

Egyptian-Saudi Strategic Integration: A Vision for the Future of International Challenges

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Abstract

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Egypt are significant political and economic powers in the Middle East. As the region faces challenges due to the Gaza war and the need to protect national security, a study focuses on strategic integration between the two countries. The study analyzes their geostrategic importance and bilateral cooperation, highlighting their positions on international issues and complementarities. It also explores opportunities for cooperation and proposes strategies to optimize Saudi-Egyptian relations for a safer, sustainable, and prosperous Arab community.

Keywords: Strategic Integration, Saudi-Egyptian Cooperation, Regional Security, Saudi Development Plan 2030.

INTRODUCTION

The roots of Egyptian-Saudi relations date back to the 1930s, when the first friendship and good-neighborliness treaty between the two countries was concluded in 1936. It was the first visit of King Farouk to the Saudi Arab Kingdom in 1945, and King Abdulaziz bin Saud's visit to the Egyptian Arab Republic in 1946. ⁽¹⁾ Further, relations quickly developed to include the areas of education and military training, thus establishing solid foundations for future cooperation between the two countries.

Historically, both countries have consistently supported each other in navigating regional challenges, providing a model for Arab cooperation in a region deeply interconnected by shared concerns. In the 1950s, Saudi Arabia stood by Egypt in the face of challenges, including the decision to nationalize the Suez Canal and finance the Aswan Dam and other regional innovations, showing the depth of historical ties between them.

The Egyptian-Saudi interaction has undergone remarkable development over the ages and has become more durable and intertwined in recent decades. After a period of stability under Egyptian President Mubarak, relations saw new momentum following the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions, with the Kingdom announcing its support for Egypt and financial assistance. With President Al-Sisi's assumption of office, cooperation between the two countries has been significantly strengthened, with the Saudi Arabian Kingdom providing a massive package of assistance to Egypt. These relations culminated in the visit of King Salman bin Abdulaziz to Egypt in 2016, which resulted in the signing of several investment and economic agreements, most notably the establishment of a large investment fund.

As regional risks have recently grown in the face of accelerating strategic shifts in the Middle East, Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman's visit to Egypt is an important step in reinforcing the strategic partnership between the two countries and strengthening their joint efforts to address regional challenges, especially in the context of the regional turmoil. ⁽²⁾

However, the consolidation of relations between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Arab

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on shared cultural and historical controls. The two countries also share some sources of threat and contribute common interests in terms of enhancing security in the Red Sea because it is linked to a number of important waterways. Thus, this creates space for cooperation between the two countries in the face of threats related to the Red Sea's navigational movement. In addition to their desire to operationalize regional development visions in line with the objectives of the Kingdom's 2030 Plan for Sustainable Development, they are also combating terrorism and countering regional extremism as Islamism political phenomena and their ramifications in the region grow. Also, protecting security in the Arab Gulf region in light of the Egyptian leadership's constant assertion that Gulf security is an integral part of Egyptian national security.⁽³⁾ Therefore, Saudi-Egyptian interaction goes beyond the bilateral framework to gain regional and international significance, contributing to the transformation of the two countries' roles into a global bridge of communication, capable of building international consensus on thorny issues and expanding regional and international cooperation.

The burgeoning Saudi-Egyptian relationship, deeply rooted in history and characterized by robust strategic cooperation, naturally raises questions about the future trajectory of this partnership and how to effectively operationalize deeper integration across all sectors. Thus, to achieve this ambitious goal, it is imperative to develop concrete recommendations and actionable proposals that will solidify bilateral cooperation and foster comprehensive integration across all dimensions. This will elevate the Saudi-Egyptian partnership to a level commensurate with their shared vision of a more stable, sustainable, and prosperous Middle East.

I- The Importance of Study

1. Deepen the strategic importance of Egyptian-Saudi interactions at the regional and international levels.
2. Provide a comprehensive analysis of bilateral relations by undertaking various aspects, including geography, economics, history, and culture.
3. Emphasize the multiple dimensions and aspects of the bilateral relationship in conjunc-

tion with its linkage to the regional context and international developments, thus giving a broader understanding of the importance of this relationship.

4. Identify the challenges facing relations between the two countries, as well as opportunities for enhanced cooperation.
5. Make proposals and recommendations and use them to formulate strategic development policies that support the operationalization of integration between the two countries.
6. Supporting scientific research with studies on the model of Saudi-Egyptian relations in promoting and cooperation in international relations in order to achieve a more stable and prosperous international environment.

