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### **The day when Saudi Arabia changes its name**



Historically speaking, Saudi Arabia is a relatively new state established in 1932. As its official name of "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" indicates, it is the Arabian kingdom ruled by Al Saud family. Abdulaziz Al Saud (known as Ibn Saud), founder of the third Saud dynasty in Riyadh, conquered the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and became the first king of Saudi Arabia. After he passed away his sons succeeded to the throne. The present King Salman is one of his sons. Crown prince, Muhammad bin Salman (so-called MbS), is Salman's son. He is the third generation of Saud royal family. He is scheduled to become eighth king. However, the political and economic situation of Saudi Arabia inside and outside is not stable. There is no guarantee that Muhammad will become the king. This paper points out the possibility that the Saud family may lose their power. The reasons are as follows.

### **Legitimacy claimed by the Saud family**

It was natural that Abdulaziz al Saud, who controlled the Arabian Peninsula by force, declared his country as "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" to show off his power. A country which has the name for the ruling family is hardly seen in the world. Another example is "the Kingdom of Jordan and Hashemite" (known as Jordan) only. Hashemite is the family name of Prophet Muhammad. The second King Saud and his successors inherited country's name and boasted the autocracy by Saud family without visible objection from inside and outside of the country. However, after World War II, democracy and legalism became the mainstream of the world. The strong head wind blew on Saudi Arabia and its ruler.

Taking the democratic and legalism movement into consideration, the fifth King Fahd enacted the Saudi Basic Law in 1992. Article 5 of the Law states that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by

Abdulaziz and his male descendants. It clearly declared that the Saud family kept the legitimacy to rule the state. However, the Basic Law is for the Saud family itself only. It doesn't mean that people accept the legitimacy of the Saud family.

To justify the legitimacy of the autocracy, King Fahd took advantage of Islam religion. In 1986, he declared himself as "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques". He added the religious authority on the throne. There are three sacred places in Islam; Makkah, Madinah and Jerusalem. Makkah and Madinah are in Saudi Arabian territory. It should be noted that even though the King of Saudi Arabia declared to be guardian of Islamic holy cities, Saudi rulers are obviously secular authority. He aimed to get religious legitimacy of Islam. Saudi Arabian rulers have strictly abided the Wahhabism, one of the Salafism (fundamentalism) movements. But now they try to dilute the religious colors. They keep out fundamentalism. Furthermore, they defined the Islamic Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. Senior people who has religious confidence for Islam is skeptical about the selfishness of Saudi rulers.

In addition to the religious legitimacy, rulers, in common, are required to have secular legitimacy based on the contractual relationship with citizens. In a common nation-state, the ruler is required to protect human rights, life and property of citizens. In case the ruler protects the minimum requirements, citizens accept the duty of tax payment in return. And if the ruler consumed the tax arbitrarily, citizens have the right to change the ruler. That would be the common rule of modern society.

Saudi Arabia, however, is a rentier state and there is no need to collect income tax from individuals. The rentier state is a state which derives all or a substantial portion of its national revenues from the rent of indigenous resources to external clients (from Wikipedia). In case of Saudi Arabia, the wealth of oil is the income resource of the state. The Saudi ruler makes the people happy or suppresses people's complaint by distributing the wealth of oil to the people.

There is another factor for the people to support the monarchy. If the king does not suppress the people and fulfills his duty, people admit the monarchy. This is so-called Noblesse oblige. This means that someone with power and influence should use their social position to help other people. This makes sense in the modern society. The European royal family or the Japanese imperial family which are widely accepted in each country are such examples. The Saud family should be questioned if they are respected by citizens.

### **Deteriorating legitimacy**

Crown Prince Muhammad has argued that "Saudi Arabia should become an ordinary state. He aimed to reform national economy which does not rely on oil. He calls for the burden on the people by introducing VAT (Value Added Tax). His claim is degrading the legitimacy of Al Saud family.

People themselves feel that the burden is inevitable to support the rapidly increasing population. But most of elderly people who had been accustomed to their easy life are not prepared for hard life. They used to rely on the government when their life getting worse.

Young people are more concerned about their future than elderly people. It might be difficult to be hired by public sectors. The option is to work in a private sector or to become an entrepreneur. Private sectors are less attractive than public ones because of low salaries and less welfare benefits. As a result, young people tend to become entrepreneur. Crown prince advocates Vision2030, which introduce new businesses like AI, IT and entertainment. He agitates youth for entrepreneurship.

Starting a new business is not so easy. The goddess of victory smiles at only a few people who is capable in creativity and has extraordinary concentration. Saudi youths who were raised under the luke-warm education and full welfare system cannot be expected creativity and concentration. Their dreams would be broken down and many of youth will become jobless in the future. They have to scream out the inability of the government.

It does not mean that the revolution will take place in Saudi Arabia in the very near future. The revolution is an act of anger by taxpayers against incapable ruler. But Saudi Arabia has a wealth of oil that can soothe the people. It seems that the policy not to rely on oil will end in failure and Saudi Arabia might return to the rentier state again.

At that time, the people will begin to question whether oil wealth is equally distributed. When they wondered about the wealth distribution policy by the Saud family, they have to think whether it is appropriate that their country is "Saudi Arabia" or not.

Your comment on this matter would be highly appreciated.

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