



Commentaries

Some Observations on the Significance of President Xi Jinping's Visit and the Problem of the Sino-Saudi Relationship

Mohammed Al Sudairi

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President Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia (Rabi' I, 8-9, 1437/January 19–20, 2016) was met with considerable enthusiasm and elation in Riyadh at both the official and unofficial levels. The Saudi state has certainly gone out of its way to extend an unprecedented royal reception, sending out four F15 fighter jets to accompany the president's plane, not to mention hosting him and his entourage at Al-Murabba' Palace (*sifang gong* 四方宫) as a show of respect.¹ In tandem, the Saudi media's coverage of the event struck an extremely positive tone (arguably, the opening salvo came from President Xi Jinping's own translated column that was published in *Al-Riyadh*),² with some columnists going so far as to suggest this was the start of a "strategic comprehensive relationship" (*quanmian zhanlue huoban guanxi* 全面战略合作伙伴关系), to borrow the official vocabulary now deployed by both the Saudis and the Chinese to describe their bilateral ties.³ Indeed, and in accordance with the popular rhetoric regarding the supposed firmness and independence of Saudi foreign policy during the so-called Salmanian era, a few columnists as well as a visible segment of Saudi social media users have even dusted off the discourse of the mid-2000s in which China – as a genuine friend to the Kingdom – is increasingly depicted as a possible security alternative to the United States (although traces of this line of thinking were noticeable already prior to the visit, as Fahad Nazer has indicated).⁴ The gushing character of the coverage has even caught the attention of Chinese academic observers who have gone on to analyze it in detail.⁵

(1) For footage of the in-flight escort, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dgvq1-WLLHI>. For footage of the reception at Al-Murabba' Palace, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1n3G3y2M6A>.

(2) Xi Jinping "Two close partners towards moving towards cooperative development" *Al-Riyadh*, 18 January 2016. Link: <http://www.alriyadh.com/1120207> (Arabic).

(3) Examples include: Al-Wa'il, Nayef "14 agreements...translating 74 years of developments in Sino-Saudi relations" *Al-Riyadh*, 21 January 2016. Link: <http://www.alriyadh.com/1121086> (Arabic); 'Arayshi, Fahad "The Importance of Sino-Saudi Relations" *Al-Watan*, 21 January 2016. Link: <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Articles/Detail.aspx?ArticleID=29332> (Arabic); "The Sino-Saudi Partnership" *Okaz*, 16 January 2016. Link: <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20160116/Con20160116819530.htm> (Arabic).

(4) Nazer, Fahad "Saudi Arabia's New Best Friend: China?" *The National Interest*, 2 September 2015. Link: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/saudi-arabias-new-best-friend-china-13761>.

(5) Lv Keding "The Chairman's Middle Eastern visit in the eyes of the Saudi media – Al-Riyadh newspaper as a case" *Zhongdong Yanjiu Tongxun*, 27 January 2016. Link: <http://chuansong.me/n/2261152> (Chinese); Xiao Lan "The Saudi media praises the results of Xi Jinping's visit: For China the doors of cooperation have been opened" *Xibu Wang*, 22 January 2016. Link: http://news.cnwest.com/content/2016-01/22/content_13546370.htm (Chinese); "Saudi media: Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia has given the bilateral relationship a new style" *Renmin Wang*, 22 January 2016. Link: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/wh/slx/31214/Document/1465710/1465710.htm> (Chinese).

This is not to say that the grand reception was unwarranted. There are symbolic, diplomatic, and economic rationales behind it, for both sides. The visit constitutes Xi Jinping's first trip to the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia accorded the honor of being the first destination on his tour. It also signals a renewed focus on the region on Beijing's part, as the long-standing tradition of Chinese state visits, arranged at the beginning of every year, seem to indicate. Interestingly – and rather unprecedentedly – the Kingdom was identified as the heart of “Islamic civilization” (the traditional Chinese vocabulary opts for the more secular-sounding “Arab” description), toward which China expressed respect and friendship.⁶ The visit and its associated reception are thus laden with and accorded substantial symbolic significance.

