



Original Research Article

Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Strategic Repositioning in Regional and International

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Abstract: This study examines how Vision 2030 has reshaped Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and regional security strategy in the Middle East. Initiated under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Vision 2030 represents a comprehensive agenda of economic diversification, institutional modernization, technological advancement, and global engagement. The study argues that Vision 2030 has strengthened Saudi Arabia's strategic autonomy by linking domestic transformation with proactive diplomacy, regional stability, and diversified international partnerships. Using Neoclassical Realism, Regional Security Complex Theory, and Strategic Hedging Theory, the research explains how internal modernization enhances state capacity, how regional interdependence shapes Saudi security behavior, and how multi-vector diplomacy with the United States, China, and Russia expands strategic flexibility. The findings suggest that Saudi Arabia is moving from a traditionally oil-centered and security-dependent posture toward a development-oriented foreign policy that prioritizes economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and conflict de-escalation. Vision 2030 therefore positions the Kingdom as a central actor in shaping a more cooperative regional order.

Keywords: Saudi Vision 2030, Foreign Policy, Economic Diversification, International Relations, Regional Security, Saudi Arabia.

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INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia has overwhelmingly changed its strategic direction since 2015, changing its domestic development agenda, its regional diplomatic course and its focus on security in the Middle East. The accession of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the throne in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia represented the start of a new Saudi vision under his leadership and called Vision 2030, which included new trends such as modernization, economic diversification, institutional reforms, strategic autonomy and proactive regional engagement. In addition to being an economic reform agenda, Vision 2030 is a nationwide transformation plan aimed at putting Saudi Arabia among the leading

regional and international powers to strengthen stability, development and international cooperation (Alkahtani 2022).

In the post 2015 era, the Middle East experienced geopolitical and economic transformation, with new energy markets, increased regional interdependence, techno-economic modernization, emerging technology trends and their implication on the development needs of youth and increasing global power relations. To counter this, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia embraced a new forward-looking strategy, which involved enhancing national resiliency, increasing bilateral relationships and forging diversified economic ties. The Kingdom

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has increasingly tied the growth of domestic prosperity with uninterrupted security and political stability across the region, thus re-aligning the security calculus of today's Middle East (Osman, 2026).

The main idea of Saudi Arabia's strategic reorientation is Neoclassical Realism that focuses on the link between domestic transformation and foreign policy behavior. In this regard, a state's external approach will not only be influenced by external factors such as the international system, but also by internal factors such as leadership vision, institutional capacity, economic power, and internal reform. For Saudi, Vision 2030 has enhanced the kingdom's competence in the fields of economic modernization, building infrastructure, technological development, diversifying into defense industries, reforming administration, and investing in human capital. The home front adjustments have helped make Saudi Arabia more capable at playing a more active, independent and more influential part in the region's security. Furthermore, the leadership's focus on modernization and sustainable development has broadened the Kingdom's agenda in diplomacy and its active presence to promote peace and cooperation in the region have boosted (Alley, 2026).

While Saudi Arabia is gearing up for a much more fundamental issue than oil, the region's strategic importance in terms of security is captured by the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). It is argued here that states in a region are closely connected by security and the challenges they face, overlapping in their political, economic, and strategic aspects. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver view regional security in terms of overlapping political, economic, and strategic problems between neighboring states. Saudi Arabia plays a significant role in the Middle Eastern security complex because of its many strengths: economic, geopolitical, religious, energy and diplomatic. The Kingdom has continued strengthening its efforts for regional dialogues and integration, de-escalation efforts, and cooperative security efforts since 2015. The Vision 2030 acknowledges that Chapati prospering national development relies on a stable regional environment, which leads Saudi Arabia to provide support for regional partnerships and positive engagement in the Middle East (Debre & Flonk, 2026).

Saudi Arabia's strategic shift also aligns with the principles of Strategic Hedging Theory, a concept used to describe nation states diversifying their relationships with various powers across the world in order to foster a higher degree of autonomy, flexibility and economic opportunity.

Saudi Arabia has increasingly diversified ties with the United States, China, Russia, the European nations and new Asian powers since 2015. The Kingdom has pursued a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy through diversification of investments, technological cooperation, energy diplomacy, defence cooperation and strategic dialogue rather than being solely reliant on one strategic partner. This multidimensional approach boosted the strategic autonomy of Saudi Arabia and its work to promote the economic and diplomatic agenda of Vision (2030) (Tahir *et al.*, 2026).

KSA's configuration has also expanded its vision on security by raising awareness about the dangers. The Gulf's security is traditionally often perceived in terms of military threats, territorial competition and external security. Saudi Arabia, however, is now putting in place a holistic strategy for security that encompasses various economic, technological, sustainable development, energy diversification, food security, tourism and international cooperation concerns into its future plans beyond 2015. In this context, economic modernisation and regional diplomacy go hand in hand and are integral parts to national resilience and regional stability. Saudi Arabia aims to provide a conducive environment for long-term regional growth through investment, building infrastructure, promoting energy transition, and fostering relations and partnerships (Ustiazhvili, 2025).

