

January 2020

SAUDI ARABIA'S INTERNAL CHANGES AND ITS FOREIGN POLICIESIN RESPONDING THE ARAB SPRING

Yon Machmudi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/irhs>

Recommended Citation

Machmudi, Yon (2020) "SAUDI ARABIA'S INTERNAL CHANGES AND ITS FOREIGN POLICIESIN RESPONDING THE ARAB SPRING," *International Review of Humanities Studies*: Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 1. Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/irhs/vol5/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Humanities at UI Scholars Hub. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Review of Humanities Studies by an authorized editor of UI Scholars Hub.

SAUDI ARABIA'S INTERNAL CHANGES AND ITS FOREIGN POLICIES IN RESPONDING THE ARAB SPRING

Yon Machmudi
Universitas Indonesia
machmudi@ui.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia's involvement in the Middle East's internal political problems for instance by supporting the Egyptian government under As-Sisi after the military coup against president Morsi and covertly supporting opposition groups can be understood as an attempt to prevent the Arab Springs from inducing political changes. Attempts were made to prevent outside influences from getting into Saudi Arabia by supporting new regimes friendly to the Saudis. In addition, Saudi Arabia has implemented many reforms to reduce the demand for political participation. The methods used were historical and qualitative research. The results show that Saudi Arabia was intentionally involved in the internal affairs of its neighboring countries and implemented internal reforms to prevent any effects of the Arab Springs in Saudi Arabia.

KEYWORDS: Saudi Arabia, Reforms, Arab Spring, Foreign Policy, and the Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The strengthening effect of the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, and Syria continues to concern the central governments of the Gulf countries. The area is known for its oil-rich countries that mostly practice a monarchy system. Public participation in politics is low and power is usually controlled by a royal family. The Arab Spring has brought the winds of political change and is expected to—sooner or later—occur in the Arab countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a country that has consistently maintained its traditional system of an absolute monarchy, and its leaders are concerned regarding how to respond to and influence the flow of the Arab Spring to prevent diminishing the power of the king and his supporters.

Saudi Arabia adheres to an absolute monarchy because of the absence of a written constitution. Instead, the state constitution refers to its interpretations of the teachings of the Koran and Hadith. Attempts to create a new constitution can be considered degrading to the two legacy Prophets by the monarchy; therefore, the words of the king's constitution is also considered part of the unwritten constitution that serves to explain the Quran and Hadith. The monarchy has attempted to accommodate legal problems by creating a type of formal constitution. The evolution of the Saudi state represents two tendencies among tribal politics: society and external changes that occur drastically. The main challenge becomes how Saudi Arabia plans to safeguard or surrender their various tribal interests.

Saudi Arabia's involvement in a variety of internal political problems in the Middle East in the form of support to the government after the military coup against president Morsi and covert support to opposition groups in Syria and Libya can be understood as an attempt to control the

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

political changes an Arab Spring could induce in the country. Attempts have been made to prevent outside influences from entering Saudi Arabia by supporting new regimes friendly to the Saudis. In addition, Saudi Arabia has implemented many reforms to reduce the demand for political participation.

This article investigates the responses of Saudi Arabia to the Arab Springs and the internal reforms implemented to prevent further effects of the Arab Springs in the country. The critical question is as follows: How has Saudi undergone internal changes and why does it interfere in the politics of other Arab countries?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political economy theory, which considers the role of economic assistance to influence the relationship between two countries, deserves consideration. In this case, Saudi Arabia often uses (what we call) the *political economy of assistance*, that is, as any aid to a country always involves the nature and motivations of for providing aid. As stated by Bakrania, all Saudi aid is channeled through specific agencies and aims to promote the country's influence in other countries (Bakrania, 2012). Notably, Saudi Arabia also provides humanitarian aid not related to politics.

In this case, aid from Saudi Arabia is channeled through the royal family and facilitated by governmental, semi-governmental, and nongovernmental organizations. At a regional level, most aid is motivated by political and humanitarian considerations. The assistance provided to some countries functions as foreign policy or a diplomatic instrument, for example, rewarding allies and building strategic alliances. By providing aid, Saudi Arabia can control, influence, and affect the internal politics of neighboring countries. The political economy of the aid Saudi Arabia provides reflects its interest in showing leadership in the region and preventing the importation of political problems from other countries.

