Why Saudi Arabia is the venue of choice for Trump talks on Ukraine



The choice by the Trump administration of Saudi Arabia as the location for key talks on Ukraine underscores how far the Kingdom has come diplomatically from the near pariah state it became after the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

The shadow that cast over the country and its de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in particular, appears to have lifted, although there are still concerns occasionally raised at international forums over Saudi Arabia's human rights record.

On many fronts - in entertainment and sport in particular - the country has spent huge amounts of money to further its ambitions to be a major player on the world stage. Diplomatically, the Saudi leadership has also been enhancing its role. During the Biden years, the Kingdom increased its pivot away from reliance on the US as its key international ally.

The Saudis made clear that they would follow what they perceive as their interests first and foremost - striking up closer relationships with countries viewed as key rivals to the US, such as Russia and China.The return of Donald Trump to the White House will have been welcomed by the Saudis.

His first foreign visit in his first term was to Saudi Arabia - and the transactional nature of his foreign policy is more conducive to the current Saudi leadership.

One of the possible achievements that Mr Trump would most like to chalk up on his record would be a peace deal between the Saudis and Israel - which would be the culmination of the Abraham Accords that he initiated in his first term.But the war in Gaza has subsequently got in the way and may well raise the price that Saudi Arabia will demand for a peace agreement.

How this will be resolved will be key to the dynamics in the evolving relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US.What is clear is that the Saudis have no intention of reining in their ambition of becoming an essential player in global diplomacy.