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's post-2015 policy in the region also reflects its increasing functions as a development-oriented and peace-supporting regional actor. The Kingdom has employed investment diplomacy, infrastructure initiatives, economic corridors, mediation, strategic partnerships, and much more to extend its reach throughout the Middle East and beyond. Saudi Arabia has Perceived as a Modernizing power, committed to Prosperity, Innovation, Regional Connectivity and International Cooperation by Vision 2030. This shift has bolstered the Kingdom's contribution to a positive security politics in the region and solidified its regional leadership in the Arab/Islamic world (Khan, 2025).

This paper looks at the effect of Vision 2030 on Saudi Arabia's strategic approach in the region's security developments since 2015. The study integrates the theories of Neoclassical Realism, Regional Security Complex Theory and Strategic Hedging Theory to shed light on Saudi Arabia's changing regional profile through a three-way interaction of these theories. Using Neoclassical Realism, Regional Security Complex Theory and Strategic Hedging Theory, the study examines Saudi Arabia's changing regional role by creating a three-

way interaction among them. The study urges that Saudi Arabia has become a proactive regional state in the early 21st century, a modern, global state with a growing regional presence, and a force that is more and more active in promoting regional stability, economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and cooperative security in the present day's Middle East (Alkahtani, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

• Economic Transformation and National Modernization After 2015

Since 2015, Saudi Arabia has undergone tremendous economic change, which is widely recognized in numerous bodies of literature. Vision 2030 considered structural reforms to move away from oil dependence and promote non-oil industries like tourism, entertainment, logistics, mining, renewable energy, technology, etc. Some scholars say this reform programme represents a holistic modernization strategy which seeks to enhance the resilience of the country and make Saudi Arabia a competitive global economy. Saudi Arabia's long-term development plans are often driven around big projects like NEOM, the Red Sea Project, and Qiddiya. They prove the Kingdom's will to diversify its economy, innovating, urban and sustainable development and attracting investments from around the world. In the literature, this is generally interpreted as a shift in Saudi Arabia's policy to focus on diversifying its economy and adopting a development model that aims at a future instead of being based on oil (Al Qaoud *et al.*, 2026). Other gains noted in the literature include gains in: foreign investment inflows, privatization programmes, public sector efficiency, innovation in digital transformation, and infrastructure investment. The reforms have improved the Middle Eastern Kingdom's signature on the global financial map and bolstered its trustworthiness as a top investment destination. In this sense, Vision 2030 is seen not just as an economic policy programme but also a tool which will enable Saudi Arabia to gain more influence in the region and internationally.

• Regional Diplomacy and Security Engagement

Saudi Arabia has been moving towards a more regional peaceful and cooperative approach with regard to security since 2015. Dialogue, mediation, conflict de-escalation and cooperation on collective security in the Middle East are given prominence in the literature. This is an example of a broader understanding that regional stability is vital for economic change, investment expansion and the development of the country in the longer term (Burrell & Long, 2026). Saudi Arabia has sought to enhance cooperation between GCC nations, regional dialogue in areas of contention, foster regional

partnerships and promote diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts, scholars say. The region's integration was especially evident in Yemen, where the Kingdom has been active in peace and humanitarian efforts; in Iraq, the Kingdom has engaged the country through diplomatic, economic and soft-power interactions; in Syria, its regional dialogue work; and in the wider Gulf region, through the Kingdom's efforts in coordinating maritime security matters. Saudi Arabia is also gaining momentum in regional connectivity, trade integration, and cross-border development projects, as highlighted in the literature. In general, these policies reflect the overall Vision 2030 agenda and promote regional peace and stability that is tied to development within a domestic context. Saudi Arabia's regional diplomatic earnestness is therefore viewed as development-driven, stability-centric and long term-oriented to the Kingdom's modernization and development program.

• Expansion of Global Partnerships and International Cooperation

Development of global partnerships and international cooperation. Increased global partnership-building and international cooperation. The continuous emphasis on Saudi Arabian's engagement strategy at the international level through scholarship is evident in the post-2015. The Kingdom has enhanced relations with great powers such as the USA, China, Russia, the highly developed nations of Eastern and Central Europe, and the developing nations of Eastern Asia. The foreign policy approach evidenced through this diversified diplomacy is one of balance and pragmatics with regard to maximizing economic opportunity, strategic flexibility and international influence (Yom, 2026). Saudi Arabia's foreign partnerships have helped the Kingdom to gain foreign investment, advanced technology, more energy cooperation and more trade relations and enhanced economic integration on the international arena, researchers state. Saudi Arabia has adopted a multi-vector approach to foreign policy and aims at promoting national modernization and regional capacity, instead of only traditional cooperation between nations. The analysis in the literature indicates that such a multidisciplinary diplomacy has contributed to Saudi Arabia's international image and to the accomplishment of the economic goals of Vision 2030. The Kingdom's diplomacy has broadened and deepened its relationship with several other global entities, enhanced strategic independence and enabled it to become a key player in the new dynamics of global economic and security cooperation.