CAUSES OF ARAB SPRING

Economic factors are the main causes of the Arab Spring. Poverty has plagued most of the Arab region, which has a wide gap between its rich and poor residents. Rich people are usually represented by the authorities and those living in poverty are underrepresented in government. This phenomenon is especially true in the Arab countries on the African continent, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, and Morocco. Other countries in the Fertile Crescent have similar economic conditions, namely, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Arab countries in the Arab region and the Arabian Peninsula are the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. The rich countries have closed political systems and are predominantly controlled by the royal family.

Unemployment among youth is a common phenomenon in Arab countries located in Africa and the Fertile Crescent, whereas the gulf area is relatively more economically stable. Statistic demonstrated that the unemployment rate is as high as 10%–20% (Noueihed, 2012, p. 12). Rich countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, are experiencing the same phenomenon. Unemployment does not arise due to the unavailability of jobs, but because jobs are mostly filled by expatriates. A major problem will occur if Saudi Arabia cannot afford the welfare it has been

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

providing. Demographically, the younger-aged population in this country is quite high.

The economic problems will affect political issues. Reform efforts have been made by Saudi Arabia, but no satisfactory progress has been observed. Efforts to limit the influence of the Arab Spring by helping the ruling regime and opposition are considered a common interest within Saudi Arabia. Prohibiting the Saudi youth from fighting in war-torn countries has also become a major policy; thus, they cannot leave the country and then return with new ideas that create new problems.

In spring 2008, a demonstration against the government spread to various countries in the Middle East. These protests against the government were largely fueled by popular discontent over economic problems, for example, the increasing prices of basic necessities. In Morocco, approximately 300 demonstrators were injured by government security forces while speaking out against the government's plans to cut subsidies of basic food. In Egypt, textile workers in the Nile Delta protested against the high price of basic commodities and low labor costs. The same movement also occurred in Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, and Bahrain.

One by one, the Arab countries are experiencing a political revolution where the citizens force a change in leadership. Tunisia was the first country to experience the Arab Spring, followed by Egypt, Yemen, and Libya. The political dynamics in the Middle East does not seem to favor of authoritarian rule and its long-time dominance in politics. Notably, the countries under a monarchy have become vulnerable to revolution and a change of power. Saudi Arabia is an influential monarchy in the Middle East and making a substantial effort to prevent the political revolutions in neighboring countries from affecting their society. Not surprisingly, to protect the power of Saudi Arabia, the government must engage in the internal problems of other Arab countries. Starting with Bahrain, Morocco, and Egypt, Saudi Arabia has continued to assist the authorities and status quo.

In general, the impetus of the Arab Spring was unstable economic and political conditions, namely, the increasing prices of basic needs caused by high oil prices, the decline in agriculture, and the small-medium enterprise, because of the citizen's dependence on speculative investments and the promise of substantial profits. In countries where oil and gas have not become major revenue staples, fuel oil is usually subsidized by the state. As a result, the amount of the subsidy for petroleum, for example, makes farmers reluctant to work in the agricultural sector. Therefore, when the price of oil increases, it can cause the type of economic recession that caused unrest.

Oil-rich countries usually provide their citizens economic compensation. In response to the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia now distributes USD 100 billion to its citizens. This amount is taken from the profits on the sale of oil in Saudi Arabia, which reached USD 250 billion within a period of three years (2015-2018). That is, the benefits recorded by the royal family had to be removed to manage the social unrest caused by the economic problems they had created. These cash incentives were beyond the typical royal subsidies, which are usually provided in the form of free education, health insurance, and unemployment insurance. Furthermore on January 6, 2018 the government issued a decree stated that the state to pay to its people to reduce the burden of VAT (value added tax), including health and education services as well as the first purchase of a house valued at up to \$226,660 (*Reuters*, January 6, 2018).

When rich countries can manage the economic crisis that is not the case with countries that are not producing oil (nonoil exporters). Citizens from countries that do not produce oil can

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

take advantage of working in the oil-rich countries when they have the appropriate skills and can acquire a visa. Hundreds of thousands of unfilled jobs in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula are filled by qualified expatriates from Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan. Egypt has received a remittance from workers in the Gulf countries of more than 4 billion dollars per year, and Jordan more than 3.2 billion dollars annually.

