

# Pakistan and Saudi Arabia : Towards Greater Independence in their Afghan Foreign Policy?

Dorothee Vandamme



NOTE D'ANALYSE 33

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## Introduction

The United States' role in the Middle Eastern and Southern Asian region is by far one of the most visible examples of external involvement in the region's affairs. American involvement plays a central role in stabilizing the region, despite difficult tensions between Washington and the regional powers. While Riyadh and Islamabad have gained increasing autonomy in their foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, they are not willing to “forgo American security assurances”<sup>1</sup>. Both Saudis and Pakistanis rely heavily on the United States for military assistance, and both need American power to counter their rival, Iran in Saudi Arabia's case and India in Pakistan's. Thus despite the trust deficit between Americans and Pakistanis, the complementarity between their interests is such that their strategic alliance is crucial to both countries. Likewise, Saudi Arabia is, as Cordesman explains, “simply too critical to US strategic interests and the world”<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, while the shale gas phenomenon leads many observers to announce the decrease of American interest and involvement in the region<sup>3</sup>, it is doubtful that the diminution in American dependency on Middle Eastern petroleum will be a corollary to decreased American strategic interest. The potential combination of terrorism and nuclear weapons, or the potentiality for regional instability to a background of nuclear weapons race, are too great a threat to be taken lightly and left to smaller powers. In this context, Islamabad and Riyadh, while maintaining their support to the United States, tend to direct their foreign policy so as to gain maximum leeway and, eventually, greater independence from American foreign policy. This objective is achieved by mobilizing the tools they have at their disposal, taking into account the necessary reactions and potential consequences from the redistribution of power they try to operate in the Afghan scene. In that sense, by supporting an inclusive negotiation process between Afghan actors, they use the role of mediator as leverage to influence the outcome of the Afghan conflict.

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1 Stéfanie von Hlatky, “Strategies and mechanisms of regional change” in *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation*, ed. T.V. Paul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 295.

2 Anthony H. Cordesman, “Understanding Saudi Stability and Instability: A Very Different Nation”, Center for Strategic and International Studies (2011), <https://csis.org/publication/understanding-saudi-stability-and-instability-very-different-nation>.

3 National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative World* (December 2012).

The literature on middle powers has typically recognized mediation as an attribute of middle powers' statecraft. It is thus interesting to analyze Saudi and Pakistani policies in Afghanistan in this theoretical framework, as there are only few studies classifying these countries as such. Indeed, the debate around the concept of middle powers is still very much open in international relations studies. In the traditional sense, middle powers refer to countries such as Canada or Australia, generally known as "good international citizens" for supporting the international system through their actions and discourses. Nevertheless, emerging powers have challenged that definition, leading to its broadening, in order to include countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico or Turkey. The following paper aims at studying the cases of Pakistani and Saudi's Afghan policies, highlighting the development of their foreign policy as middle powers' foreign policies. After explaining the limits of the constitutive approach to middle powers, we will underline Islamabad's and Riyadh's interests and objectives in Afghanistan, by developing the perspectives of offensive realism as applied to Saudi Arabia, and defensive realism as applied to Pakistan. The third and final part of the analysis will focus on Pakistani's and Saudi's policies in Afghanistan to develop their statecraft in the framework of the middle powers' behavioral approach.

## **1. Classifying Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as middle powers: is the constitutive approach relevant?**

Identifying the criteria that make a power a *middle* power is a challenging task. Today's middle powers are vastly understood as such from the instinctive sense that they do not fit within the "great"/"major" or the "small" powers categories. As Carsten Holbraad highlighted, a middle power is "a state occupying an intermediate position in a hierarchy based on power, a country much stronger than the small nations though considerably weaker than the principal members of the state system"<sup>4</sup>. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have enough influence to not be considered small, but not enough to be major powers. Within the limits of their regions, they play a significant political role. Thus instinctively, they would qualify as middle powers<sup>5</sup>.

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4 Carsten Holbraad, cited by Meltem Müftüleri and Muberra Yüksel, "Turkey: A Middle Power in the New Order", in *Niche diplomacy: middle powers after the Cold War*, ed. Andrew F. Cooper (Hampshire : Macmillan, 1997), 185.

5 Interestingly, some studies on middle powers include the category of "regional" power in their analyses. However, the paper assumes that regional powers belong to a different theoretical category than the one being developed here.

Nevertheless, this leads to categorizing them within the same group as Canada, Australia, Mexico, Argentina, or South Africa, leading to a broadening of the category and a necessary adjustment of identifying criteria. Consequently, as Cooper points out, cases must be analyzed on an issue-specific basis<sup>6</sup>. Such examination of cases has led scholars to differentiate between traditional and emerging, or non-traditional<sup>7</sup>, middle powers<sup>8</sup>. Basing his research on Cooper's *Niche Diplomacy* analysis, Ping highlights three methods used to define a middle power: the statistical approach – absolute power –, the normative approach – perceived power –, and the behavioral perspective – statecraft. These complementary perspectives represent the two sides of one coin: constitutive and behavioral factors of middle powers. The following section will explain the constitutive approach to middle powers and highlight its limits.

### 1.1. Statistical approach

Labeling a country as a middle power requires taking a look at the sources of its power in order to identify its rank in terms of absolute power. However, power is an essentially contested concept; the amount of literature and studies that aim at understanding and explaining its sources, origins and constitutive elements is considerable; yet researchers still debate these elements. Three dimensions seem to bring somewhat of a consensus in terms of material capabilities: a country's strategic territory, its economic resources and its military resources. Ping's statistical approach is an additional attempt towards identifying indicators that enable to determine middle powers in their constitutive dimension. The author uses nine indicators to determine a country's absolute power<sup>9</sup>:

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6 Andrew F. Cooper, *Niche diplomacy: middle powers after the Cold War* (Hampshire : Macmillan, 1997).

7 "Emerging" middle powers are referred to as "non-traditional" middle powers in this paper. The label "emerging powers" is considered by the author as referring to a different type of powers, i.e., powers such as Brasil, India, Russia or South Africa that are emerging in the global political economy.

8 Eduard Jordaan, "The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers", *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 30:1 (2003): 165-181, DOI: 10.1080/0258934032000147282; Jonathan H. Ping, *Middle Power Statecraft: Indonesia, Malaysia and the Asia Pacific* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005).

9 Appendix 1 presents two tables displaying these indicators for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia from 2008 to 2013.

*Geographic and demographic data*

- Country's surface
- Population
- Life expectancy at birth

*Military capabilities*

- Military expenditures

*Economic resources*

- Growth domestic product (purchasing power parity)
- Real GDP growth rate
- Value of exports
- Gross national income per capita
- Trade as percentage of GDP

Table 1 presents these indicators for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan from 2008 to 2013.

Table 1: Data Comparison for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan – based on Jonathan Ping's indicators

	Saudi Arabia						Pakistan					
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Surface area	2 149 690 km <sup>2</sup>						796 095 km <sup>2</sup>					
Population <i>in million</i>	24,6	25,4	27,4	28,2	28,3	29,9	166,1	169,7	173,6	176,2	179,2	193,2
Life expectancy at birth	(-)	(-)	73,87	74,11	74,35	74,82	65,78	65,96	66,12	66,28	66,35	66,71
GDP (purchasing power parity) in million US dollars	599,1	599,7	622,5	852,1	895,8	927,8	421	439,4	451,2	531	554	574,1
<i>Rank in world economy out of 229</i>	20						27					
Real GDP growth rate	4.3%	0.1%	3.8%	8.6%	5.1%	3.6%	3.6%	4.3%	2.7%	3.7%	4.4%	3.6%
Value of exports <i>in billion US dollars</i>	226,7	313,4	237,9	364,7	388,4	379,3	21,09	18,33	20,29	30,9	24,71	25,05
Gross national income per capita <i>in US dollars</i>	25790	26110	27720	30160	(-)	(-)	2540	2600	2650	2750	2880	(-)
Trade as percentage of GDP	96	85	83	86	86	(-)	36	32	33	33	33	(-)
Military expenditure <i>in million US dollars</i>	44425	45655	47511	48531	54218	66996	5899	6078	6251	6547	6630	7641

Sources:

*CIA World Factbook (lines 2 to 9)*

*World Bank Data (lines 10 and 11)*

*SIPRI Military Expenditures Database (line 12)*

In 2003, Jordaan<sup>10</sup> differentiates traditional and non-traditional middle powers and identifies six constitutive characteristics of non-traditional middle powers that can be seen as completing this quantitative approach:

- A recently established and unstable democratic system
- Income inequality
- Unequal wealth distribution (based on the Gini Index)
- Semi-peripheral in the global political economy
- Powerful, sometimes dominant, in their region
- Support for regional integration
- Nature of the ideological divide
- Importance of national leaders in the decision-making process (prevalence of agency over structure)

Table 2 presents the position of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan relative to these characteristics.

