

Saudi Arabia's New Development Path from the Perspective of "Global Swing Country" in the Context of Multi-polarization

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Abstract: After the end of the Cold War, the world pattern gradually changed from the bipolar pattern of the United States and the Soviet Union to multi-polarization. In this context, the United States, Russia, China, the European Union, the League of Arab States, and other "poles" have a greater influence on the change of the world situation, and the Russia-Ukraine war, the relations between the United States and China, the oil crisis, and other factors are constructing international relations. The American think tank defines some countries with an international voice but different preferences for cooperation as "global swing countries" and expands the original four countries (India, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey) to six countries (adding Saudi Arabia and South Africa). These are also countries that the Western world, led by the United States, is trying to win over. This paper focuses on the development of Saudi Arabia after the implementation of the new policy in the context of multi-polarity and the reasons for the United States to regain the concept of "global swing state". The main research method is literature analysis, and the data and reports obtained from the official website are combined on the basis of scholars' research. It can be seen that the new policies represented by the "2030 vision" introduced by Saudi Arabia since Salman came to power meet the development needs of Saudi Arabia and have achieved certain results. After a period of flat relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia, the United States has attached great importance to it. The reason is that national interests determine international relations.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, America, "global swing states", multi-polarization, "Vision 2030".

1. Introduction

Firstly, the term "Global Swing States" was first coined in the Marshall Fund's "Global Swing States: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey and the Future of International Order" [1]. Since then, international relations have been analyzed from the perspective of "global swing states". For instance, "Global swing states and the maritime order" [2], and "6 Swing States in the Global South Will Decide Geopolitics" [3], emphasizing the important role of these swing states in the geopolitics of the post-Cold War ("balance"). In addition, German Marshall Fund's new "Alliances in a Shifting Global Order: Rethinking Transatlantic Engagement with Global Swing States" [4]. The article further expresses the importance of the United States stepping up its engagement with "swing states". However, there are few scholars and literature on Saudi Arabia from the perspective

of “global swing states”, like Mason’s “Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates: Foreign policy and strategic alliances in an uncertain world” [5].

Secondly, there are many articles reviewing and analyzing the development of relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States in academic history, among which the most authoritative is “Saudi Arabia and the United States” [6] by Pollack. “The Biden Administration's Policy Towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2021-2022” [7].

Finally, beside these, there are many scholars who focus on the study of Saudi Arabia's social and economic development, especially the new policy implemented by the Salman government after coming to power. Examples in this field are: “The Economy of Saudi Arabia in the 21st Century: Prospects and Realities”; And “Saudi Arabia as a resurgent regional power”.

This paper is based on a wealth of literature, supplemented by data from official websites. Moreover, the article will surround those questions, like what are the definitions of “global swing states” and Saudi Arabia’s “Vision 2030”; how to understand the changes that happened in the history of Saudi Arabia and the United States; and what efforts the new government of Saudi Arabia has made. These are all the questions that need to be researched and discussed in the article.

2. The background and definition of Global Swing States

“Global swing states” are those that are not fully aligned with certain powers, like the United States, Russia, and China, after the Cold War, as defined by the United States and some Western nations. The word takes root in American hegemony, and these countries of the global south are regarded as the goals of great power competition. Actually, in order to get rid of the competition, they prefer to create their own development and find a higher international position by cooperating with different forces. It can be seen that although those wing countries prefer to pay most attention to searching for their own development paths and improving their global influence, Washington should pay more attention to them. They have found these countries are playing an increasingly important role in geopolitics day by day, and it would be easier to shape the future global order and keep American hegemony with swing states’ help. For instance, some research proposed “sea blindness” to warn those traditional major maritime powers like America, the United Kingdom and other traditional shipping powers. Besides, in Richard Fontaine and Daniel M. Kliman’s article, they said “Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Turkey offer great potential as partners to extend the global order. Though separated by location and historical experience, these countries, possess large and growing economies while inhabiting strategic locations in their respective regions.” [8] These four countries were the first to be added to the list of “global swing states,” which has now been expanded to six. It is obvious that “the precise global role of each is in flux” [8], moreover, showing that America and other Western countries has attach more importance to these countries day by day.

America’s strategic retrenchment policy towards the Middle East began during the Obama administration. The reason is that, politically, the way the United States deals with the Iranian nuclear issue has caused Saudi Arabia’s distrust; Economically and militarily, the United States has completed the shale gas revolution, achieved energy self-sufficiency and even exports, and Saudi Arabia is no longer an essential energy partner, and U.S. investment and security protection in Saudi Arabia have also decreased.

After the Trump administration came to power, although it still continued the previous strategic contraction policy and “small footprint” in general, the Trump administration strengthened its support for Saudi Arabia based on the demand of the United States to maintain its influence in the Middle East and the influence of domestic factors.