Arab countries are also experiencing an increase in youth unemployment, and Saudi Arabia is no exception. The unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia in 2009 increased from the previous year by 9.8% to 10.5%, and 39% of the unemployed in Saudi Arabia are young people aged between 20 and 24 years. Obviously, this is a major problem that must be addressed. Additionally, nearly 92% of working Saudis are employed by the government, and the remainder work in the private sector.

In 2013, the unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia decreased to 5.60% at the beginning of the year and was 5.50% by the end of the year. Average unemployment in Saudi Arabia from 1999–2013 was 5.44%. In 2006, the unemployment numbers were highest, at approximately 6.30%. Economically, Arabs must implement specific policies to address the increasing need for new workers who could not be accommodated in the government sector. If the younger generation does not get the channel jobs, this phenomenon will affect social issues, as has occurred in other countries in the Middle East.

The number of Saudi women who want jobs is increasing. The number of educated women in rich countries in the Middle East has experienced a tremendous increase, because they prefer to spend their time learning, rather than working. We posit that the traditions of the Arabs, especially in Saudi Arabia, which still restricts women from public work, have resulted in the improvement of education among women. If Saudi Arabia experienced economic problems, of course, those who have earned higher education would be encouraged to work to help strengthen the family economy. In addition, the increase in the number of educated women could lead to an increase in their personal expression, regarding voicing their opinions about public rights and politics.

A characteristic of the socioeconomic conditions in the Arab countries is the large income gap between the rulers and commoners; thus, poverty and social status causes distrust of the ruling elite. These problems are more prevalent in the relatively poor Arab countries in North Africa and the Fertile Crescent. Relatively stable conditions occur in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, including the Gulf countries.

Even if the economic problems can be solved by rich countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, these problems cannot be separated from the chronic problems of the monarchy. The rich countries' political channels to provide a forum for wider public participation in determining public affairs are relatively closed. Additionally,, the Arab countries are experiencing problems of political legitimacy. This condition does not only occur in countries that embrace the monarchy system but also in countries already using the system of the republic. In Arab countries with a republican system, while they have implemented democratization, it is limited to procedural democracy, in which the president elected through electoral mechanisms leads for an extended period of time. Authoritarianism has become common in the internal dynamics of politics in the Arab countries. Even though the ruler has allowed some limited political participation by establishing more inclusiveness in institutions, liberalization of the press, and less repression of the Shi'ite Muslims (Seznec, 2002, p. 32). Therefore, in politics

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

in the Middle East, they use the technical term *jumlukiyyah* (*jumhuriyyah mulukiyyah*), that is, a republic that adopts a political culture that remains attached to the royal system. The important question is whether a stable economy in the oil-rich countries could dampen the discontent of the people in closed political channels. The following analyzes the responses from Saudi Arabia to block the entry to the country's wave of political revolution.

SAUDI ARABIA'S RESPONSE TO THE ARAB SPRING

Saudi Arabia's response to the Arab Spring has not been entirely positive. The government has tended to intentionally weaken the revolutionary waves that have occurred in neighboring countries. Siding with the Saudi authorities against the status quo is very prominent. Notably, the Saudis cannot always avoid the impact of the revolution by relying on their interventionist policy, but they have enacted measures in anticipation of the spread of the Arab Spring.

Internal Reforms

The positive steps undertaken by Saudi Arabia are delineated in a policy of gradual reform. These policies include strengthening the consultative body that provides input on policies dictated by the king to provide a space for the public to have broader political access. Although still limited, these efforts have changed the political system of absolute monarchy, and the government is starting to accommodate groups outside the palace.

Actual political liberalization efforts have been made since King Fahd (1982–2005) came to power, and he has introduced a new tradition by creating democratic institutions. This trend was further encouraged by political reforms caused by the spread of democracy and public participation in the Arab countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf Silver 1990–1991 (Namay, 1998, p. 235). Saudi Arabia does not have a written constitution. The constitution is run by the royal party agreement involving an informal alliance between the royal family and traditional *ulama*. Government activities are run through the royal system and assisted by the council of ministers. In 1992, King Fahd introduced a reform program that provided space for royal institutional change by introducing a consultative council that helps to formulate laws and a constitution in Arabia. The role of this consultative council continued up to the time of King Abdullah. King Abdullah is known for being aggressive in introducing modern systems in Saudi Arabia by providing greater access to the general public, although this access is still limited. At the time of Abdullah, and other times, women have had strategic roles in Saudi Arabia, and leaders have given significant acknowledgment to its existence (Okruhlik, 2005, p. 190). However, in Saudi Arabia, the legal aspects remain consistent, in that only the Quran is followed, and God made man to execute the law. Therefore, the constitution made in Saudi Arabia is not a constitution that replaced the Quran but an attempt to set a fixed law based on the Koran.

