Defense Diplomacy and Military Diplomacy in Saudi Arabia: A Survey

Abstract

This survey paper examines the strategic role of defense and military diplomacy in shaping Saudi Arabia's geopolitical strategy, emphasizing its impact on Middle East security and international relations. The survey is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis, beginning with foundational concepts and definitions of defense diplomacy, military diplomacy, and defense policy. The paper then delves into Saudi Arabia's specific strategies, highlighting its use of bilateral defense cooperation agreements and strategic hedging to enhance regional security and geopolitical influence. The survey further explores the kingdom's geopolitical strategy, focusing on its adaptive responses to regional dynamics and challenges posed by state and non-state actors. Through case studies, including military interventions in Yemen and Gulf Cooperation Council responses to regional incidents, the survey illustrates the practical applications and outcomes of Saudi Arabia's defense diplomacy. The findings underscore Saudi Arabia's dual approach of combining military posturing with the promotion of 'moderate Islam' to project power and foster international alliances. By leveraging defense cooperation agreements and strategic partnerships, Saudi Arabia balances its relations with global powers while asserting its regional influence. The survey concludes by emphasizing the significance of these diplomatic strategies in maintaining regional stability and enhancing Saudi Arabia's position as a key player in Middle Eastern and global security affairs.

1 Introduction

1.1 Structure of the Survey

This survey provides a thorough examination of Saudi Arabia's defense and military diplomacy in the context of its geopolitical strategy in the Middle East. It begins by introducing defense diplomacy and military diplomacy, underscoring their importance in achieving diplomatic goals. The survey is organized into several key sections.

The second section offers a comprehensive overview of essential terms, including defense diplomacy, military diplomacy, and defense policy, while discussing their relevance within international relations, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the broader Middle East.

The third section focuses on Saudi Arabia's defense and military diplomacy strategies, analyzing their role in enhancing the kingdom's geopolitical influence and ensuring regional security. It includes an examination of strategic concepts and bilateral defense cooperation agreements.

The fourth section analyzes Saudi Arabia's geopolitical strategy, emphasizing its objectives and challenges in maintaining security in the Middle East. It discusses the significance of defense diplomacy in navigating complex international relations, providing a framework for understanding regional dynamics and the impact of non-state actors.
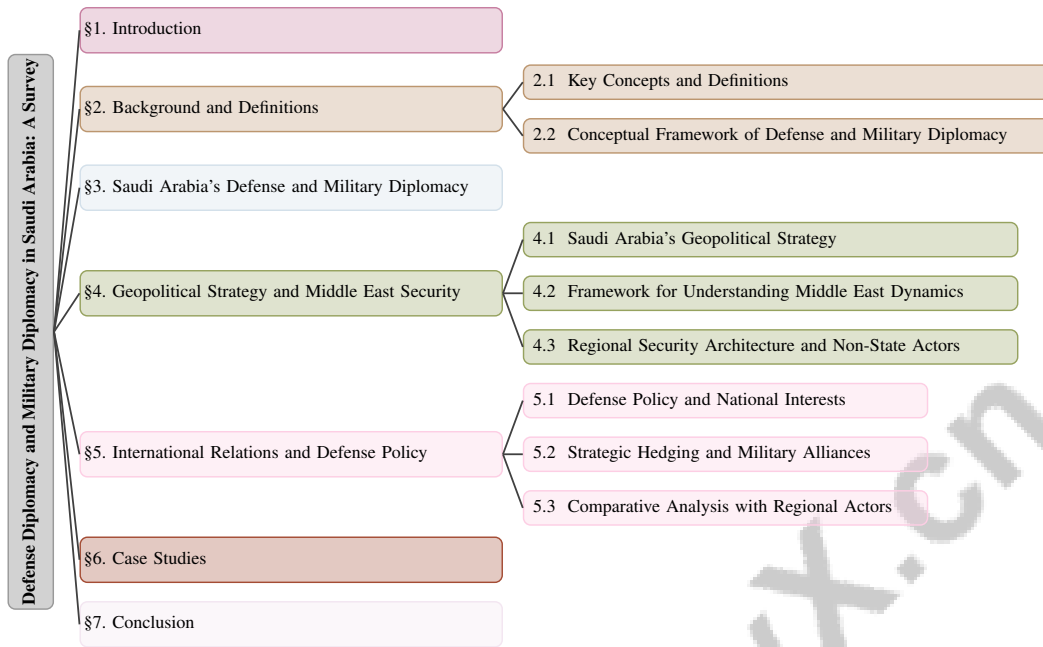
Figure 1: chapter structure

The fifth section explores the relationship between Saudi Arabia's defense policy and its international relations, illustrating how defense diplomacy facilitates alliance formation and conflict management. It examines the alignment of defense policy with national interests and analyzes strategic hedging and military alliances.

