last ten years, China has made up only 1% to 2% of the kingdom's military sales (IISS, 2021). Saudi Arabia showed off Chinese intermediate-range missiles like the DF-3 in a parade in 2014 (Masterson, 2022). Chinese companies also sent "carrier killer" DF-21 missiles to Saudi Arabia in 2007 (Xie, 2022). The Saudi military has relied on American technology for a long time, so adding Chinese weapons to systems that are already in place is hard from both a technical and a political point of view. Furthermore, China has limited ability to compete with Western arm providers. The Saudi government sees China as an important business partner, even though they depend on the US for defense. The government of Riyadh wants to keep things fair with both countries. If China and Saudi Arabia make a deal on security, it will be harder for Saudi Arabia. At that time, the US gave the country 78% of the weapons it bought. These included 91 combat planes, hundreds of ground attack missiles, and more than 20,000 guided bombs (Wezeman and Gadon, 2023).

CHAPTER 4

4. GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Together with Chinese businesses, Saudi Arabia's ruling family, government, and business community worked to accomplish Vision 2030's goals of restructuring the nation's social and economic structure. This is because they provide competitive prices, they are successful in many different economic and technological fields, and most importantly in certain cases, Chinese enterprises teach Saudi talent and share their technical experience. To preserve ties with major international powers like the US, Russia, and China, the royal government employs a multifaceted foreign policy approach. China helped negotiate a diplomatic agreement with Iran in March 2023, which also eased tensions in the Middle East. Particularly when it comes to military issues, the US has questioned Saudi Arabia's engagement and relationship with China. In order to make up for the possible reduction in US security aid, Saudi Arabia is pursuing two strategies: first, to strengthen its military capabilities while aggressively growing its military and economic alliances. Saudi Arabia is strengthening its security alliances with European countries including South Africa, China, India, and Turkey. These connections might be beneficial in the future as they could make it easier to invest in Saudi Arabia's growing weapons sector. To aid in the advancement of its ballistic missile program, the monarchy is deepening its alliance with China.

In the face of this competitive environment, Saudi Arabia is anticipated to seek new possibilities and take on duties that were previously held by great countries in order to improve regional stability or broaden its area of influence. It is likely that Saudi Arabia would want to enhance its strategic independence by skillfully negotiating with key players in order to maximize benefits and avoid being involved in unanticipated confrontations. In order to increase its influence and, in certain situations, work together on global issues, it may also look into forming coalitions or strengthening existing regional alliances.

4.1. Global Security Initiative (GSI)

At the yearly Boao Forum in April 2022, China's President Xi Jinping launched the Global Security Initiative (GSI). The plan is based on six ideas and principles. The first is the goal of shared, cooperation, and long-term security. Second, protecting the independence and safety of all

countries' territories. Third, following the goals and principles set out in the UN Charter. Fourth, all countries need to put real security issues first. Fifth, use talk and debate to solve the problems between countries. Sixth, ensuring security in both conventional and non-traditional areas (China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

The goal of the GSI China is to improve economic ties between countries in the Middle East to support peace, stability, and safety. It also shows how important the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and the ME conference are as places to spread the GSI's ideas in the area. "Put the five-point plan for Middle East peace and stability into action. These points are promoting mutual respect, ensuring fairness and justice, promoting nonproliferation, working together to improve collective security, and speeding up development cooperation to create a new security framework in the region."

To quickly find a fair solution to the Palestinian problem, the international community needs to take real steps to support the two-state solution and hold a full, authoritative, and powerful international peace conference (China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). China is aware that its relationship with Saudi Arabia is getting stronger, which has other countries, like Russia and India, interested. From GSI's point of view, there are two main things that worry them about in the Middle East: the peace process in Palestine or the ME region, and the security plans across the Gulf region. In 2023, the China Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that after seven years of open fighting, Iran and Saudi Arabia reached a deal to repair formal contact. China thought that making formal ties would help them fight back against U.S. efforts to make a regional alliance against them or Iran. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, wants to keep the area stable by putting a focus on economic ties, progress, and Vision 2030.