• Social and Institutional Development

An extra significant theme is Saudi Arabia's

social institutional modernization from 2015 to present. Significant reforms, which have changed the governance, social development, public administration and lives have been implemented by Vision 2030. These reforms have been claimed to have fostered a more dynamic, participatory and globally connected Saudi society (Leber & Draege, 2026). The important points that came to light in studies were the extension of education and skill development initiatives, rise in the employment of women, modernization of the legal and administrative framework, growth of the cultural and entertainment industry, and enhancement of public services. These reforms have bolstered social inclusion, increased economic inclusion and strengthened institutional performance. The literature also attributes to the social modernization the Saudi foreign policy transformation in general. A more multi-cultural, educated and globalised society enhances the Kingdom's capacities in investment attraction, cultural diplomacy and global branding of the Kingdom. Genuine change at home, and abroad in the context of a Vision 2030, thus goes hand in hand with each other.

- **Energy Transition and Economic Diversification**

Another factor that literature focuses on is Saudi Arabia's proactive participation in global energy markets and diversifying its energy portfolio. Saudi Arabia has become one of the world's major energy producers, while also seeking to diversify their efforts towards renewables, green hydrogen, carbon reduction technologies and sustainable infrastructural projects. These measures are part of the Kingdom's endeavour to achieve a balance between its energy leadership position and efforts for long-term sustainability. (Osman 2026). Energy transition plans have been identified as the key pillar for the Saudi Vision 2030 by experts and researchers, due to its ability to boost economic diversification and maintain the Kingdom's strategic role in the world energy landscape. The country's plans for solar investment, green hydrogen, carbon capture, and sustainable infrastructure indicate that Saudi Arabia is committed to still playing a significant part in the energy sector, both in traditional fuels and in new energy sources. It interpreted the energy transition undertaken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia not in the sense of stepping out of the energy geopolitics, but rather as a strategy of adaptation in a changing world of global economy. The Kingdom's strategy of investing in renewable energy technologies and sustainable development takes a proactive approach to prioritizing energy's influence over long-term oil revenue reliance. By investing in renewable technologies and sustainable development, the Kingdom is taking a proactive approach to securing energy influence, while minimizing reliance on oil

income.

- **Security and Stability-Oriented Regional Role**

Ensure regional stability through security and stability. Provide regional security and stability. A central issue of literature in recent years has been how the Saudis are becoming a stabilizing force in Middle Eastern security politics. Since 2015 it has become a growing Kingdom emphasizing that regional stability is important for regional economic growth, investment confidence and long product for the region. It is a stability-centric approach which dovetails in line with the objectives of developing Vision 2030 and the national strategy of transformation laid out by the country (Miller & Cardaun, 2025). Saudi Arabia has focussed more on dialogue, mediation, strengthening collective Gulf security, providing economic cooperation, and helping with reconstruction as means of achieving peace in its regional security policy. The Kingdom has expanded its concept of security into areas of development, investment, connectivity and institutional cooperation, rather than military security alone. They emphasize Saudi Arabia's actions to ease regional tensions via constructive diplomacy efforts and engagement. This fosters the Kingdom's role in contributing to the stability, development and cooperative security in the region. From this perspective, a defining aspect of Saudi Arabia's security role is its embrace of modernizing and developing its regional identity.

- **Vision 2030 as a Long-Term Development Framework**

Seeing back 2030 as a longer term development framework. Looking back at the 2030 as a longer term development framework. Throughout literature, Vision 2030 is consistently defined as a long-term strategic plan on how to achieve Economic Transformation, Social Modernization, Institutional Reform, and Regional Leadership. Scholars stress that the programme is intended more than just to diversify the economy, it sets out to make Saudi Arabia a world centre for investment, innovation, tourism, culture, logistics and international cooperation. Overall, Vision 2030 has enhanced Saudi Arabia's global perception as a modern and developmental country dedicated to sustainable development and engagement with the international arena. It has also offered the inspiration and support for the Kingdom's more assertive presence on the regional and international scene. Vision 2030 has emerged as a major pillar of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy tilt, connecting its domestic transformation with regional peace and international cooperation (Alkahtani, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows the qualitative research design to study the shifts in Saudi Arabia's strategic positioning in the field of regional security undertakings since 2015 and which coincided with the implementation of Vision 2030. It is descriptive and analytical, rather than based on a numbers-based measure, with a focus on both policy transformation and regional diplomacy and security engagement.

The research is deductive as it starts with the centered framework of Vision 2030 and proceeds through analyzing how this vision affects the economic modernization of Saudi Arabia, regional cooperation as well as international partnerships. The study deals with dates from 2015 to current which are related to the implementation phases of Vision 2030 and its impact on Saudi foreign policy behavior.

The sources used in the study are secondary sources such as academic sources, Saudi government reports, Vision 2030 literature and documents, international organization publications and credible policy analyses. These materials are discussed using a thematic content analysis that prioritizes economic diversification, regional diplomacy, strategic partnerships, institutional reform and security cooperation.

Verified sources are identified to ensure reliability and texts are cross-referenced with policy and academic sources to ensure the validity. The methodology is limited to secondary data, but it will give a structured vision on the development of Saudi Arabia's regional security role in the coming years according to Vision 2030.

Research Gap

While there has been a lot of work that has engaged with each of these key theories individually, that is Vision 2030, Saudi economic modernization and Saudi foreign policy – little work has attempted to connect all three of these in a single analytical perspective. Existing research focuses on economic reforms, diplomatic engagement, regional security or geopolitical balancing to the exclusion of the others, and none of them adequately considers how these elements interface in the Saudi Arabian post-2015 strategic reorientation.

