

SAUDI ARABIA

Party Portrait

Saudi Arabia has consistently presented itself as a regional leader of the Arab world in the Middle East. It derives this identity narrative from its control over the cities of Mekkah and Al-Madina, while also legitimizing its influence through its vast economy fueled by oil revenues. It's Islamic/Arab leadership narrative has propelled the nation to serve a proactive and regional coordinative role in regional conflicts, especially in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The threat perception that has tended to capture the Saudi conflict narrative has shifted from a focus on the Palestine-Israeli conflict to a concern with Iranian political ascendancy in the region, and its impact on Saudi's domestic politics and regional role.

Key Interests

- Maintaining the economic and political stability of the country, particularly given the number of domestic terror attacks by Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliated individuals/groups that have been reported over the years
- Ensuring a powerful role in Middle Eastern political decision making processes. The nation wishes to maintain its prominence as the political, economic and religious powerhouse of the region, which has been challenged by Iran.

Sources of Leverage

Religion – Saudi Arabia is home to the two holiest cities of Islam, providing the Al-Saud family with both domestic and regional legitimacy.

Natural Resources – Revenue from oil exports allows the nation to create a loyal citizenry through an expansive welfare based social contract. Its economic strength provides an important tool to foster partnerships across the region and globally.

Political - The Saudi government has relied heavily on its relationship with the United States, which has primarily revolved around shared interests regarding regional security, oil and defense cooperation.

Regional Strategy

Continue to leverage its economic might through “checkbook diplomacy”, whereby it provides financial incentives and aid packages to regional political actors in order to form a network of support across the Middle East and North Africa. Funds rebel/opposition groups in Syria against Bashar Al-Assad. Quell the Houthi rebellion in Yemen and counter threats that may emanate from, or are supported by, Iran.

Powerful Individuals

King Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince Muhammed bin Nayef, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

Potential Negotiation Moves

Broker Agreement - Seek to play a key role in brokering agreements to cease hostilities in Syria or Yemen

Strengthen Western Relationship - Strengthen relationship with the US around shared interests in the region, particularly the threat of increased Iranian influence

Work with Israel - Build strategic partnership with Israel with regards to intelligence sharing and containment of Iran

Internal Conflicts

There are contestations for influence with the royal family between the Saudi civil service, religious establishment and the military establishment. Among the ruling elite, the quest for royal succession between the princes and their factions primarily plays out in the form of tribal rivalries, but also manifests itself on the lines of ideological variances or differences in constituencies and support structures of princes.

Memberships

ARAB LEAGUE, GCC, IAEA, OIC, OPEC, UN

Allies

BAHRAIN, OMAN, KUWAIT, UAE, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government

Partners

IRAQ State of Law Coalition, TURKEY, EGYPT Government

Rivals

IRAN, QATAR

Adversaries

LEBANON Hezbollah, SYRIA Government, EGYPT Muslim Brotherhood

Active Armed Opponents

YEMEN Houthis, ISIS, AQAP

Proxy

SYRIA Other Opposition Groups

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

EGYPT Government, PALESTINE Fatah, YEMEN Government

Aid Donor

N/A