

## Research Article

# Political Character And Saudi Arabic Fire Diplomacy

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**Abstract.** This paper seeks to track the political nature behind the decision of Saudi Arabia Kingdom of Saudi executes Shia cleric, Nimr Baqir Al-Nimr using speech act theory. It is not a coincidence when the execution of the Nimr conducted before implementation JCPOA, reached Iran with 5+1 group and the European Union. The Saudi political action born out of political character that is both personal and tribal. This paper provides a theoretical reinforcement to the previous related research, especially Hermann Frederick Eilts about the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia, also Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner that highlights the state's formation and patterns of tribal Arab country. Tracking model of diplomacy fire that relies on oil (money) and sword (military), a bit much to contribute about the urgency of understanding the political nature, including the style of diplomacy, as large maps to analyze the political action of the actors Arab kingdom of Saud in responding to the political dynamics of regional and global.

**Keywords:** *Speech Act, Political Nature, Personal, Triba.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

In the field of the discipline of International Relations, Nicholas Greenwood Onuf proposes a theory of speech act regarding the relationship between the influence of agents and structures that take place in a circle of interactions. Subject creates and influences structure, whereas structure affects the subject. Because it is people who make the rules, then the rules govern society, and the rules of society are what make people do it themselves in certain ways. As stated by Onuf in *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (1989: 66), "People make rules, rules make society, society's rules make people conduct themselves in specified ways."

Onuf (1989: 66) views humans - especially politicians - in building reality through their actions in the form of real actions or speech acts. Repetitive actions and statements form rules for other actors. The statements of politicians become rules that only provide two choices for other political actors, whether to follow them or not, of course with their respective consequences.

Onuf's glasses help to trace the political character of the rulers of Saudi Arabia from his political action to execute Nimr Baqir al-Nimr which was carried out on the second day of the new year 2016. The reason is that al-Nimr's execution was not born out of a purely Saudi internal affairs decision. with national security, but more influenced by external factors, especially as a reaction to regional and global dynamics.

Al-Nimr's execution comes amid the easing of tensions between Iran and the West over the nuclear issue with the achievement of a nuclear deal between Iran and the 5 + 1 group and the European Union in Vienna. The agreement reached by the two parties on July 14 2015 gave birth to a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which would relax Western sanctions that have been imposed on Iran for years. It is not a coincidence that the execution of Al-Nimr

was carried out about two weeks before the implementation of the JCPOA on January 16, 2016. (<http://www.irna.-ir/fa/News/81923180/>).

For more than three decades after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Saudi Arabia and most other Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region enjoyed great support from the US. At the same time, the Western exclusion of Iran benefits Saudi Arabia's dominance in the region. Therefore, when the West began to close with Iran, Riyadh's concerns emerged about the strengthening of Iran's influence in the Middle East region. The Saudi political action to execute Al-Nimr as a reaction to the regional transformation of the Middle East (and globally) raises big questions about the political nature that underlies the politics and diplomacy style of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## **B. METHOD**

This research approach uses a qualitative analysis system in which the qualitative research process is carried out by researchers through literature studies and studies related to the subject. The character of qualitative research is a comprehensive narrative, where the researcher tries to carry out an in-depth analysis of the research questions so that the analysis can be carried out from various aspects. Thus, this research is expected to be able to visualize the problem clearly and completely.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Tracing Saudi Political Character**

Around the sixty decade, Dean Acheson (1893-1971) once said that the national goal of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like any other country, was to survive and prosper, but had to add conditions under the Al Saud dynasty. Hermann Frederick Eilts put the statement of the US Secretary of State in the era of President Harry S Truman as an entry point for understanding the nature of Saudi Arabia's politics, including foreign policy, and even its diplomatic style (Brown, 2004: 219).