4.2 Agreements

Saudi Arabia and Iran, acting as mediators, begin discussions with Iraq in Baghdad in April 2021. These discussions were complex since they addressed security problems such as Yemen and Iran's nuclear program. To investigate concerns, Iraq and Oman maintained discussions, with a focus on Saudi Arabia and Iran's participation in Yemen. In December 2022, China emerged as a mediator during the first Chinese-Arab meeting in Riyadh, where President Xi Jinping was present. This meeting paved the way for China to organize additional bilateral negotiations in March, concluding in a joint Trilateral Statement that formalized the accord (China Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, 2023). Saudi Arabia strengthened connections with China due of its strong political and commercial relationships with Tehran, believing that China was one of the governments to guarantee both sides followed through on their pledges (International Crisis Group, 2024). Saudi Arabia accepts that the pact does not fix the concerns with Iran, including Tehran's nuclear aspirations and backing for armed groups. This strategic alliance with China may boost Saudi Arabia's position in future talks and regional stability initiatives.

4.3 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) came into being in the year 2001. Aiming to promote cooperation in the domains of politics, commerce, and security, this organization brings together four nations in central Asia with Iran, China, Russia, and Pakistan. Saudi Arabia's admission as a conversation partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) alters the global political scene. In the wake of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit, Saudi Arabia has chosen to become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This move mirrors a change in China's foreign policy course and a movement in Saudi Arabia's economic priorities towards Asia. Of all the countries in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has the most robust ties to the East and has advocated for similar ties with other nations. After the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Saudi Arabia placed a premium on strengthening ties with Russia and China, goals driven by the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. By joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Saudi Arabia hopes to reduce tensions in the Gulf area, especially with Iran, and to reinforce commercial links with Central Asia (Xinhua, 2023). To see this shift from security to economy, look no farther than the Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO).

4.4 Johannesburg Summit and BRICS

Beginning on August 26th and continuing until September 4th, 2002, Johannesburg, South Africa played home to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which is more often referred to as the Johannesburg Summit. The presidents of the BRICS nations extended invitations to Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates during their conference in Johannesburg. The goal of the BRICS system is to foster collaboration, prosperity, stability, and peace among its member states. Saudi Arabia is largely dependent on frameworks such as the BRICS and the SCO in order to increase its influence on a global scale.

According to Dezan Shira and Associates (2023), Saudi Arabia may benefit from its participation in the BRICS group in a number of different ways. These include a decrease in costs, more market integration, and a reduction in its reliance on the United States currency. The biggest economy in the Middle East, which is heavily dependent on agricultural imports, could potentially save money and enhance its food security by joining up with the BRICS nations. According to Dezan Shira and Associates (2023), Saudi Arabia might potentially become a member of the BRICS and make use of the group's pooled resources in order to strategically improve its trade policies with emerging countries. According to Dezan Shira and Associates (2023), the BRICS group has contributed to an increase in Saudi Arabia's exports, commerce, and investment.

On January 1, 2024, Saudi Arabia did not formally become a member of the BRICS group of emerging economies, despite the fact that this was the intention. "Saudi Arabia has been invited to attend BRICS, but we have not yet officially joined," the Saudi trade minister stated at the World Economic Forum. "We have not yet joined." In accordance with Al Arabiya (2024), this notice was sent after the original joining date of January 1, 2024 had already passed. In order to avoid becoming a member of the BRICS, Saudi Arabia is using the technique of negotiating complicated geopolitical problems. In spite of the fact that it had obtained security guarantees from the United States and had the opportunity to negotiate beneficial defense arrangements, Saudi Arabia postponed its acceptance of membership in August of 2024. The economic pressure that Saudi Arabia's relations with its western allies have been under has compelled the kingdom to investigate the advantages of BRICS membership and to seek conversations before further strengthening its ties with the organization.

One further way in which this strategy helps Riyadh achieve its national security objectives is by providing it with the ability to exercise influence on the dynamics of the region. The United States of America has recently been making efforts to bolster its ties with Saudi Arabia as a response to China's growing regional influence and concerns over the possibility of a nuclear weapons race to occur in the Middle East. The expansion of Iran's nuclear project, in addition to Saudi Arabia's pledge to take a comparable action in the event that Iran acquires nuclear weapons, has made this endeavor more difficult to accomplish. Through the provision of security guarantees to Saudi Arabia in exchange for normalizing ties with Israel, the United States sought to deter Iran and bring about a reduction in tensions in the area. These conversations, however, came to a stop

as a result of the bloodshed that occurred in Gaza. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia is making significant progress in the development of a nuclear energy strategy for civilian use.

The United States of America may be able to assist in the prevention of the development of nuclear weapons and lessen dependency on China, which may impose more lax restrictions. Regardless of China's cooperation for Saudi Arabia's uranium development, the United States of America is worried about the possibility of nuclear latency. Despite the fact that regional tensions and distrust make it improbable, the United States of America and Saudi Arabia could be able to work together on issues pertaining to nuclear matters. In the event these conversations are unsuccessful, Riyadh may examine other alternative ways to acquire nuclear weapons for non-military purposes, such as forming a partnership with China.

