

THE RUSSIAN-SAUDI RELATIONSHIP AFTER THE BEGINNING OF THE SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION (2022)

ВЗАИМООТНОШЕНИЯ МЕЖДУ РОССИЕЙ И САУДОВСКОЙ АРАВИЕЙ ПОСЛЕ НАЧАЛА СПЕЦИАЛЬНОЙ ВОЕННОЙ ОПЕРАЦИИ 2022 г.



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The rapid changes that the world is witnessing after the beginning of the Russian special military operation have left their mark on the entire world, as they have affected most of the world's economies and policies, as well as imposed a new, tangible reality and alliances that can pave the way for the formation of a new world order different from the existing one, whose main pillars are multipolarity and liberation from US hegemony as a major superpower. This paper shows that a new phase of political pragmatism in Saudi Arabia has begun, its title is diversification of relations and full openness to the countries of the world, including Russia and other major countries. In addition to the emergence of awareness of the self-capabilities and real levers that the Kingdom possesses, through which it can influence the course of politics in the region and the world, also striving not to forfeit the mighty economic power that it possesses and not to employ it in the service of the Americans who exploited the country for a long time and prevented it from real development, they also prevented its leadership from deviating from



the framework set by the American policy for them. The importance of the stage is in the golden new opportunities that have emerged with the great global developments that Saudi Arabia and Russia can, if they act correctly, move the relationship to a new level with all the real possibilities required for them as published by the author that would make a change leap that he believes, is becoming needed to meet the realistic needs of the two countries, the region and the world.

Keywords: Russian-Saudi relationships, OPEC+, Arab gulf region, Multipolarity, New world order, BRICS+, Energy sector, Political-Economy evolution, SMO

For citation: Kfoury Mansour I. The Russian-Saudi Relationship After the Beginning of the Special Military Operation (2022). *Oriental Courier*. 2023. No. 2. Pp. 48–59. DOI: 10.18254/S268684310026690-7

Стремительные изменения, происходящие в мире после начала российской Специальной военной операции, наложили отпечаток на весь мир, так как они затронули большую часть мировой экономики и политики, сформировав новую осязаемую реальность и союзы, способные проложить пути формирования нового, отличного от существующего миропорядка, основные столпы которого — многополярность и освобождение от гегемонии США как сверхдержавы. В работе показано, что в Саудовской Аравии начался новый этап политического прагматизма, диверсификации отношений и полной открытости миру, включая Россию и другие крупные страны. Помимо осознания собственных возможностей и реальных рычагов, с помощью которых Королевство может влиять на политику в регионе и мире, не лишаясь экономической мощи и не используя их в угоду американцам, которые долгое время эксплуатировали страну и мешали ей в реальном развитии, препятствуя отходу от рамок, установленных американской политикой. Важность этапа заключается в новых возможностях, появившихся в связи с крупными глобальными переменами, благодаря которым Саудовская Аравия и Россия смогут перевести отношения на новый уровень для удовлетворения реальных потребностей двух стран, региона и мира.

Ключевые слова: российско-саудовские отношения, ОПЕК+, регион Персидского залива, многополярность, Новый мировой порядок, БРИКС+, энергетика, политико-экономическая эволюция, СВО

Для цитирования: Кфури М. И. Взаимоотношения между Россией и Саудовской Аравией после начала Специальной военной операции 2022 г. *Восточный курьер / Oriental Courier*. 2023. № 2. С. 48–59. DOI: 10.18254/S268684310026690-7

The Arabian Gulf region, specifically the Arab Gulf states (GCC)¹, is one of the strategic regions in the world due to its importance in terms of energy and its geostrategic location. There is no doubt that after February 24, 2022, international affairs will not be the same as before. This saying is repeated by many experts and specialists in political and economic sciences², as they affirm that there is a birth of a new multipolar world order that is

completely different from the attempted system of American dominance that we witnessed from 1990 until the year 2022.

