

Mohammed ALSHEHRI
The Faculty of Political Sciences, The Bucharest University

SAUDI ARABIA'S DIPLOMATIC POLICY OF CONTAINMENT AND REJECTION OF POLARIZATION FOLLOWED UNDER KING SALMAN

Case study

Keywords
diplomacy,
club diplomacy,
network diplomacy,
stability,
containment policy.

Abstract

In a world and century facing continuously challenges due to complex phenomena as globalization, regionalization, terrorism, diplomacy has to lead these new trends, trying to maintain an equilibrium between traditional, classical elements and new ones. The author intends to emphasize the availability of these new trends of diplomacy in the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after the death of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz.

Motto: "Diplomacy: the art of restraining power." (Henry A. Kissinger)

In a world and century facing continuously challenges due to complex phenomena as globalization, regionalization, terrorism, diplomacy are, diplomacy has to lead these new trends, trying to maintain an equilibrium between traditional, classical elements and new ones.

Diplomacy is seen as an institution that orders at international level; is the helpful instrument that tries to install peace and stability all around the world.

Diplomacy is compared with a salient activity in nowadays world, a world characterized by the feature that the core authoritative actor is still the state. At the same time, in some respects the practice of diplomacy is following the technology age's challenges, meeting changes to the context, tools, actors and domain of the trade. These changes arise from the changing nature of the state, the changing nature of the whole world order, and the interconnections between them (Cooper, Heine and Thakur, 2013).

As in medicine it is well known that better to prevent a disease instead applying a treatment, we can strongly affirm that this principle has entirely availability in diplomacy.

The two core elements of diplomacy that have to be met at any level are representation and communication. The first one refers to the way actors behave towards others within the international system, while the second one defines a way to influence those others and promote own interests (Pigman, 2010).

According to these new trends, the interdependence between different levels of diplomatic activities has to increase, and also the social connectivity between involved diplomatic networks has to increase.

Traditional "club" and new "network" diplomacy are cornerstones for the deal with the complexities of modern diplomacy (Cooper, Heine, and Thakur, 2013).

Sometimes, diplomacy is confused with foreign policy making.

According to the increased dimensions of the existing interdependence between the actors on diplomatic scene and to the complex dimension of the issues, diplomacy met changes in terms of agendas and multilateralism. Also diplomatic agendas include now new security threats, as climate change, global health risks or terrorism are, but also human rights or migration issues since they can affect the whole globe and connect different actors.

Nowadays multilateralism raised as a consequence for the need of different international actors or leaders to be heard their voices, trying to

solve the problems presented by them. It is known that top-level officials meet on an ad-hoc basis, determining so known shuttle diplomacy.

The difference between traditional club diplomacy and new network diplomacy consists in the fact the first one refers only to state actors that can be identified with a strong hierarchy and act according to secrecy rules, while network diplomacy allows for more players from the big scene of diplomacy to interact with greater transparency and openness. What is important is that both types face problems of legitimacy and accountability though differences and challenges exist for domestic and foreign policy, for inclusion of new actors that belong to different cultures, different set of rules. The table below tries to synthesize the main differences between the two types of diplomacy.

It is important to mention that network diplomacy is closely connected to social media and its new trends. All events are closer to the actors through the social media channels.

The author intends to focus the attention of the reader on the diplomatic policy lead in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by King Salman after the death of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, on 23rd of January 2015. This moment represented an important turning point within Saudi's home. Under King Salman it is expected to see significant change in the Saudi foreign policy in handling important issues that were in the attention of policymakers in the world, considering the impact Saudi Arabia had in the Arab Spring, a tangible and dramatic one in the reign of King Abdullah.

Immediately after King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz death, more than 15 country presidents and high-level officials visited Saudi Arabia to listen and discuss the Kingdom's opinions regarding many vital international issues and most certainly , to reinforce the bilateral relations with the new Saudi leaders, in a clear and explicit expression of the advanced position of the Kingdom and its leadership in the international scene.

The outputs resulted from these visits represent the new Saudi foreign policy frameworks. Therefore, the author intends to highlight the most significant visits and the outcome at the internal level of the Kingdom, regionally and internationally along. In chronologically order, the most important visits where:

- US President's Barack Obama visit on 27th of January 2015-08-04

With the occasion of his visit in the Kingdom, President Obama presented his condolences and secondly, he included discussions and coordination in many issues of common concern. There was underlined by both parties the strength of those relationships and joint coordination in crucial issues, most notably, Oran's

nuclear program which has been declined by the Kingdom, along with possession of nuclear weapons to any party in the region, while still ensuring the right to peaceful and meaningful use of nuclear energy. The two sides also expressed deep concern over the fate of Yemen, a country in great distress and turmoil from the overturned case by the Houthi group called “The agreement of peace and partnership” led by UN, with bad outcome of national dialogue, in a blatant challenge to the sovereignty of Yemen and in attempt to impose foreign agendas (Iran) in the internal Yemeni affairs.

The Kingdom’s strict position in all forms of violence and extremism was also confirmed, maintain the continuity of the previous approach regarding terrorism by ideology and military ways, extremism which affected the image of Islam.