4.5. Challenges

China and Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision for the future It is anticipated that the BRI would see substantial progress in the Saudi-Chinese collaboration. This collaboration is anticipated to propel the expansion of several different industries, including mining, tourism, and renewable energy businesses, especially for robust development.

The expansion of the tourism sector facilitates rapid interpersonal interactions between the two countries. By 2030, Saudi Arabia's tourism ministry hopes to have five million Chinese tourists and rank China among its top three markets. In 2023, 140,000 Chinese travelled to Saudi Arabia, whereas in 2024, 30,000 Saudis travelled to China. Compared to other nationalities, Chinese tourists visit Saudi Arabia in greater numbers, but the present problems in the Middle East have produced many challenges that have an impact both locally and globally. The factors that are detrimental to China's goals and interests in the ME in one way or another include the conflicting objectives of regional and international actors with respect to stability and security, trade and investment competition, and the worldwide pandemic and its effects (Jr, 2020). The ME is governed by powerful nations like the US and Russia, thus the BRI project cannot be straightforward under these circumstances. Great countries have waged proxy wars in the Middle East. Russia has played a significant role in managing ME via military intervention in regional conflicts and in utilising the UNSC to resolve Iran's nuclear issue, particularly in the instance of Syria. Using China as an example, it has supported Moscow's stance, even though China needs to be more active in the region for political reasons (Jin, 2017). It must take a more active role in the

region in order to accomplish its goals. The United States' reintroduction of sanctions on Iran and disputes with Iran hinder the PRC's progress and expansion in the BRI. Iran, one of the major nations, is located at the intersection of the Maritime Silk Road (MSRI) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) makes it apparent that its strategy for the Middle East is to engage in economic development-related activities while avoiding political participation. China must also take into account the threat that extremist and terrorist organizations pose to the BRI infrastructure, which might result in serious financial losses. In an effort to create a secure environment, China has de-radicalized the region with the help of other Middle Eastern nations (Qiblawi, 2019).

Since sea power has been essential for major nations to increase their influence in the Middle East, China sought to strengthen its relations with Saudi Arabia. China has extended its operations to the Gulf of Aden, a vital conduit for Persian Gulf oil, in an effort to combat the issue of piracy. China sent its guided missile destroyer and frigate to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea's Gulf of Aden, off the coast of Somalia (The Economic Times, 2019). Although these initiatives are applicable worldwide, China's growing influence in the Middle East worries the West. China's involvement in Middle Eastern industrialization poses a threat to Western hegemony. Emerging concerns include financial difficulties, environmental changes, and rising skepticism about Chinese intentions (Jinping, 2019). Among many other issues and difficulties, the Middle East faces political instability, economic difficulties, internal conflict, wars, corruption, etc.

China's economy is another challenge, and it has a big impact on Saudi Arabia's non-oil and oil prices and demand. China presently accounts for more than 25% of Saudi Arabia's oil exports, therefore the country has an impact on Saudi Arabia's oil profits (International Monetary Fund, 2023). As a significant export market for Saudi Arabia, China's economic downturn affects Saudi Arabia's non-oil GDP and its exports of chemicals and plastics, as well as supporting the country's diversification efforts via investment and tourism (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Depending on how the U.S. elections in 2024 turn out, the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia might take a number of different forms. These factors might put Saudi Arabia's foreign policy objectives to the test as it seeks to maintain close security ties with the United States while expanding its economic cooperation with China (Gause, 2024).

In terms of politics or strategy, China is concerned that, in light of escalating Middle East tensions, the Saudi-Iranian agreement, which it assisted in promoting in March 2023, may fall apart. Since the accord serves their interests and is essential to regional security, Saudi Arabia and Iran are equally concerned about it. At the China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran Joint Commission Meeting in Beijing in December 2023, Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized the need of preventing external interference in Saudi-Iranian relations. China believes that escalating the Saudi-Iranian rivalry might undermine its regional and global security ambitions. Under these circumstances, Saudi Arabia fears that the ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel and the Red Sea involving Ansar Allah (the Houthis rebels) and the United States may jeopardise the de-escalation of the region and, ultimately, the peace talks between the Houthis and the Yemeni government, ultimately leading to its collapse.