Based on the foregoing, the Middle East, and the Islamic world, in addition to China, Europe, Latin America, etc., is expected to form in the future active and interactive poles. Multipolarity is the pending hope to get out of the hegemony of the West, which imposes its authority and customs

1 The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a political and economic union of the Middle Eastern countries. The six member states of the union are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

2 العالم ما بعد الحرب الأوكرانية ليس كما قبلها [The post-Ukrainian war world is not the same as before (in Arabic)]. *Skynews Arabia*. 02.06.2022. URL: <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/world/1527756-قبلها-الوكرانية-ليس-قبلها> (accessed 11.07.2023).



on the peoples of the world. Hence, in this new world order the formation of a Middle Eastern pole is hoped to play an active and important role, especially in the Arab Gulf region, and we have seen many positive indicators between Russia on the one hand and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries on the other.

Let us recall the previous stage, so that we can analyze the current and future events. The United States of America dominated the world through two methods. First, through crushing military interventions through NATO, for example, in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, etc., where the natural resources were stolen from these countries, killed and displaced millions of people

Secondly, economic sanctions, as it imposes its financial hegemony through the US dollar, especially after World War II, as Europe emerged from this war economically exhausted. During World War II, the United States government implemented a number of economic policies that allowed it to accumulate a large amount of gold. One of the key factors was the Lend-Lease program, which allowed the US to provide military aid to its allies in exchange for assets such as gold. Additionally, the US government also implemented strict price controls and rationing measures, which helped to curb inflation and stabilize the economy. As a result of these policies, the US was able to amass a significant amount of gold, which helped to solidify its position as a dominant economic power after the war³. Gold became a guarantor of the dollar as a result of trust in it due to the economic, military and political power of Uncle Sam's country. However, more banknotes were printed than gold in the 1960s because of the Vietnam War and Nixon

then decided to print banknotes for the dollar without gold coverage since 1971⁴. He shocked the civilized world that trusted the signed agreements.

These two things caused fear and panic among the rest of the world, fearing that they would fall under the American scissor if they did not submissively submit to it. This is what happened in the Middle East in the 70s: To back up the dollar, it was agreed between Washington and Riyadh to link the most important commodity in the world, "oil"⁵, to the dollar, and it was sold to all countries in the American currency⁶.

Returning to our main topic about the position of the Arab Gulf countries, especially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, we note another context for events and developments related to Gulf–Russian relations based on more cooperation, trust and exchange of visits at the highest levels, which indicates not only desires but actual practical steps that have begun to be translated on the ground between these countries and Russia to open a new important path in the formation of the new world.

Faced with this reality, an obvious question arises: **Will Saudi-Russian relations develop, especially in recent years, according to a fleeting intersection of interests or a strategic shift?** To determine this matter, we must go back to the history of these relations to anticipate their future. Are they stable and built on solid foundations and pillars?

With quick glances, we will try to point out important stations that we cannot bypass in that relationship. The first of these stations was the former Soviet Union, the first country to recognize the independence of Saudi Arabia in 1926 and the

3 Lend-Lease and Military Aid to the Allies in the Early Years of World War II. *Office of the historian, Department of state United States of America*. URL: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/lend-lease> (accessed 11.07.2023).

4 Kenton W. *What Is Nixon Shock? Definition, What Happened, and Aftereffects*. *Investopedia*. 2022. URL: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/nixon-shock.asp> (accessed 15.02.2023).

5 Morland L. Forget the Gold Standard: The World has had an Oil-Backed Currency for Years. *Benzinga*. 24.05.2011. URL: <https://www.benzinga.com/generallifemisc/movers-shakers/11/05/1109185/forget-the-gold-standard-the-world-has-had-an-oil-backe> (accessed 11.07.2023).