The sixth section presents case studies demonstrating Saudi Arabia's application of defense and military diplomacy in scenarios such as military interventions in Yemen and the Gulf Cooperation Council's responses to regional incidents. These case studies assess the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving diplomatic objectives.

The survey concludes with a summary of key findings, emphasizing the critical role of defense and military diplomacy in shaping Saudi Arabia's geopolitical strategy amid regional instability and power dynamics. This analysis highlights how Saudi Arabia's enhanced military engagement and diplomatic initiatives are vital not only for its national interests but also for influencing broader regional security and international relations, particularly in the context of competition among major powers and the evolving security landscape in the MENA region [1, 2, 3, 4].The following sections are organized as shown in Figure 1.

2 Background and Definitions

2.1 Key Concepts and Definitions

Defense diplomacy and military diplomacy are vital in international relations, serving as tools for nations to enhance geopolitical influence and protect national interests. Defense diplomacy utilizes military resources for diplomatic objectives, fostering bilateral and multilateral ties, as demonstrated by Malaysia's soft power strategy [2]. Military diplomacy, on the other hand, involves deploying military personnel and assets in peacekeeping, anti-piracy operations, and multinational military exercises (MMEs) to build trust and improve capabilities beyond mere deterrence.

Defense policy outlines a nation's approach to national security and military affairs, influenced by ideological motivations, national interests, and internal dynamics [5]. Theoretical frameworks like 'offensive realism' suggest that states must maximize power in an anarchic international system [6]. The defense industry shapes defense policy through strategies like integration, collaboration, self-sufficiency, and political influence via defense capabilities [1].

In Saudi Arabia, these concepts are central to its Middle Eastern geopolitical strategy, where it navigates complex international relations and seeks regional security. The reliability of military technologies, such as Chinese UCAVs, and enhanced military cooperation with regional partners are crucial considerations [7]. Additionally, declining confidence in U.S. commitments among Gulf states and diverging regional policies from American interests add complexity to the defense diplomacy landscape [8].

This survey clarifies these concepts and their applications, providing insight into how Saudi Arabia and other nations use defense and military diplomacy to achieve strategic goals and manage international relations [9].

2.2 Conceptual Framework of Defense and Military Diplomacy

The conceptual framework of defense and military diplomacy is informed by theoretical perspectives that elucidate the dynamic nature of international relations, especially in the Middle East. Complex realism underscores the fluid power dynamics in the MENA region, emphasizing the interactions among state and non-state actors [3]. Strategic hedging explains how states like the UAE balance cooperation and conflict management in a volatile geopolitical environment [10].

The proliferation of Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) is analyzed through a framework combining cooperation theory and network analysis, highlighting a complex network of bilateral and multilateral relationships that strengthen alliances and promote stability [11]. The common prior assumption suggests that while agents share a common probability distribution over outcomes, divergent observations influence their strategic interactions and diplomatic engagements [12].

Defense diplomacy's role in military statecraft and its connection to soft power are exemplified by Malaysia's grand strategy, showcasing it as a means to enhance national influence and foster international cooperation [2]. The framework for U.S.-Gulf relations illustrates the interplay of mutual interests and varying perspectives that shape diplomatic landscapes and influence defense policy [8].

A comprehensive framework for the Middle East, characterized by diverse actors and interests rather than a mere balance of power, is crucial for analyzing strategic interactions in defense and military diplomacy [9]. This framework is enriched by categorizing incidents like cyber warfare as acts of war, emphasizing the ethical implications within diplomatic relations [13]. These theoretical foundations provide a robust basis for analyzing strategic objectives and diplomatic maneuvers in international defense and military diplomacy.

