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[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Saudi Arabia is a very influential and powerful monarchy in West Asia. It is considered to be a regional hegemon. It is the world's largest producer and exporter of oil and has around 16 per cent of the world's total oil reserves. Saudi Arabia is the land of Mecca and Medina, thereby making it the custodian of the two holy places in the Muslim world. On the other hand, People's Republic of China is one of the world's fastest growing economies. It believes in the five principles of peaceful co-existence. China's West Asian relations is quite evident from a historical perspective.

The major trade route that connected the two was the Silk route. Islam as a religion was well received in China and there is the presence of a sizeable Muslim population in the country as well. A large percentage can be seen in the Xinjiang province, which has a significant Uyghur population. China has maintained a tri-dimensional policy with the West Asian region which revolves around oil, trade and arms sale.

During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia was apprehensive about the 'communist expansion' in West Asia. However, China's energy demands sowed these seeds for the bilateral relations between these two. China has also been an aid receiver from the region. For e.g.

, In May 2008, Saudi Arabia provided 50 million dollars in cash and 10 million dollars in goods to China's South West Sichuan province after an earthquake hit the country. China allowed individual workers, and then groups and companies, to provide labour, participate in construction projects and offer consultation services in West Asian markets. At present, China is pursuing a

policy of maintaining friendly relations with all countries in the region. In 2004, China - Arab States Cooperation Forum was set up to further these ties.

Relations between Saudi Arabia and China at the very informal basis took place when Muslim Chinese pilgrims started visiting the Kingdom's holy sites in mid-1950's. Chinese Hajj pilgrims have travelled to Saudi Arabia every year since 1955. Their number exceeded regularly with 6, 000 in 1990 to 10, 000 in 2003. A total of 11, 863 Chinese Muslims made organized pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia during the year 2013. According to the Kingdom's Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI), Saudi Arabia's population stood at 30. 8 million of which 33 per cent are expatriates in 2014.

Although, the official diplomatic relations began in 1990, the two had security cooperations since 1985. Under the reign of Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (1982 - 2005), Saudi Arabia purchased CH-4 intermediate-range ballistic missiles from China for the first time in 1985. One of China's intentions of its regional engagement is to maintain a steady supply of oil for its economic expansion. Under the rule of King Fahd, Saudi Arabia began exporting oil to China since 1993, when the latter started running out of its energy resources.

Its growing domestic energy consumption led to the rapid depletion of its oil reserves. In order to secure long term energy security, today China has made investments in oil and gas fields and has also diversified its oil supply sources. However, Saudi Arabia remains one of the biggest oil suppliers to China. Jiang Zemin was the first Chinese head to visit the

kingdom in 1999 where both the parties signed the Strategic Oil Cooperation Agreement.

Under the reign of King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the year 2012 is important for Saudi Arabia - China relations for a reason. An important development took place. i. e. on January 15, 2012 China and Saudi Arabia signed a deal to enhance cooperation in the development and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. The deal set the stage for strengthening scientific, technological, economic cooperation between these two countries along with maintenance and development of nuclear power plants, research reactors as well as supply of nuclear fuel components. According to the Wall Street Journal, Saudi Arabia intends to spend more than 100 billion dollars on 16 nuclear reactors to be built by 2030. The Saudi Arabia - China relations cannot be seen in isolation and countries like US has played a crucial role in moulding the relation between the former two countries.

The 9/11 attacks shook the entire world and is seen as a major setback for the Saudi Arabia - US relations. This incident eroded the trust factor between the two countries and made Saudi Arabia adopt the 'Look East' policy which gave China an edge. Although, US and Saudi Arabia have shared objectives of regional stability and repression of Iran, they differed over the Iranian nuclear deal with the Obama administration. Saudi Arabia was dismayed by the lack of US support in the Yemen war in 2015. US provided Saudi Arabia with arms, intelligence and aerial refueling to prosecute the war, but there were underlying disagreements between the two. With such factors in consideration, Saudi Arabia intended to look for other partners. It cannot

besaid that Saudi Arabia would completely curtail its relations with US but following the Arab awakening, it has shown deeper interest towards China.

The effects of post - Arab Uprising could also be seen in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia has taken these events as a warning call and has decided to pursue a liberal attitude in its governance. Subsequently, Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman on 25th April, 2016 laid down an ambitious plan 'Saudi Vision 2030', intending to diversify and expand other sectors of revenue and specifically attract the investment of Chinese companies in the Jazan economic city which lies in the South West of the country. While China laid its ambitious project of One Belt One Road (OBOR) in 2014 that will connect it to major centers of trade, West Asia is central to it. Thus the integrated policy of Vision 2030, National Transformation Program (NTP) 2020 and OBOR together proves to be a significant link where the two countries can ensure development and prosperity. Since the OBOR initiative has been taken, Chinese leadership has maintained that OBOR is about free trade, nevertheless many countries see this effort on part of China as a covert try to broaden its geopolitical relevance. Saudi Arabia is aware of the fact that it can cash in by being involved in the OBOR project as it serves as a central hub connecting three continents - Asia, Africa and Europe.

In mid -2016, Saudi Arabia came up with the statement that it wanted to expand investments in China's energy industry. Saudi Arabia saw it as an opportunity to boost cooperation with its top customer. It also wanted to enlarge its market of hydrocarbon products such as petrochemicals. Both the

countries share interest in crude oil storage, mining, renewable energy and industrial development.

Saudi Aramco and Saudi Arabian Basic Industrial Cooperation (SABIC) have joint venture businesses in China. Saudi Aramco and Chinese Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC) operate a refinery in the Fujian province of China. Joint efforts were also made to expand the Yanbu oil refinery.

Apart from energy cooperation, Saudi Arabia is a significant market for Chinese goods which include electronics, textiles and food. Thus, the growth of bilateral trade between Saudi Arabia has reached to 51.7 billion dollars in 2015 under the reign of Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud following the death of King Abdullah.

To facilitate the expanding ties, China has also opened a branch of Industrial and Commercial Bank of China in the country's capital Riyadh in 2015. Thus, it is vividly clear that in the near future, relations between Saudi Arabia and China are going to grow more rapidly, as the two have agreed to upgrade the bilateral relations into a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. Both the countries focus primarily on short and long term economic gains.

China is interested in improving ties with Iran and has never explicitly picked any side whenever crisis struck the region. However, in spite of the positive developments, fault lines exist in this relation. For no reason, China is willing to sacrifice its economic growth by playing the role of mediator in the volatile, sectarian war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. However as all these concerns exist, the Saudi Arabia - China relations will have to maneuver and grow beyond the sectarian and geostrategic interests that are seen in the region.