*Table 2: Jordaan's middle powers constitutive characteristics applied to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Income inequality</li> <li>•Wealth distribution inequality</li> <li>•Dominant in its region</li> <li>•Importance of leaders in the decision-making process</li> <li>•Not challenging the international order</li> <li>•Supports regional integration processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Income inequality</li> <li>•Wealth distribution inequality</li> <li>•Dominant in its region</li> <li>•Importance of leaders in the decision-making process</li> <li>•Not challenging the international order</li> <li>•Recent and unstable democracy</li> <li>•Ideological division in the country</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Saudi Arabia</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Pakistan</p> 

<sup>10</sup> Jordaan, "The Concept of a Middle Power in International relations".

## 1.2. Why look at constitutive characteristics?

The number of approaches developed by scholars to evaluate power leads to questioning the relevance of using quantitative indicators only. Indeed, as power is essentially “the capability of units [here, countries] to perform specified tasks as a result of the attributes they possess”<sup>11</sup>, absolute power should enable to explain the behaviors of these states in the international system. Nevertheless, a quick look at the facts challenges this approach. The research assumes here that, while quantitative indicators can bring an additional aspect to the definition of middle powers, they are rather an indication of a country’s potential and the resources it owns and can mobilize to carry out its external strategy. Indicators can be useful tools, but they enable to take into account neither the qualitative aspect of power nor the perception of other actors. Thus middle powers status is in fact an unclear position within the international system when considering the countries’ attributes or relative capacities.

Moreover, while these characteristics do represent an interesting blueprint for studying middle powers, their theoretical nature leads to broaden the definition of middle powers. Indeed, scholars have, so far, limited the numbers of middle powers to those countries fitting into the categories. Consequently, an important number of countries are not classified as middle powers because they do not “fit” into the pre-defined category. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are both in this case. However, the question remains: if they are not middle powers, what category do they belong to? Certainly they are neither small nor major powers. Jordaan justifies that exclusion as follow: “middle powers do not challenge or threaten the global status quo—that is, the economic and military–political ‘balance’ of power—nor the desirability of liberal democracy, in any fundamental way”<sup>12</sup>. Accordingly most Middle Eastern countries are excluded because democratization is not a priority for the regime. Additionally, Pakistan, India and China are excluded on the ground that they are “non-Western nuclear powers”, hence “deviat[ing] from hegemonic orthodoxy”<sup>13</sup>.

The present analyses differs from that supposition by posing two hypotheses that will be tested below: a behavioral perspective of Pakistan’s and Saudi

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11 Barry Buzan, Charles Jones and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 66.

12 Jordaan, “The Concept of a Middle Power in International relations”, 167.

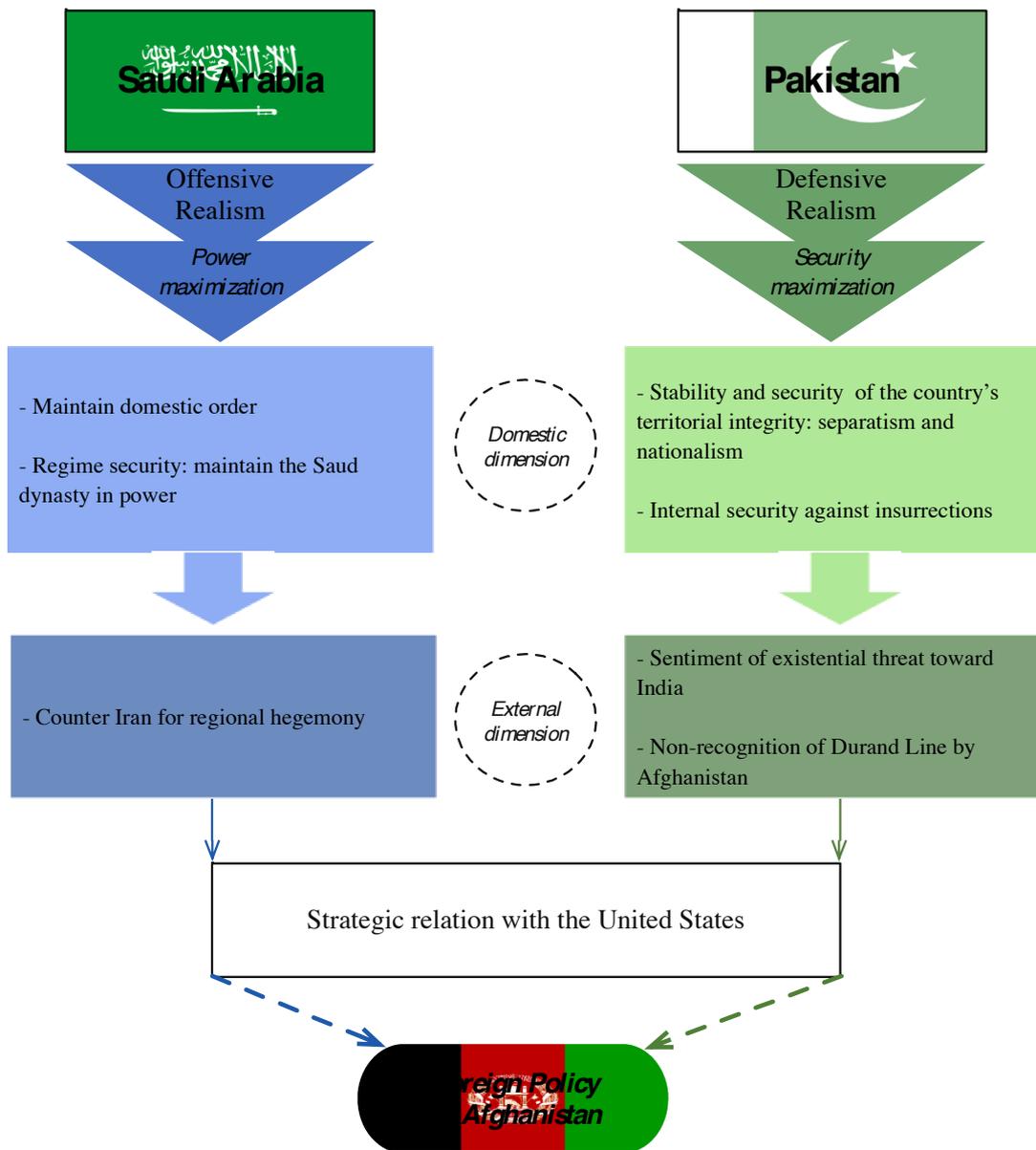
13 Jordaan, “The Concept of a Middle Power in International relations”.

Arabia's Afghan foreign policy brings to light their use of middle powers' statecraft tools. Secondly, both countries tend to adopt the role of mediator in the Afghan peace process as a power multiplier to gain significance and independence vis-à-vis the United States.