In examining the complexities of Saudi Arabia's defense policies, it is crucial to understand the underlying structures that shape its military and diplomatic strategies. This is particularly evident in the hierarchical organization that governs Saudi Arabia's defense and military diplomacy. As illustrated in Figure 2, the figure highlights the strategic concepts employed by the kingdom, emphasizing a dual approach that integrates military strength with ideological strategies. The visual representation not only delineates the framework of these strategies but also outlines the objectives they aim to achieve. Furthermore, it provides insights into the framework and benefits of bilateral defense cooperation agreements, illustrating their strategic impact on enhancing Saudi Arabia's military capabilities and expanding its geopolitical influence. By integrating this visual analysis, we can better appreciate the multifaceted nature of Saudi Arabia's approach to defense and diplomacy.

3 Saudi Arabia's Defense and Military Diplomacy

3.1 Strategic Concepts in Saudi Defense Diplomacy

Saudi Arabia's defense diplomacy integrates military strength with ideological strategies to bolster its geopolitical influence and ensure national security. This dual approach involves assertive military posturing alongside the promotion of 'moderate Islam' as a diplomatic instrument, projecting power while fostering international alliances through a blend of hard and soft power dynamics [6]. By championing moderate Islam, Saudi Arabia seeks to counter extremist ideologies and enhance its global legitimacy, reinforcing diplomatic engagements and defense initiatives. This strategy underscores the kingdom's commitment to regional stability and the pursuit of national interests through a comprehensive diplomatic framework.
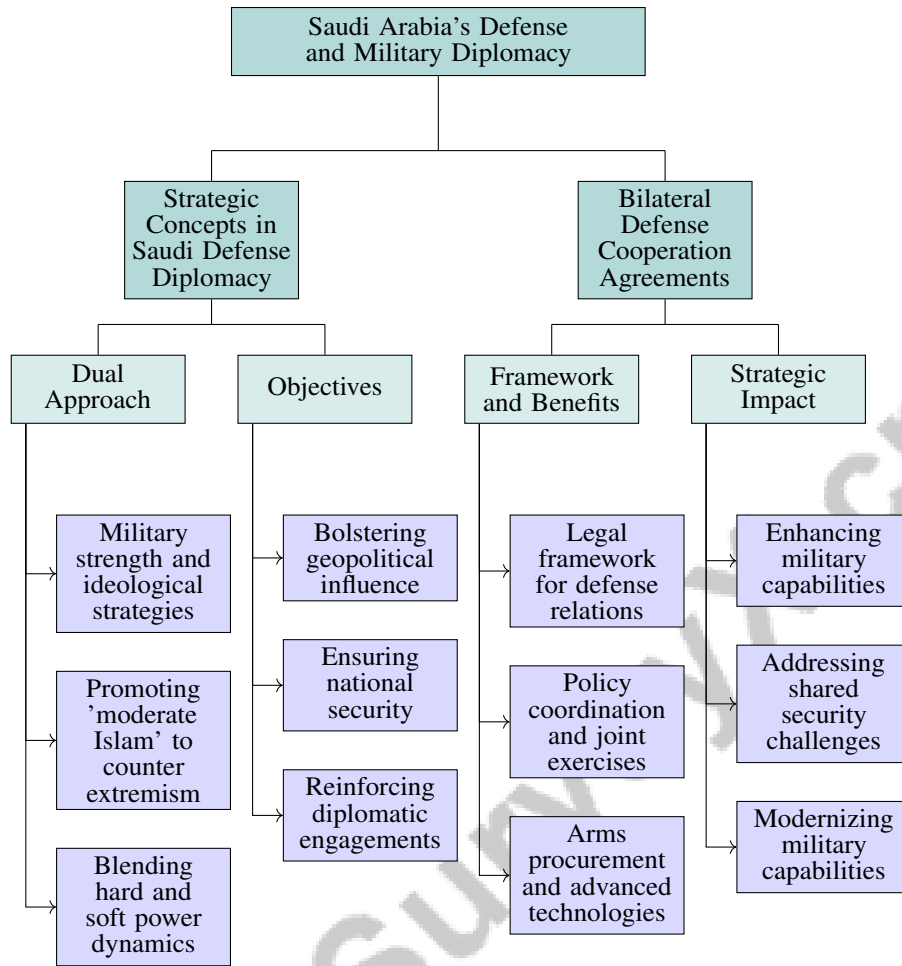
Figure 2: This figure illustrates the hierarchical structure of Saudi Arabia's defense and military diplomacy. It highlights the strategic concepts, including the dual approach of military strength and ideological strategies, and their objectives. Additionally, it outlines the framework and benefits of bilateral defense cooperation agreements and their strategic impact on Saudi Arabia's military capabilities and geopolitical influence.