King Abdullah has provided channels for public participation and media for young children to enable productive participation in the development of Saudi Arabia. The closure of access to the political problems will create apathy among the youth, and this has alerted the king to provide them with constructive activities as an alternative to involvement in terrorist activities. It has been observed that dissatisfaction among the Saudi youth with the political system that developed in

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

Arabia has been increasing religious radicalization. Activities that increase radicalization and terrorism in Saudi Arabia have created political instability and threaten the position of the king (Hegghammer, 2008, p. 701-715). Therefore, Saudi Arabia has been imposing penalties on citizens involved in terrorist activities inside and outside Saudi Arabia. In the 1990s, the kingdom tended to allow the activities of its citizens outside the country, with the assumption that this practice reduced resistance to the hardliners in the kingdom. Currently, however, the country has a tough stance on citizens who engage in acts of jihad in other countries (Schwartz, 2003, p. 244).

From an economic aspect, Saudi Arabia provides substantial national economic assistance to every citizen in the form of making it easy to get a job and increasing salaries and housing assistance. The purpose of the financial assistance is to maintain political stability, and the reason the government was willing to make this expenditure on a large scale could be the impact of the economic crisis (Jones, 2001, p. 54-64). Oil production in large quantities and high oil prices have a positive impact on the Saudis in that the government channels this money as economic assistance to its citizens. However, Saudi Arabia must retain the world's oil supply to control the price of oil, that is, they prevent the price from soaring to the detriment of the interests of its foreign policy partners, especially the United States. By following this policy of oil price fixing, the price of oil remains in compliance with the wishes of the United States and is an important part of the Saudi strategy to maintain the support it requires as it faces the possibility of a wave of Arab Spring.

Saudi Arabia economic conditions that have not improved due to declining oil prices have threatened political stability and the future of the kingdom. Even predicted if there were no serious steps taken by the kingdom, Saudi Arabia could potentially experience bankruptcy. Since 2015, Saudi has a budget deficit and continues in 2016 and 2017. However, the increase of oil price in 2018 has reduce the potential of saudi's financial problems.

In order to overcome this economic problem, Saudi launched a very ambitious program called Saudi Vision 2030 as part of the socio-economic reforms. It is hoped that through this program, the dependence of state income on the oil sector could be reduced by 50 percent and new jobs are created, especially for women workers. It seems that this rescue program has not shown satisfactory results even though in general the trend of deficit starts can be reduced.

Saudi involvement in the unresolved Yemen's war further adds to the kingdom's financial burden. Furthermore, the Saudi miscalculated decision to impose the economic embargo and termination of foreign political relations with Qatar had reduced the public confidence in the authorities. Moreover currently Saudi start to have foreign loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This policy is believed to further worsen the Saudi Arabia's economy since many research shows that most African countries, for example, which are assisted by the IMF actually end in more tragic conditions. While it is not uncommon that state's budgets are also used to finance the royal family's luxurious lifestyle.

In these conditions, Muhammad bin Salman who would inherit the royal throne tried to take a "brave" step to save the future of the kingdom and improve the image in the public eye. One of them is by launching an operation to eradicate corruption with the pretext of increasing efficiency, transparency and accountability. On Nov. 4, 2017 Saudi Arabia arrested 11 princes including Prince Waleed bin Talal charging of corruption activities in the kingdom (Kirkpatrick, 2017).

The impact of corruption eradication operations is expected to reap public appreciation and support. Therefore, the public support is needed by the kingdom because the kingdom plans to

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

impose some taxes for families in Saudi and also the additional tax value to its people in order to raise revenue from non-oil sectors,

In addition, the Saudi government began to reduce benefits for royal employees and would revoke electricity subsidies and other basic needs that have been burdened the Kingdom's finances. It is understandable that the subsidy revocation program and the introduction of taxes for the Saudi people will lead to social unrest so that an increase in the image of the authorities needs to be increased through corruption eradication programs. Although this program is actually suspected as an attempt to consolidate politics and get rid of princes who are not in line with Bin Salman's policy.