## **2. Afghanistan, a case study for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as middle powers**

The changing regional scene in the Middle Eastern and Southern Asian region since the American operations in Afghanistan and Iraq has led to evolution in the countries' grand strategies. Despite common regional objectives such as combating terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, or organized crime, the region is characterized by enduring rivalries that can only be understood by taking a closer look at regional dynamics, particularly those emanating from the dominant countries and their pattern of interactions and conflict. Afghanistan, as this section will show, is a case study for understanding the evolving regional dynamics and the new positions that Middle Eastern and Southern Asian powers adopt in their region. In particular, since Obama's announcement of the surge in December 2009 and the planned withdrawal of combat troops from Afghanistan in December 2014, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have started positioning themselves to prepare for the American withdrawal, the uncertain future that awaits Afghanistan and the consequences for Riyadh and Islamabad. As the Afghan endgame is unraveling, these countries' foreign policies towards Afghanistan put to light the diplomatic tools and political processes that enable to classify them as middle powers.

Figure 1: Saudi Arabia's and Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan



### 2.1. Pakistan in search of national security in Afghanistan

This brief overview of American interest in the region enables to bring to light an important aspect of Pakistan's foreign policy that has been overlooked as a factor of its positioning in international affairs. Indeed Jordaan, in 2003,

declared that middle powers are those countries that do not challenge the global *status quo*, adding: “states that deviate from hegemonic orthodoxy cannot be conceived of as middle powers”<sup>14</sup>. Based on this explanation, the author excludes from the middle power category non-Western nuclear powers, among which Pakistan – on the basis that Pakistan’s nuclear weapon is a contending factor to the international system. While it is not the objective here to question the characteristics of Jordaan’s definition of middle powers, we argue that Pakistan is in fact a middle power despite its being nuclear-armed.

As Ping points out, the fundamental rationale for statecraft<sup>15</sup> is “the creation of a state which holds supreme legitimate authority within a territory”. In that sense, statecraft has four main components: domestic, international, tools and practitioners. The international dimension of statecraft is a process whereby the state aims at creating an external environment “which supports rather than threatens [its] existence [...] and its sovereignty”<sup>16</sup>. Foreign policy is the other side of the “sovereignty” coin – the first side being domestic politics – which leads the state to establish and maintain authority and legitimacy. In other words, foreign policy enables the state to express its legitimacy outwards by positioning itself in the international system in such a way that other actors will not threaten its existence. As Waltz explains, the international system structurally constrains states. However, structure does not predetermine how the states will respond to this pressure. Thus hierarchy in international affairs is neither fixed nor the result of absolute capacities; it is best explained by motives and actions. Pakistan’s security-centric foreign policy is defined by its perception that it needs to increase its power in order to guarantee its survival: the existential threat emanating from India has defined its foreign policy decisions since 1947. In addition, the non-recognition of the Durand line by successive Afghan governments has created a fear of Pashtun nationalism that would threaten the territorial integrity of the country.

With these two factors in mind, defensive realism brings an explanatory framework to Pakistani foreign policy. Developed by authors such as Snyder

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14 Jordaan, “The Concept of a Middle Power in International relations”, 167.

15 Statecraft is defined by the author as referring to “the political process of a state”, as defined by “the establishment of domestic policy and the examination of the process”. Ping, *Middle Power Statecraft*, 17.

16 Ping, *Middle Power Statecraft*, 17.

and Van Evera<sup>17</sup>, defensive realism postulates that, given the anarchy of the international system, states seek to maximize security – as opposed to power – as their ultimate objective. In that perspective, power is seen as a tool, a means for the ultimate goal of security. Based on the three hypotheses of defensive realism<sup>18</sup>, Pakistan's foreign policy is explained by the need to defend the country against forces and/or actors perceived as a threat for its very existence – be it on the ideological or the physical dimensions. The acquisition of nuclear weapons thus responded to that same imperative. Feroz Hassan Khan, in *Eating Grass*<sup>19</sup>, extensively develops the case of the Pakistani bomb and develops the concept of strategic culture as an additional factor explaining the development of nuclear weapons. The loss of East Pakistan in 1971 led to a wide belief that nuclear weapons were necessary to counterbalance India's power. The internal instability that had led to the 1970-1971 civil war and the external vulnerability as Pakistan faced a stronger India combined: Pakistani leaders developed the perception that only an increase in military capabilities could guarantee their state's interest without weakening their national sovereignty – as would have been the case with bandwagoning<sup>20</sup>. In this context, the development of nuclear weapons has been thought of as a means to guarantee Pakistan's survival, not as a challenge to the international system.

Given its positioning as a direct neighbor, Afghanistan has been traditionally seen by Pakistani leaders as their “backyard” so as to gain strategic depth against India, despite the territorial dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan about the recognition of the Durand line. With an increasing domestic insurgency, however, the country's instability became a major issue facing Islamabad, and a crucial intervening variable for its foreign policy. Thus the “I

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17 Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of Offensive : Military decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Stephen Van Evera, « Offense, Defense and the Causes of War », *International Security* 22 (1998).

18 The three hypotheses of defensive realism are: (1) a country will have an offensive strategy only when it feels threatened; (2) the perception of threat depends on leaders, who will only use those means necessary for defending vital interests; (3) once a country is secured by having obtained a relative gain, it will seek negotiations to obtain recognition of that gain.

19 Feroz Hassan Khan, *Eating Grass. The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

20 Bandwagon would have meant accepting the dominance of India as the stronger state and rely on it for their safety. Given the perception of India as a direct existential threat, such a possibility was anathema to Pakistani leaders.

don't touch you – you don't touch me” policy<sup>21</sup> that Pakistan has had towards the Afghan Taliban sanctuaries has been challenged by the growing interconnection between Afghan and Pakistani insurgencies. Consequently, the Pakistani establishment – military and civilian – has shifted its focus on issues of internal security<sup>22</sup>, resulting in a strategic shift of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif declared in August 2013 the need to “re-prioritize [Pakistan's] policy with respect to Afghanistan”<sup>23</sup>. In that context, while Afghan leaders remain the most relevant actors for Pakistan, India becomes increasingly important for Islamabad, the latter accepting more and more that New Delhi will eventually play a role in Afghanistan. From considering Afghanistan through an India-centered perspective, Islamabad has shifted to seeing Afghanistan through the lens of internal stability. Therefore, Pakistan's strategic imperative is to avoid any negative spillover that might result from an unstable Afghanistan – and India, as Islamabad sees it, can have a role to play in that objective. As a result, from seeing Afghanistan as a zero-sum game between Islamabad and New Delhi, Pakistani actors gradually perceive it as potentially inclusive and a ground for cooperation with India.

Therefore while Pakistani policies have often been qualified as confrontational or challenging, they depict in fact a defensive policy aimed at guaranteeing internal and external security and legitimacy. The strategic shift in Pakistan's Afghan policy is an example of a security-centered policy, a characteristic that Pakistan has gradually developed as its diplomatic niche in international affairs, given the central role it plays in both stabilizing Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism.

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21 Moeed Yusuf, “Decoding Pakistan's 'Strategic Shift' in Afghanistan”, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2013), 13.

22 Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif thus declared, in his August, 19th, 2013 address to the Nation, that “the ever increasing terrorism has put the country at stake”, identifying the national insurgency as the country's number one problem, adding that “terrorism [is] the outcome of wrong policies and ulterior motives”. “Prime Minister's Address to the Nation on 19th August 2013”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan. <http://www.mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?prID=1375>.

23 “Prime Minister's Address to the Nation on 19th August 2013”.

### 2.3. Afghanistan in Saudi politics: seeking regional hegemony

While not being as central as the role it plays in Pakistan's foreign (and domestic) policy, Afghanistan places high in Saudi politics, as part of the Islamic circle as defined in its foreign policy<sup>24</sup>. Offensive realism enables to adopt in this regard an interesting perspective to Saudi foreign policy. Basing his theory on realism, Mearsheimer<sup>25</sup>, supports that states aim at maximizing power – contrary to defensive realism, according to which states seek to optimize power in order to gain security. While in the latter, power is a means, offensive realism sees power as an end in itself and a key for the state's survival. Hence, powerful states are pressured by international structures to gain more power and assume their responsibility, leading to expansionist diplomacies through which they seek hegemony. Popular support plays an important role in this regard.