6 Amadeo K. What Is the Petrodollar? *The Balance Money*. 2022. URL: <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/what-is-a-petrodollar-3306358#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20dollar%20is%20the%20standard%20currency%20used%20to%20pay,the%20dollar%20and%20oil%20began> (accessed 15.02.2023).



opening of a Soviet consulate there. But after that, unfortunately, the Russian–Saudi relations did not develop much during the following decade, as Britain had strong influence in the Middle East, including KSA, and was very keen to keep the Soviets away from the region.

SAUDI–RUSSIAN RELATIONS: INTERESTS AND CHALLENGES

Russia is a power that has been able, throughout modern, and contemporary history, to wrestle with the factors of geography and find a place for itself among the powers that participate in the process of making current history. Despite the loss of ideological content in this relationship, important opportunities have emerged to strengthen it, especially at the economic and cultural levels, by virtue of the existence of multiple ties and entrances that can bring its parties closer and maximize the volume of mutual benefit among them. In our study, we will try as much as possible to show the available opportunities for this relationship as well as the obstacles.

RUSSIA — SAUDI ARABIA: POLITICAL RELATIONS

The exchange of visits between the leaders of the two countries witnessed a remarkable growth after the year 2000, and perhaps the most important of them was the visit of King Abdullah, when he was Crown Prince, to Moscow in November 2003, during which he signed a set of agreements to develop bilateral cooperation relations, then followed by a visit from the Russian President Vladimir Putin in February 2007 to KSA, during which he signed a bilateral agreement in the field of air communications and a treaty to avoid paying double tax on income and capital, several agreements in the field of culture, exchange of information, banking cooperation, and directions

of cooperation in the fields of atomic technology were also discussed. Also, there is the visit of Prince Muhammad bin Salman Al Saud, when he was Minister of Defense, to Moscow in June 2015 where he discussed the ways to enhance cooperation. Then, in October 2017, Saudi King Salman visited Moscow to enhance cooperation opportunities between the two countries.

Also, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov mentioned in an interview with “Al Sharq News” channel, saying, “I would like to emphasize the evaluation of the Russian leadership, which believes that Moscow’s relations with Arab countries, especially with the Gulf states, is developing with an active and very successful dynamism.” He continued, “I would also like to point out that the strong impetus for the development of these relations resulted from the last two visits that President Vladimir Putin made to Riyadh in 2019 and Abu Dhabi in 2019.” He added that during the two visits, “deep and content negotiations took place between the Russian President and King Salman bin Abdulaziz, as well as with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as well as with the President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed”⁷. These visits show the great interest that Moscow attaches to the Gulf countries and their pivotal economic role, especially in the energy sector.

We refer here to the very high interest shown by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to President Putin’s visit and the warm reception at the highest levels that the Russian President enjoyed.

POLITICAL STATEMENTS AFTER THE SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in an important and pivotal speech before the Federal Assembly dedicated to the first anniversary of the start of the Russian Special military operation on

⁷ Asharq News (الشرق للأخبار) An exclusive interview with Mikhail Bogdanov, Special Representative of the Russian President in the Middle East, and Africa. *Youtube*. 2023 (in Arabic). URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kiq5rJf-kGos> (accessed 15.02.2023).



Ukrainian soil to root out the neo-Nazi threat directed by NATO against the Russian lands and people that: “Russia will particularly focus on developing the North-South transport corridor, which will open up new routes for business cooperation with India, Iran and Pakistan, as well as Middle Eastern countries”, the President said addressing the Russian Parliament⁸.

The President also noted that the share of Russian international trade settlements in rubles had doubled since December 2021. “Together with partners, we will continue to work to create a stable system of international settlements independent of the dollar and other Western reserve currencies,” the leader said. This confirms the sincere intention of the Russian leadership, headed by President Putin, to open effective channels of communication with the pivotal Eastern countries, especially with the Arab Gulf, and to strengthen the bonds of these relations for the benefit of both parties.

In this context, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov expressed satisfaction with the harmony and steady development of relations between Moscow and the Gulf states “politically and economically,” noting that the two sides seek to strengthen relations between them⁹.