However, the Biden administration’s attitude toward Saudi Arabia has undergone a shift. From the criticism of Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the election campaign to courting gradually, the attitude of the US government is a manifestation of the influence of geopolitics, which also affects

the world situation. During Biden's first visit to Saudi Arabia on July 15, 2022, he held separate talks with the King and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. In a departure from his previous approach to Saudi Arabia, facing questions from reporters after the meeting, he praised the Saudis for their positive efforts in pushing for a cease-fire in Yemen and expressed his recognition. These two pictures in figure 1 and 2 reflect the situation at that time.



Figure 1: American president Biden and the king of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud [9]



Figure 2: American president Biden and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Muhammad bin Salman bin Abdel Aziz Al Saud [9]

3. The Efforts Saudi Arabia has done

Although someone argues that such vision-type agendas are always used to pacify political unrest in the present, "Vision 2030," proposed by Saudi Arabia, has contributed a lot until now.

For instance, as for tourism, western media and politicians often resort to extreme and stereotyped discourse to describe the Islamic world and associate the region with terrorism and danger, including Saudi Arabia. This discourse could lead to more and more public misunderstandings, and foreigners are not willing to choose Saudi Arabia as their destination. According to the government website, it is obvious that the tourism investment in Saudi Arabia has increased from SAR 130.5 billion in 2015 to SAR 164.6 billion in 2019 in order to boost

the tourism economy. Moreover, in September 2019, Saudi Arabia started to introduce online electronic tourist visas for 49 countries, and Saudi Arabia established their the Ministry of Tourism in 2020 for better service to tourists from all around the world, especially those who share their faith.

Saudi Arabia has two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, which attract a large number of visitors every year. Saudi Arabia can rely on Islam to develop religious tourism. One of their projects, “Makkah Route Initiative,” was established in 2018 and officially activated in 2019. This project is designed to reduce the time and comfort of pilgrims from certain nations (Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Morocco, Bangladesh, Türkiye, and the Ivory Coast).



Figure 3: Pilgrims’ direct transportation [10]

The picture comes from the website of Saudi Arabia government, showing their vehicle designed to serve pilgrims in order to reduce their waiting time. According to the official figures, these visitors could complete all immigration procedures in an average of 1.48 minutes (2020). And these actions has got 99.45% satisfaction rate of beneficiaries in 2022. [10]

Besides, they also developed agricultural tourism and set funds and loans to support the development of tourism projects. The picture below is showing the locals’ agriculture. At the same time, hosting major international events and entertainment events referred in “Vision 2030” could also boost local tourism. Like Taylor Swift’s “Age” World Tour, it can be seen that the tourism economic benefits that such events bring to host countries are much enormous.



Figure 4: Saudi Arabia’s agricultural tourism [10]

4. Conclusion

The relationship between the two countries was so close in history, and the United States and Saudi Arabia needed each other's oil and military protection, respectively. Obviously, as the international situation changed, the United States became the world's second largest oil exporter and no longer depended on Saudi Arabia for energy; In order to maintain its position in the energy market, Saudi Arabia has sharply increased production to reduce oil prices, which has attracted the dissatisfaction of the United States. Besides, Saudi Arabia is not America's most vital partner in the Middle East actually. In recent years, the United States has worked to improve relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, hoping to maintain a certain degree of geopolitical control over the Middle East through these two countries, in line with its own strategy of strategic contraction.

Under such background, it is clear that relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States have recently shown a warming trend. As mentioned above, senior leaders of the two countries have met regularly, planning to sign bilateral agreements on security and defense cooperation. However, the authors tend to believe that the signing of the agreement does not indicate that the relationship between the two countries can quickly "warm up" and even return to the peak in the history. On the contrary, the content of the agreement is the result of a compromise between the two sides, and it is more like a "guarantee" that could bring a sense of security to them. Therefore, it can be seen that the product of the lack of trust between Saudi Arabia and the United State.

From the continuous promotion of the Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030", it can also be seen that, Saudi Arabia will not completely fall into the camp of the United States in the future, nor will it give up cooperation with Russia, China and other nations in order to fitting its own development in the future. Other swing states may hold similar arguments. Moreover, based on the idea that the United States is not willing to get involved in wars in the Middle East and occupies its shrinking strategy, it is also really likely that the United States security guarantee for Saudi Arabia is not as comprehensive as before.

To be honest, the article is just a simple analysis of Saudi Arabia's development path and the strategies of the United States based on the author's perspective. With the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is clear that international relations are changing rapidly. National interests determine international relations, and different countries will search for and design their own suitable development paths based on their own national interests. Despite the fact that current geopolitics are still unstable in some parts of the world, the future of international relations is still worth looking forward to.

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