Efforts to strengthen the position of the Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman is necessary to ensure the process of the leadership succession run smoothly. King Salman wants to ensure when he released his power it would soon be followed by the appointment of the Crown Prince as a king.

Considering there is a tendency in the Saudi political culture that when the father dies, immediately the king's son has lost influence in the court's family. This political consolidation needs to be done to ensure that the very young Muhammad Bin Salman can become the next Saudi King in a smooth way.

Some attempts are done to cut the influence of the Crown Prince's competitors, among others, the King's policy of removing Prince Mutib bin Abdullah from the position of Minister of National Defense relating to corruption issues. Whilst the mysterious death of Prince Mansour bin Muqrin in a plane crash after the princes' arrest also is considered to be part of strategies to remove the critical princes in the Palace. Mansour's father, Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz himself, was appointed Crown Prince in the early days of King Salman in power and was later replaced by Muhammad bin Nayef bin Abdul Aziz. Shortly after serving as crown prince Muhammad bin Nayef was later replaced by Muhammad bin Salman.

Presumably the effort to create a positive image through corruption eradication and political consolidation done by the kingdom aims to protect the power. It is hoped that the impact of the Arab Spring does not affect political change in Saudi Arabia and jeopardize his plan to stay in power.

POLITICS OF ASSISTANCE AND INTERVENTION

To maintain economic stability and reduce dependence on oil production, Saudi Arabia has made economic policy in terms of food security. The government is concerned about the high import dependence, especially regarding the basic needs of its people; thus, they have created a new policy to address *food security*. This policy opens up new fields of agriculture outside Saudi Arabia as suppliers. Most of the farms were opened in Africa and Southeast Asia and involved investors from Saudi Arabia. Thus, the basic needs of Saudi Arabia will continue to be fulfilled from outside the country but will remain in control of Saudi investors. This policy is part of the Saudi's cooperation to create stability in the Arab region that prevents unnecessary political change.

From the international aspect, Arabia continues to exert a more aggressive approach by conducting political stabilization in neighboring countries experiencing turbulence. Upheavals that

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

affect the revolution will greatly affect Arabia; thus, the kingdom, with its power at the regional level, is always involved in the political affairs of neighboring countries as well as others directly involved in the political dynamics of Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria. Efforts to prevent its citizens from engaging in the illegal wars in war-torn countries have been conducted to monitor the royal party in the country that has the potential to cause political instability in Saudi Arabia. This effort, compared with the crown policies, directly involves political matters in other countries that have the potential to create a revolution.

Saudi Arabia wants to assist its neighboring countries resolve political issues and ensure the power does not fall to the group that jeopardizes the position of the status quo. In foreign policy, the Saudis remain committed to safeguarding the interests of the United States and seek to optimally serve that political support to maintain the existence of the monarchy. By providing economic compensation to the people, being directly involved in the political affairs of neighboring countries, and consistently maintaining the interests of the United States, the Saudi government continues to maintain political stability in the country and region and has, at least so far, prevented the entry of the Arab Spring wave to his country (Partrick, 2016).

Furthermore, Since King Abdullah's leadership (2005-2015) there has been a shift in the direction of Saudi foreign policy by making Asia an alternative partner to replace Western hegemony (America). The strategy used is a strategy known as "managed multi dependence" (MMD). MMD is a strategy to find a variety of foreign relations with major countries in order to reduce dependence and hegemony in one large country (United States). The change of Saudi foreign policy can be seen from when King Abdullah chose China and India as his first trip outside the Middle East region in early 2006.

In February and March 2014, Salman bin Abdul Aziz, during his time as Crown Prince, was tasked with visiting Japan, India and China. The position of these three countries is considered very strategic because the merging of the wealth of these three countries turns out to be equal to the amount of US state wealth that has been a loyal ally of Saudi Arabia. Likewise, all three countries have jointly capable of absorbing more than 39% of Saudi oil. A very large amount compared to the US itself which only absorbs 19%.

King Abdullah's policy of reducing American hegemony and glancing at Asia was followed by his successor, King Salman. In June 2015, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sent the Deputy Crown Prince and Minister of Defense, Muhammad bin Salman, to visit Moscow to sign bilateral cooperation agreements in the oil, military, nuclear and space exploration sectors. After that royal visits were carried out in Asian countries such as Japan, China, South Korea and India. Although the US currently still dominates Saudi oil purchases (19%) but four Asian countries (Japan, China, South Korea and India) potentially replace American position. These four countries each buy oil to Saudi by 1.2 million BPD (Japan), 1.1 million BPD (China), 0.9 million BPD (South Korea) and 0.8 million BPD (India). The total imports of Asian countries from Arabia reached 4 million bpd (51%). Even up to 2040 their needs will continue to increase while the US is currently beginning to limit its oil imports because it focuses on fulfilling itself (Yamada, 2015).

