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SAUDI ARABIA AND THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION IN THE LIGHT OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Palestine have remained a pillar of Middle East politics for decades. However, today, against the background of tectonic shifts in global geopolitics and regional security architecture, this vector is undergoing a profound transformation. Riyadh is trying to find a balance between its historic support for the Palestinian cause and the pragmatic interests of its ambitious Vision 2030 modernization program.

Traditionally, Saudi Arabia has been the main financial and political donor to the Palestinians, relying on the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, proposed by the Kingdom itself. It provided for the creation of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital in exchange for normalization of relations with Israel.

However, in recent years, Riyadh's approach has become more pragmatic. The Kingdom has realized that the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict is becoming an obstacle to the implementation of ambitious economic plans and the formation of a regional bloc capable of countering Iran's influence.

The signing of the "Abraham Agreements" between Israel and a number of Arab countries (UAE, Bahrain, Morocco) changed the rules of

the game. Saudi Arabia faces a difficult choice: stay true to its hard line on Israel or join the normalization process, which opens up access to technology, investment, and defense cooperation.

Prior to the events of October 7, 2023, negotiations on the normalization of relations between Riyadh and Tel Aviv, mediated by the United States, were at an advanced stage. The Saudi side insisted that the Palestinian issue must be resolved, or at least translated into a real political process, in order to justify such a step in front of the Arab and Muslim public.

The escalation of the conflict in October 2023 was a "cold shower" for regional ambitions. The war in Gaza has once again brought the Palestinian issue to the forefront of the world's agenda, making it impossible to quietly normalize relations with Israel.

For Saudi Arabia, this has become a serious challenge. On the one hand, the Kingdom cannot ignore the humanitarian catastrophe and the anger of the "Arab street". On the other hand, Riyadh does not want to abandon its strategic partnership with the United States and its long — term goal of transforming the region. As a result, Saudi Arabia has taken the position of an "active mediator", demanding an immediate ceasefire and insisting on the establishment of a Palestinian State as the only condition for long-term peace.

The Middle East has been undergoing tectonic shifts in recent years. Against the backdrop of a global transformation of the world order and a regional regrouping of forces, relations between Saudi Arabia and Palestine are caught in the middle of a complex diplomatic game. Riyadh, which aspires to the status of a global economic player, is forced to maneuver between the need to modernize the country and maintain its status as the leader of the Islamic world, for which the "Palestinian issue" remains a fundamental marker of legitimacy.

The main vector of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy today is the implementation of the Vision 2030 strategy, initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. For the success of this program, the Kingdom needs regional stability, an influx of foreign investment and technological partnership.

In this context, the traditional tough stance on the Palestinian issue is beginning to transform into pragmatism. Riyadh is no longer prepared to allow the Palestinian conflict to block its strategic interests, including the potential normalization of relations with Israel, which is seen as key to building a powerful anti-Iranian bloc and integrating it into global supply chains.

Despite its pragmatic approach, Saudi Arabia cannot afford to completely "write off" Palestine. For Riyadh, the Palestinian question is:

- **The legitimacy tool:** As the custodian of Islam's two holy sites, Saudi Arabia has a duty to demonstrate protection of the rights of Muslims.
- **Pressure lever:** Supporting the Palestinians allows the Kingdom to maintain its influence on the Arab "street" and resist Iran's attempts to monopolize the role of the "main defender" of the Palestinian cause.

After the events of October 7, 2023 and the subsequent escalation in the Gaza Strip, Saudi Arabia was forced to suspend negotiations on normalization of relations with Israel. This was a clear signal: Riyadh is ready for dialogue, but only if a real political horizon is created for a Palestinian State.

International transformations, such as China's growing role in the Middle East (in particular, mediating the restoration of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran), are changing the rules of the game.

- **The Chinese factor:** Beijing is actively promoting the idea of a peaceful settlement, positioning itself as a more neutral mediator than the United States. Saudi Arabia is taking advantage of this trend to diversify its foreign policy ties and not depend solely on Washington.

- **The crisis of Western mediation:** The apparent failure of the United States to achieve a ceasefire or propose a viable two-State solution is pushing Riyadh to seek collective regional solutions where the voice of Arab countries is more consolidated.

The main dilemma for Saudi Arabia is how to combine the desire for regional leadership and economic prosperity with the need for a just solution to the Palestinian conflict.

- **Risks:** A complete rejection of support for the Palestinians could lead to a loss of credibility in the Islamic world and an increase in radicalism that threatens the stability of the kingdom itself.

- **Features:** If Saudi Arabia can act as a guarantor of a "Palestinian state" within the framework of a broad regional deal, it will consolidate its status as the main architect of Middle East security, surpassing the influence of both Iran and Turkey.

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Palestine today are not just bilateral ties, but a complex knot in which the ambitions of great powers, the interests of regional players and the fate of millions of people are intertwined. Riyadh is moving from the role of "sponsor" of the Palestinian movement to the role of "political broker".