In tangible practical steps, it is expected that these mutual visits will greatly help in raising the level of these relations at all levels, especially on the financial and economic ones. The Russian Central Bank has begun to set the official exchange rates for the ruble against 9 additional foreign currencies. The list of foreign currencies includes the following GULF currencies¹⁰: Emirati dirhams / Qatari Riyal. This matter will undoubtedly leave positive effects

on the exchange process that will be available in local currencies during the Russian trade exchange with those countries. So, as it seems, the financial base and its legislation have been put on the road to work in preparation for the launch of a long and steady march of cooperation far from the dominance and power of the US dollar.

In the same context, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced in a session of the State Duma that Russian diplomacy had intensified work in areas where the processes of building a multipolar world and establishing peace were gaining ground. The minister stressed that enhancing engagement with allies and supporters in Eurasia is one of the unconditional priorities. He added, “Russia is also developing relations with India, Brazil, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and many other friendly countries on all continents”¹¹.

WESTERN PRESSURE

In fact, all Western attempts to isolate Russia have failed, and this matter was not issued by Russian parties, but rather by the journalists of the “Washington Post”, where it was stated in an article published in the newspaper that “a lot of evidence indicates the failure of the attempt to isolate Russia, especially among Moscow’s allies China and Iran”. The Washington Post journalists emphasized that Africa and the Middle East are attracted to Russia¹².

Despite the strong pressures exerted by Washington on the countries of the world, including the Arab Gulf states, to impose sanctions and participate in the pressures and siege on Russia, it has, ironically,

8 Presidential Address to Federal Assembly. *Kremlin*. 2023. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70565> (accessed 15.02.2023).

9 Asharq News (الشرق للأخبار). An exclusive interview with Mikhail Bogdanov, Special Representative of the Russian President in the Middle East, and Africa. *Youtube*. 2023. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kiq5rJ-kGos> (accessed 15.02.2023).

10 Bank of Russia to set official exchange rates of ruble against nine more foreign currencies. *Bank of Russia*. 2023. URL: <https://www.cbr.ru/eng/press/pr/?id=38270> (accessed 15.02.2023).

11 Djuki San. Speech by S. V. Lavrov in the State Duma, Moscow, February 15, 2023. *Youtube*. 2023. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzOJJJoFn2U> (accessed 15.02.2023).

12 Sly L. A Global Divide on the Ukraine War is Deepening. *Washington Post*. 2023. URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/22/global-south-russia-war-divided/> (accessed 15.02.2023).



failed miserably in forcing these countries to take hostile stances against Russia. On the contrary, it had remarkable positions in this regard at all levels, especially in the warm meetings that took place with the President of the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed bin Zayed, who visited Moscow and had a friendly meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin; let us not forget the continuous phone calls to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, as well as the Kingdom's strong supportive position for Russia within the "OPEC+" organization, despite the unbridled American anger over the "OPEC+" production cut, opposing the American desire in their critical circumstance.

BRICS+

In the political context, too, what is currently taking place is no less important than a serious study of the accession of new countries to the BRICS group next August. The BRICS decided to adopt its decision this year regarding accepting new members, as well as determining the criteria that countries wishing to join the alliance will have to meet, including Saudi Arabia, and other countries that have submitted an official request to join the alliance, according to the South African ambassador in BRICS¹³.

If KSA joins BRICS, it will have two of the largest Oil Exporting Nations and Two of the Largest Oil Importing Nations (India and China are the 2 largest Rice Exporting Nations, Russia is the largest global wheat exporter). The most important part is that within the BRICS all payments are in non-dollar currencies¹⁴.

ADVANCED STEPS

On the one hand, the visit of King Salman bin Abdulaziz of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to

Russia in 2017 was a great opportunity that opened wide prospects for concluding a series of important economic and military deals that included the sale of advanced Russian missile defense systems to Saudi Arabia, especially the Russian S-400 defense system. It was also agreed to establish an investment fund with a capital of one billion dollars, and it was the first visit of a Saudi king to Russia.