A diplomatic and political rationale underpins this symbolism. From my own observations (and contrary to the dominant narratives), the Sino-Saudi relationship, during the period from 2010 to 2014, has been in a state of drift or malaise and characterized by muted tension due to differences between the two parties over a number of important regional (Syria and Iran) and economic (GCC-China FTA negotiations over petrochemical tariffs) issues.⁷ At the root of these tensions has been a sense of disillusionment, felt among Saudi elites and perhaps more broadly Arab elites and intellectuals during King Abdullah's time (2005–2015), that the “Going East” strategy has failed to live up to its imagined or anticipated dividends, at least in the strategic and political realms. China's vetoes in the United Nations Security Council (2011–2014) on resolutions dealing with the Syrian crisis were deemed particularly problematic by Riyadh and were seen as evidence that the rhetoric of friendship with Beijing was at best a hollow performance.⁸ Although the two countries' relations were not damaged, there were obvious costs: these differences led to a de-prioritization of bilateral ties on the Saudi and GCC side that saw the suspension, for instance, of the China-GCC Strategic Dialogue talks, which did not resume until early 2014 following a 32-month-long hiatus.⁹

Arguably, it was not until the decision of then–Crown Prince and now King Salman to visit Beijing in March 2014 that this drift in bilateral ties was arrested.¹⁰ In some respects, this decision may have been prompted by changing Saudi geopolitical calculations and a recognition that, despite the differences between the two countries, there was a need to maintain cordial ties. From a diplomatic

(6) A Chinese scholar alerted me to this point. See President Xi Jinping's speech at: “Xi Jinping publishes an important speech in the Saudi media” *Xinhua*, 18 January 2016. Link: http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2016-01/18/c_1117812832.htm (Chinese).

(7) Makio Yamada is one of the few scholars to have acknowledged some of these tensions in his work. See Makio Yamada, “Saudi Arabia's Look-East Diplomacy: Ten Years On,” *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 4 (2015): 121–39. The suspension of the GCC-China FTA talks took place in 2009, but they were not revived until 2014. An interesting discussion by one of the participants in the talks, Abdulaziz Al-Uweishig, can be found here: Aluwaisheg, Abdel Aziz. “China-GCC strategic dialogue resumes” *Arab News*, 19 January 2014. Link: <http://www.arabnews.com/news/511401>.

(8) For list of vetoes, see: “Security Council – Vetoes” *United Nations* (undated): <http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>. For Saudi media discourse on China's stance regarding Syria and the undertone of disillusionment, see Mohammed Al-Sudairi, *China in the Eyes of the Saudi Media* (Gulf Research Center, February 2013).

(9) “China-GCC strategic dialogue resumes”.

(10) One gets the sense, however, that the decision for this visit was made at the very last moment – China in fact was not part of the crown prince's original Asia-tour itinerary. Information on the visit can be found here: “Saudi Crown Prince Salman begins state visit to China” *Ashaq Al-Awsat*, 13 March 2014. Link: <http://english.aawsat.com/2014/03/article55329967/saudi-crown-prince-salman-begins-state-visit-to-china>.

perspective, Xi Jinping's visit to the Kingdom was thus construed as having a reciprocal character and, more importantly, as being a critical catalyst toward re-energizing the relationship after several years of stagnation. Originally, the Chinese President was slated to visit Saudi Arabia (and Egypt) in April 2015 following his major trip to Pakistan, as part of a wider diplomatic initiative launching his "One Belt One Road" project.¹¹ The eruption of the war in Yemen, however, led to the cancellation of the visit, partially out of security concerns, but also in order to avoid the potential diplomatic fallout from appearing to endorse the Saudi-led campaign against the Houthis.¹² It is worth noting that within some quarters in Beijing, the initiation of the conflict at that particular time was interpreted to some extent as a diplomatic insult directed at Beijing by the Saudis, particularly since the trip itself was invested with considerable political capital, signifying as it did the launch of China's ambitious economic project across the breadth of the Asian continent. In any case, this "snub" was ignored by policymakers in Beijing, and it is clear that the recent visit by President Xi was informed largely by the perceived need to reinfuse the relationship with the spirit of vitality and optimism that had prevailed during King Abdullah's era.