II- Study Objectives

1. Determine the geostrategic specificity of both countries by lighting on the factors that make Egypt and the Kingdom two geostrategic countries in the region and the world.
2. Assess bilateral cooperation and its ability to strengthen the two countries' influence regionally.
3. Identifying the challenges facing the two countries and opportunities for enhanced cooperation between them.
4. Attention to ways of utilizing their geographical location and natural resources to achieve sustainable development.
5. Demonstrate the importance of the interactive relationship between the two countries in promoting Arab integration regionally.
6. Formulate a strategic policy to develop cooperation methods and strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries and transform them into a role model in the Arab region to activate international relations between the Middle East countries and the international community.

III- Study Methodology

The following scientific curricula have been adopted in addressing the topic of this study on the analysis of the prospects of Saudi-Egyptian cooperation and ways of developing it,

in order to reach the desired outcomes:

1. Extrapolation approach: The collection and extrapolation of concepts related to the evolution of Saudi-Egyptian relations and the specificity of the geostrategic importance of the two countries in the Middle East region, including their geostrategic position and how to invest in their economic and human wealth in order to consolidate the international controls between them. In order to draw clear conclusions on the importance of strengthening the integration of the two countries in order to achieve common goals, including sustainable development and the maintenance of security and stability in the region.

2. Analytical approach: in order to investigate the effects of Saudi-Egyptian convergence, considering the depth of their historical strategic relationships. Our analysis focused on understanding the interactive relationship between the two countries, aligning Egyptian goals with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, and identifying opportunities and challenges that could enhance convergence. Further, by analyzing interpretations and data received through scientific research, we aimed to draw the most prominent proposals from the innovative policy of openness and economic diversity supported by Saudi Vision 2030 and Egyptian ambitions. This analysis sought to provide influential scientific recommendations capable of engineering targeted development strategies to document Arab controls and their capacities in decision-making and promote external relations in the international community.

Therefore, this study will focus on highlighting the strategic geographical importance of Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East by examining the following aspects: firstly, a shared vision of regional and global issues, including the common interests and challenges faced by both countries, and secondly, formulating strategic policies, which involves developing effective proposals and recommendations to enhance Saudi Arabia's integration with the Arab Republic of Egypt.

I. Strategic geostrategic importance of the two countries in the Middle East

The Arab Republic of Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia play a pivotal role in the

regional and international landscape of the Middle East. This is due to a range of overlapping factors, most notably their strategic geographical position that makes them a bridge between the continents of Asia and Africa and their growing economic strength supported by their oil wealth, which makes them an influential force in regional decision-making, especially as they grow able to forge broad-based regional alliances. In this context, Egyptian President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, in an extensive discussion session with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, emphasized the depth and centrality of strategic fraternal relations between the two countries and the importance of continuing coordination and cooperation between them, particularly as regional risks grow.⁽⁴⁾ In the face of the doubling of Saudi-Egyptian endeavors to consolidate their international relations, the geostrategic importance of the two countries is crystallized into key themes related to the features of geographical location, what the enormous human forces are, and economic wealth in their historical civilization heritage going back thousands of years.

a. Geostrategic location

Saudi-Egyptian relations are among the most prominent regional interactions, with the strategic geographical location of the two countries placing great importance on this partnership. Egypt's immediate geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia, two regional forces, makes their cooperation a critical factor in shaping regional balances and maintaining security and stability in the region. Therefore, these relationships are not just a political alliance but an expression of deep cultural and social interaction spanning decades.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia have always received unique strategic importance thanks to their geographical locations on the international map.⁽⁵⁾ As a bridge linking the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe, Egypt is privileged to make it a center of trade and civilization through history. The Swiss Canal has strengthened this importance, becoming a vital artery of global trade, making Egypt a global commercial and logistical mogul. In contrast, the Kingdom is strategically located in the heart of the Arab peninsula, overlooking the most important trade waterways, including the Gulf of Aqaba, the Arabian Gulf, and the Red Sea, giving it considerable regional and economic influence. In addition, its embrace

of Islamic sanctities lends it strategic religious significance as the world's Muslim center of attraction.