In 2015 Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman paid an official visit to Russia and signed a package of six agreements with the Russian President. During this visit, it was agreed to build 16 nuclear reactors for peaceful purposes and sources of energy and water with Russia having the most prominent role in operating these reactors. In the field of culture and education, it was agreed to raise the number of Saudi students who pursue education in Russia to 500 students. Joint committees between the two countries and cooperation in the field of space have been activated, in addition to cooperation agreements in the areas of housing, energy and investment opportunities. All these efforts contributed greatly to raising relations between the two countries to an unprecedented level.

On the other hand, we cannot forget the warm historical handshake between President Putin and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the G-20 summit in Buenos Aires, which aroused the wrath of the United States and its followers from Western countries that sought to isolate the Crown Prince and submit him to their blackmail. The handshake was like a great rescue branch for the Crown Prince, which gained appreciation and gratitude from the Eastern leader, Muhammad bin Salman, towards the seasoned Russian president, as it received great praise and welcome from the Saudi people, and appreciation for Russia and its role, especially on social media, which buzzed with the event and the respect for President Putin for this very smart step.

13 Abdulkareem I. South African Ambassador in Moscow: 13 countries are interested in joining BRICS. *Syria Times*. 2023. URL: <http://syriatimes.sy/south-african-ambassador-in-moscow-13-countries-are-interested-in-joining-brics/> (accessed 15.02.2023).

14 Fleck A. The World's Biggest Oil Producers. *Statista*. 2022. URL: <https://www.statista.com/chart/16274/oil-productin-countries/> (accessed 15.02.2023).



ENERGY

Russian cooperation with the Kingdom in the oil sector is quite famous, and it is being carried out with remarkable success. As indicated by the Russian Ambassador to Riyadh, Sergey Kozlov in an interview with RIA Novosti, the Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia are cooperating effectively in the energy sector and within the framework of “OPEC+”¹⁵. According to him, the interaction of the two countries in the energy sector can be called one of the pillars supporting bilateral relations.

The Russian ambassador said that KSA believes that the introduction of various kinds of illegal restrictions, including sanctions, embargoes and “price ceilings”, only leads to uncertainty and unpredictability in the global energy sector. Russia and Saudi Arabia are the largest producers of conventional hydrocarbon energy in the world. Saudi Arabia produces about 10.2 million barrels per day, while Russia produces about 10.05 million barrels per day. The two countries are working to coordinate positions and decisions in the global energy markets¹⁶.

INVESTMENTS

In 2015, the two countries launched a joint investment fund worth \$10 billion to finance various projects in Russia. KSA invests most in the infrastructure sector, including toll roads in Russia. The two countries also launched a Russian-Saudi fund to invest in the Saudi energy sector with a value of \$1 billion. In addition, countless Saudi investments went to Russia after the events of September 11, 2001.

Tracking the growth of trade exchange between the two countries from 2003 at least to the present

day shows that it has moved from an amount of \$211.8 million in 2003 to \$1.5 billion in 2021, with the possibility of it reaching \$5 billion in 2023, as stated by the Russian ambassador to KSA, Sergey Kozlov. This, if anything, indicates the massive development in relations between the two countries, especially after the Russian Special Military Operation.

The relations between the two countries have been expanding in their commercial aspect after the visit of King Salman bin Abdulaziz to Russia in 2017, as the tendency was to discuss opportunities to enhance the volume of investments and partnership between the two countries, as the Saudi Investment Authority granted Russian companies licenses for direct investment in the country, in the industrial aspect and services. There is also joint coordination to rebalance the oil markets, and interest in conducting cooperation in the field of technological investment, considering the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030.