Offensive realism can thus explain Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, as it is characterized by the search for regional hegemony. In this objective, Iran ranks as the number one issue in Saudi foreign policy, as illustrated by the speech made in October 2013 by Prince Turki Al Faisal, director of Saudi's General Intelligence from 1979 to 2001<sup>26</sup>. As the largest Sunni country in the Middle East and the home of the two holy cities of Medina and Mecca, Saudi Arabia perceives itself as "the eminent leader of the wider Muslim world"<sup>27</sup>. With the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the rise to power of a theocratic Shia government, and the 2003 American intervention in Iraq, Shia Iran has been emerging as a regional power, counterbalancing Saudi Arabia in its traditional central role within the Muslim community. Moreover, the prestige and military superiority that would come with Iran being a nuclear power pose a threat to Saudi Arabia. While weak Saudi armed forces have relied on American protection in

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24 The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs thus defines four circles in the Kingdom's foreign policy: the Gulf circle; the Arab Circle; the Islamic Circle; and the International Circle. In all four circles, the most important factor shaping Saudi foreign policy is Islam. "The foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, last updates in September 2011.

<http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/KingdomForeignPolicy/Pages/KingdomPolicy34645.aspx>.

25 John J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

26 Prince Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy", text of the address to the 22nd annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference in Washington, D.C., Middle East Policy Council, Winter 2013, Vol. XX, n° 4 (22 October 2013).

27 Prince Turki Al Faisal, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy".

the past, they are no longer confident that they can count on it. Additionally, the rise of a Shia country is seen as a threat for the Kingdom's internal stability. Riyadh fears that the Shia minority in Saudi Arabia, which lives where the country's energetic resources are, will look to Iran as a beacon and turn against the regime. As Lippman points out "the Saudis always prefer stability to turmoil"<sup>28</sup> both internally and externally. The uprisings in the Arab world since 2011 have added fuel to this situation; accordingly, as it is critical for the Saudi regime to maintain popular support<sup>29</sup>, it has dealt with the required waves of change by finding a balance between conservatism and reform. This emphasis on stability explains the setting up of the Allegiance Council, which was created as a structure to favor a peaceful transfer of power from King Abdullah to the next monarch – and the next generation coming to power in the Saudi royal family. This critical juncture in Saudi politics adds pressure on Riyadh to maintain as stable an external environment as possible, as an internal instability would distract Saudi leaders and weaken their ability to play a strong role in foreign affairs, thereby making them be less prominent in international affairs.

This brief overview of the current political scene in Saudi Arabia explains the Kingdom's motivations in its Afghan policy. While countering Iranian influence is the first priority, considerations of political prestige and concern for Pakistan, one of Saudi Arabia's first strategic allies, also play a role in defining Saudi's involvement in Afghanistan<sup>30</sup>; these three factors explain the country's increased involvement in South Asia. Four objectives drive Saudi's Afghan policy since 2009: (1) keeping Iran out of Afghanistan; (2) seeing a government of national unity in Kabul that includes Taliban elements; (3) the need to avoid a civil war; and (4) isolating Al Qaeda in Pakistan to weaken the terrorist network. The first two objectives are explained by Riyadh's search for regional hegemony. An inclusive government would be mainly Sunni; comprising Taliban elements, there is a high probability that it would be a conservative Islamic government (as it is doubtful that any Taliban would agree to an agreement that would not be in the framework of an Islamic regime), offering what Saudi Arabia perceives as "a natural obstacle to the propagation

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28 Thomas Lippman, "Nuclear Weapons and Saudi Strategy", Policy Brief 5, The Middle East Institute (January 2008), 1.

29 Cordesman, "Understanding Saudi Stability and Instability".

30 R. Green, "Saudi Arabia's Conflicted Policy on the Afghanistan Crisis", Inquiry & Analysis Series Report 601, The Middle East Media Research Institute (2010).

of a revolutionary Shi'i doctrine"<sup>31</sup>. The third and fourth objectives are explained by the importance of the Saudi-Pakistani strategic alliance. Pakistan holds a significant geopolitical position for Saudi Arabia, as a militarily strong and nuclear-armed Muslim ally, and a potential counter-power against Iran. It also plays a critical role in fighting terrorism and militancy that (may) target the Saudi regime and other Gulf monarchies. The spillover of an unstable Afghanistan in Pakistan would lead to Islamabad's increased vulnerability and its inability to play an active role in other external affairs, including regional issues involving Iran and Saudi Arabia.

### **3. The means of Saudi Arabia's and Pakistan's diplomacies in Afghanistan**

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have limited means to mobilize in their search for power of security, particularly in Afghanistan. Their external alignment with the United States has led them to adopt a posture that would give the image of followers and supporters of American's Afghan policy. In the case of Pakistan, that image has not withstood the test of the country's politics. The absolute capacities of both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan limit their possibility to have a significant weight at the systemic level. The development of these capacities in terms of absolute power would prove economically overstretching and, in some cases, impossible. Indeed, as highlighted by Marijke Breuning, the foreign policy of a state and the development of its capabilities are "circumscribed by limitations imposed by the state's size, its geographic location and the structure of its relations with other states"<sup>32</sup>. Saudi Arabia, while being economically important, is militarily weak; moreover, its economic leverage might prove less and less significant with the development of shale gas energy. Additionally, the Saud regime might prove to be fragile if internal dissensions and divisions both within the royal family and in society come to the front. As for Pakistan, despite having "big potential"<sup>33</sup>, the country's

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31 Haroun Mir, "Afghanistan" in *Is a Regional Strategy Viable for Afghanistan?*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2010), 13.

32 Marijke Breuning, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

33 Adam Balcer, "Golden Age of Middle Powers?", Policy Paper, Demos Europa (January 2012), 4.

internal shortcomings and difficult economic situations limit its capacity to play as tangible a role as it could.

### **3.1. Transforming interests and capacities into international political influence**

As middle powers are limited in how they can increase their impact at both the systemic and the unit levels, they tend to focus their efforts at the interactional level, “acting upon the workings of the system through their societal and technical capabilities”<sup>34</sup>. Ping points out that middle powers’ statecraft is elaborated so as to increase the political significance of the state in international affairs. By doing so, states aim at transforming their absolute power – capabilities – into political weight by developing skills at the interactional level that will provide to middle powers a position that it cannot reach at a systemic level<sup>35</sup>. Accordingly Bélanger and Mace point out that middle powers gain in significance when they have a diplomatic or technical niche in questions dealt with at the level of politics rather than with structural leadership. Their knowledge of sectorial issues – especially when these issues are the object of cooperation or litigation – thus becomes their tool to gain significant weight in the international system; in other words, it becomes their power multiplier. A concrete example of niche-building statecraft is the place oil holds in Saudi Arabia’s diplomacy. The economic importance of Saudi oil in the global economy has led to Saudi Arabia holding an important position in global forums. The position of regional leader that Riyadh holds in the Middle East thanks to its economic strength and its religious influence is reinforced by regional integration, a process that Saudi Arabia not only supports but also initiates. Hence a positive image is developed through what looks like a commitment to multilateralism, as it implies cooperation and dialogue; regional integration forums such as the Arab League, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, the Gulf Cooperation Council or the Organization of Islamic Conference enable Riyadh to maintain its leadership position, while giving a stronger weight to its foreign policy.

As these several forums illustrate, middle powers can only gain importance in sectorial issues, their foreign policy is developed and implemented as “a

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34 Louis Bélanger and Gordon Mace, “Middle Powers and Regionalism in the Americas: The Cases of Argentina and Mexico” in Cooper, *Niche Diplomacy*, 166.

35 Appendix 2 presents a figure illustrating the process explained in this section.

product of contextually located deliberate action”<sup>36</sup>. In this regard, the definition of foreign policy answers to five considerations: (1) the state’s capacity; (2) position of the state in the international order; (3) normative composition of the state-societal complex; (4) domestic class interests; (5) the role and influence of foreign policy-makers<sup>37</sup>. With these characteristics in mind, the following section aims at putting to light how Saudi Arabia and Pakistan use their diplomatic tools and capabilities to put their interests forward and increase their impact in Afghanistan to gain significance internationally.