In this context, the Arab Republic of Egypt is located in the northeast of Africa, and its fertile territory extends to a large part of the continent. Bordered by the North Mediterranean Sea, the East occupied Palestinian territory, the South Sudan, and the West Libya. Egypt is also characterized by a variety of terrain, including the vast Western Desert, the fertile Nile plains, the agricultural Nile Delta, and the mountainous Sinai Peninsula. Its highlights lie in the River Nile, which is Egypt's lifeline, as well as the Nile Delta, one of the world's largest deltas, and the Suez Canal, which connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

Saudi Arabia also covers a vast area of the Arabian Peninsula, limiting it to the north of Iraq, Kuwait, and Bahrain; to the east of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman; to the south of Yemen; and to the west of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Red Sea. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is characterized by a variety of terrain, including vast deserts, mountain plateaus, and coastal plains. In addition, its most visible natural features take shape in the Arab desert, which is the world's largest connected sandy desert, not to mention the Hijaz Mountains along the Red Sea coast.

Further, Egypt and Saudi Arabia's strategic location offers significant potential for future investments due to their strategic location, which allows them to capitalize on technological advancements, climate change, and international competition. However, they also face challenges such as terrorism, extremism, sea level rise, and changing global trading patterns. These challenges require significant investments in logistical infrastructure, strengthening the national economy, and operationalizing international security alliances to address risks and change.

b. Massive human resources and economic wealth

Geostrategic importance refers to the ability of the DAC to leverage its strategic potential to influence regional or international policies and promote development. In this way, human resources are a key factor in activating the position of foreign exchange across the economic, military, and political spheres, as they are critical to generating wealth and

technology.

Egypt's Arab Republic has tremendous human powers, with a population of more than 100 million, making it the most populous Arab nation. This large population provides Egypt with a huge and diverse workforce, which enhances its ability to achieve economic development. In addition, Egypt has a strong educational base with the availability of many universities and educational institutes that graduate thousands of students annually in various disciplines, including Cairo University, Ain Shams University, and others.

The Swiss Canal, which generated about \$5.61 billion in revenue in 2020, is a vital artery for the Egyptian economy. ⁽⁶⁾ This artery, together with Egypt's geostrategic location and natural wealth, has made it a global trading center and has contributed to the diversification of sources of income. Agriculture also plays a vital role in the Egyptian economy, with fertile land on the banks of the Nile providing opportunities for agricultural production and export. Furthermore, in its report, the Geological Survey of the United States confirmed the existence of gas, petroleum, and condensate reserves within Egypt's Mediterranean international waters, indicating that Egypt's international waters and the Gulf of Mexico are among the world's largest. ⁽⁷⁾

This integration of geostrategic location and diverse natural resources, coupled with the evolving infrastructure with enormous human power, makes Egypt a rising economic force in the region, capable of meeting global economic challenges and contributing to sustainable development.

In this context, the Saudi Arab Kingdom is one of the largest Arab countries in terms of area and is characterized by enormous economic wealth. The Kingdom's population is about 35 million, and the Saudi government is working to develop its human resources through investment in education and training. In this context, Vision 2030 is a model for the Kingdom's growing ambitions to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil through the development of other sectors such as education, tourism, technology and industry. In this regard, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) is the region's leading university.

Saudi Arabia has the world's largest oil reserves, making it one of the largest oil producers

and exporters. This oil wealth gives Saudi Arabia enormous economic influence globally. Especially because the Kingdom has the world's largest oil reserves, estimated at 268 billion barrels. ⁽⁸⁾ In addition to oil, Saudi Arabia has significant reserves of natural gas and minerals such as gold and silver.

Saudi Arabia enjoys a prosperous economy supported by its unique geographical location and natural wealth, as well as the stability of its currency and low inflation, making it an ideal destination for global investment. The Kingdom has therefore made remarkable progress in global competitive indicators, in terms of ease of doing business and real estate registration costs. In addition, the Kingdom is characterized by highly competitive energy prices, making it an ideal destination for industrial enterprises. Starting with, while Egypt relies heavily on agriculture and tourism as a source of income, the Kingdom seeks to diversify its economy away from depletion by investing in sectors such as technology and industry. This variation in economic composition reflects a difference in the tools for achieving both countries' development strategies.

