

# Coronavirus and Saudi Arabia's "Soft Power". Will This Year's Hajj be Cancelled? "Pilgrims bring in Billions of Dollars..."

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*Today, the tourism industry is considered as one of the important sources of the soft power of countries in promoting and disseminating its material and spiritual attractions to attract other nations of the world. Saudi Arabia is known as a country with the soft power of religious tourism due to its Islamic richness and Muslim holy sites. Despite high economic income from oil sales, Saudi Arabia is seeking to expand its tourism industry and tourism for pilgrim's day by day due to the presence of Mecca and Medina, to spread its culture and achieve its political goals by bringing pilgrims from different parts of the world. Get an outsider. But in late February, Saudi Arabia abruptly suspended all visas for Umrah and pilgrimage to the holiest Muslim city. A city with about thirteen million visitors a year. Today, the two holy cities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Mecca and Medina, are fully involved in the spread of the coronavirus. Even Saudi citizens are barred from traveling to the two cities as pilgrims. Saudi officials are likely to cancel the Hajj this year, in late July, for the first time in two centuries. In this memo, seeks to address the consequences of the suspension of Hajj on Saudi policies.*

Although the suspension or cancellation of this year's Hajj has not yet been officially announced, the Saudi Minister of Hajj has called on the public to abandon plans for their pre-booked trips, which may indicate a formal and imminent suspension. This year's Hajj ceremony. However, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has not yet commented on the official announcement of the cancellation of this year's Hajj. Riyadh has acted faster than most other Muslim states and religious institutions in response to the spread of Kuwait-19. Al-Azhar University in Egypt was hesitant to cancel Friday prayers until late March. Other Muslim countries, such as Malaysia and Morocco, have been slow to close their mosques.

Despite the obvious benefits of suspending Umrah and Hajj in preventing the spread of coronavirus and public health, Saudi Arabia will pay a heavy price for its precautionary measures. Pilgrims bring billions of dollars into the country each year, so the Saudi economy will suffer severely as the crisis continues. The Times of India writes about the kingdom's huge revenue from Hajj: "After oil and gas, the tourism industry is the most important industry in Saudi Arabia." Seven percent of Saudi Arabia's total non-oil GDP comes from Hajj. Many luxury hotels in Mecca cost around \$ 5,800 a night to stay in hotels overlooking the Kaaba. In 2016, the country earned \$ 76 billion from the tourism industry. This year, Saudi Arabia's only domestic tourism sector, including pilgrims and tourists from historical and tourist areas, made a profit of nearly \$ 48 billion, and the total number of trips by foreign tourists to Saudi Arabia is reported to be 13 million. Therefore, the sustainability and development of the tourism industry from the perspective of Saudi Arabia is an important

strategy in the field of soft power to improve its position in the eyes of the world's Muslim public opinion and by investing in it, it produces attractiveness and enhances its soft power. The paper cites the pilgrimage as a "new oil" in Saudi Arabia and continues: The 2030 Vision Document, compiled by Saudi Crown Prince Bin Muslim to develop the non-oil sector of the economy, focuses on pilgrimage. The country has developed plans to develop businesses in Mecca and plans to build 115 new buildings, 7,000 hotels, and 9,000 homes. These programs create 1.5 million jobs.

Apart from the economic importance of Hajj, pilgrimage is one of the most important tools of the soft power of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has endangered the public image of the country with the outbreak of the coronavirus. By cutting off this powerful transnational current, the Coronavirus reveals Saudi Arabia's turmoil in the Islamic world. The Associated Press writes that the Hajj has never been separate from politics in Saudi Arabia; in fact, since 100 years ago when Al-Saud took control of the country's political and religious foundations, the Hajj has played a major role as the main tool for power and legitimacy for the Saudi regime. It has a determinant. It has also used the Islamic ritual of Hajj to put pressure on rival countries such as Iran, Syria, and Qatar. Although Saudi rulers have always claimed that they do not use Hajj politically, the fact is that anyone who controls the Hajj will have soft and very strong power.

Saudi Arabia, as the center of the emergence of Islam and the host of the "House of God", "Masjid al-Haram", holy places and other religious symbols reminiscent of the early history of Islam and the Holy Prophet (PBUH), has always attracted the attention of Muslims around the world. It is transnational. The leaders of Saudi Arabia have taken full advantage of this capacity to inspire the Muslim nations of the world, and in a dynamic process, have deepened their influence with a rich cultural-cultural richness. It is safe to say that the a primary and fundamental pillar of Saudi influence and insight, along with the respect of millions of Muslims in the land stems from its religious position and as a non-structural component of soft power and an invaluable source of propaganda, The Saudis have played abroad.

Saudi Arabia's religious geopolitics has enabled Saudi officials to establish themselves as religious and spiritual leaders among Muslim nations and increase their motivation to establish political, economic, and cultural institutions under the pretext of Islamic solidarity. Annual hosting of the pilgrims of the Sacred House of God, construction and equipping of mosques and large schools in Islamic countries, production of books with propaganda content, sending missionaries, attracting and training the youth of Islamic countries based on Wahhabi teachings are among the measures taken as a fixed procedure by Saudi officials have been pursued, and in a way, they have consolidated the dignity and position of the the leadership of the Saudi rulers. Aware of this issue, Saudi leaders and rulers have worked to create and strengthen their media and press in the Islamic-Arab world and these media and press have acted in various regional and international challenges and crises as their propaganda showcase. These media outlets have been instrumental in the disputes of the 1960s and 1970s, especially after Saddam's occupation of Kuwait and the subsequent disputes between it and Saudi Arabia. Saudi diplomacy, with its behind-the-scenes consultations and steadfastness in pursuing regional and international interests owe much of its success to religious dignity and its inspiration among Muslims. In their meetings and relations with Western countries, Saudi officials have also tried to use their patriarchal brand in most of the Islamic countries and increase their respect for Western officials. Saudi Arabia's covert diplomacy is such that even media outlets close to it are confused and

frustrated at understanding why diplomatic trips, their goals, and how far they have come.

The twentieth century and beyond should be seen as the beginning of the formation of the process of identification and use of soft power resources by governments. Soft power resources rely on software-oriented values and norms that help countries achieve the desired goals without the use of force, coercion, and violence, which are the main sources of hard power. The soft power of action is based on the attraction and the desire to direct thoughts and actions to achieve the preferences of a state and achieve the desired results. Nye believes that soft power is rooted in cultural resources, political values, and foreign policy.

Over the past decades, the Saudi government has cleverly used the two cities of Mecca and Medina, these two sources of soft power, to protect itself and the Al-Saud family and to make the most of this powerful resource. By establishing a discourse link between the government's monopoly in the hands of the Al-Saud dynasty and the protection of the safe sanctuary, the government has strengthened its basic strategies for producing attractiveness and gaining religious and political legitimacy. A strategy that could be severely damaged as the Coronavirus virus continues to spread, and the possibility of continuing to suspend and even cancel this year's Hajj rite continues.

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