TECHNICAL-MILITARY COOPERATION

The Russian-Saudi relations also extend to the military aspect. The Saudi Military Industries Company signed a memorandum of understanding and a general terms contract with “Rosoboronexport” (the Russian arms and military products export company). The memorandum of understanding is mainly concerned with localizing the manufacture of qualitative and very advanced weapons in the Kingdom. It also includes the transfer of technology for manufacturing (Kornet-EM) systems, which is an advanced anti-tank missile system, in addition to transferring the technology of manufacturing the missile launcher system (TOS-1A) and the bomb launcher (AGS-30). The memorandum also included the development of a

15 Russia and Saudi Arabia are successfully cooperating in the energy sector, the ambassador said (in Russian) [Россия и Саудовская Аравия успешно сотрудничают в энергетике, заявил посол]. *РИА Новости*. 2023. URL: <https://ria.ru/20230212/energetika-1851475899.html> (accessed 15.02.2023).

16 Saudi crude production to hit 10.3 m barrels per day in 2016. *Arab News*. 2016. URL: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/998761/business-economy> (accessed 15.02.2023).



plan to localize the manufacture and sustainability of parts of the advanced air defense system (S-400), while the contract of general terms means the localization of the manufacture of the Kalashnikov weapon (AK-103) and its ammunition in the Kingdom. Also, these agreements included programs for educating and training national cadres in the field of military industries to ensure the sustainability and development of this sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia¹⁷.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE: THE CAVIAR PROJECT

Various Russian exports have begun to flow into the Saudi market. According to the Russian Ambassador to the KSA, S. Kozlov, “In the year 2022, exports of the products of the local agro-industrial complex to Saudi Arabia grew by an unprecedented 49.9 % and approached a milestone — one billion dollars”¹⁸. Kozlov stressed that the increasing interest of Saudi partners in supplying Russian agricultural products, among other things, contributed to the increase in exports.

Within the framework of joint agricultural cooperation, the remarkable Russian-Saudi cooperation was prominent in the famous Russian caviar production sector on the territory of the Kingdom, where a unique Saudi farm of its kind was established in the desert under the supervision of Russian experts. Overlooking the Caspian Sea, Russian experts worked hard with their Saudi colleagues on this distinguished caviar project. They carried out preliminary studies that preceded the construction process, and they created natural conditions suitable for caviar production and sturgeon breeding. The production of this farm, which was built jointly between the Russians

and the Saudis, reached the second place globally, where its annual production reached five tons, which is equivalent to 4 % of the estimated global production of 110 tons¹⁹.

OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN SAUDI–RUSSIAN RELATIONS

There are no direct obstacles that impede the development of relations between the two countries, especially since Russia has begun to resort to more than one approach to strengthen its economic relations with Saudi Arabia as a starting point for influencing the Gulf countries in general and the Islamic countries. Russia also shows that it deals with various countries on economic grounds, and it can tend to open to them in a way that maximizes the gains and benefits of Russia, including showing itself as a source of arms and nuclear energy trade equipment for peaceful purposes, and the possibility of benefiting from the Russian space capabilities to launch satellites, as well as the tendency to invest in the energy sector in all its forms.

The other important point is KSA realization that one of its most important strategic goals is to reduce its security dependence on the United States of America in the medium term, if it wants to maximize its gains and the freedom of its strategic decision, without affecting its position as a country with great influence in the Arab region, and this is a very important matter that Riyadh, especially, realized after the Russian special military operation in Ukraine. Nonetheless, the resort of Washington and its followers from Western countries to unprecedented measures in sanctions and blockades against Russia, it reached the freezing of its money in Western banks and the possibility of confiscating it, this matter greatly

17 Saudi Arabia signs agreement to manufacture Russian weapons locally. *Alarabiya*. 2020. URL: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2017/10/05/Saudi-Arabian-Military-Industries-signs-agreement-to-manufacture-Russian-weapons-locally-> (accessed 16.02.2023).

18 Russian Agricultural Exports to Gulf State Surge — Envoy. *RT News*. 2023. URL: <https://www.rt.com/business/571359-russia-agricultural-exports-saudi-arabia/> (accessed 16.02.2023).