The future of this engagement will depend on whether Saudi Arabia can convert its economic weight into real diplomatic leverage that can force the parties to reach a compromise that suits both Israeli society and the Palestinian leadership.

Riyadh is aware that the status quo, in which the Palestinian issue remains a frozen conflict, is no longer secure. The events of recent

months have shown that ignoring the Palestinian agenda is fraught with unpredictable outbreaks of violence that can nullify any investment projects in the region. Therefore, Saudi Arabia's strategy is shifting towards "active mediation".

The Kingdom seeks to consolidate the Arab world around a single platform that demands from the international community not just humanitarian assistance, but a clear timetable for the creation of a Palestinian State. This transforms Riyadh from a passive observer to a key architect of regional security. Saudi Arabia is trying to build a configuration in which normalization of relations with Israel will not be a "gift" for the latter, but an instrument of pressure that forces Tel Aviv to make territorial and political concessions.

For Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the success of Vision 2030 is inextricably linked to the image of Saudi Arabia as a stable, modern and responsible leader. In this context, the Palestinian issue ceases to be exclusively a "religious duty" and becomes a matter of "regional image".

Riyadh understands that in an era of social media and global transparency, completely ignoring the suffering of the Palestinians will cause irreparable damage to the kingdom's soft power. Therefore, Saudi diplomacy today works on two fronts:

- **Within the country:** Demonstration of commitment to Islamic values and the protection of Palestinian rights in order to stop the discontent of conservative segments of society.
- **On the international stage:** Positioning itself as the only player capable of offering a "big deal" that will bring peace and prosperity to the entire Middle East.

Saudi Arabia is at a unique but extremely risky point in its historical development. It no longer has the luxury of being just a

"financial donor" to the Palestinians, but it also cannot afford to become a "traitor" to their cause in the eyes of the Arab public.

The future of relations between Riyadh and Palestine will be determined by the Kingdom's ability to build a multi-layered security system where a Palestinian State is not an obstacle, but a necessary element of regional stability. If Saudi Arabia succeeds in implementing this scenario, it will finally consolidate its status as a leader capable not only of managing its own resources, but also of directing the development vector of the entire Middle East region, turning historical responsibility into an instrument of global influence. Ultimately, the success of this strategy will be a major test for the new Saudi diplomacy in a changing world.

At a time when the United States is facing a crisis of confidence in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is seeking to occupy the niche of an "independent center of power." This requires Riyadh to play a delicate game: on the one hand, maintaining a strategic partnership with Washington in the security sector, on the other — actively participating in the BRICS formats and strengthening ties with Beijing.

For the Palestinian question, this means internationalizing the problem. Riyadh no longer wants the fate of Palestine to be decided exclusively in the White House offices. Saudi diplomacy promotes the idea of an "international conference" or broad coalition, where the voice of Arab countries will be reinforced by the support of other global players. This is an attempt to create a "collective security umbrella" that would make the creation of a Palestinian State a prerequisite for regional integration, rather than a subject of endless bilateral bargaining.

Realizing that the weakness of the Palestinian National Authority (PA) and the lack of a legitimate political horizon create a vacuum that is immediately filled by radical groups, Riyadh is beginning to play a more

active role in matters of Palestinian governance. Saudi Arabia is interested in reforming the Palestinian institutions of power to make them more effective, transparent and, importantly, capable of constructive dialogue.

For the kingdom, this is a matter of its own security: the spread of the ideology of "resistance", sponsored by Iran, poses a direct threat to the stability of the Gulf monarchies. Therefore, the Saudi strategy is aimed at intercepting the agenda of the radicals by offering the Palestinians an alternative — a path through economic development, state-building and diplomatic recognition, rather than through an endless cycle of armed struggle.

As part of the "Vision 2030", Saudi Arabia relies on the economic integration of the region. Riyadh sees the future of the Middle East as a single economic space, where infrastructure projects (such as the India — Middle East — Europe corridors) link ports, railways, and energy networks.

In this model, Palestine is seen not as a "burden", but as a potential participant in the regional market. Saudi Arabia is ready to invest in the reconstruction and development of the Palestinian territories, but only if there is political stability and security guarantees. This is a pragmatic approach: to transform the Palestinians from "refugees living on benefits" to "development partners." However, this plan remains extremely vulnerable in the face of the current military confrontation, which daily destroys the very possibility of such integration.

Ultimately, Saudi Arabia's position on the Palestinian issue is a test of the maturity of its foreign policy. Will the kingdom be able to transform its historical responsibility into a modern political capital?

If Riyadh succeeds in achieving a breakthrough that gives the Palestinians real statehood, it will not only lift the burden of the

"Palestinian curse", but also secure decades of dominance as the main peacemaker and stabilizer of the region. If mediation attempts fail, Saudi Arabia risks becoming a hostage to a conflict that will continually undermine its ambitious transformation plans.

Thus, for modern Saudi Arabia, Palestine is not just a foreign policy case, but a mirror that reflects the kingdom's ability to become a full-fledged global player, capable not only of following global trends, but also of independently shaping the security architecture in one of the most complex regions of the planet.

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