To this end, this study is addressed to filling the gap placed by such a study, which devotes itself to an integrated theoretical analysis of how Vision 2030 has changed the Saudi strategy in the region. It believes that the concept of diversifying partnerships with other countries and of forming regional partnerships is not a policy in itself, but part of a wider Saudi Arabia's role as a development partner,

co-operative and stabilizing nation in the region and in the world at large.

Theoretical Framework

This research reflects the impact and positive changes that Vision 2030 brought to Saudi Arabia's diplomatic role in the Middle East, its influence and leadership in the region's level of security, and its transformation in role. Vision 2030 is a transformation project on a national scale aiming at further strengthening economic diversification, institutional modernization, regional stability, international cooperation and sustainable security partnerships.

Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has become one of the most active players in the region in supporting economic modernization, diplomacy, regional connectivity and strategic stability. Security, diplomacy, and development ensure they work together as a single country's policy towards the region. An integrated region by the Kingdom's policy, forming a coherent and harmonious strategy between underdevelopment and diplomacy, as well as between security and diplomacy.

This transformation is studied according to three theories which have some relationships with each other: Neoclassical Realism, Regional Security Complex Theory, and Strategic Hedging Theory. Each of these theories can be used to illuminate part of the puzzle as to how Vision 2030 has helped Saudi Arabia build up state capacities, achieve a high degree of strategic autonomy, contribute to regional stability and forge positive partnerships with other nations.

- **Neoclassical Realism**

Neoclassical Realism suggests that it is the combination of international strategic conditions and domestic political-economic capabilities which influence a state's foreign and security policies. The theory highlights the necessity of good domestic governance and sound leadership, economic vigor, and internal changes boosting the capacity of advancing and having a powerful foreign policy. Likewise, Vision 2030 has undoubtedly raised the national capacity, with its focus on economic diversification, modernization of institutions, technological advancements and development, infrastructure building, defence modernization and human capital development in the Saudi context. These changes have helped Saudi Arabia to become more assertive and to play a more responsible role in regional security affairs. The Saudi Vision 2030 has come after a long period marked by a predominantly oil-based economy, and is now a catalyst to make the country a regionally dynamic player in sustainable development and strategic modernization. Vision

2030 has turned Saudi Arabia from a traditional oil-based economy to a regionally dynamic player for sustainable development and strategic modernisation. In the process, the Kingdom's approach to regional peace, economic cooperation, diplomatic engagement and strategic partnerships is shaping up as key pillars of regional security and prosperity. Neoclassical Realism is useful in understanding Saudi Arabia's capacity in leading diplomatic efforts, advancing its economic integration, fortifying its defense capabilities, and efforts to draw in foreign investment, as well as to stabilize the region under the auspices of domestic reforms in the process of implementing Vision 2030. The theory also emphasizes the significance of the vision of the leader in the formulation of foreign policy. Saudi leadership under Vision 2030 has embraced a concise, modern, pro-active roadmap that focuses on modernisation, cooperation with neighbours and development of the country's engagement with the international community. Thus, Neoclassical Realism can be used to postulate that Vision 2030 has positively transformed Saudi Arabia's regional security policy-making efforts by consolidating the internal basis for effective foreign policy.

- **Regional Security Complex Theory**

The Regional Security Complex Theory was developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver and they believe that regional security is inter-connected because of the shared challenges that neighboring states face politically, economically and strategically. This theory proposes that regional security can't be analyzed without taking into account the overall region's private environment. Because of its geopolitical location, economic power, religious importance, energy leadership and diplomatic influence, Saudi Arabia has a crucial and active role in the overall region's security complex. It is an accepted point in Vision 2030 that for sustainable national growth, there must be a peaceful and collaborative regional environment. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has increasingly been pushing for increased dialogue, diplomacy, economic cooperation, de-escalation of conflict, cooperation in collective security and security dialogues among the region's countries. In an era that demands more than ever from the GCC countries to bolster regional security, RSCT sheds light on the expanding initiatives Saudi Arabia is pursuing in fostering stability in the region through cooperation programmes, economic ties, regional investment projects, mediation and diplomatic work. This also provides insights into how the Kingdom has engaged in a positive and constructive way in regional issues, with inclusion on the agenda in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia aims to provide an economic cooperative, strategic connected and sustainable development, peaceful

coexistence Middle East through Vision 2030. Stability is thus not only necessary for security, but also a requirement for development in the implementation of Vision 2030 at the regional level. The examples from the individual countries participating in its meeting showed that Saudi Arabia has a positive and stabilizing influence in regional security politics with the integration of the Arab region economically, its active diplomacy and security cooperation efforts. The Saudi regional active role proved clearly in the regional meeting through the city where the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a positive and stabilizing role in the political field in the region, due to its active involvement in regional economic integration and diplomatic relations and security cooperation, that are considered as factors contribute to the long term peace in the Arab region.