- Prince of Qatar visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 17th of February 2015

In order to solidify the bonds of fraternal relations within GCC space, the Prince of Qatar

came to discuss all the ongoing issues in the Arab world, especially since the state of tension and polarization prevailed the GCC House, determined by the differences within the Council, which have defused after the efforts resulted in the signing of the “Riyadh Agreement Supplementary”. Certainly, the stability of Egypt, was at the top of the agenda, concerning all parties, and with it the Syrian crisis, which worsened dramatically after four years of Syrian people suffering and the nearby regions, in the absence of clear and practical solutions to end the crisis that seized an entire population suffering from displacement and systematic murder.

- Egyptian President visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 1st of March 2015

This visit revealed the importance of the relations between the two countries as it lies in the importance of how the visit evolved during the economic conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh, meant to support the “tottering” Egyptian economy, in which the Egyptian president mentioned that the country is counting on the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to succeed in the future economic reforms.

With regard to the situation in Syria, Saudi media reported that King Salman discussed with President al-Sissi possible ways to salve Syria and stop civil war, especially after the Syrian opposition failed to topple President Bashar al-Assad, President Sisi pointing out to King Salman that there should be a political solution for the conflict in Syria

In the regional diplomacy, Saudi Arabia has become a key player while Egypt has sidelined itself in the waning period of the Mubarak regime, turning inward while it waits for the succession. An extremely vigilant country, historically unwilling to

rock its relationship with the United States, the Kingdom has been pursuing an unusually independent and, by its standards, assertive policy (Ottaway and Herzallah, 2008).

- Turkish President visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 2nd of March 2015

This visit is considered a historical visit considering the difference of opinions between the two capitals, here referring to the Arab Spring and to the consequences of the rise of Islamist parties in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular (which received support from Turkey), in the region and their participation in the political process within the targeted countries, especially in the approach with Iran.

The visit expressed the desire of both parts to remove the apathy that characterized the relationship between the two countries, and when referring to apathy that characterized the relationship, that does not imply the contrast between the two countries. With this occasion, Turkish President expressed the common concerns of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in all issues in the region, excepting Egyptian affairs and stated that the variation will not affect the excellent relations existing between Riyadh and Ankara.

- President of South Korea visited Saudi Arabia on 3rd of March 2015

One of the most important visits held in the mentioned period (after death of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz) is the one of South Korea’s President, with significant outcomes in the field of domestic affairs, after the signing of a memorandum of cooperation linked to the peaceful nuclear program in the Kingdom.

All visits had an important role in the field of foreign affairs policies led by important state leaders, proving their strong qualities in the field of diplomacy and revealing that these qualities are updated according to nowadays trends.

For a success in the big arena of diplomacy, it has to be used a mix of instruments, focusing on leaders and their incentives that hold great promise to define the different policies and behavior of different regime types, not only in international relations, but also in comparative politics (Debs and Goemans, 2010).

Conclusions

The position the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has from political and economic weight in the world is far from easy. Saudi Arabia’s position does not qualify to be a normal state, but to be a pivotal state in the region, even an influential country in the world. Kingdom’s strategic geopolitical position and its importance within economical, political and religious powers will be strengthened thanks to the policy led by rejecting polarization and a policy of containment, and this

way hoping for the installment of a sustainable stability in the region and in the whole world.

Saudi Arabia will continue its active role within the GCC and Arab World considering that within Arab World exists a wide array of programs and “leadership” providers, but not necessary reflecting the complex framework providers of leadership use in order to do their work (Al-Dabbagh, Assaad, 2010).

References

[1] Al-Dabbagh, M., Assaad, C., 2010, *Taking Stock and Looking Forward: Leadership Development in the Arab World*, prepared for Appreciating and Advancing Leadership for Public Wellbeing, a workshop sponsored by NYU Abu Dhabi Institute, Research Center for Leadership in Action, NYU Wagner

[2] Cooper, A. F., Heine, J., Thakur, R., 2013, *Introduction: The Challenges of 21st Century*

Diplomacy, in Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine & Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 1-31

[3] Debs, A., Goemans, H.E., 2010, *Regime Type, the Fate of Leaders, and War*, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 104, No. 3, August 2010

[4] Heine, J., 2006, *On the Manner of Practising the New Diplomacy*, Working Paper No. 11, “Re-Shaping Diplomacy”, The Centre for International Governance Innovation, p.5

[5] Ottaway, M., Herzallah, M., 2008, *The New Arab Diplomacy: Not With the US and Not Against the US*, *Carnegie Papers*, No. 94, July 2008, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Massachusetts

[6] Pigman, G. A. (2010), *Contemporary Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Polity Press

Tables

Table 1 – Club versus Network Diplomacy

	Number of players	Structure	Form	Transparency	Main Purpose
Club diplomacy	Few	Hierarchical	Mostly written	Low	Sign agreements
Network diplomacy	Many	Flatter	Written and oral	High	Increase bilateral flows

Source: Heine, J., (2006), “On the Manner of Practising the New Diplomacy”, Working Paper No. 11, “Re-Shaping Diplomacy”, The Centre for International Governance Innovation, p.5