Political tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran are thus more likely to increase. The Houthis are undoubtedly still relatively autonomous from Iran. They may unilaterally resume attacks on Saudi interests if the war in Gaza rages on, if Saudi Arabia normalizes relations with Israel, or if cease-fire talks in the Yemen Civil War go through.

According to a media source, Saudi Arabia is giving in to the Houthis in Yemen in order to prevent war with the group, which has shown a notable increase in capabilities as seen by its most recent attack on Tel Aviv, Israel.

As tensions in the Middle East, particularly between Israel and Iran, increase, Saudi Arabia is prioritizing three primary goals: protecting its territory, ensuring the security of maritime trade routes, and lowering perceived geopolitical worries. As a result, Saudi Arabia wishes to continue collaborating with Iran on both bilateral and regional issues in order to avoid any escalation that would lead to further attacks on Saudi interests by Yemen and Iraq. In order to manage this delicate situation without jeopardizing Iranian-Saudi relations, Riyadh may also be turning to China for assistance. By enlisting China as a mediator, Saudi Arabia hopes to advance regional stability and create a peaceful environment that advances its diplomatic and economic objectives. Riyadh, on the other hand, believes that Beijing's close political and economic ties with Iran might favorably affect the accord's longevity.

Under the broader geopolitical struggle between the United States and China, China would see a formal defense treaty as an attempt by the United States to encircle it with friends. This may

impact many facets of international relations and increase tensions between the two nations, from technology to business. By increasing U.S. supply of cutting-edge weaponry to Saudi Arabia, the agreement might have an impact on the military balance in the region.

Saudi Arabia has insisted that the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders, should be a prerequisite for normalizing relations with Israel. Saudi officials have always insisted that diplomatic relations with Israel are only possible if there is substantial and long-lasting improvement in this area. A Knesset decision supports the current Israeli government's opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state, which exacerbates the Saudi situation. A military agreement between the United States and the Kingdom that does not include normalization with Israel would also probably encounter political challenges since Congress would not likely support it. This issue has impeded a crucial U.S.-Israeli-Saudi agreement, which is a cornerstone of President Biden's Middle East strategy. Global and regional factors, however, are unchanged; indicating that the next US president may finalize the deal after the urgency of the Gaza issue has subsided.

Crucially, there is little chance that the U.S. Senate would approve a weapons agreement with Saudi Arabia without also normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. This situation is very challenging since ratification requires a two-thirds majority in the Senate. Given the additional challenges a divided Congress presents, a comprehensive strategy is even more crucial: Republicans advocate for solid defense alliances, while Democrats emphasize human rights.

The outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential and congressional elections, as well as the impact of the Gaza conflict, might force U.S.-Saudi ties to swerve in a number of directions, even if these problems are probably going to persist in the near future. As Saudi Arabia attempts to maintain close security ties with the United States while expanding its economic ties with China, these factors might put its foreign policy objectives to the test.

4.6 Discussion & Analysis

The research focuses on three questions. The first question was: How are China and Saudi Arabia aggressively fostering and extending their diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties in the present geopolitical landscape? The second question was: in what ways does China stand to profit significantly from its growing cooperation with Saudi Arabia, notably in terms of economic,

energy, and geopolitical benefits? The final question was on how the expanding China-Saudi Arabia alliance affects the balance of power and influence in the Middle East, and what implications it may have for regional stability. Following the analysis, literature survey, and application of the theoretical framework, the following are the study's discussion and findings:

- China. Saudi Arabia connections exemplify complex interdependence by focusing on the intricate ways in which developing relationships cause transnational actors to become mutually reliant, susceptible to each other's actions, and sensitive to each other's demands. China's active growth and extension of ties with Saudi Arabia may be understood via this lens, since both countries participate in a strategic relationship based on common interests.
- As a developing state, China is strengthening its partnership with Saudi Arabia for economic, political, and defense interests. Both countries promote their relationship for the mutual benefit of their governments and peoples. China and Saudi Arabia have aggressively strengthened their diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties, demonstrating a shared commitment to expanding their alliance across several sectors. China and Saudi Arabia are aggressively fostering a comprehensive alliance via high-level diplomatic contacts, substantial economic engagement, and strategic cooperation, establishing themselves as key participants in the shifting geopolitical environment.
- Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision plan aspires to diversify its economy beyond oil and China by attracting global investors for infrastructure, technology, and industrial projects in several areas. Through the BRI, China may work with Saudi Arabia to finance and build big infrastructure projects. China is already Saudi Arabia's greatest trade partner. Deepening the cooperation may improve commerce by giving China access to Saudi Arabia's markets for commodities, technology, and services. As the world's top oil importer, China's rising economy is strongly dependent on dependable energy suppliers, and deeper collaboration ensures long-term energy security and affordability.
- China's growing connections with Saudi Arabia challenge US supremacy in the Middle East. By strengthening ties with a crucial ally, China may reduce US geopolitical power in the Gulf area. The collaboration helps China secure its energy requirements, develop commercial relations, grow its influence in the Middle East, and challenge the US-dominated international order, all while helping Saudi Arabia achieve its economic diversification aims.