Judging from its national goals, the ruler of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia defines the national goals of the Arab state in terms of the interests of the Al Saud dynasty. Although Saudi Arabia adopted political institutionalization in its pyramid of power, its features are tribal and personal (Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, 1987). The so-called Shura as an alternative to Western democracy, or Bedouin Democracy, was nothing more than an association of princes of the Al Saud dynasty plus Wahabi scholars. According to Fred Haliday, this form of political institutionalism does not explain the character of the modern state (Halliday, 2005: 44). Anthropological investigations show that the social order prevailing in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries was based on the centrality of tribes in the life of Arab society. A group of people share the territory under their control, and their economic interests are supported by kinship. Political allegiance of members to the chief will receive physical and economic protection and social status. However, a tribe is not a monolithic structure but is divided into sub-units: families, clans, and larger factions. Collective solidarity (asabiyah) is expressed through military and economic cohesion. This pattern is still valid today in a more systematic and large form with the dominance of the Al Saud tribe over other tribes in Saudi Arabia (Kostiner, 1993: 16-17).

With such a social structure, it is not surprising that the voice of the people has very little place in making political decisions in this Arab country. In addition, the important posts of Saudi Arabia's power have always been filled by princes of the Al Saud dynasty, as well as people affiliated with the king and crown prince. For example, the governor of Mecca was held by Khalid al-Faisal Al Saud. Previously held by Mishaal bin Abdullah Al Saud, who was also a prince. Askari's research shows the personal political nature of the rulers of Saudi Arabia.

This is indicated by the thin wall between the state treasury and private accounts to meet the needs of the authorities which are almost limitless (Askari, 2009: 107-108). Tracking the personal and tribal nature of the Al Saud regime's politics helps to understand the motive for Al-Nimr's execution.

First, the execution of Al-Nimr as a way for the Al Saud dynasty to suppress the popular protest movement which has been increasingly swift since 2011, especially in the oil-rich heartland in the east. The beheading of Al-Nimr sent a signal to all the opposition Riyadh government to stop their action against the Al Saud kingdom. Riyadh currently offers only two options; obey the Al Saud, or be muzzled. Perhaps it is not important for Riyadh to distinguish whether Nimr rebelled by taking up arms, or just shouting at the podium with his words to simply voice the oppression of the people who demanded his legal rights. Because there is only a single narrative about the interpretation of the nation and state according to the definition of Al Saud, not others. Since about five years ago, this personal political style has been dominant in the various repressive actions of Al Saud in responding to the peaceful wave of popular protests in the eastern region calling for justice and democratization.

Personal political character, as practiced by Saudi Arabia, is determined by who is in power as King, who transcends the constitutional system and the prevailing laws. One of the characteristics of the absolute monarchy system of government is its thick personal features. A king's decision is a law, and can invalidate the rules, even change them. In addition, from the perspective of the social psychology of Middle Eastern society, the tribal political style shows Al Saud wants to only interact with top leaders, not members of the community or their representatives through elections. If the leader of a tribe can be invited to compromise, he will become an ally, but if he refuses, he must be removed and fought. This character is still preserved today. When Al-Nimr as the leader of the Saudi Shia cannot be silenced so that he is silent, then the path Al Saud has chosen is to suppress him. In addition, studies of Middle East political anthropology show tribal resistance never lasts long when its leader dies, unless it has other charismatic leaders who are equal or better.

This approach also explains why Arab countries are fighting each other for regional domination, as the Saudis have done with Yemen, Syria and Iraq. On the other hand, this problem indicates that democracy, which promotes the interests of the common people, is seen as a threat to the national interests of some Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia.

Second, the execution of Nimr sent an important message to Tehran after the nuclear deal was reached between Iran and the 5 + 1 group in July 2015. Riyadh views Tehran as the main rival for its position to dominate the Middle East. Al Saud's tribal political character tends to be ambitious and wants to make him the most influential ruler in the Middle East (West Asia) region. Middle East anthropological studies illustrate the high competition between tribes in the region in order to compete for regional domination. The Al Saud dynasty itself controlled the Hijaz, with its main cities Jeddah, Mecca and Medina, through bloodshed in the battle known as the "Mecca War" in 1924. Since ancient times, the personal and tribal nature of Arab politics has been very well read and utilized by imperialists such as Britain and now the US, for the benefit of its own political economy. At that time, a British archaeologist and diplomat named Thomas Edward Lawrence launched an asymmetric provocation that gave birth to a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire, and the separation of the Hijaz in 1916.