19 How a Saudi Farm Changed the Global Caviar Market. *Al-Arabiya*. 2020. URL: <https://english.alarabiya.net/webtv/reports/2015/11/11/How-a-Saudi-farm-changed-the-global-caviar-market> (accessed 16.02.2023).



affected all countries of the world, especially Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, for fear that it would be repeated the same thing with them, if Riyadh do not fully comply with it, especially since the Arab Gulf countries have accounts in American and Western banks that exceed 1.5 thousand billion dollars²⁰. Hence, concern began to dominate the leaders of the Gulf countries, especially the Saudis. This point makes Saudi Arabia motivated to open more files and topics with Russia and others.

Openness outside the circle of the Western world provides KSA with great opportunities to develop its resources, because the West did not develop Saudi Arabia's capabilities, or help it move to a manufacturing society and localize technology and knowledge. KSA realizes that its Western relations did not add much to it in the economic field outside the scope of consumption, which means it did not become a military, industrial or knowledge capability, rather it was not allowed to be, despite what Washington obtained huge resources, and despite what Riyadh spent. The trend towards the non-Western world allows it to become an average country with real capabilities, it can grow into a society and a country with great capabilities in a short period of time because geography, historical and religious factors support its transformation into a major regional power, which is the pillar of Saudi Vision 2030.

As for Russia, it realizes that it is a great country, and that it needs to open up to all spheres of influence, and to withdraw countries from the balance of the traditional allies of the USA. It realizes that its cooperation with other countries is subject to several considerations, including trade and political factors, and KSA is among the countries with which it is possible to develop relations. The need for these relations is mutual: As Saudi Arabia desires to enhance its position and strength, Russia desires to enhance its economy and presence. In general, the possibility of Russia providing technological assistance to Saudi Arabia in a way that enhances its strength poses two challenges:

1. Is Saudi Arabia really interested in building a sustainable base of knowledge, research, industry, and productivity? Is it civilian or military?

2. Does Russia find interest in transferring technology to other countries? And to Saudi Arabia in particular?

History shows that Russia on various levels has contributed to the development of the capabilities of China and Iran and has put forward initiatives to support the capabilities of Egypt and Turkey. In many cases, the reactions of those countries were not up to the responsibility, as an example of this is the aid to Egypt and the behavior of its President Anwar Sadat in the 70s, and here we must remember that Russian investments do not represent charitable aid, but rather political-economic activities and operations.

On the other hand, KSA has not yet shown real signs of a transition from the mentality of the emirate to the mentality of the state. Such transformation presupposes a shift from patterns of excessive consumption to a pattern that combines systematic education with the localization of knowledge, science, and industry, as well as opening to a comprehensive capacity-building project, revisiting all available capital, and new relationships and alliances — issues that have begun to form a base and indicators today, at the Saudi level.

Even at the Gulf level, the GCC states still act as individual states, not as states within the framework of an organization, and Saudi Arabia itself lacks capabilities:

— An advanced military industry that meets defense needs rather than strategic exposure to the Western world.

— Civil industries that meet consumption and export. An advanced research capabilities that encompass all science to make growth sustainable with internal factors, not just those focused on history and religion.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 offers a glimmer of hope in the direction of building a regional,

20 Arab Funds and Investments outside the Arab Countries. *Darululoom-deoband*. 2013. URL: http://darululoom-deoband.com/arabic/articles/tmp/1574675272%2005-Dirasat-12_1434_2.htm (accessed 16.02.2023).



sustainable state project, while President Putin's vision for Russia is to open all aspects of cooperation to benefit both sides.

So, the future creates opportunities for both countries to strengthen their mutual relations, and Saudi Arabia must put forward its desires in state language.