- The increasing cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia is altering the Middle East's geopolitical environment, with enormous implications for regional stability and global influence. Saudi Arabia is China's top crude oil supplier, making energy a cornerstone of their cooperation. This energy interdependence boosts China's influence in the area and is consistent with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which aspires to diversify its economy and lessen reliance on oil exports.
- Saudi Arabia has been a key contributor in China's Belt and Road Initiative, with Chinese investment in infrastructure, technology, and renewable energy projects across the country. As Saudi Arabia diversifies its alliances, it decreases its historical reliance on the United States and Western friends.
- The expanding Saudi-Chinese connection threatens the United States' long-standing influence in the Middle East. China's participation generates a more multipolar dynamic in the area by pursuing economic diplomacy without getting engaged in the region's political and military confrontation. China's connections with Saudi Arabia supplement its larger relationship with Iran, the UAE, and other Middle Eastern countries. However, the United States and its allies may perceive China's increased participation as a danger, possibly escalating great power rivalry in the Middle East. If a proxy battle breaks out, this might aggravate instability. China's investments in infrastructure and technology might spur regional growth and promote economic stability.
- The emerging China-Saudi Arabia cooperation represents a trend towards increased multipolarity in the Middle East, with important consequences for US influence and regional security. While it provides prospects for economic development and conflict resolution, it also poses concerns such as increased competition and reliance on Chinese investment. The degree to which this cooperation stabilizes or destabilizes the area depends on how Saudi Arabia, China, and other parties balance their interests and negotiate rising problems.

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

China achieves its aims, and the Middle East has increased in importance as a result of its geo-economics and geopolitical interests. Under Xi Jinping, developing connections with the Middle East have gained fresh vigor in crucial areas of cooperation. China has urged Middle Eastern countries to aggressively align their policies with those of regional and international entities. China is interested in the Middle East due to its abundant energy resources and rapid economic expansion. China, a growing global power, is looking for a new partner who can match its economic demands and resources. Saudi Arabia is one such country that can supply its energy requirements, and in return, the two nations have formed a partnership for infrastructure projects, technology, and economic development.

China and the Middle East have traditionally exclusively engaged in trade activities. China has been heavily engaged in the region since the Arab Spring. China first interfered in the Libyan war in 2011 to save the lives of residents. This marked the beginning of a new era of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the region, as well as China's first political participation in the area. China makes major contributions to Middle Eastern economic stability via projects such as the AIIB and the Belt and Road Initiative. China is becoming more involved in the Middle East in order to maintain peace and security while also meeting the region's growth needs. Despite a number of geopolitical and geo-economics issues, China controls various political challenges and crises in the Middle East while also being responsible for regional stability and growth. The Biden administration recognizes China's growing regional importance and values the security partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia. China and the United States focus only on diplomatic and technical challenges, not military ones. Stability in the Middle East was required to strike a compromise between Chinese economic interests and US security concerns. Despite their developing economic relations, China and Saudi Arabia have struggled to build the same kind of traditional security ties with the West.

In the face of a more competitive, multipolar world and an uncertain US foreign policy, both governments are determined to strengthen and broaden their alliance. Under Xi Jinping, China and Saudi Arabia have forged stronger economic, political, and strategic connections, significantly

improving their relationship. In addition to energy trade, the two countries are increasingly cooperating on infrastructure, technology, military, and cultural exchange. The China Belt and Road Initiative promote investment and economic diversification in the kingdom, which aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Furthermore, they have strengthened diplomatic relations with China, which is active in Middle Eastern geopolitics by facilitating the reunification of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Even if they have disagreements, their actual collaboration demonstrates a common purpose of regional peace and economic success, making their partnership increasingly important in the changing global order.

Saudi Arabia is committed to working with Washington to develop a defense and security alliance that promotes its interests. It aspires to maintain its independence while strengthening diplomatic and business connections with China, Russia, and Iran. Congress, particularly the Senate, has a difficult time striking this delicate balance between these competing goals. The outcome of this scenario might have a significant impact on US foreign policy in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia's strategic goals. The decisions may transform the geopolitical landscape, affecting global alliances and power structures for years to come.