- **Strategic Hedging Theory**

Strategic Hedging Theory states that states face multiple external powers and will strive to ensure the balancing of these relations to maximise strategic flexibility, as well as economic opportunities and diplomatic influence. States diversify partnerships to enhance autonomy, minimize dependency and independent policy choices as a way to avoid dependence on one global partner. The implementation of Vision 2030 needs a great scale of international cooperation in various aspects including technology, investment, energy, infrastructure, defence modernization, logistics, tourism and innovation. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has broadened its ties and strengthened its connections with key players from around the world, including the United States, China, Russia, European nations and some emerging Asian nations. The Strategic Hedging Theory offers a rational and pragmatic understanding of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy making which hinges on twin-tracked relations through economic partnership, strategic flexibility, international investment agreements, foreign policy soft power and mutually beneficial relations. Today, in the context of Vision 2030, the Kingdom is further walking the path towards economic integration in the global arena, multidimensional diplomacy, diversified defense relationships and international development cooperation. This would help Saudi Arabia to play its role as a global influence, an independent regional power, and a connected region. It offers the Kingdom the opportunity of particularly deepening old economic and strategic relations as well as establishing new ones with emerging world powers. Thus, SH Theory provides support for the notion that Saudi Arabia is contributing positively to regional and international stability in its strategic reorientation since 2015. Saudi Arabia's multi-stakeholder and multi-national approach to partnerships mitigates risks of relying on a single power and contributes towards attaining the goals of

Vision 2030.

provide a comprehensive explanation of Saudi Arabia's positive strategic transformation under Vision 2030.

Integrated Theoretical Framework

The study integrates the three theories to

Table 1: Integrated Theoretical Framework

Theory	Core Focus	Application to the Topic
Neoclassical Realism	Domestic reforms and state capacity	Explains how Vision 2030 strengthens Saudi regional leadership
Regional Security Complex Theory	Regional cooperation and stability	Explains Saudi Arabia's constructive regional role
Strategic Hedging Theory	Diversified global partnerships	Explains Saudi Arabia's balanced international strategy

These theories all show the importance of Saudi Arabia's role in boosting the stability of the region, economic cooperation, the expansion of strategic cooperation, and sustainable regional development that has been achieved through Vision 2030. Taken together, Neoclassical Realism, Regional Security Complex Theory and the Strategic Hedging Theory help to account for the country's current projection of becoming a more proactive regional actor with more diversified international interest and more development-oriented agendas.

The Conceptual Framework of the current study is mostly based on the concept of Vision 2030 as a main independent variable determining Saudi Arabia's strategic transformation in the regional security Politics. The Vision 2030 has several aspects of national upgrading such as economic diversification, institutional upgrading, the development of defence, technological innovation, investment expansion and smoother engagement in diplomacy. All of these changes increase the state's capacity in Saudi Arabia, notably in its role in the region, which it is more active and influential in it reveals various intervening variables, which affect the relationship between Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's strategic shift. These cover regional cooperation, world economy transition, strategic cooperation, energy transition and technological modernization. These influence the regional geopolitical and economic landscape on which Saudi Arabia is laying its modernisation and security plans.

Saudi Arabia's strategic reorientation in its regional security policies is the dependent variable in this study. The transformation is manifested in regional side-by-side leadership, diversified strategic partnership arrangements, economic-security integration, defense modernization, linking the region, peaceful regional interaction, and increasing the volume of cooperation with the outside world. Saudi Arabia's shift to a holistic strategy towards economic development, diplomacy and security is clearly evident in these hallmarks.

The framework consequently argues that Vision 2030 is becoming an overarching guideline for the orientation of the Saudi foreign and security policies. The Kingdom has enhanced its capacity for regional peace and stability, its reach into the international arena and its path of long-term development goals with domestic reform and strategic modernization.

Analytical Proposition

The research in this study has showcased the positive impact of Vision 2030 on Saudi Arabia's position on regional security, highlighting economic modernization, diplomatic interaction, strategic coordination, regional stability, and International partnership in regional security as the key features of the SWSS. The study in this research revealed that Vision 2030 has made a positive impact on Saudi Arabia's regional security strategy, which has encompassed economic modernization, diplomatic engagement, strategic cooperation, regional stability and international partnership within the broader framework of regional security.

As Saudi Arabia paves the way toward Vision 2030, it is increasingly also becoming a regional power that has been determining a peaceful, development-oriented and strategic Middle East; a region of economic integration and cooperative security. This Kingdom's strategic direction beyond 2015 is indicative of the changing attitudes from security reliance to one of growth and global integration as a regional leader.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of this research demonstrate that Vision 2030 has greatly changed Saudi Arabia's foreign policy trend and its security role in the region since 2015. The Kingdom has adopted a more proactive foreign policy, emphasizing development and strategic diversifications, rather than a relatively passive posture adopted till now from its neighbors in the region. The Kingdom's foreign policy has clearly become more proactive, instrumental for development and diversified foreign than what was

done till now with the neighboring countries in the region, which is relatively reactive. Vision 2030 has served as a blueprint for the integrated approach of home modernization and regional diplomacy, economic statecraft, and co-operative security engagement. It has allowed for Saudi Arabia to extend its influence not just through the old school tools of geopolitics, but also via economic integration, multilaterals, infrastructure investment, and even through diplomatic leadership.