Moreover, for some Chinese observers, there was an added benefit: the efficacy of the trip might have been enhanced as a result of Saudi Arabia's perceived diplomatic isolation on the global stage, given the West's détente with Iran and emerging tensions with the United States.¹³ This is not at all off the mark: President Xi Jinping's visit allowed the Kingdom to signal to various parties that it will keep its strategic options open and that it is certainly not "isolated." Additionally, it was able to position itself, both to domestic and international audiences, as a great regional power (Riyadh has, after all, actively framed its status on the global stage through the terminology of the G-20, its right to regional leadership, and so on).

Beyond the symbolic and diplomatic rationales behind the visit, the economic one is likewise extremely important, particularly as both countries enter a "new normal" (*xin changtai* 新常态) defined by greater economic vulnerability and a pressing need for restructuring during a period of low global growth. Needless to say, China enjoys very close economic ties with Saudi Arabia, and sees it – as one of the region's largest economies – as a critical element in the realization of its Silk Road project and its overall ambitions in the region, outlined in its recently issued "Arab White Paper"¹⁴ (the Kingdom's willingness to join China's newly inaugurated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was certainly appreciated).¹⁵

(11) "China's Xi Jinping agrees \$46bn superhighway to Pakistan" *BBC*, 20 April 2015. Link: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32377088>.

(12) Mu Chunshan "Revealed: How the Yemen Crisis Wrecked Xi Jinping's Middle East Travel Plans" *The Diplomat*, 22 April 2015. Link: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/revealed-how-the-yemen-crisis-wrecked-xi-jinpings-middle-east-travel-plans/>.

(13) "After breaking times ties with Persia, in reality, Saudi Arabia's diplomacy has revealed an added isolation [for the country] which at this time requires Great Power appeasement/placation" "沙伊断交风波后，实际上，沙特的外交出现了更加孤立的境地，此时需要大国安抚。" "One Article to understand why Chairman Xi Jinping will visit three Middle Eastern countries" *Zhongdong Yanjiu Tongxun*, 16 January 2016. Link: <http://chuansong.me/n/2177457> (Chinese).

(14) "Full text of China's Arab Policy Paper" *Xinhua*, 13 January 2016. Link: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/13/c_135006619.htm.

(15) Hewitt, Duncan "Fifty Countries Sign Up To China-Led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, In Diplomatic Victory For Beijing" *International Business Times*, 29 June 2015. Link: <http://www.ibtimes.com/fifty-countries-sign-china-led-asian-infrastructure-investment-bank-diplomatic-1987459>; "About Us" Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank official website: <http://www.aiib.org/html/aboutus/AIIB/>.

Bilateral trade volume has hovered near the USD 70 billion mark for the last few years, making China one of the Kingdom's largest trading partners.¹⁶

More significant, and underlying this impressive figure, is a close energy dynamic that links the two countries together and in which China is effectively Saudi Arabia's biggest and, for the foreseeable future, most dependable customer – although there are questions to be raised about the health of the Chinese economy in the coming period. Indeed, since 2011, an average of 1,000,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil have been exported to the Chinese market (constituting roughly 20% of China's total oil imports).¹⁷ As a way to reinforce China's growing dependency on Saudi crude oil, Saudi Aramco has invested heavily in downstream refining projects across mainland China in Quanzhou (Fujian), Qingdao (Shandong), and prospectively in Yunnan.¹⁸ Moreover, the Saudi state has sought, at various junctures and with strategic as well as economic objectives in mind (against Iran and Russia for instance), to maintain and expand its share of the Chinese market through price discounts, long-term contracts, and supplementary redirection of its exports.¹⁹ There are also other arenas of economic engagement beyond energy, including multiple construction projects (of which the Haramain railway in the vicinity of Mecca is one primary example) as well as technological and clean energy cooperation, not to mention drone sales.²⁰