Saudi Arabia is a key geostrategic ally of China, a global leader in Islam, and a powerhouse in the oil industry. Each of these qualities would make the monarchy a desirable Middle Eastern partner of its own, but when combined, they represent an important component of Beijing's Middle Eastern strategy. Saudi Arabia views cooperation with other extra-regional nations as critical, believing that the United States' commitment to the region is weakening and that China's rising regional influence makes this a crucial connection to nurture.

China has so far been successful in directing its growing relationship with Saudi Arabia to serve its interests by avoiding taking sides in regional disputes, offering incentives that encourage local powers to compete for its attention and favors, and benefiting from the security that the U.S primarily provides. There is an obvious conclusion about Saudi-Chinese digital partnership. According to Saudi officials, this is a critical issue for the country's future, and China has a strong track record in this area as well as a clear effort to support Saudi Vision 2030. In addition to warning of the implications of permitting a larger Chinese digital presence in the kingdom, the US must offer Saudi Arabia a credible option. The United States and China should collaborate to develop a regional framework that highlights opportunities for collaboration. This sketch should

emphasize that the United States want to avoid, if at all possible, turning the Gulf become an arena of great power clashes in the near future.

While China has expanded its strategic reach via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which links governments and civilizations in Asia, Europe, and Africa, the United States has dominated the Middle East for decades and sees the region as a major danger. Beijing must safeguard its commercial and financial interests in the Middle East due to China's large investments in infrastructure and technology. In order to minimize their reliance on Washington, whose powerful military presence in the region gives it an edge over Beijing as a stand-in, its allies want to strengthen ties with Beijing. Nonetheless, the US-China relationship may help to sustain regional peace and security. The region would benefit from the US-China balance of power strategy and the finding of a middle ground. The Sino-Arab Summit made plainly clear that the Middle East and China have a long history of respectful and dependable ties. To observe the shift of power in the region, all parties must respect each other's sovereignty, traditions, and history. China and Arab states seem to be committed to helping one another in a variety of ways, including protecting rising nations' interests in order to sustain the global order based on international law and multilateralism. They are also committed to upholding the concepts of collaboration, harmony, and justice in global affairs. Recent events, such as the first Sino-Arab summit and China's support of the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, have sparked worldwide interest and marked a significant shift in Middle Eastern affairs. As a result, China's growing influence in the Middle East may alter the path of regional politics, particularly the Saudi-Iranian rivalry into a tighter partnership.

5.1 Main Findings

- China's growing energy needs have driven its engagement with Saudi Arabia, while the latter sees China as a reliable partner to diversify its economy beyond oil.
- China's non-interventionist stance and emphasis on mutual respect have enhanced its diplomatic appeal in the Middle East, distinguishing it from the U.S. model of engagement.
- The alignment of China's BRI with Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 has opened new avenues for cooperation in infrastructure, technology, and digital transformation.
- The weakening of U.S.- Saudi ties has enabled China to step in as a strategic partner, capitalizing on Riyadh's desire to maintain autonomy and hedge against Western dependence.

- The digital partnership between the two nations reflects a deepening of ties in sensitive and strategic domains, which has raised concerns in the West, particularly in the U.S.
- China's role in facilitating the Saudi-Iran reconciliation and its active participation in multilateral forums like the Sino- Arab Summit indicate its ambition to play a stabilizing role in the region.

5.2 Recommendations

1. For China:

- Continue to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties through mutually beneficial projects while maintaining a neutral stance in regional conflicts.
- Deepen engagement in soft power initiatives such as cultural exchange and educational cooperation to sustain long-term influence.

2. For Saudi Arabia:

- Maintain a balanced foreign policy that leverages both U.S. and Chinese partnerships to maximize national interests without over-reliance on a single global power.
- Invest in Cyber security and regulatory frameworks as Chinese digital infrastructure becomes more embedded in national systems.

3. For the United States:

- Offer viable technological and economic alternatives to counterbalance China's growing digital and economic presence in the Gulf.
- Shift from a security-centric model to one that incorporates economic and technological cooperation with regional partners.

4. For Regional Stability:

- Encourage inclusive multilateral platforms where global and regional power can coordinate development goals without exacerbating rivalries.
- Promote collaborative conflict resolution mechanisms that include non-Western actors such as China to foster broader regional ownership of peace processes.

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