3.2 Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreements

Bilateral defense cooperation agreements (DCAs) are central to Saudi Arabia's defense diplomacy, providing a legal framework for defense relations that facilitate policy coordination, joint military exercises, and arms procurement [11]. These agreements strengthen Saudi Arabia's military capabilities and strategic alliances, amplifying its geopolitical influence in the Middle East. The rise of DCAs reflects a trend towards increased military collaboration in response to shared security challenges, enabling coordinated military strategies that address complex threats in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region [5, 3, 11, 4].

Joint military exercises under DCAs enhance interoperability, capacity building, and trust development, addressing shared security threats and reducing strategic uncertainty [3, 2, 4, 11]. These exercises improve tactical and operational capabilities, fostering mutual understanding among participating nations. In arms procurement, DCAs provide access to advanced military technologies, crucial for maintaining a qualitative edge and safeguarding national interests. This strategic approach facilitates peaceful military deployment and fosters bilateral and multilateral relationships, enabling Saudi Arabia to modernize its military capabilities and navigate major power competition [2, 3, 11, 4].

Saudi Arabia's bilateral defense cooperation agreements are vital to its defense diplomacy, enhancing regional stability and security through comprehensive military collaboration frameworks. These

agreements enable defense policy coordination, joint exercises, arms procurement, and information sharing, allowing Saudi Arabia to modernize its military and effectively address shared security challenges. Amid a volatile Middle Eastern landscape marked by inter-state conflicts and geopolitical rivalries, these partnerships reinforce Saudi Arabia's influence as a resurgent regional power, promoting a cohesive security environment among allied nations [2, 4, 3, 11, 5]. Through these agreements, the kingdom navigates the complex geopolitical landscape, solidifying its role in regional and international security affairs.

4 Geopolitical Strategy and Middle East Security

4.1 Saudi Arabia's Geopolitical Strategy

Saudi Arabia's geopolitical strategy is a multifaceted framework aimed at navigating the complex interplay of regional and global powers while safeguarding national security. Central to this strategy is the kingdom's adaptability to shifting alliances and the dynamic roles of non-state actors, which significantly influence regional stability and power dynamics [9]. The increasing involvement of global powers, such as Russia and China, necessitates a recalibration of Saudi Arabia's diplomatic and defense strategies to protect its interests.

The kingdom balances traditional alliances, especially with Western nations, while forging new partnerships with emerging global powers, enhancing economic and military cooperation. This dual approach reinforces Saudi Arabia's position as a regional leader amid evolving global power competition, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region [2, 3]. Such balancing diversifies strategic partnerships and reduces dependency on any single power, thereby enhancing geopolitical resilience.

Saudi Arabia leverages its economic clout, particularly through initiatives like Vision 2030, to bolster its regional leadership and project soft power. By investing in economic diversification and development, the kingdom aims to strengthen its infrastructure and mitigate vulnerabilities to external economic disruptions. This strategy not only enhances resilience against global market fluctuations but also amplifies Saudi Arabia's geopolitical influence amidst intensifying competition for power and stability in the MENA region [2, 3, 4, 10].

Addressing the influence of non-state actors that threaten regional stability, Saudi Arabia adopts a dual strategy encompassing military interventions and comprehensive diplomatic initiatives. This approach fosters regional cooperation, establishes defense agreements, and builds coalitions to respond effectively to shared security challenges. Through defense diplomacy, Saudi Arabia enhances mutual trust, coordinates defense policies, and conducts joint military exercises, reducing strategic uncertainty and promoting stability in a complex security environment [2, 4, 11]. By engaging in regional security dialogues, the kingdom positions itself as a pivotal player in shaping the Middle East's future.