These symbolic, diplomatic, and economic rationales substantiate the claims made about the visit's importance for both parties and the reception consequently accorded to it. One could add, furthermore, that the visit, which resulted in the elevation of the relationship into a comprehensive strategic one and the conclusion of more than 14 agreements covering a variety of fields, succeeded in recapturing the spirit of the “golden era” of Sino-Saudi ties in the mid-2000s.²¹ This is, in any case, the narrative that

(16) Hua Liming “Xi's Mideast visit portrays all-round diplomacy” *China Daily*, 20 January 2016. Link: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xixivisitmiddleeast/2016-01/20/content_23160504.htm; Observatory of Economic Complexity, MIT. Link: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/sau/#Imports>; “China-Saudi Arabia Relations” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 2015. Link: http://wcm.fmprc.gov.cn/pub/chn/gxh/cgb/zcgmzysx/yz/1206_27/1206x1/t6336.htm (Chinese).

(17) “Saudi turns to China as oil exports to US drop” *The Financial Times*, 17 May 2015. Link: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/2df94184-fb2c-11e4-9aed-00144feab7de.html#axzz3yX3KOnku>.

(18) Said, Summer & Al-Omran, Ahmed. “Saudi Aramco Set for Chinese Energy Deals” *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 January 2016. Link: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-aramco-set-for-chinese-energy-deals-1453301376>; <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-16/saudi-arabia-spends-billions-to-get-asia-hooked-on-its-crude-oil>.

(19) Blas, Javier & Mahdi, Wael “Saudi Arabia Spends Billions to Get Asia Hooked on Its Crude Oil” *Bloomberg*, 16 December 2015. Link: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-06/saudis-deepen-asia-oil-discount-to-a-a-record-low>; Harold, Scott & Nader, Alireza “China and Iran: Economic, Political, and Military Relations” *RAND: Center for Middle East Public Policy*, 2012. Zambelis, Chris “Shifting Sands in the Gulf: The Iran Calculus in China-Saudi Arabia Relations” Jamestown, China Brief Volume 10 Issue 10. Link: http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36371&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=414&no_cache=1#.VqnrFhuqqko.

(20) Tago, Abdul Hannan “China Civil, a reliable partner in construction” Arab News, 19 January 2016. Link: <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/867086>; “Saudi lancuhes a satellite from China for long-range detection” Al-‘Arabiyya, 20 January 2016. Link: <http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/saudi-today/2016/01/20/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D9%82%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF.html> (Arabic); Keck, Zachary, “China to Sell Saudi Arabia Drones” *The Diplomat*, 8 May 2014. Link: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/china-to-sell-saudi-arabia-drones/>.

(21) “China and Saudi Arabia declare the establishment a comprehensive strategic partnership” *Sina*, 20 January 2016. Link: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/nd/2016-01-20/doc-ifxnqz9920297.shtml> (Chinese).

is now being propagated by official organs and the associated media. For all intents and purposes, it appears that the Sino-Saudi relationship is not only on the right track but stronger than ever.

However, this perspective is, in my opinion, misleading. In many ways, the relationship continues to be an essentially *transactional* one. It remains, moreover, especially vulnerable to divergence in views and political perspectives. The reason for this is that there are persistent “knowledge gaps” in each side’s understanding of the other’s policymaking processes, in their strategic calculus, and in how they approach/envision this relationship (i.e., how they perceive the parameters of the opportunities available to them). Such discrepancies not only increase the likelihood of political differences and tensions and generate false expectations about the respective roles each side is “supposed” to play (this is really at the crux of the disillusionment observed during King Abdullah’s era; they also circumscribe the ability of the parties to have more granular discussions and to persuade each other on matters of importance. More critically, they obfuscate the parties’ perceptions of each other and thus limit their ability to chart out an effective long-term strategy of engagement.

