


Hedging Strategy in Foreign Policy: Saudi Arabia's Relations with the US, China, and Russia after the Cold War, NEU Press, 2023, p. 229

Hamdullah BAYCAR 

Karadeniz Technical University,
Faculty of Economics and
Administrative Sciences,
Department of International Relations,
Trabzon, Türkiye

Dış politikada korunma (Hedging) stratejisi: Soğuk Savaş sonrası Suudi Arabistan'ın ABD, Çin ve Rusya ile ilişkileri, NEU Press, 2023, s. 229

Are international relations theories, and generally theories, applicable to the Middle East, or does the Middle East still serve as an exceptional area where the theories need to make more sense? Mehmet Rakipoglu's book *Hedging Strategy in Foreign Policy: Saudi Arabia's Relations with the US, China, and Russia after the Cold War* [Dış politikada koruna (Hedging) stratejisi: Soğuk Savaş sonrası Suudi Arabistan'ın ABD, Çin ve Rusya ile ilişkileri] is a case in which a theory for his case, hedging, has been applied to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's relations with the United States, China, and Russia in the post-Cold War era. By doing so, this study is yet another contribution to exceptionalizing the region and making it relevant to IR theories.

The book's overreaching argument is that Saudi Arabia, out of fear of being abandoned by the US, hedged with China and Russia in order to minimize the risks of abandonment. The hedging is mainly done with rising powers, so the choice of China and Russia, in this sense, is not coincidental. The hedging with China and Russia occurs in economic, political, and security spheres. By doing so, the Kingdom decreases its reliance on the US. This is particularly important when US Middle East policies are less predictable, such as the withdrawal of US military and Iranian agreements.

While the Kingdom shows its desire to hedge with China and Russia, these states also responded positively. For example, contrary to expectations, the author argues that China prioritizes its relations with Saudi Arabia over Iran. In 2019, Saudi Arabia and China trade values reached over 73 billion USD, while China-Iran trade remained at a much lower figure, around 19 billion USD. Again, the Kingdom has attracted over 40 billion USD in investment from China since 2005, while this figure was around 27 billion USD for Chinese investment in Iran.

The hedging, of course, does not go unnoticed by the US. For example, when Saudi Arabia showed interest in buying Russia's S400 missile system, the US administration did not approve. However, the disapproval came with a benefit for the Kingdom. In exchange, the US had to approve Saudi's Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) deal, which was around 15 billion USD. In some cases, the hedging brought even more visible independence in foreign policy for Saudi Arabia, according to the author. An example is the Kingdom's refusal to decline the oil price when the US asked after Russia began its war against Ukraine.

Geliş Tarihi/Received 02.05.2025
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted 14.05.2025
Yayın Tarihi/Publication Date 30.06.2025

Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar:
Hamdullah BAYCAR
E-mail: hamdullahbaycar@ktu.edu.tr

Cite this article

Baycar, H. (2025). Hedging Strategy in Foreign Policy: Saudi Arabia's Relations with the US, China, and Russia after the Cold War, NEU Press, 2023, p. 229. *Journal of International Relations Studies*, 5(1), 53-54.



Content of this journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License.

The book consists of four chapters in addition to the introductory and conclusion chapters. The first chapter explains the relevant terms and concepts needed to make sense of the theory, such as balance, foreign policy strategies, bandwagoning, and timing. The second chapter surveys Saudi Arabia's relations with the US with several milestones, such as until September 11, the effect of September 11, the occupation of Iraq, and, more importantly, the US changing relations with Iran, such as during the Obama administration, which was considered a rise of the Iranian threat and perceived as abandonment by Saudi Arabia. The third and fourth chapters discuss where Saudi Arabia began to hedge with China and Russia.

Hedging theory is frequently studied in Asia-Pacific cases, while Middle Eastern cases have also begun to increase. In this sense, the book contributes to the case, bringing a Middle Eastern case to the agenda. The other contribution derives from bringing two countries to the study. The literature mainly examines hedging with or against China. At a time of uncertainty when China and US competition became fiercer, the Kingdom undertook a strategic foreign policy to diversify its foreign actors by maintaining its current and historical relations with the hegemonic power. The new hedging occurs by engaging in three levels of relationship with China and Russia, though none at the expense of the US. For example, while the primary economic aim in hedging is to gain new economic benefits from China and Russia, the Kingdom also maintains what it has already gained from the US. In military affairs, while the primary target is to maintain the US security umbrella, the Kingdom aims to engage with China and Russia militarily without harming the US. In a political/diplomatic aspect, while the Kingdom gains new benefits by engaging with these two states, who also do not lecture the Kingdom in internal affairs, the Kingdom also maintains its place with the US.

Even though the book has attempted to clarify the differences between bandwagoning, balance, and hedging, the boundaries between those are still not very clear. However, this applies to most of the hedging literature. Being aware of this blurriness, an entire chapter reserved for conceptual and term explanation would be extra. This could be eliminated or summarized in the introduction.

The book can serve as a good source for students and researchers in international relations and political science. Because it also takes Saudi Arabia's engagement with the US, China, and Russia, researchers from Middle Eastern Studies and Security Studies can benefit from this case. Unfortunately, the readers will need to know Turkish as it has yet to be translated into English. If translated with a new version, the book can eliminate the conceptual part and update it with recent regional developments that occurred during the Trump and Biden administrations.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Financial Disclosure: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.