As is the case in Syria, Iraq and Yemen today, in the past, Arab nations with their personal and tribal characteristics were easily pitted against one another by Lawrence more than a century ago. This British scientist and diplomat played a major role in the Aqaba war in 1917, the Tafilah war in 1918, and the Sykes-Picot Treaty in 1916 between Britain and France, which divided Ottoman Turkish territory into fragments. Even today, Arab countries in the Middle East are so dependent on the West, especially Britain and the US. If a century ago the

conflict that was sparked by Britain against the Arab nations was a common enemy of the Ottomans, now it has changed its name to Iran, and was carried out by not only Britain, but the US as its new actor. The imperialist goals have not changed from then until now in order to control natural resources that are overflow. In addition, these imperialist countries are profiting from selling weapons in the wars they are waging in the region. More than that, it succeeded in pitting the Muslims against each other.

The personal and tribal nature of the Al Saud regime's politics easily adopts the big "Iranophobia" narrative that is heralded by the West, especially the US and Britain, and Israel. For Arab countries like Saudi, Iran after the victory of the Islamic Revolution is the culprit in the region. For more than three decades, the Saudis have agreed with the US and Britain in various ways to reduce the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The support of Riyadh along with the West and a number of Arab countries for Saddam Hussein in the war with Iran in 1980-1988 did not produce results. In fact, a few years later, Saddam was overthrown by the US, which previously supported him, through a military invasion in 2003, and Saddam himself was executed on December 30, 2006.

Not only that, the Saudis also intervened in many countries in the region to realize their ambitions, including supporting terrorist groups such as ISIS operating in Syria and Iraq. Saudi Arabia also launched military aggression in Yemen to provoke Iran, and previously in Bahrain. Third, the personal and tribal nature of Saudi politics is very strong in the collective representation that the Al Saud regime echoed with great fanfare. Al-Nimr's execution was carried out to strengthen the position of collective representation of Saudi Arabia among Arab countries and the Islamic world in order to reduce Iranian influence. This collective representation can be explored a little by Durkheimian analysis of how to act from collective elaboration through authoritative legal rules (Durkheim, 1982, and Ceri, 1993: 135-152). The aim is to raise sectarian collective awareness of the subjective values planted by Saudi by building solidarity between Arab and Sunni tribes, as opposed to Iran. The Saudis use ingroup solidarity to lead a confrontation with the Sunni Islamic world in order to destabilize Iran, which is placed as an outgroup. Therefore, the communication patterns used are "us" and "them", or propaganda "Shia is not Islam" and others.

When this scenario was carried out by the Saudis, in fact Riyadh was implementing an imperialist plot to segregate the Islamic world into a plot of sectarian political tensions, just to serve the ambition of regional domination by the Al Saud regime and the hidden agenda of the West, especially the US, which has political economic interests behind the conspiracy. that. It seems that, as the ruler of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Al Saud regime idealized its own values. With the enactment of these values in the state, his leadership will become solid. And vice versa, whether Sunni or Shia, any opposition force like Sheikh Nimr will be eliminated in order to maintain the status quo of Al Saud. The Al Saud regime's decision to execute Al-Nimr cannot be separated from the support of the West's "blank check on human rights". The election of Saudi as a panel of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the 2014-2016 period was a cover for its actions. Even The Independent said there was a hidden agreement between Britain and Saudi Arabia regarding this issue. Various human rights institutions in the world have explained a series of human rights violations committed by Saudi Arabia. Most recently, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Saudi Arabia used a banned weapon, a CBU-58 type cluster bomb produced by an arms factory in the US state of Tennessee in 1978 to hit residential areas around Sanaa, the Yemeni capital.

### **Fire Diplomacy: Oil and Sword**

Korany and Dessouki (1984) describe four components of foreign policy as a starting point for analysis in the form of the domestic environment, foreign policy orientation, decision-

making processes and behavior (Halliday, 2005: 28). In the context of the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, these four factors are a function of several variants with interactive factors, namely: Arab identity and its status as the largest entity of the Arabian Peninsula; a unique Islamic heritage as custodians of the Islamic holy sites of Mecca and Medina; petroleum natural resources and the impact of international finance that results (Eilts, 2004: 222). These various factors together with the full political and military support of the West, especially the US and UK, have made the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia more confident in claiming to be the most influential power in the Middle East region. Askari et al's study shows the Persian Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia as the main customers of the global military industry, especially from the United States. In fact, arms producers from various countries compete fiercely to reap the benefits of access to the very lucrative Persian Gulf arms market (Askari, 2009: 105-107).