Following Cooper’s work, Jordaan analyses that middle powers typically focus on conflict reduction in their foreign policy approach; hence they tend to adopt negotiator roles, favoring mediation (within, across or outside institutions) as their approach to international issues. This common orientation drives them to develop niches, whereby they will gain greater significance internationally. By adopting the roles of bridge-builders, they carry out a positive image while putting their interests forward. This attribute of “role-modeling” stems from the middle power’s perception that the international system is in fact “a source of opportunities for action, rather than strictly a source of constraints”<sup>38</sup>. In this process, an important role is held by national leaders: hence there tends to be a prevalence of agency over structure in middle powers’ statecraft. At first glance, Pakistani and Saudi diplomacies in Afghanistan are rather divergent: while the former is depicted as defiant and confrontational, the latter is perceived as remote and cooperative. Pakistan’s Afghan policy has been decried as ambivalent, any declaration or action emanating from Islamabad towards Afghanistan being viewed suspiciously by Afghan actors. Riyadh, on the contrary, has enjoyed a rather positive image from the Afghan people and Afghan officials as a distant financial partner.

### **3.2. Interfering or mediating? Two middle powers in search of a niche**

Despite the positive image Saudi Arabia enjoys among Afghans, Saudi policy in Afghanistan is “not straightforward”<sup>39</sup>. Thus Riyadh is increasingly engaging in

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36 Jordaan, “The Concept of a Middle Power in International relations”, 166.

37 Jordaan, “The Concept of a Middle Power in International relations”.

38 Bélanger and Mace, “Middle Powers and Regionalism in the Americas”, 166.

39 Christopher Boucek, “Saudi Arabia”, in Tellis and Mukharji, *Is a Regional Strategy Viable for Afghanistan?*, 46.

“key strategic areas”<sup>40</sup>, recognizing that it cannot depend on other nations to defend their national interests: in the words of Turki Al-Faisal, “Obama’s speech to the UN last September [2013] made it clear that America will be concentrating exclusively on Palestine and Iran, and for everywhere else [...] you will have to fend for yourself. So whether it is collecting your [Saudi Arabia’s] own resources to do that, or reaching out to others in the area to help you overcome these challenges, we are adjusting to the reality of a retreating America”<sup>41</sup>.

In 2009, Turki Al-Faisal explained Saudi positioning towards Afghanistan as being “in favor of meaningful negotiations with the Taliban”, also pursuing the objective to “take on the heroin trade” and fix the issue of the Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan<sup>42</sup>. Through this explanation of Saudi foreign policy in Afghanistan, Turki Al-Faisal emphasizes the negotiator role that Saudis assume vis-à-vis the Afghan conflict. As explained above, Taliban reconciliation would benefit to Riyadh by (1) isolating Al-Qaeda and other extremist networks that could target the Kingdom and (2) providing a Sunni government in Kabul that would counter Iranian influence. Saudi press highlights that the war in Afghanistan is not military; rather it is a “war of ideas and beliefs”<sup>43</sup>, legitimating the religious aspect of Saudi foreign policy. This religious tool can be seen for example in the Saudi-financed project to build an educational religious complex in Kabul that would teach the Saudi brand of Sunni Islam as an answer to the Khatam al-Nabeyeen Islamic University, an educational complex comprising a madrassa and teaching Iran’s brand of Shia Islam<sup>44</sup>. While money flows from various sources and is difficult to trace back to its origins, it is undeniably a source of Saudi Arabia’s diplomatic action. Economic strength is indeed identified as an instrument of Saudi foreign policy

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40 Boucek, “Saudi Arabia”, 46.

41 Edward Luce, “Lunch with the FT: Prince Turki al-Faisal”, *Financial Times* (14 March, 2014). <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/9eb2ba0c-a9e0-11e3-adab-00144feab7de.html>.

42 Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, “A To-Do List for Afghanistan”, *Washington Post*, (9 October 2009). <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/08/AR2009100803805.html>.

43 Green, “Saudi Arabia’s Conflicted Policy on the Afghanistan Crisis”.

44 Sharon Behn, “Afghans worry about Iran’s Growing Influence”, *Voice of America* (27 November 2012). <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghan-worry-about-iran-growing-influence/1553651.html>.

by the regime<sup>45</sup>; but this instrument of hard power, often emphasized as Riyadh's first foreign policy tool, comes in second after its first source of soft power and diplomatic means that is Islam<sup>46</sup>. Consequently Saudi Arabia projects in Afghanistan the image of a protector of Islam, as the example cited above highlights. It is mainly used in the mediator role that Riyadh adopts to urge and support the Afghan reconciliation process. In order to do so, Riyadh plays a role "behind-the-scenes"<sup>47</sup> so as to appear neutral and distant from the process – a position that would portray them as not favoring a certain faction over another, providing them with enough room to build good relations with the next generation of Afghan leaders. This role is further promoted by the Saudi press, which emphasizes the absence of special connection between Saudi Arabia and the Taliban<sup>48</sup> – a connection that has created many problems for Riyadh in the past. The two rounds of secret talks in autumn 2008 and early 2009 thus marked the re-launch of increased activity in Saudi foreign policy towards Afghanistan, starting a process of periodic reconciliation and mediation efforts between elements of the Afghan government and the Taliban. It is interesting to note that Riyadh's involvement in Afghanistan goes mainly through these two channels of diplomatic tools – religion and mediation –, with only few efforts being directed at the official government itself. However, while oil remains Saudi Arabia's force multiplier on the international scene<sup>49</sup>, its positioning in Afghanistan has not yet given Riyadh a defining role as a powerbroker in Kabul, as its actions are mainly seen through the lens of regional competition against Iran.

Pakistan, on the other hand, is so entangled with the Afghan conflict that in the last decade it has been referred to as the "AfPak conflict". The country's geostrategic location and its closeness to the conflict theater are used to put forward its knowledge of Taliban, a knowledge that serves as Islamabad's power multiplier. Accordingly, Pakistan has developed the capacity to use their link with and knowledge of the Afghan Taliban – and other insurgent groups – as a diplomatic tool, most notably vis-à-vis Washington. The 2013 Doha

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45 Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, « Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy », *Middle East Policy* 20 (2013), 37–44. Doi: 10.1111/mepo.12044.

46 Giulio M. Gallarotti and Isam Yahia Al Filali, "The Soft Power of Saudi Arabia", *International Studies* Forthcoming (January 2013).

47 Robert D. Lamb and Sadika Hameed, "A Framework for U.S. Policy and Strategy in South Asia, 2014–2026", *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (29 January 2014), 6. <http://csis.org/publication/south-asia-regional-dynamics-and-strategic-concerns>.

48 Green, "Saudi Arabia's Conflicted Policy on the Afghanistan Crisis".

49 Balcer, "Golden Age of Middle Powers?"

process<sup>50</sup> illustrated the influence that Pakistan has in bringing the Taliban to the negotiation tables and the unavoidable role it holds.

By pushing to achieve an inclusive reconciliation process, Pakistan hopes to prompt Afghan Taliban to give up their sanctuaries in Pakistan, thus avoiding a joining of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban movement and a rise of Pashtun nationalism, decrease violence in Afghanistan so as to prevent any negative spillover, and ensure that the Afghan government comprises non-hostile actors towards Pakistan. While appearing ambivalent since 2001, Pakistani foreign policy has in fact been consistent since December 2009 with Islamabad's ultimate objective to ensure that Taliban's demands will have a significant weight in Afghanistan's political reconciliation. Pakistan's positioning is that of an actor trying to take a step back from the conflict to appear more as an external powerbroker, not as a party in conflict, in order to focus on its internal situation. In other words, Pakistan's strategic shift in Afghanistan is aimed at repositioning from an interfering actor to a role of mediator, as is illustrated by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's comments on the reconciliation process and Pakistan's role: "Our role [in the Afghan peace process] will remain that of a facilitator and not a leader"<sup>51</sup>. As a result, while the Pakistani establishment sees "Karzai as an obstacle to peace with the Taliban"<sup>52</sup>, Islamabad's efforts to engage more directly with former Northern Alliance factions are illustrative of their shifting policy towards Afghanistan: during the visits to Kabul by Pakistan's then-foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar in February 2012 and then-prime minister Pervaiz Ashraf in July 2012, both Pakistani officials met with non-Pashtun Afghan opposition leaders<sup>53</sup>. In December 2012, Pakistan's

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50 In 2013, Afghan Taliban opened a representative office in Doha, Qatar, which was meant for the Taliban to have a permanent known address. It was seen as the first step towards establishing relations with the movement, in order to start a negotiation process. Due to political tensions with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan government, the process resulted in a deadlock before even starting.