Currently Indonesia's oil imports has reach 0.55 million bpd and will continue to climb up to 0.88 million bpd. About 29% of Indonesia's oil needs are supplied from Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in line with the strategy of Saudi MMD's fairly effective in shifting the US hegemony in Arabia, Indonesia's position is very important because of Indonesia's large oil import needs that is below

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

India and this will be an important market prospect for the Saudis.

Although Indonesia-Saudi Arabia historically had a special relationship because of religious similarities, the bilateral relations between the two countries are not as strong as often assumed by many observers. Indonesia is not a strategic partner for Saudi Arabia while Indonesia's foreign policy's strategy for long time have been oriented towards the West. Most dominant issues deals with Indonesia Saudi Arabia's relation are women workers in Saudi Arabia.

There is a misperception between the two countries that it affects the optimal bilateral relations between them. Saudis who often use aid strategies (politics of assistance) focus more on cooperation in the field of religion by building religious facilities (houses of worship) and religious schools. Uniquely, the role of diplomacy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Indonesia is mostly done by Religious attaches because of the absence of trade attaches and education.

Saudi religious assistance does not mean without problems. The amount of assistance to different religious foundations with a majority of Muslims in Indonesia has created a potential religious conflict. Since the New Order era, the Indonesian government's attitude towards countries in the Middle East has been less positive due to radicalism issues. The Middle East, including Saudi Arabia is suspected of being the center of the spread of radical Islamic movements in Indonesia.

It was not realized that the emphasis of religious cooperation turned out to make the relations between the two countries not optimal. The Saudis consider Indonesia a deficit in terms of religion while the Indonesian side is concerned about the potential entry of radical streams into Indonesia. As a result, cooperation in the economic and non-religious education sectors is not optimal, even though the potential of these two countries is very large.

In terms of investment, Saudi Arabia has enormous potential. The Saudi investors are very identical to the royal family. The political and economic policies of the royal are always interrelated. Most of the wealthy Saudis are royal families. For instance, the Prince Waleed bin Talal bin Abdul Aziz is one of the richest people in the world with a fortune reaching USD 20 billion. In 2005 he donated Harvard University and Georgetown for USD 40 million to develop Islamic studies.

On the other hand education cooperation in Indonesia is mostly played by the Islamic and Arabic Education Institute (LIPIA) in Jakarta which is planned to be developed in three regions in Indonesia. Educational cooperation and assistance is not much done with well-known public universities in Indonesia. As a result, Saudi's role in Indonesia tends to be peripheral because it only appears in the religious domain. Unlike Iran and Turkey, for example, it began to focus on working on cooperation in the field economics and general education. President Ahmadinejad (2006) and Abdullah Gul (2011) for example, took time to visit the University of Indonesia to deliver a message of peace attended by thousands of students. The resonance also blossomed among young Indonesians.

Saudi investment in the US is also quite large, reaching USD 600 billion. More recently, the US Treasury Department to disclose information about the value of the US debt to Saudi peak of \$ 116.8 billion (CNN,2016). Political change in the US, especially since Trump came to power, caused the Saudi kingdom and its investors to feel uncomfortable and began to transfer their funds. Saudi anger was shed on the United States when the country tried to pass a law on terrorism which gave victims' families the chance to September 11 to demand that Saudi be responsible for the

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

incident. The kingdom also threatened to withdraw funds from the US. Last year it was reported that as much as USD 200-300 billion was withdrawn by Saudi investors from the US (South Front, 2016) and the rest were waiting for development. Indonesia as the largest Muslim country in the world where in 2050 will enter the top four world economic giants has the potential to be an alternative for Saudi investors.