This effect is obvious in the relative unawareness and ignorance of Saudi policymakers and intellectuals about how discussions regarding the Kingdom in China (beyond the official rhetoric) are playing out. Space constraints do not allow me to undertake an extended analysis of how Chinese policymakers, academics, and pundits imagine/think of Saudi Arabia, but I will touch on a few themes that should be taken into consideration. Within some circles – especially those involved in defense and strategic discussions – dependency on Gulf and Saudi oil is viewed as a potential long-term threat to China’s national security. These perspectives are rooted both in the growing tensions affecting Sino-American relations particularly in the maritime arena (where American naval superiority can effectively impose a cordon on Chinese imports if a conflict erupts, crippling the country as a result) and in the perception that the Arabian Peninsula is susceptible to the same upheavals that swept through Iraq, Syria, and Libya.²² In effect, some have argued that China’s dependency on Gulf oil – which relies effectively on the Americans’ continuing their policing of the sea lanes of operation – is dangerous under such conditions, and it would be prudent, as a hedging strategy, to diversify and limit China’s energy imports from the region.

Beyond energy, another important factor is the preference, in some policymaking circles, for Iran as strategic pathway for China’s westward economic ambitions and as a complementary actor for the success of China’s military-defensive approaches as embodied in the A2/AD strategy (anti-access anti-denial).²³ Certainly, this comity appears to be evidenced by China’s unprecedented role in facilitating the nuclear talks between the United States and Iran, by the Chinese leadership’s decision to have President Xi be the first foreign leader to visit Iran following the lifting of the sanctions, and by the fact that the targeted bilateral trade volume marked out for Sino-Iranian relations by the end of the decade – nearly

(22) Jon B. Alterman and John W. Garver, *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008).

(23) John W. Garver, *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

USD 600 billion – is equal to that put forward for the whole Arab region combined.²⁴ This emphasis on Iran in Chinese multidimensional strategic thinking needs to be taken into account, and it necessitates new Saudi approaches and instruments of engagement. Additionally, there are growing circles in China – at the official as well as Muslim communal levels – that view Saudi Arabia as an ideational and security threat to China through the “export” of problematic and presumably radicalizing “Wahhabi” or “Salafi” influences to China’s Muslim minorities (principally the Uyghurs, but the Hui are also increasingly deemed to be a vulnerable group).²⁵ Even in this latter arena, Iran is increasingly being positioned as a possible “counterbalancing” and “moderate” force to offset malignant Saudi influence.²⁶

Needless to say, the knowledge gap problem is more acute on the Saudi side, where,²⁷ despite the passage of nearly 26 years since the establishment of formal diplomatic ties with China, little investment has been accorded to the creation of a sustainable and strong knowledge infrastructure on China (or Asia more broadly). There is a distinct lack of Chinese-speaking Asianist career path diplomats in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs (it should be noted that King Salman, during President Xi’s visit, was not even accompanied by a Saudi-born translator)²⁸ and little in the way of dedicated and specialized think tanks or research establishments producing – let alone translating – material dealing with China’s political, strategic, military economic, and social issues. Much of what is produced in terms of media commentaries and university studies remains superficial at best. This is particularly problematic in view of the fact that the Kingdom’s main regional competitors/opponents – Israel and Iran – both have specialized knowledge-producing infrastructure on China with close ties to their diplomatic establishments.²⁹ The dearth of such infrastructure is particularly puzzling since Saudi Arabia already has something of an indigenous pool to draw upon to create it, including well more than 1,400 students/graduates as well as locally trained translators at King Saud University, among others.

This problematic situation creates an asymmetry of knowledge and a dependency on the other side as well as a distinct lack of Saudi awareness of internal developments and discussions taking place in China (with all the disadvantages this brings). More significantly, it impedes and complicates any attempts

(24) Sharafedin, Bozorgmehr, “Iran’s leader says never trusted the West, seeks closer ties with China” Reuters, January 23 2016. Link: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-china-idUSKCN0V109V>.

(25) See Mohammed Al-Sudairi, “Adhering to the Ways of Our Western Brothers: Saudi Influences on the Development of Hui Salafism in China,” *Sociology of Islam* 4, no. 1/2 (2016), forthcoming.

(26) Mohammed Al-Sudairi, “The New Eastern Frontier of the Da’wah: The Rise of a China-Oriented Missionary Impulse in Saudi Arabia” (paper presented at an international conference on Chinese Muslims (Hui) in diaspora, Chinese University of Hong Kong, December 3–4, 2015).