51 As quoted by a senior aide to the Prime Minister, cited by Kamran Yousaf, "Afghan endgame: Islamabad, Kabul to revive Taliban office", *The Express Tribune*, December 2, 2013.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/639883/afghan-endgame-islamabad-kabul-to-revive-taliban-office/>

52 Mehreen Zahra-Malik, "Pakistan sees Afghanistan's Karzai as obstacle to peace with Taliban", *Reuters*, March 24, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/24/us-pakistan-afghanistan-idUSBRE92N0KJ20130324>.

53 "New Pakistan outreach could aid Afghan peace deal", *USA Today*, October 27, 2012. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2012/10/27/pakistan-outreach->

Ambassador to Afghanistan Mohammad Sadiq commented: “there are very important people who fought against the Taliban and are not still ready to talk and negotiate with the Taliban. And we are working with them”<sup>54</sup>. Furthermore, the noticeable silence of the military on this issue is explained by this shift in Pakistani policy: as Faiysal Alikhan points out, the Pakistani army is traditionally the “custodian of Pakistan’s Afghan policy”<sup>55</sup>. Nevertheless, the military’s new leadership since November 2013, under General Raheel Sharif, brings a new perspective on the country and its foreign policy, with a body of officers more concerned about domestic security and protecting Pakistan’s territorial integrity. This moderation in Pakistan’s positioning and disengagement from Taliban-exclusive support could prove to become Islamabad’s tool to normalized relations with Kabul and Washington; most importantly, greater transparency and a moderate role for the army would enable more flexibility to political decision-makers, enabling Pakistan to gain in stability in its external relations.

### **Comparative conclusion of the case studies**

The analysis of Pakistan’s and Saudi Arabia’s foreign policies through the middle power theoretical framework has highlighted their use of mediation as a diplomatic tool and a source of power, as Riyadh and Islamabad pose as bridge-builder between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Typical of middle powers’ statecraft, mediation enables them to gain leverage, which in turn serves as a power multiplier in their foreign policy. The use of diplomatic tools such as communication and influence balances their weaknesses in terms of absolute power.

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afghanistan/1662535/. See also Yusuf “Decoding Pakistan’s ‘Strategic Shift’ in Afghanistan”.

54 Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq, cited by Reuters, “Pakistan urges all Afghan insurgents to pursue peace: Ambassador”, November 11, 2012. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/464083/pakistan-urges-all-afghan-insurgents-to-pursue-peace-ambassador/>

55 Faiysal Alikhan, “Why Pakistan is ignoring the Afghan elections”, The South Asia Channel, Foreign Policy, April 4, 2014, available on: [http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/04/04/why\\_pakistan\\_is\\_ignoring\\_the\\_afghan\\_election](http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/04/04/why_pakistan_is_ignoring_the_afghan_election).

Table 3: Comparison between Saudi's and Pakistani's Afghan policies:

<i>Area of action</i>	<i>Diplomatic tool</i>	PAKISTAN	SAUDI ARABIA
<i>Significant expertise in global political economy</i>	<i>Regional integration</i>	--	--
	<i>Knowledge of sectorial issues</i>	--	Oil
<i>Use of geostrategic location</i>	<i>Regional integration</i>	Dialogue for an economic partnership with Afghanistan	Islamic Cooperation Organization
	<i>Knowledge of sectorial issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbor state</li> <li>• Link with and knowledge of Afghan Taliban</li> </ul>	In immediate neighborhood (Islamic circle)
<i>Cultural power</i>	<i>Diplomatic know-how</i>	Cultural proximity with Afghan actors	Cultural proximity with Afghan actors
	<i>Knowledge of sectorial issues</i>	Link with and knowledge of Taliban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projecting image of protector and leader of Islam</li> <li>• Access to actors through religion</li> </ul>
	<i>Economic tool</i>	--	Investment in cultural/religious projects

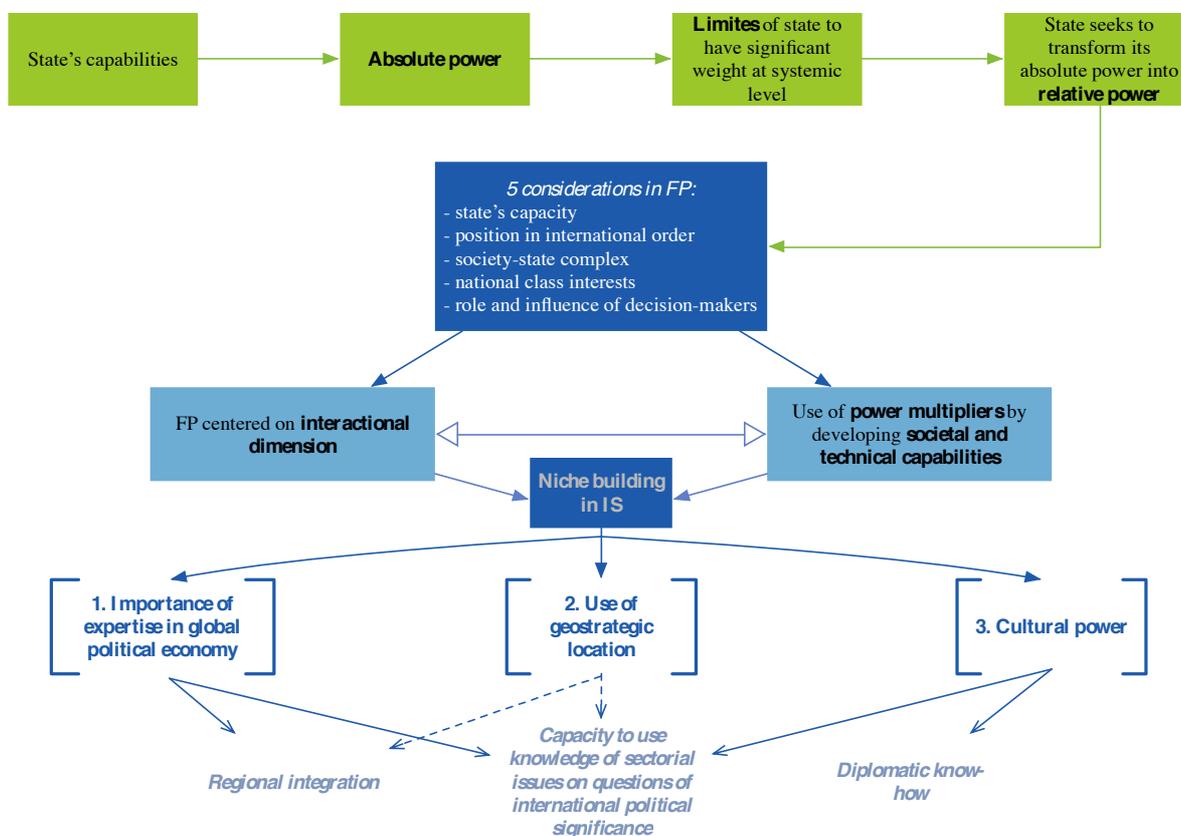
Hence Saudi Arabia develops a culture- and religion-centered foreign policy, by using religion and money. In the case of Pakistan, the inevitability of its involvement in the Afghan conflict has led Islamabad to establish a security-centered foreign policy. The role of national leaders in establishing their diplomacy appears prominent: the prevalence of agency over structure enables greater flexibility, but causes the process to be more opaque, which can lead to ambivalent policies. In both countries, ruling elites – or the ruling families – control the foreign policy's apparatus and agents decide civilian institutions' role.