Saudi Arabia's geopolitical strategy is thus an adaptive framework aimed at navigating the intricate web of regional and global interactions. By balancing traditional and emerging alliances, capitalizing on economic initiatives, and countering non-state actors, the kingdom seeks to protect its national interests and enhance its influence in the Middle East. This approach is increasingly crucial amidst ongoing geopolitical shifts characterized by instability, interventionist foreign policies among regional powers, and the complex aftermath of the Arab Spring [2, 4, 9, 3, 10].

4.2 Framework for Understanding Middle East Dynamics

Analyzing the Middle East's intricate geopolitical landscape requires a comprehensive framework that accounts for the interplay between state and non-state actors, as well as the influence of external powers shaping the region's strategic environment. The concept of complex realism provides insights into these interactions, emphasizing the fluidity of power relations and the diverse motivations of regional actors [3].

Recognizing the Middle East as a multipolar region is crucial, characterized by several influential states pursuing distinct strategic objectives. This multipolarity is complicated by the involvement of global powers like the United States, Russia, and China, whose interests significantly affect regional stability and power dynamics [9]. The strategic hedging behavior of Middle Eastern states, balancing

cooperation and competition with these powers, is essential for navigating this complex environment [10].

The framework must address the role of non-state actors, including militant groups and transnational networks, which challenge the traditional state-centric paradigm of international relations. Their influence on regional security dynamics necessitates a nuanced understanding of their motivations and strategies [13].

The proliferation of Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) in the region illustrates the interconnectedness of Middle Eastern states, relying on strategic alliances to address shared security challenges. Analyzing these agreements highlights the importance of bilateral and multilateral relationships in fostering regional stability and enhancing collective security [11].

Furthermore, the ethical implications of emerging security threats, such as cyber warfare, should be integrated into the framework. Categorizing such incidents as acts of war underscores the need for comprehensive diplomatic strategies to address these challenges within the broader context of international law and norms [13].

4.3 Regional Security Architecture and Non-State Actors

The Middle East's regional security architecture significantly influences Saudi Arabia's strategic decisions. This architecture involves the interplay between state actors, such as Saudi Arabia and its neighbors, and non-state actors, including militant groups and transnational networks, complicating the security landscape and leading to increased instability and fragmentation. In response to persistent threats from these actors and broader geopolitical challenges emerging from regime collapses since 2010, Saudi Arabia has shifted from a traditionally cautious approach to a more interventionist stance, necessitating adaptive strategies for effective navigation of this complex security environment [6, 3, 4].

Saudi Arabia's regional security strategy is significantly shaped by the need to counter threats from non-state actors, who exploit geopolitical instability to advance their agendas. This approach has evolved amid a deteriorating MENA subsystem, characterized by ongoing interstate conflicts and the rise of violent non-state actors since the 1980s. The fallout from the Arab Spring has further intensified this volatility, prompting Saudi Arabia and neighboring states to adopt a more assertive foreign policy. This trend reflects increased activism within the Kingdom, particularly post-2015 leadership transition, as it seeks to assert influence and maintain stability in an increasingly fragmented regional landscape [2, 6, 4, 3, 10]. Non-state actors can undermine state authority and disrupt regional stability, necessitating Saudi Arabia's military and diplomatic efforts to counter their influence. The kingdom's strategy involves coalition-building and fostering regional cooperation to address shared security challenges.

The regional security architecture is characterized by a network of alliances and partnerships that Saudi Arabia leverages to enhance its defense capabilities and strategic positioning. Engaging with global powers and regional allies strengthens military cooperation and intelligence sharing, fortifying the collective security framework. The UAE's pragmatic policy, which seeks to maximize political and economic returns while minimizing risks, serves as a model for Saudi Arabia's strategic engagements in the region [10].

Saudi Arabia actively engages in diplomatic initiatives alongside military strategies to counter non-state actors and foster regional stability. This multifaceted approach is vital in the context of a chaotic MENA region, which has experienced significant disorder since the Arab Spring. The Kingdom's diplomatic efforts complement military actions, enabling it to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape and assert its role as a resurgent regional power. By leveraging both hard and soft power, Saudi Arabia aims to mitigate security threats and enhance cooperation, contributing to a more stable regional environment [3, 4]. These efforts involve participating in regional dialogues, supporting peace processes, and promoting economic development to address the root causes of instability. By integrating military and diplomatic approaches, Saudi Arabia seeks to construct a resilient security architecture capable of withstanding challenges from both state and non-state actors.