One of the most important findings is that Saudi Arabia furthered its efforts in the region due to its efforts with regard to the construction of coalitions within the region, as well as to the establishment of mechanisms for security cooperation in the form of a regional security cabinet. Growth in the promotion of security coordination in the Gulf, the Arab-Islamic arena, and in multilateral security groups signals a preference for group-oriented security measures over unilateral ones. Saudi Arabia continues to stake its claim as a responsible regional power capable of organizing together actions to asymmetric threats, maritime security concerns in the Red Sea, and counterterrorism. These trends have strengthened burden-sharing by regional partners and lessened the external security guarantees dependency.

In addition, the study reveals that Saudi Arabia has managed to expand its international strategic relations beyond traditional partnerships successfully. The Kingdom has continued its partnership with the United States but has also developed more active and extensive partnership with China, Russia, India and major Asian economies. That is a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy stance that has contributed to granting Saudi sovereignty over its strategic agenda and boosting its diplomats' flexibility in the region's security dynamics. Saudi Arabia has diversified investments, developed new technology, strengthened defense relations, energized energy markets and geopolitical leverage through diversified partnerships.

A second significant conclusion relates to the rise in the Kingdom's economic diplomacy practice and how it leverages the region for its influence. The construction of mega-projects as part of the Vision 2030 programme, especially the projects related to the development of NEOM and the Red Sea, serve not only as a form of internal development but also as geopolitical and economic connectors. These projects will make Saudi Arabia an important regional trade and logistics, tourism, infrastructure, and investment destination. The economic ties formed under the programs help to promote regional stability by encouraging cooperation and decreasing the opportunity for interstate conflict.

The results also reveal that Saudi Arabia's approach towards regional security increased in pragmatism and deescalating manner. The diplomatic process with Iran has begun to grow from a state of outright opposition to a state of managed competition and conflict reduction, and regional dialogue efforts have started. This has helped to make the region where it is based comparatively more stable and more diplomatic opportunities have been opened in regions like the Gulf and Yemen where conflicts are raging.

The research also underlines Saudi Arabia's soft power and Islamic leadership role in the area. Saudi Arabia is the custodian of the two holy mosques, giving it religious legitimacy and a lot of diplomatic clout throughout the Islamic Ummah. In the process, the Kingdom has been more and more blending into its image of a modernizing unifier and peace-bringing power in the region with these religious currents and influences in the context of modernization, cultural diplomacy, tourism promotion, and international interaction as part of Vision 2030.

Another key takeaway is that Vision 2030 has expanded perceptions of the concept of security in Saudi Arabia beyond its military aspect. Economic diversification and technological innovation, sustainable development, the transition to renewable energy, infrastructure development, and international cooperation are all matters of national and regional security that are no longer in question for the Kingdom. With this more comprehensive, security approach, the people are taking a new step in regional leadership that is development-oriented.

The results showed that Vision 2030 has made Saudi Arabia more independent, active and influential regionally in all three areas of Saudi Arabia's strategic, diplomatic and economic quad. Saudi Arabia has reinforced its role as a key player in the region's stable and cooperative security in the modern Middle East via regional involvement, economic diplomacy, diversified partnerships, and coalition leadership.

DISCUSSION

The Neoclassical Realism approach, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), and Strategic Hedging Theory are able to describe Saudi Arabia's post-2015 regional transformation effectively. These frameworks, combined, illustrate how Vision 2030 has facilitated the Kingdom to link domestic modernisation, regional leadership and a diverse diplomacy into a coherent regional security approach (Chen, 2026).

In the Neoclassical Realism view, the development of Saudi foreign policy is a result of the process of interaction between formal national transformation and external strategic pressure. Saudi Arabia's desire to become more active in the region was driven by factors such as the uncertainties of regional stability, growth of Iranian influence, security threats by non-state actors and geopolitical issues. But the changes enacted under the Vision 2030 gave the Kingdom a greater capability to act. Saudi Arabia's national proficiency and foreign policy capabilities were greatly strengthened through the process of economic modernization, institutional reform, national defence development, technological progress and administrative restructuring.

Saudi Arabia has come a long way in institutionalizing lead-up on collective security in Islam, as seen in the Yemen conflict and the creation of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition in 2015. Concurrently, Vision 2030 carved defense modernization into the national modernization strategy and the development of defense industry localization, as well as bolstering long-term defense capabilities. Likewise, Vision 2030 connected national modernization and defense modernization, and efforts to localize the defense sector included defense industry localization and enhancing long-term defense capacity. (Salameh & Alotaibi, 2026) These positive steps are a direct reflection of how Saudi Arabia is actively driving its own domestic transformation as part of Vision 2030, which in turn helps advance Saudi Arabia's growing role in protecting and securing its neighbors.

The Middle East has a complex security framework, with the same center being interwoven into the fabric of the Middle East. It is no less complex than the Middle East's security environment, as the central position of the State of Saudi Arabia is interwoven into its fabric. The Middle East is one of the most integrated and conflict-prone regional systems in the world, with one country's instability influencing other nations in the area rapidly. With its economy, key role in regional security, leadership in the energy sector and its influence in religion, Saudi Arabia plays a crucial role in this regional security complex.