CHALLENGES TO SAUDI-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

In the face of all this and based on the experiences in this regard, Russian decision makers after 2016 tended to show attempts to engage the GCC countries to find a political solution to the crises in the region. In particular, the war in Syria and Yemen in a way that gets along with Russia's objectives, to prove that Russian diplomacy in the Gulf is not driven solely by economic interests but by political factors, and that shows that Russia does not lay all its eggs in the basket of specific countries, but it opens up to all other countries and interests.

Russia is trying, and has succeeded so far, as a result of multiple factors by acquiring new allies and increasing the number of countries that are not affiliated with the United States, or at least neutralizing them and reaping economic interests. This strategy makes Russia open all areas of cooperation, including the most sensitive military and security fields. These submissions do not mean that there are no limitations to the relationship between the Russian State and Saudi Arabia, including the following:

On the Saudi level, the biggest constraint is: The tribes' mentality still prevail due to the Saudi civil state's fragility and this trend does not help build a state that builds comprehensive intellectual, research, and industrial production capabilities. Also, the Saudi culture still believes in consumption and not in production, there is still a view towards the state as a rentier state that provides the citizen with

all his needs and not as a real production state, just as the employment of knowledge, industrialization and scientific research is still lacking. The central question is: will the mechanisms of power and the hierarchical relationship in it allow the country to turn into a regional power with real capabilities? How can one reach that stage? Because it requires doubling resources, capabilities, and alliances. The United States has become a burden on Saudi Arabia more than a source of real support, and therefore it has become urgent and necessary to diversify foreign relations.

At the Russian level, the biggest determinants of its relations with Saudi Arabia are: The crisis of its relations with the West, which seizes conspiracies to encircle and isolate it to no avail and vigorously tries to prevent these relations from evolving to a strategic level between the two countries. Saudi Arabia's oil richness also makes it the capture of major American interests that Washington cannot easily abandon.

So, there are limitations and determinants that impose their impact on both countries, which cannot be easily overcome and need action and determination. One of the most prominent is the political climate, which has not led the two States to take serious steps to strengthen their common relations.

FUTURE INSIGHTS

As for the possible future of the bilateral relations, there is a possibility that Russia could provide support to Saudi Arabia in various areas, including:

— Construction of nuclear reactors, which is simple at the level of their technologies, to produce electric power or possibly for peaceful activity defying the western maneuvers²¹;

— Russia's involvement in the development of the Saudi energy sector because it generates resources and benefits for Russia as well as for Saudi Arabia;

21 USA connect the project of nuclear reactors to the peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel. See: Rod M. Saudi normalization, Israeli-Palestinian relations focus of Abraham Accords hearing. *Jewish Insider*. 10.03.2023. URL: <https://jewishinsider.com/2023/03/abraham-accords-capitol-hill-house-foreign-affairs-middle-east-subcommittee-saudi-arabia/> (accessed 12.06.2023).



— Cooperation in the construction of many production plants and factories for consumer purposes;

— Contribute to the political solution in Yemen, because of its impact on the Saudi-Iranian relationship, which benefits the pragmatic Russian policy.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, the future bears all expectations, as the solid base of cooperation between Russia and KSA is already strong and is steadily being strengthened. Development in the economic sector is very promising, however, in politics one must be careful: Both parties fear to fully cooperate because this relation cannot be called a strategic one, it is rather a fleeting intersection of interests. Riyadh must diversify its foreign investments and pay attention to its money in American and Western banks if it wants to break the concept of petrodollars, because the American reaction may be freezing and stealing accounts as they are doing now with Russia, at least it must reduce it slowly. This very important rapprochement will undoubtedly have a positive and effective impact if it shifts to high political levels, not only on the interest of the two countries, but certainly on the interest of the Arab and Islamic region and the entire world. Like the former foreign affairs minister Evgeniy Primakov once said: “The sign of a great power is that when your country is needed, they want to deal with it. Russia is a great power precisely because many problems in the international arena cannot be resolved without it”²².

Hence, reaching the high level of relations between KSA and Russia will create important economic stability, not only in terms of energy, but can steadily enhance global economic stability, and thus security and politics.

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