The influence of regional security architecture and non-state actors on Saudi Arabia's strategic approach is significant and multifaceted. This dynamic necessitates a comprehensive and adaptive strategy that effectively integrates military capabilities with diplomatic efforts. Given the ongoing

instability in the MENA region, characterized by interstate conflicts and the rise of non-state actors, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has evolved to become more interventionist and assertive since the 2015 leadership transition. As a resurgent regional power, Saudi Arabia must navigate its geopolitical environment by balancing hard power with soft power initiatives, including defense diplomacy, to address immediate security challenges and long-term strategic goals [3, 4]. By navigating this complex landscape, Saudi Arabia seeks to maintain national security and assert influence in the Middle East, contributing to regional stability and security.

5 International Relations and Defense Policy

5.1 Defense Policy and National Interests

Saudi Arabia's defense policy is intricately aligned with its national interests, emphasizing regional stability and national security. A critical component of this policy is navigating complex relations with Iran, its primary regional rival, balancing security concerns with broader geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East [10]. This involves both military preparedness and diplomatic engagement aimed at mitigating threats and fostering stability.

The kingdom's defense industry significantly influences its defense policy, enhancing military capabilities while shaping political power and international relations [1]. By leveraging its defense industry, Saudi Arabia seeks to increase strategic autonomy and reduce reliance on foreign military suppliers, thus reinforcing its national security framework.

Strategic alliances with key global and regional partners are vital for collective security and addressing shared threats, such as terrorism and regional instability. The proliferation of Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) exemplifies a strategic response to evolving security challenges, enabling military collaboration, joint exercises, and information sharing among states [3, 2, 4, 11]. Such engagements reflect the kingdom's commitment to robust security partnerships aligned with its national interests.

Saudi Arabia's defense policy is further informed by a broader geopolitical strategy that combines hard and soft power tactics, including economic initiatives like Vision 2030, aimed at enhancing economic resilience and international standing. Integrating economic reforms with a more assertive defense posture, Saudi Arabia aspires to solidify its status as a dominant regional power and a key contributor to global security. This approach marks a shift from a historically cautious foreign policy to a more interventionist stance, necessitated by the complexities of a volatile Middle East and challenges posed by rival powers [2, 6, 4, 3, 10].

Saudi Arabia's defense policy thus represents a multifaceted and adaptive framework that aligns with its national interests and international relations. By navigating the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and capitalizing on its defense industry, the kingdom aims to bolster national security and amplify regional influence, playing a pivotal role in fostering stability amidst ongoing conflicts [2, 3].

5.2 Strategic Hedging and Military Alliances

Saudi Arabia's strategic hedging and military alliances are crucial components of its defense and geopolitical strategy. This approach, exemplified by regional actors like the UAE, combines diplomatic engagement with robust military alliances to manage and mitigate regional threats [10]. It allows Saudi Arabia to navigate the uncertainties of the Middle East's volatile geopolitical landscape, balancing cooperation with potential rivals while enhancing its defense posture.

The proliferation of Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) since the end of the Cold War has significantly bolstered Saudi Arabia's strategic hedging. These agreements facilitate military collaboration and mutual defense, enabling the kingdom to establish a network of alliances that enhance strategic flexibility and security [11]. By engaging in DCAs, Saudi Arabia fortifies its military capabilities and fosters relationships with key regional and global partners, diversifying security dependencies and mitigating risks associated with reliance on a single ally.

Collaborative initiatives such as joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing programs strengthen Saudi Arabia's military alliances, enhancing interoperability among allied forces and fostering mutual trust in response to shared security threats. These efforts are part of a broader defense diplomacy strategy aimed at navigating the complex security landscape of the Middle East and North

Africa (MENA) region, where instability and competition for influence necessitate closer military cooperation [3, 4, 11]. Such activities not only improve operational readiness but also affirm Saudi Arabia's commitment to collective security, positioning the kingdom as a central player in regional defense initiatives.