Saudi Arabia's efforts to build coalitions, coordinate security in the Gulf, and conduct regional diplomacy underscore an effort to consolidate an already divided regional order plagued by proxy wars, non-state threats and, among other things, geopolitical rivalry. The Kingdom continues to foster regional dialogue, economic integration, infrastructure connectivity and cooperation in security matters, as a basis for achieving regional stability in the future (Ramírez Varela *et al.*, 2026). In

this context, the Vision 2030 also identifies the need for a conflict-free and peaceful regional setting for sustainable economic development.

In this context, Strategic Hedging Theory offers more insight regarding Saudi Arabia's balanced and multi-faceted foreign policy stance. Saudi Arabia has simultaneously built strategic ties with emerging powers such as China, Russia and India while ensuring security cooperation with the United States remains robust. This strategy of diversification increases the Kingdom's diplomatic agility, economic opportunities and strategic independence.

The Saudi-Iran "reconciliation" accord brokered in 2023 by China is the most crucial case of strategic hedging. In order to avoid confrontation or alliance dependency, Saudi Arabia has increasingly pursued a policy of conflict management, economic diplomacy, and deterrence within a general policy of pragmatic approaches to the region in more recent years (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2026). The Leadership in Action approach is strengthened by Vision 2030, which integrates economic transformation with international partnerships for investments, technologies and connectivity projects like NEOM.

Saudi Arabia's financial might and energy dominance continue to be key factors in its influence in the region. The Kingdom's might in the international energy market and regional economic diplomacy is equal to being one of the world's foremost manufacturers of energy resources and one of the global's biggest investors. The key areas of Vision 2030 are the strategic allocation of oil money to diversification, infrastructure development, modernisation of technology and sustainable economic transition. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is also taking a more active role in employing economic statecraft as a conventional geopolitical instrument to influence regional dynamics and further consolidate its geopolitical position (Kalaitzidis, 2026).

Saudi Arabia's soft power and regional legitimacy also remain on the rise thanks to the Islamic element of the Kingdom's foreign policy. Saudi Arabia has a unique symbolic power in the Muslim world as custodians of the Two Holy Mosques. In the course of Vision 2030, this religious leadership has been increasingly associated with moderation, regional engagements in religious-cultural and developmental projects, and interfaith dialogue. Saudi Arabia fosters joint action, regional peace and diplomacy coordination through institutions like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which works to support cooperation among Islamics (Roll, 2026).

The research also highlights that Saudi Arabia's strategy on military involvement has undergone numerous changes for the sake of implementing the Vision 2030. Over the last few years, the focus seems to be shifting from military action to measures of de-escalation, diplomacy, coordination with other coalitions, and deterrence. The Kingdom is more and more trying to strike a balance between being armed and playing a diplomatic role to minimise destabilization threats whilst keeping the longer term development goals in mind (Manor & Golan, 2026).

The Kingdom's strategic partnership with Pakistan also mirrors the Kingdom's overall shift to a new security outlook. The trust-based relationship is based on cooperation in defense, military training, sharing of information, intelligence, and counterterrorism. Pakistan's military capabilities enhance Saudi's arms modernization initiatives under Vision 2030 and Saudi's economic and diplomatic support further bolsters cooperation in the field of Pakistan's strategic partnership. This collaboration helps boost regional security coordination and aligns with Saudi Arabia's focus on collaborative security arrangements (Woldearegay, 2026).

Saudi Arabia's 2015 transition indicates a multidimensional approach that consolidates measures of modernization at home, leadership in the region, economic positioning and strategic diversification. The internal reforms were found to be the key to enhance Saudi Arabia's foreign policy capacity, which is the theory explained by Neoclassical Realism. The Kingdom's influence in a very complex regional security environment has been proved by RSCT. Saudi Arabia's strategic hedging theory is the dictum behind its foreign policy of balancing its relationship with multiple countries and concepts. In combination, these are indicators of Saudi Arabia's emergence as a proactive, modernizing, and globally-oriented regional power that is increasingly oriented towards stability, economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and cooperative security in the Middle East (Cingöz *et al.*, 2026).

CONCLUSION

The study has illustrated that the regional security behaviour of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since 2015 is considered one of the greatest security shifts which has been influenced and highlighted by the confluence of Neoclassical Realism, the Regional Security Complex Theory and the Strategic Hedging Theory in the venue of Vision 2030. The findings reveal that Saudi Arabia has shifted from being a somewhat reactive regional player to a more active leader of the coalition in terms of the involvement of

its diplomacy, strategic independence and regional significance.

This change can be attributed to Neoclassical Realism, which posits that the States change in response to external geopolitical realities and their own processes of internal modernization. The external security pressure was heavy as a result of regional instabilities, the Yemen conflict and Iranian influence on the region, and the internal pressure was high as a result of Vision 2030 which had advanced the underlying institutions and factors of security, defense production, economic diversification, and the process of decision making. As a result of these reforms, the Kingdom could take a more aggressive stance and play a more active and dominant role in regional security policy.