Pakistan's and Saudi Arabia's foreign policies towards Afghanistan are comparatively summarized in table 3.

## **Conclusion: towards an expanded framework for middle powers**

The literature on middle powers has highlighted a qualitative and a quantitative approach to categorizing middle powers, leading to a binary classification of these countries between traditional and non-traditional middle powers – or non-traditional middle powers, as we call them in this paper. This study on Saudi's and Pakistani's Afghan policies has brought additional light to the understanding of middle powers. Indeed, as explained in the first part of this study, the quantitative approach needs to be completed by qualitative factors. In that sense, Jordaan's (2003) and Ping's (2005) works are complementary in providing an analytical framework to define what constitutes in essence a middle power. Thus statistics provide a necessary – but insufficient – insight into a state's capacities. Likewise, Jordaan's constitutive factors provide an interesting insight into the evolution of middle powers' classification. What appears more and more evident is how important the transformation process from absolute power, *i.e.* capacities, into relative power, *i.e.* actual political influence, actually is, as figure 2 illustrates.

Figure 2: Saudi Arabia's and Pakistan's process to transform absolute capacities into political influence (adapted from Cooper, 1997, and Jordaan, 2003)



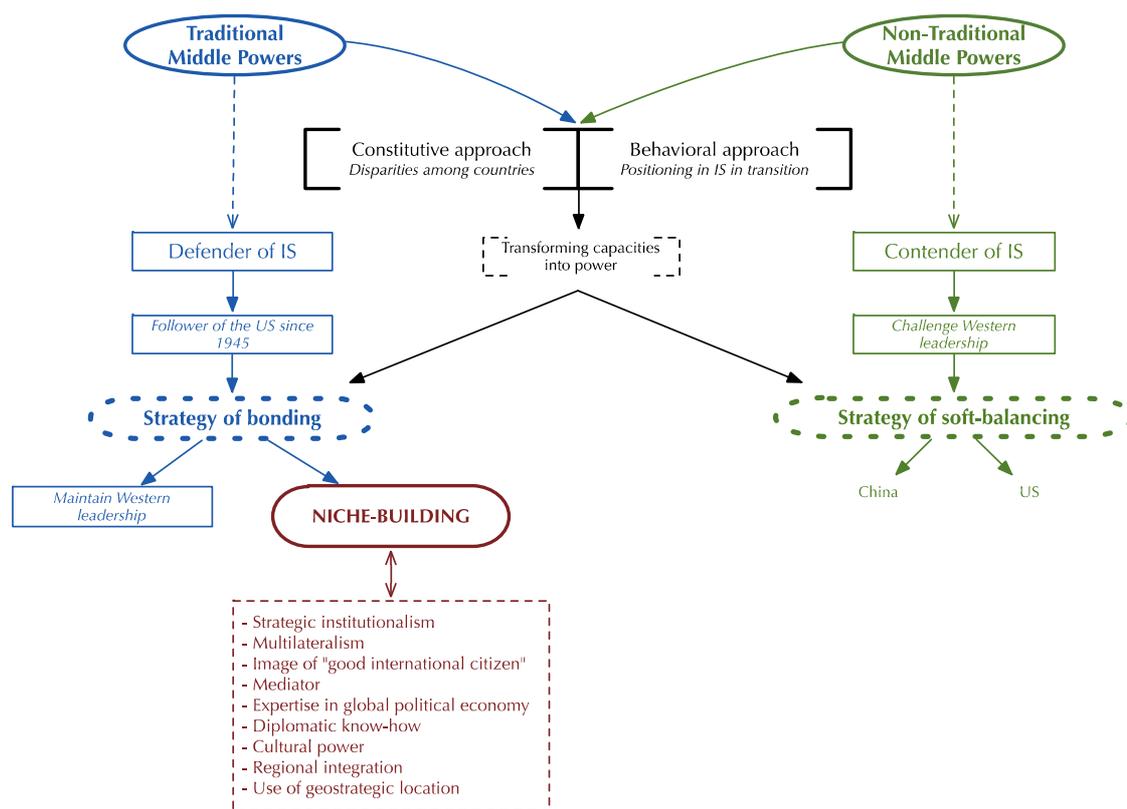
As neither Pakistan nor Saudi Arabia possess the sufficient capacities to have a strong and direct influence over the situation in Afghanistan in the international context, they develop a foreign policy based primarily on the interactional level with the main stakeholders – state and non-state actors likewise. This relational approach is complementary to the use of power multipliers, i.e. the development of specific capabilities, providing them with a comparative advantage on the international scene. The combination of these two elements enables them to build a niche, which in turn becomes their comparative advantage and their leverage to gain influence. While Saudi Arabia has developed such niche in the area of global political economy with oil, Pakistan's niche is more centered on its closeness to an epicenter of concern for international security, *i.e.* Afghanistan.

Middle powers thus have in common not only their objective to gain power on the international scene, but also the means through which they tend to accomplish that transformation. Indeed, capacities *per se* do not enable to

classify a power into the “middle power” category, as the great disparity among statistics of widely recognized middle powers shows. When looking at the numbers, for instance, it appears that Saudi Arabia and Pakistan can be classified as middle powers (see in this regard Ping, 2007). Nevertheless, their behavior is very dissimilar to that of countries such as Canada, Australia, Chile, Mexico, Indonesia or Norway. Hence what define middle powers are the relative political influence they gain through their behavior on the international stage and the means through which they gain that influence.

While it is interesting to gain better insight into Pakistan and Saudi Arabia *per se*, these cases challenge the binary classification of middle powers as it is established in the literature. Indeed, it becomes more and more difficult to categorize middle powers between *traditional* middle powers on one side and *non-traditional* middle powers on the other. Figure 3 illustrates the positioning of middle powers, as it has been understood so far.

Figure 3: Middle powers’ behavior in the international system



While there seems to be a clear difference between these two categories regarding their positioning towards the United States and today’s international

system, we can hypothesize that middle powers are in fact more similar in their objective and vision than what such binary classification would presume, but also more diverse in their international positioning. Marque (2011) highlights that traditional middle powers are defenders of the international system, and follow the United States since 1945, by implementing a *strategy of bonding*<sup>56</sup>: not only do they establish a relationship of trust and support, they also develop their foreign policy so as to maintain the current leadership located in the Western center of power. Their objective is thus to maintain the *status quo*, which enables them to have political influence in international affairs and, ultimately, to exist on the global stage. In today's world in transition, their positioning is of primary importance to the United States, as China rises and challenges the American leadership. A shift in the balance of power would lead these traditional middle powers to decrease in political significance. On the contrary, Marque notes that non-traditional middle powers are contenders of the international system. They question and challenge the international order established since 1945, and China's rise gives them the opportunity to counter American power without directly confronting the United States. This *strategy of soft-balancing*<sup>57</sup> thus enables them to play on both sides; they position themselves depending on the shift in power and support either the Western or the non-Western center of power. Ultimately, however, their strategy challenges Western leadership and aims at providing support to the rise of non-Western leadership. These strategies of bonding and soft-balancing bring to light the transitional nature of the international system. Foreign policies are indeed defined relative to their need to exist, thus in accordance with the global order. In today's context, traditional middle powers gain their influence from the leadership of the West, while non-traditional middle powers gain theirs from the rise of China challenging the United States.