Saudi Arabia's strategic hedging is further illustrated by its cultivation of balanced relationships with major global powers, including the United States, Russia, and China, as it navigates regional instability and seeks to enhance its influence in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. This balancing act enables the kingdom to maximize political and economic gains while mitigating security risks, reflecting a broader trend among regional actors responding to the tumultuous dynamics of the MENA region [3, 10].

5.3 Comparative Analysis with Regional Actors

Saudi Arabia's strategic approach to defense diplomacy can be effectively compared with other regional actors, highlighting both unique and shared elements in military and diplomatic engagements. Like many of its counterparts, Saudi Arabia employs Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) as foundational tools for enhancing strategic alliances and military capabilities. The proliferation of DCAs is influenced by network dynamics, such as preferential attachment and triadic closure, which facilitate agreement signing as more states engage [11]. This network effect underscores the importance of interconnectedness and strategic partnerships in the Middle East's security architecture.

Saudi Arabia's defense diplomacy emphasizes strategic hedging, balancing relations with major global powers while strengthening regional alliances. This approach is mirrored by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, such as the UAE, which also utilize strategic hedging to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape. The UAE's foreign policy effectively balances political and economic gains while mitigating risks, aligning closely with Saudi initiatives aimed at fostering regional stability post-Arab Spring. This strategy includes diplomatic engagement with Iran and military cooperation with allies like the United States, reflecting shared objectives in maintaining a secure and stable Middle East [6, 8, 3, 10, 5].

The evolving nature of military engagements and joint exercises conducted by Saudi Arabia and its regional counterparts underscores the kingdom's intensified foreign policy and assertiveness amid increasing geopolitical competition and instability in the MENA region [2, 3, 4, 14]. These exercises enhance military readiness and build trust and interoperability among nations, demonstrating a commitment to collective security and the ability to respond to shared threats like terrorism and regional instability.

The defense diplomacy landscape in the Middle East is complicated by the rising influence of non-state actors and fluid allegiances among global powers, as states engage in bilateral defense cooperation agreements (DCAs) to modernize militaries and address shared security threats. This dynamic is exacerbated by historical inter-state conflicts and ongoing geopolitical maneuvering, particularly following regime changes in the Arab region since 2010, leading to heightened disorder and more aggressive foreign policy postures from regional powers like Saudi Arabia [2, 3, 11]. Saudi Arabia's response to these challenges involves a combination of military interventions and diplomatic initiatives, similar to strategies employed by other regional powers, highlighting the need for adaptability and resilience in the face of evolving security dynamics.

6 Case Studies

Examining Saudi Arabia's military interventions in Yemen is pivotal for understanding the intricate dynamics of defense and military diplomacy in the Middle East, particularly as the Kingdom has solidified its status as a regional power post-2015. This era has been marked by increased instability following the collapse of Arab regimes and the emergence of violent non-state actors, prompting Saudi Arabia and its allies to pursue a more interventionist foreign policy. Analyzing this case reveals how Saudi military actions align with its strategic interests and influence broader geopolitical interactions [3, 4]. The examination will delve into the motivations, implications, and outcomes of these interventions, offering insights into Saudi Arabia's role in regional security dynamics.

6.1 Saudi Arabia's Military Interventions in Yemen

Initiated in 2015, Saudi Arabia's military interventions in Yemen highlight its defense and military diplomacy, integrating hard power with religious diplomacy to achieve its objectives. The intervention aimed to counter the Houthi insurgency, viewed as an Iranian proxy, addressing significant regional security concerns [6]. This military campaign underscores the Kingdom's dedication to regional stability and the safeguarding of its national interests against perceived threats from rival powers.

The diplomatic ramifications are multifaceted, showcasing Saudi Arabia's strategic use of military force to enhance geopolitical influence while engaging in religious diplomacy. By promoting moderate Islam, Saudi Arabia seeks to counter extremist narratives and bolster global legitimacy. This dual strategy of combining hard power with religious diplomacy enhances Saudi Arabia's international standing and reinforces its defense initiatives [6].