II. Egypt and Saudi Arabia: A joint vision for regional and global challenges

Foreign interactions between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab-Egyptian Republic are vital themes in the privacy of Arab cooperation and integration to address regional and global geopolitical and economic challenges. During his visit to Cairo in 2024, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan stressed the depth of the Kingdom's historical relations with Egypt and its strategic importance in stabilizing as risks and challenges grow regionally and globally.⁽⁹⁾

a. Egyptian and Saudi perspectives on international matters

The Arab region is currently undergoing radical transformations that require wise and flexible attitudes from its influential countries. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt play a pivotal role in addressing these transformations, given their geographical and strategic location, regional impact, and the depth of their historical relationships. Especially as accelerated regional developments force Arab countries to adopt flexible foreign policies capable of confronting emerging challenges. Thus, through enhanced cooperation and coordination between them, the two countries have activated their role in dealing with crises and in-

ternational issues. Their external positions have been elaborated as follows:⁽¹⁰⁾

1. The Ukrainian Crisis and its Repercussions: The Ukrainian crisis has marked a turning point in international relations, directly and indirectly affecting the Arab region. In this context, both Saudi Arabia and Egypt have adopted balanced positions regarding this crisis, emphasizing the importance of dialogue and peace, and supporting international efforts to resolve the crisis. Both countries have also sought to protect their economic interests amidst the challenges posed by this crisis on global energy markets.

2. The Palestinian Cause: The Palestinian cause remains at the heart of Arab concerns. Both countries support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and strive to achieve a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue based on a two-state solution and recognition of an independent Palestinian state. Both countries are also keen to provide financial and humanitarian support to the Palestinian people.

3. Situations in Arab Countries: Many Arab countries, including Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, are experiencing political, security, and economic crises. Egypt and Saudi Arabia seek to support stability by providing humanitarian and economic assistance and calling for comprehensive national dialogue. Both countries are also working to enhance security cooperation to combat terrorism and extremism and protect Arab national security.

4. Syria's Return to the Arab Fold: Syria's return to the Arab League is an important step towards restoring stability to the region. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have played a pivotal role in this context, emphasizing the need for a political solution to the Syrian crisis and empowering the Syrian people to determine their own future through democratic representation. Additionally, both countries have worked to create a suitable environment for Syria's return to the international community.

5. Regional Alliances: Saudi Arabia seeks to strengthen its relations with countries in the region and expand regional cooperation. The Kingdom is working to enhance cooperation with Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Egypt, Jordan, and all Arab countries.

6. The Egyptian Vision and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030: The Egyptian vision aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 for sustainable development, aiming to enhance regional co-

operation, resolve conflicts peacefully, combat terrorism and extremism, and build a more prosperous and stable future for the region.

b. Complementarities between Egypt and the Kingdom: a strategic multidimensional partnership

Despite the challenges of the region in the current period, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab - Egyptian Republic have activated the regional dialogue within the joint summits. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, emphasized that “the challenges facing our world today require all efforts to strengthen cooperation among our nations to achieve security and stability in our region.”⁽¹¹⁾ Especially as terrorism and extremism grow in regional crises and climate change accelerates. In this context, the multidimensional integration between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Egyptian Republic reflects the shared awareness of the importance of cooperation to achieve security, stability, and development in the region, as reflected in the following format:⁽¹²⁾

- 1. Joint Investment:** Economic relations between the two countries are undergoing a transformation towards increased mutual investment. Saudi Arabia is investing heavily in Egypt’s industrial and energy infrastructure projects, such as the Sadat City industrial project, one of the largest joint industrial ventures between the two countries. Conversely, Egyptian companies are investing in various sectors in Saudi Arabia, particularly in real estate and services.
- 2. Trade Exchange:** Both countries are seeking to increase bilateral trade by facilitating customs procedures and encouraging exports and imports. Bilateral trade between the two countries has witnessed significant growth in recent years, with the exchanged goods including petroleum products, agricultural products, and industrial products.
- 3. Cooperation in the Energy Sector:** Egypt benefits from Saudi Arabia’s extensive experience in the energy sector, particularly in oil and gas. The two countries are working to develop joint projects in renewable energy, such as solar and wind energy, aiming to achieve sustainable development goals.
- 4. Investment in the Industrial Sector:** Industrial cooperation between the two countries

is witnessing remarkable development, with Egyptian and Saudi companies establishing partnerships to produce goods and services that meet the needs of both markets. These partnerships encompass various sectors, including petrochemicals, food, and pharmaceuticals.