(27) The Chinese have strong Middle East studies and Arabic-language programs across the country, and per their own institutional approaches, they appoint only diplomats with regionally relevant linguistic skills. Tago, Abdul Hannan “Over 40 universities in China teach Arabic” Arab News, 23 February 2014. Link: <http://www.arabnews.com/news/529946>. I should add that some prominent Chinese scholars, such as Wang Jisi, have pointed out the need for Saudi-focused specialists/experts, but this does not discount my point: the Chinese academic capacities and regional specialization outstrip the Saudi ones by many decades. See: “Wang Jisi: Chinese experts, in terms of international issues, find it hard to get a handle on things” *Zhiku Zhongguo*, 18 December 2014. Link: http://www.china.com.cn/opinion/think/2014-12/18/content_34347314.htm (Chinese). Many thanks to Wang Tingyi for pointing this out.

(28) More recently, based on my own observations, Saudi diplomatic entities operating in China have hired a few Chinese-speaking Saudi graduates, but much of their work remains limited to the economic realm.

(29) For Israeli knowledge production on China, see: Al-Sudairi, Mohammed “Israel-Sino Relations through the Prism of Advocacy Groups” Durham University (Sabah Paper series). Link: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/alsabah/al-SabahPaperal-Sudairi.pdf>.

to effect change in the tone of the discussions taking place in Beijing. Again, it should be pointed out that there is little in the way of an effective and sustained Saudi strategy³⁰ to challenge some of the increasingly negative views and perspectives about the country, with potentially harmful consequences over the long term. For instance, there is no active Saudi presence – official or otherwise – on the Chinese official and social media (such as *weibo*) or any organized attempt to invite Chinese scholars, academics, opinion-setters, and the like (who are one important pathway to affecting policymaking conversations) to visit the Kingdom. This is not to say that there have been no attempts to reach out; there are ad hoc efforts here and there, often pursued in individual capacities, and some Saudi media outlets have tried to provide Chinese-language services, including *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (now offline) and, more recently, the government-owned Saudi Press Agency, which seeks to convey “official perspectives.”³¹ None of these, however, are sufficient or have had a tangible impact.

There is a growing need to build a strong knowledge-producing infrastructure, embodied by academic exchanges, cooperation between think tanks, and efforts to build an Asia/China-focused educational groundwork in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, this is a vital endeavor if the Sino-Saudi relationship is to live up to its newfound moniker as a “comprehensive strategic relationship” and move beyond a superficial modality of engagement. It is especially pressing, I would argue, for two reasons. First, Saudi Arabia will not naturally generate a knowledge-producing infrastructure familiar with China without sustained effort and input from the state. The Saudi capacity in this realm contrasts starkly with the natural emergence of many Saudi elites and specialists who are linguistically proficient, culturally comfortable, and politically familiar with the West. Second, the traditional foundations of this essentially transactional relationship – such as energy complementarity – are going to be subject to many pressures over the coming decade, which may result in a diminishment of its overall importance to Beijing over the long run. These pressures include Saudi economic restructuring and overconsumption of local reserves, China’s imperative to minimize reliance on foreign energy imports, changes in global energy production, and new technological advances, among others. Investing in these endeavors will allow for a reconceptualization of the relationship in ways that serve the interests of both parties. There is a serious need to capitalize on the opportunity that has now emerged to inaugurate the Sino-Saudi relationship on a firmer foundation and tackle the knowledge gap problem before a new state of drift sets in.

(30) Aside from what I would call prestige-oriented propaganda, such as the USD 146 million Saudi pavilion built during the Shanghai Expo in 2010; see Tang Zhihao “Saudi Arabia’s Expo pavilion a crowd pleaser” *China Daily*, 23 September 2010. Link: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-09/23/content_11338437.htm.

(31) <http://chinese.aawsat.com/> (Chinese); <http://www.spa.gov.sa/Default.aspx?language=chinese> (Chinese).