CONCLUSION

The countries in the Middle East are vulnerable to a wave of Arab Spring because of their low political legitimacy. Both oil-rich countries and those that do not produce oil have similar conditions in terms of low political participation and low public access to the political process. The main issue of the Arab Spring is leader succession. In addition to economic issues, the Arab Spring is a phenomenon in the Middle East that describes the magnitude of the people's demand for freedom of speech and assembly (organization). Freedom is what is largely absent in these Arab countries. The public also wants to be involved with political issues and public affairs concerning their livelihood. The dominance of the elite and political groups in the Middle East is very strong; thus, little space is available for the distribution of power. Small groups with a stronghold as well as follow-tribal and kinship are a common phenomenon in politics of the Arab world.

Saudi Arabia has generally shown two responses to the Arab Spring. These responses suggest that different orientations, namely, the royal Western-oriented elites who create a Western model in politics and conservative elites who strive to maintain their dominance in the Saudi Wahhabi religious orientation. Gradually, the kingdom led by King Abdullah is introducing political reforms through strengthening the consultation council (consultative assembly) but continues to honor the king as a major force in all political institutions. Prince Nayef, who represents conservative groups, tended to retain the functions of the clergy in providing political legitimacy and reduced the strong desire of the people to be involved in the political process in the country (Doran, 2004, p. 35-51).

Although the economic crisis is characterized by increasing unemployment and high prices of basic necessities, the Saudi kingdom seeks to reduce these economic problems by providing more incentives to its people. Substantial financial assistance is provided to prevent the public confidence in the king from decreasing. The king is still regarded as a servant of the people and also a religious waiter as a custodian of the two holy cities. This factor has ensured the survival of Saudi Arabia's monarchy system and blocked the effects of the Arab Spring.

Saudi Arabia has implemented important changes in its politics and economy in the face of a wave of Arab Spring. Saudi Arabia also showed a more aggressive role in international relations by supporting the regime (the status quo) and strengthening its relationship with the United States. Thus, Saudi Arabia has attempted to portray itself as a great, regional power with substantial influence while protecting the interests of the king and his family.

The increasing population, the sectarian conflict at the regional level, and the inability to sustain welfare in the kingdom will affect the internal conditions of Saudi Arabia. The increasing population, the increasing of regional and the sectarian resentments, and the decline of the welfare state have become the main issues of Arabia. Slow and fast waves Arab Spring will occur in rich

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol. 5, No.1, January 2020, pp. 1-12

countries, and Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that might be affected by the change. Economic problems and social course must be completed. Additionally, and no less important, community needs and political openness should also be given a channel in the form of gradual political liberalization. This process can be implemented by strengthening political reform efforts and making Saudi Arabia a country with a constitutional monarchy system, instead of an absolute monarchy.

REFERENCES

- Cotterrell, L., & Harmer, A. 2005, *Diversity in donorship: the changing landscape of official humanitarian aid: aid donorship in the gulf states*. London: Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Policy Group.
- Dequin, H. 1976, *The challenge of Saudi Arabia*. Singapore: Eurasia Press.
- Doran, M. S., 2004, The Saudi paradox. *Foreign Affairs*, January-February.
- Harper, R. A., 2007, *Saudi Arabia*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Hegghamm, T., 2008, Islamist violence and regime stability in Saudi Arabia. *International Affairs*, 84.
- Jones, T. C., 2011, Saudi Arabia versus the Arab Spring. Raritan, Fall.
- Kechichian, J. A., 2001, *Succession in Saudi Arabia*, New York: Palgrave.
- Kirkpatrick, David D., 2017, "Saudi Arabia Arrests 11 Princes, Including Billionaire Alwaleed bin Talal." *The New York Times*, Nov. 4.
- Namay, R. A., 1998, The new Saudi representative assembly. *Islamic Law and Society*, 5.
- Niblock, T., 2006, *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy, and survival*. New York: Routledge.
- Noueihed, L., & Alex, W., 2012, *The battle for the Arab Spring: revolution, counter revolution and the making of a new era*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Partrick, N., 2016, *Saudi Arabian foreign policy: conflict and cooperation*. London: IB Tauris.
- Reed, J., 2007, *The Saudi Royal family*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Reuters*, January 6, 2018
- Schwartz, S., 2003, *The two faces of Islam: Saudi fundamentalism and its role in terrorism*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Seznec, Jean-François. , 2002, "Democratization in the Arab World? Stirrings in Saudi Arabia." *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 13, Number 4 October 2002.
- Wynbrandt, J., 2004, *A brief history of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Facts on File Inc.
- Yamada, Makio. 2015, "Saudi Arabia's Look - East Diplomacy: Ten Years On', *The Middle East Policy*, 01 December 2015