Nevertheless, we can question the relevance of maintaining a binary distinction beyond this one. Indeed, as the cases of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia illustrate, middle powers tend to build a niche in the international system, using their expertise in a specific area as power multiplier to gain more influence. This strategy of niche-building is thus not exclusive to traditional middle powers, but concerns also non-traditional ones. The case of South Korea is enlightening in this regard: indeed, South Korea is a non-traditional middle

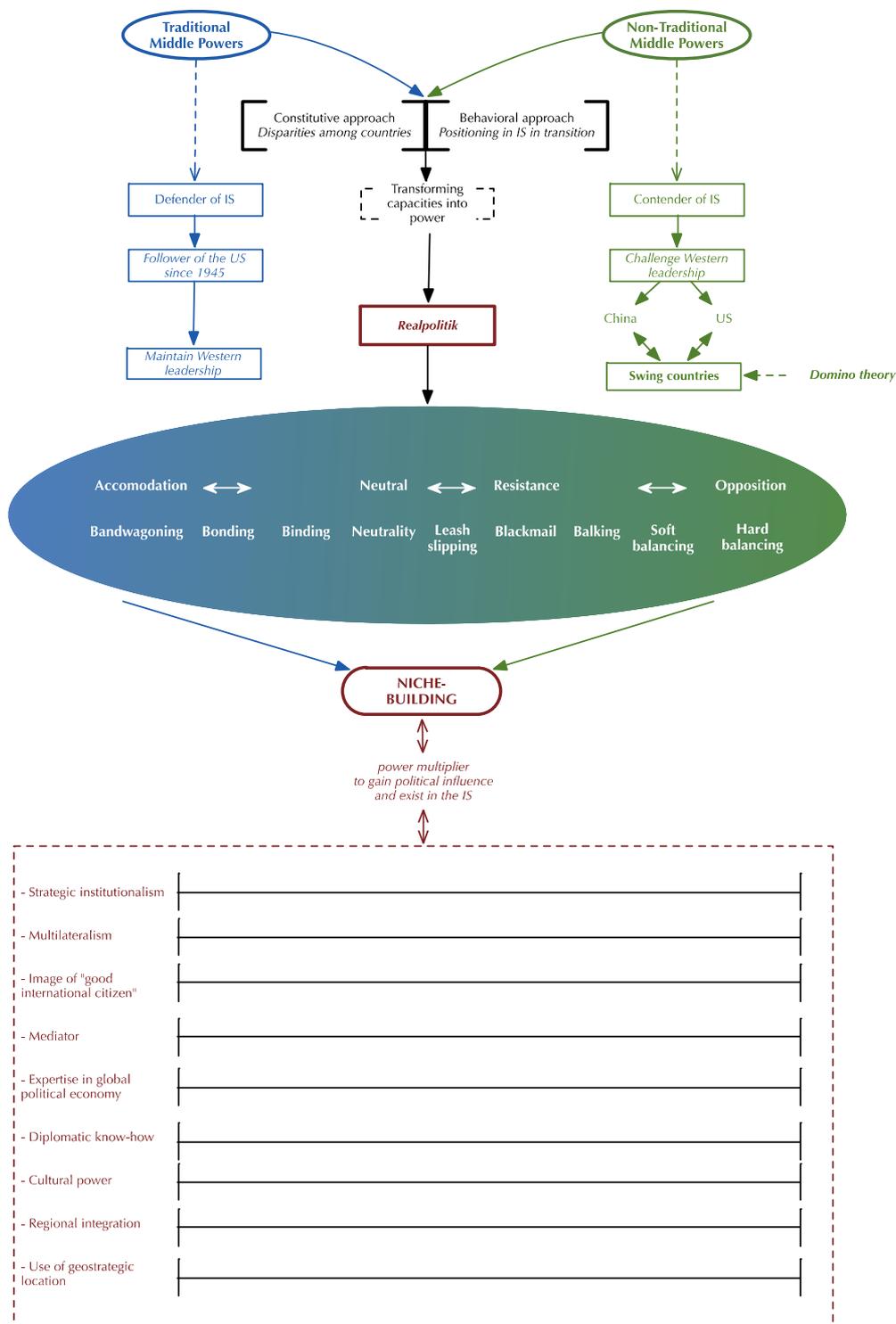
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56 Neal G. Jesse et. Al., « The leaders can't lead when the followers won't follow », in *Beyond Great Powers and Hegemons*, Williams, Lobell and Jesse, 2012.

57 T.V. Paul T.V., « Soft Balancing against the United States », *International Security*, vol. 30, n°1, Summer 2005, 46-71

power but a defender of the international system and a follower of the United States.

Figure 4: Towards a new analytical model for middle powers



Adapted from Jesse et al., *ibid*, 14.

According to Tanguy Struye de Swielande, as we see in the American electoral system with the swing states that eventually determine the result of an election, these middle powers can be seen as *swing countries*<sup>58</sup>. In the case of a (quasi-) balance in power between China and the United States, these swing countries will determine which way the scale shifts. An analogy can be made with the Domino theory which, during the Cold War, posited that if a certain region were to become communist, neighboring countries would follow, just like domino pieces falling one after the other in a chain reaction<sup>59</sup>. Similarly, if one swing country were to follow China rather than the United States, other swing countries would follow, thus shifting the tip of the balance of power towards Beijing and away from Washington.

The relevance of the relational nature of power in the structure of the international system becomes clear. As *Jesse et al.* highlight in their work on hegemony and followers, “hegemony is not a trait but rather a type of interaction or relationship”<sup>60</sup>. Hegemony being a type of structure in the international system, we can expand this characteristic to the international system *per se*. Thus the structure of the international system is not only the result of the distribution of material capabilities, but also that of the will of countries and their relations to one another and the international structure as a whole. Thus we open here a possible area of research that would bridge leaders-followers literature with middle powers literature. Based on the model presented above, the three elements of hegemony – (1) strength on economic and military dimensions; (2) awareness of power preponderance and will to act; and (3) active in the arena of international institutions – that are identified by *Jesse et al.* are classes to determine to what extent a middle power is a contender or a follower, in the way they vary across these dimensions in reaction to the hegemon. Thus it is not the nature of the tools of statecraft they use that differentiate middle powers from one another, rather the strategy they develop to use said tools and their final objective regarding the international system. The first classification made by Marquie differentiates contenders and followers. However, based on *Jesse et al.*, as Struye de Swielande points out, it is not so much a strict binary distinction, rather a

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58 Interview with Tanguy Struye de Swielande, Wednesday, July 16th, 2014.

59 Interview with Tanguy Struye de Swielande, Wednesday, July 16th, 2014.

60 Neal G. Jesse et. Al., « The leaders can't lead when the followers won't follow », in *Beyond Great Powers and Hegemons*, Williams, Lobell and Jesse, 2012 : 4.

“continuum of responses to hegemony”<sup>61</sup>, that will differentiate middle powers among each other.

Middle powers’ niche-building is a process by which they develop and use certain foreign policy behavior in order to establish their strategies and, ultimately, defend their national interest. In the current international system, “Rule based on might is enhanced by rule based on right”. Consequently, the liberal perspective that viewed traditional middle powers such as Australia or Canada as good international citizens or defenders of international organizations and international law is in fact illustrative of the tools these countries use to exist on the global scale. While institutions are created by the hegemon, or at least the dominant power of its time, its followers sustain them to maintain the international order in which these institutions were created in the first place. As long as it is in their interest to protect and maintain the current international structure and follow the leader, *i.e.* the United States, these middle powers will act within that system to maintain it and support the leader. Nevertheless, it would be inexact to think of followers as blind supporters. Indeed, as Jesse *et al.* demonstrate, followers’ behavior varies along a scale of bandwagoning to bonding to binding. Likewise, contenders do not oppose the international order purely on a political-military dimension, as most of them do not have the capacities to do so. Thus they develop strategies that enable them to constrain the United States, while maximizing their chance to implement an independent foreign policy. Such is the case of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, who neither follow nor openly oppose the United States, but aim at influencing its foreign policy.

These conclusive remarks aim at opening the debate about the current classification of middle powers, with possible further research on the model that is proposed here. In-depth analysis and development would be necessary to operationalize this model, most importantly in the variation of tools of statecraft used by middle powers and the relative weight these tools have in the countries’ grand strategy.

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61 Ibid.