The political character of Saudi Arabia is carried out very massively in the form of fire diplomacy using two means, the sword (military) and oil (money). The fire diplomacy reached its peak in the era of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, and his young son became defense minister, Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud. Highlighting the militarization of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report shows that Saudi Arabia is ranked as the fourth country with the largest military spending in the world after the US, China and Russia, valued at 80.8 billion dollars in 2014. SIPRI report also shows a budget increase of 112 percent from 2005 to 2014 with a percentage of 10.4 of the Arab country's gross domestic product (GDP) (SIPRI, 2014). Meanwhile, the International Institute for Strategic Studies places Saudi Arabia's military spending in third place in the world with a budget of 80.8 billion dollars and a contribution of 10.7 percent of the oil-rich country's GDP (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015). All of these figures are based on 2014 estimates that do not take into account the growing military costs of funding the continued war in Syria in support of Assad's opposition, in Iraq and Yemen, which continues today with direct or indirect US and British assistance. Apart from deploying military advisors, the US and Britain supplied weapons to Saudi Arabia in the Yemen war.

Apart from the military, the fire diplomacy carried out by the kingdom of Saudi Arabia uses oil (money) to realize its foreign interests. Saudi Arabia's decision to increase its oil supply beyond its quota to nearly 11 million barrels per day has caused oil prices to plummet to their lowest level in recent years. Although on the surface this policy is to hold back the pace of US Shale Oil, the CNN report shows that Iran (and Russia) are the main targets of the Saudi oil price reduction policy. Then, how long this strategy will continue. The reason is, this policy actually backfires for Riyadh itself. The Saudi Arabian rial exchange rate, which has been known to be strong, fell to its lowest level since 1999. Reuters (4/1/2016) reported that the exchange rate of one US dollar was 680 Saudi riyals, whereas on Thursday it was perched at 425 riyals. In addition, the Saudi stock exchange's composite stock price index fell 2.4 percent.

Perhaps in *ceteris paribus* conditions, all other variables are constant, the decline is still considered normal. But the problem is that Saudi Arabia is experiencing the largest budget deficit in its state budget in the last few decades. Last year, the IMF predicted a budget deficit of more than 400 billion riyals or the equivalent of \$ 107 billion. This figure is calculated with the oil sector's revenue of 81 percent, which is reduced from the previous 90 percent. However, the Riyadh-based Samba Financial Group expects state spending to increase by 0.4 percent in 2016.

Towards the end of 2015, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia decided to increase fuel prices by up to 50 percent in order to overcome a budget deficit of US \$ 98 billion, or around Rp.1,372 trillion. The US economic magazine Forbes ran an article by Katie Sola, an economic analyst, about breaking off diplomatic ties between Riyadh-Tehran, which would cost Saudi Arabia

billions of dollars. Forbes, in its report regarding the severance of relations between Saudi and Iran on Tuesday (5/1), revealed that if the Tehran-Riyadh cutoff resulted in stopping sending Iranian pilgrims to Saudi Arabia, Riyadh would lose most of its income. Forbes added that every year 100,000 Iranian pilgrims visit Saudi Arabia and contributed five percent of the world's two million Muslim pilgrims to Saudi Arabia in 2015. The American magazine emphasized that the pilgrimage is very helpful for the Saudi economy. According to Forbes, a Saudi economist stated that Saudi income from Haj and Umrah in 2014 was 18.6 billion dollars, of which 8.5 billion dollars came from Hajj. Therefore, if that figure were assumed for the Iranian Haj and Umrah pilgrims, the Saudis would lose three billion dollars.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Fire diplomacy was once carried out massively by Saddam Hossein's regime, assisted by the West on a large scale in the war with Iran from 1980 to 1988. But then the US changed direction when Saddam was out of control by attacking Kuwait which triggered the birth of UN sanctions and the inclusion of Iraq in articles the seven UN charters. Then, will the fate of Saudi Arabia in the hands of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz be like Iraq in Saddam's hands left by the West? Maybe time will test it.

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