

# Resilient Partnership under Scrutiny: UK–Saudi Defence Cooperation, Path Dependence, and Managed Continuity (1902–2025)

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## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The article's central argument identifies “two mutually reinforcing mechanisms: defence-industrial and operational path dependence and political-economic interdependence.” However, the manuscript should explain more clearly how these mechanisms are analytically distinguished from general indicators of bilateral cooperation. For example, arms sales, trade, and investment are presented both as evidence of cooperation and as causal mechanisms producing resilience. The authors should clarify the causal chain by specifying how these mechanisms generate continuity rather than merely reflecting a pre-existing strategic relationship.

The paragraph outlining the research question and objectives is well structured, but the article would benefit from a stronger explanation of the dependent variable. The question asks “How and why have UK–Saudi relations remained resilient,” yet the manuscript does not establish measurable indicators of resilience beyond continued cooperation. The authors should specify whether resilience is demonstrated through continuity of agreements, institutional survival, policy adaptation, defence cooperation levels, diplomatic engagement, or avoidance of rupture despite crises.

The methodological paragraph states that the study employs “a qualitative, historically informed case-study approach combining process tracing with triangulation across multiple source types.” This methodological claim requires greater elaboration. The authors should provide more information regarding the process-tracing design, including the specific causal mechanisms being tested, the historical episodes selected as critical junctures, and the evidence used to establish causal links. At present, the methodology section describes sources but does not sufficiently explain the analytical procedure.

The paragraph beginning “Personnel diplomacy reinforced this reframing” provides an interesting interpretation of Prince Turki al-Faisal’s appointment as ambassador. However, the argument that his appointment represented strategic signalling requires further evidence. The authors should clarify whether this interpretation is based on official statements, diplomatic correspondence, contemporary analysis, or retrospective interpretation.

The discussion of Vision 2030 states that diversification “broadens the relationship, making it more resilient by ensuring that cooperation does not hinge on a single domain.” This is a theoretically important point, but the manuscript should provide stronger empirical evidence regarding whether economic diversification has actually reduced defence dependence or merely added new areas of cooperation. A comparative analysis of defence versus non-defence cooperation before and after Vision 2030 would strengthen this argument.

The section addressing Yemen-related controversies and arms-export litigation is one of the strongest parts of the manuscript because it demonstrates tension between strategic interests and normative constraints. However, the authors should further analyse whether legal challenges merely altered the governance of cooperation or whether they produced measurable changes in policy outcomes. The paragraph stating that “the result is best conceptualised as ‘managed continuity’” would benefit from clearer empirical indicators demonstrating this transformation.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the paragraph discussing limitations, the authors acknowledge that “defence and security cooperation is partially opaque by design.” This is an important observation, but the manuscript should discuss how source limitations affect the reliability of the conclusions. For example, if major defence arrangements are confidential, what criteria are used to distinguish confirmed institutional dependence from inferred dependence? A more explicit discussion of evidentiary hierarchy would strengthen the methodological credibility of the study.

The section “Relations from the outset to 2001” provides a detailed historical narrative, but the early paragraphs remain largely chronological rather than analytical. For example, the paragraph beginning “According to Gary Troeller, the first references to British relations with the Wahhabis date to the early nineteenth century” provides valuable historical information but does not sufficiently connect these developments to the article’s central argument about resilience mechanisms. The authors should consistently link historical episodes to the proposed framework of institutional continuity and strategic interdependence.

The discussion of the 1926 negotiations with Ibn Sa‘ud provides extensive detail regarding treaty provisions, including the clauses concerning friendship, British interests, and non-intervention. However, the manuscript should explain why this episode is analytically significant for the argument. The paragraph currently functions mainly as diplomatic history. The authors should demonstrate how this negotiation established patterns of asymmetric cooperation, sovereignty management, or institutional expectations that later shaped UK–Saudi relations.

The paragraph beginning “By the mid-1930s, Anglo–Saudi relations were strained” offers a rich historical explanation of geopolitical pressures but requires stronger integration with the theoretical framework. The authors should explain whether this period represents an example of resilience under external competition, a temporary weakening of partnership, or a transformation in the strategic basis of relations. Explicitly identifying the causal relevance of this episode would improve the analytical structure.

The discussion of the 1960s military relationship states that “bilateral military relations began to acquire a more institutionalised and durable form.” This is a significant claim and should be supported with a deeper analysis of institutional mechanisms. The authors should examine how training missions, maintenance arrangements, military advisory structures, and personnel exchanges created long-term dependency. Without such analysis, the argument risks reducing institutionalisation to arms transfers alone.

The paragraph concerning Al Yamamah I and Al Yamamah II is central to the manuscript’s argument but requires additional analytical depth. The authors state that these agreements embedded “long-term UK-linked procurement, training, and

sustainment structures,” yet the specific mechanisms through which these contracts generated path dependence should be explained in greater detail. For example, the manuscript should discuss supplier lock-in, technical compatibility, personnel expertise, maintenance ecosystems, and switching costs.

The section discussing the post-9/11 period argues that counter-terrorism cooperation became a “principal justificatory pillar” of bilateral relations. This is a strong argument, but the authors should provide more empirical evidence demonstrating how counter-terrorism cooperation changed institutional practices between the two governments. The discussion would benefit from examples of intelligence-sharing mechanisms, security dialogues, operational cooperation, or formal agreements established after 2001.

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## 2. Revised

Editor’s decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.