The intervention has reshaped Saudi Arabia's relationships with global and regional powers, marking a shift from a traditionally cautious foreign policy to a more assertive stance. This transformation, particularly post-2015 leadership change, has been driven by regional instability and the pursuit of geopolitical advantages amidst fragmentation in the MENA region. As Saudi Arabia adopts a more aggressive foreign policy, its actions increasingly influence the strategic considerations of major international players, including the United States and the European Union, altering power dynamics within the international system [6, 3]. While the Kingdom has garnered support from allies like the United States and other GCC states, the prolonged conflict and resultant humanitarian crisis have drawn international criticism, necessitating a diplomatic balancing act to maintain alliances while addressing humanitarian concerns.

6.2 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Responses to Regional Incidents

The GCC has been pivotal in shaping member states' collective responses to regional incidents, reflecting efforts to address shared security challenges and maintain Middle Eastern stability. As a leading GCC member, Saudi Arabia has leveraged its military capabilities and strategic influence to orchestrate collaborative security initiatives and foreign policy strategies among neighboring states. This shift towards a more interventionist stance, particularly post-2015 leadership transition, underscores Saudi Arabia's ambition to assert itself as a resurgent regional power amid ongoing instability and fragmentation in the MENA region [2, 6, 4, 3, 10].

Following the Arab Spring, the GCC's approach to regional incidents has combined diplomatic engagement with military readiness. The UAE's evolving stance towards Iran, shaped by internal and external pressures, exemplifies the nuanced strategies employed by GCC states to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape [10]. This evolution reflects a broader trend within the GCC, where member states balance cooperation with the imperative to protect national interests against potential threats.

Saudi Arabia has taken a leadership role within the GCC, spearheading collective security initiatives aimed at promoting regional stability in response to escalating inter-state conflicts and the rise of non-state actors. This shift towards a more interventionist foreign policy since 2015 reflects the Kingdom's increasing assertiveness in addressing unprecedented disorder and geopolitical challenges following the Arab Spring [6, 3]. The Kingdom's strategic influence is evident in its capacity to galvanize support for joint military operations and diplomatic efforts aimed at countering threats such as terrorism and regional instability. By coordinating with GCC partners, Saudi Arabia enhances its ability to address transnational challenges and strengthen the regional security architecture.

Moreover, the GCC's responses to regional incidents often involve deploying military forces and establishing joint task forces to tackle immediate security concerns. These coordinated efforts underscore the critical importance of interoperability and mutual support among GCC states, essential for addressing crises and presenting a united front against shared threats. The establishment of bilateral defense cooperation agreements (DCAs) has facilitated this collaboration, providing legal frameworks for defense policy coordination, joint military exercises, and vital information exchange. As regional instability and competition for influence have intensified, particularly following upheaval in the Arab world, GCC states have adopted more proactive foreign policies, leveraging these agreements to modernize their militaries and respond to common security challenges. This strategic alignment not only enhances their collective capabilities but also strengthens their position within the broader geopolitical landscape of the MENA region [3, 11].

9

7 Conclusion

The survey underscores the integral role of defense and military diplomacy in Saudi Arabia's geopolitical strategy, significantly influencing Middle Eastern security and international relations. Saudi Arabia's proactive foreign policy, aligned with its promotion of 'moderate Islam', reflects its ambition to reaffirm its status as a regional power within a multifaceted geopolitical environment. The intricate interplay between local and global forces has heightened instability in the Middle East, requiring a sophisticated comprehension of regional security issues and the strategic actions of influential players such as Saudi Arabia.

The kingdom's defense diplomacy is marked by strategic hedging and the establishment of military alliances, which enhance its ability to manage regional uncertainties. Through Defense Cooperation Agreements and strategic partnerships, Saudi Arabia skillfully balances its interactions with major world powers while expanding its regional influence. This approach is mirrored by other Gulf states, including the UAE, which similarly utilize strategic hedging to counter regional threats and sustain stability.

Furthermore, the survey highlights the significance of emerging military technologies, such as Chinese Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs), which present both opportunities and challenges for the security dynamics of the region. As Saudi Arabia evolves its defense strategies to address the shifting geopolitical landscape, future research should focus on empirically validating theoretical insights and exploring the potential for service-based business models within the defense sector to enhance collaboration with other states.

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