In addition, the Saudi Arabian region has an extremely involved security landscape that shapes the country's actions and policies through Regional Security Complex Theory. Saudi Arabia has become a focal point in the Gulf and wider Middle Eastern security matrix and has seen how regional security, stability, economic ties and diplomacy have become fundamental to national security for the long-term future. Its regional coalitions, Gulf security coordination and diplomacy are indicative of its attempts to make its system a little more secure and integrated in an interdependent but conflict-ridden region.

The Strategic Hedging Theory gives an extra layer of depth as it provides an explanation for the Saudi kingdom's foreign policy that is balanced and diversified. The Kingdom is not only aligning itself with one of the few strategic partners but is also building relationships with the United States and continuing to strengthen relationships with China, Russia and new emerging countries in the world. Saudi Arabia's strategic flexibility and manicured regional warfare underscore the kingdom's transition toward pragmatic engagement, reasonable competition and cooperation, leaving evident the results of the diplomatic and negotiation efforts, including the Saudi – Iran reconciliation process of 2023.

In general, Saudi Arabia has improved its regional influence, diplomatic position and bolstered the Vision 2030 overall through strengthening its coalition-building and strategic reorientation. Saudi Arabia is transforming itself into a regional power that is increasingly stabilizing and connecting the region in an economic modernization, diversified partnership, and development oriented diplomacy.

Many significant challenges, however, remain. The unexpected divisions in the coalition,

competing for opportunities to counterbalance the regional rivals, the need for state-funded domestic change and international security obligations, along with various other factors, continue to challenge the longevity of Saudi Arabia's leadership. A secure Kingdom for Vision 2030 thus requires a capability to shift away from military-focused security policies and to put more in place to gain regional influence – ones that are more institutionalized, anchored in diplomacy and embedded in the economy.

In short, Vision 2030 brings a new form of security politics to the Middle East, as much as any sign of a modernization process in Saudi Arabia. The future of the Kingdom's contribution to the region's stability, economic integration, cooperative security and the evolving geopolitical landscape of the contemporary Middle East is likely to remain a focal point of the Kingdom's contribution.

Recommendations

• Institutionalizing Regional Security Frameworks

The Regional Security Framework is the preferred option for these victims. The Regional Security Framework is the preferred option for these victims. Saudi Arabia should shift towards a more gradual and binding approach towards regional security and military engagement through networks of coalitions instead. Saudi Arabia's regional influence increased with coalitions like the Yemen intervention and Islamic Military Counter Terrorism (IMA) Coalition, but they have limitations in maintaining their influence in the long run because of suboptimal institutional stability and country commitment in such alliances. Solidification of permanent security mechanisms in the Islamic security platforms, as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council, would provide better coordination, continuity of security mechanisms and avoid coalition-driven politics.

• Prioritizing Conflict De-escalation and Preventive Diplomacy

Conflict possessiveness and conflict prevention is prioritised. Conflict de-escalation and prevention is in focus. Conflict de-escalation, mediation and preventive diplomacy must be given more weight than military engagement. From budgetary and humanitarian perspectives, the costs of protracted wars, especially in Yemen, underscore the ineffective results of hard-power in maintaining lasting regional stability. The Saudi Arabia-Egypt-Iran trilateral and multi-lateral dialogues demonstrate the importance of dialogue-based engagement and the core principles of pragmatic diplomacy in 2023. Incorporating such diplomatic efforts into the Saudi foreign policy would help stabilize the region, help maintain the credibility of

threat and provide strategic flexibility.

• Integrating Economic Modernization with Security Strategy

There is a need for an integrated economic modernisation and security strategy. A holistic approach is required towards economic modernisation and security-politics. Saudi Arabia must persist in incorporating the economic reforms of Vision 2030 with the regional security agenda. The Kingdom's goal of localisation of 50 per cent of its defence industry production by 2030 is another opportunity to increase strategic autonomy and industrial capacity. This goal, though, needs to be realized through greater cooperation in the region via defense technology, cyber security, joint production, and partnerships of innovation to maximize efficiency and minimize possible duplication in the Gulf and Islamic world.

• Enhancing Coalition Legitimacy and Humanitarian Engagement

Improving the legitimacy and humanitarian action of Coalition. Strengthening the legitimacy and humanitarian action of Coalition. Saudi Arabia should continue to enhance the legitimacy and credibility of the coalition by working transparently, undertaking humanitarian operations and enhancing post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Enlarging humanitarian assistance, reconstruction diplomacy and development partnerships in conflict-stricken areas would boost Saudi Arabia's soft power image and stabilize its role in the region as a responsible and peace-loving state. More and better coordination of regional operations in line with international humanitarian requirements would also boost the Kingdom's diplomatic status and international image.

• Maintaining Balanced and Diversified Strategic Partnerships

Continuous Development and/or Maintenance of Balanced and Diversified Strategic Partnerships. Saudi Arabia should continue its diversification of strategic partnerships with other key actors in the world while taking special care to maintain balance among them. Saudi Arabia has built up strategic partnerships with the United States, China, Russia and developing Asian nations, thereby enhancing its international flexibility by means of strategic hedging. But this kind of diplomacy is a multi-faceted endeavor, which needs to be managed well to prevent strategic overextension and geopolitical dependency. There is a need for a kind of "foreign policy balance," based on maintaining traditional security cooperation models, while actively pursuing diversified foreign economic and technology cooperation.

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