5. Military and Security Cooperation: Security and intelligence cooperation between the two countries is a cornerstone of strengthening regional security and stability. This is evident in the exchange of intelligence information to combat extremism and terrorism, as well as joint military exercises conducted by the armed forces of both countries to enhance combat readiness and exchange expertise. Additionally, both countries pay special attention to securing maritime navigation in the Red Sea through joint maritime patrols to protect commercial ships from various threats.

III. Recommendations and proposals

Saudi-Egyptian relations face both political and economic challenges. While the two leaders have strong political will to promote cooperation, economic and regional challenges require joint efforts. Strengthening Egypt-Saudi relations is crucial for regional Arab cooperation and combating terrorism and extremism. To achieve the Kingdom's Vision 2030 for Sustainable Development, proposals should be submitted to governments, strategic policy experts, engineers, and research centers to promote integration, build strategic partnerships, develop national competencies in business and scientific research, and promote cultural and knowledge exchange. This will help Arab capabilities meet intertwined challenges, combat terrorism, and build a more developed and sustainable Arab and regional economy.

a. At the legislative and legal level:

1. Updating and unifying economic legislation, particularly in relation to bilateral investment agreements, working on updating existing agreements, and concluding new ones to encourage mutual investments and provide greater protection for investors.

2. Working towards achieving customs integration between the two countries to facilitate the movement of goods and services between them and reduce costs. Also, unifying standards and specifications to facilitate trade between the two countries. Furthermore, designing legislation to establish a joint free economic zone to enhance trade and investment.

3. Cooperation in the legal and judicial field by working on exchanging judicial expertise and developing mechanisms for cooperation in legal and judicial matters. Drafting laws to facilitate mutual legal assistance in criminal and civil cases.

4. Working on designing legislation to establish joint Egyptian-Saudi committees to address the various issues of the two countries, which aim to develop targeted strategies to develop bilateral relations in order to activate sustainable economic development for both countries.

b. At the level of strategic dialogue

1. Establishing a Strategic Cooperation Council composed of high-level officials from both countries to hold regular meetings to discuss regional and international issues of mutual interest and to set priorities for cooperation.

2. Forming specialized subcommittees focusing on specific sectors such as economics, security, energy, and culture to follow up on the implementation of joint projects and address any challenges they may face.

3. Establishing a mechanism for continuous political consultation between the foreign ministries of the two countries to exchange information and views on regional and international developments.

4. Promoting media cooperation by fostering media exchanges between institutions in both countries and by facilitating positive media coverage of bilateral relations, while countering misinformation and disinformation that may undermine bilateral ties.

c. At the level of Enhancing Economic Cooperation

1. Allocating a substantial budget to establish a joint investment fund to finance joint projects across various sectors. Simplifying investment procedures by streamlining relat-

ed regulations and laws, and providing incentives for investors. Additionally, directing investments towards promising sectors such as renewable energy, technology, agriculture, and tourism.

2. Creating specialized industrial zones in specific sectors and building joint regional supply chains to enhance industrial integration. Furthermore, encouraging the exchange of expertise and technology in the industrial sector.

3. Investing jointly in developing infrastructure projects for communications, information technology, renewable energy, transportation, irrigation, and drainage, as well as connecting the electricity grids between the two countries to enhance energy security. Additionally, supporting research and development in the field of hydrogen energy.

4. Cooperating in agricultural production and marketing agricultural products. Also, working on exchanging modern agricultural technologies and developing joint food supply chains.

d. At the level of enhancing security cooperation

1. Strengthening intelligence coordination and cooperation by exchanging real-time intelligence information on terrorist threats and organized crime. Furthermore, coordinating joint investigations, intelligence gathering, and analysis.

2. Deepening military cooperation by increasing the frequency of joint military exercises between the armed forces of both countries. Additionally, leveraging the digital revolution to develop joint defense industries while strengthening coordination and cooperation in combating terrorism and extremism, and drying up its funding sources.

3. Cooperating in border protection by exchanging information on illegal infiltration and activating surveillance technology through the use of the latest border surveillance technologies to combat the smuggling of weapons and drugs across borders.

4. Enhancing cybersecurity cooperation by aiming to protect critical infrastructure from cyberattacks and cybercrimes. Additionally, exchanging information on cyber threats and training personnel to combat cybercrimes.

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