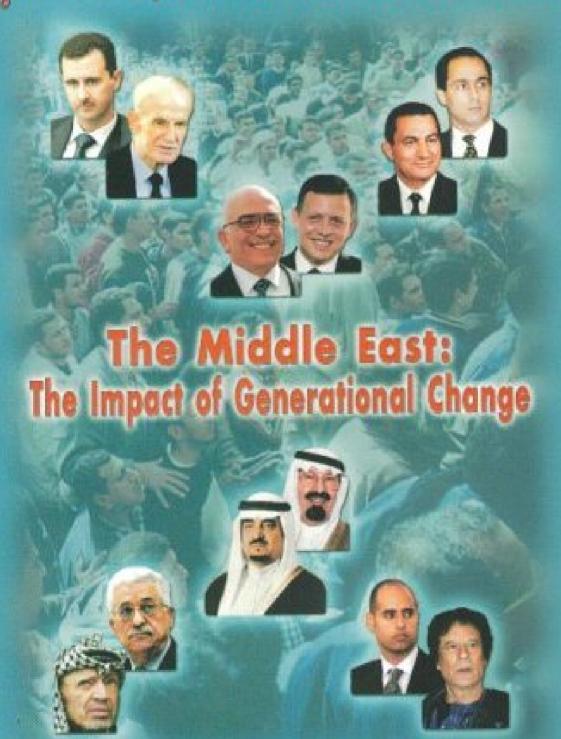The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies

# The Middle East:
# The Impact of Generational Change

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**The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies** seeks to contribute by research, documentation, and publication to the study and understanding of the modern history and current affairs of the Middle East and Africa. The Center is part of the School of History and the Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities at Tel Aviv University.

# The Middle East:

## The Impact of Generational Change

The Moshe Dayan Center for
Middle Eastern and African Studies

Tel Aviv University

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# *Introduction*[1]

A flurry of political change in the Middle East has created the appearance of an "Arab Spring": elections in Iraq and the PA (Palestinian Authority), mass rallies and elections in Lebanon, President Husni Mubarak's decision to allow other candidates to compete in the Egyptian presidential elections, and local elections in Saudi Arabia. What is the essence of these changes, and what is their cause? Are they the fruit of President Bush's policy to advance democracy in the Middle East, or are they perhaps an outcome of the media revolution currently sweeping the Arab world? Are they the harbingers of a genuine revolution that has been provoked by the considerable political, economic, and social frustration in the region, or are they merely a series of superficial coincidences that have nothing to do with comprehensive change? Are the various leadership successions inducing gradual transformations, or are the new heads of state simply waging the same persistent, age-old struggle to preserve the status quo?

In light of these ambiguities, the successions in the Middle East were examined at a symposium held in March 2005 at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. All the speakers were scholars of the Dayan Center, with the exception of Dr. Yoram Meital, a guest lecturer on Egyptian affairs from Ben-Gurion University.

For quite some time, observers discussed the possibility that Husni Mubarak would follow in the footsteps of Syria's Hafiz al-Asad and bequeath the Egyptian presidency to his son. However, in February 2005, Mubarak called for a revision of the constitution that would allow several candidates to compete in free presidential elections. Given the restrictions imposed on potential challengers and the overwhelming victory of Mubarak, the change appeared to be cosmetic or, as the Egyptian opposition claimed, merely an optical illusion of democracy.

The question being asked in Syria is not whether democracy is making inroads following the aforementioned transfer of power but whether Hafiz al-Asad's son and successor, Bashar, is actually in control of the country. A more pertinent question, however, is – how long can this

military, radical, and anachronistic regime, whose world view has become obsolete, continue to survive after having lost a substantial portion of its public base? Bashar's gravest mistake, which might jeopardize the very existence of his regime, has been his failure to adapt Syria's political strategies to the changes in the regional policy of the United States in the aftermath of 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Whereas the United States previously considered Syria an ally – albeit a somewhat problematic one – it now deems Syria an enemy, who threatens vital American interests in the Middle East.

Tensions with the United States also contributed to the eruption of anti-Syrian sentiment in Lebanon, which culminated in Syria's humiliating withdrawal from the land of the cedars after having ruled its diminutive neighbor with a heavy hand for the course of an entire generation.

Libya is another example of a republican regime that seized the helm by means of a military coup and may now transfer the reins of power in the style of monarchs, from father to son, inasmuch as Sayf al-Islam – Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi's first-born, thirty-two year old son – is apparently his father's candidate to succeed him. Sayf al-Islam began to make a name for himself during the second half of the 1990s, and today he is involved in all facets of government activity. He is well-versed in the culture of the West and the ways in which its society functions. Moreover, the head of state's son is spearheading a reform process in domestic and foreign policy although he does not bear any official title. In fact, Sayf al-Islam is largely responsible for the dramatic change in his country's international status; from an isolated state mired under heavy sanctions during the 1990s, Libya is presently being courted by the West in both the economic and diplomatic spheres.

Unlike the aforementioned republican regimes, the changes in Iraq were precipitated by an external force, the United States, which incapacitated the existing elites – foremost among them, the Ba'th party and the army – and elicited the rapid ascent of new elites. The collapse of the ruling center in Baghdad bolstered the Shi'i and Kurdish elites on the periphery. Moreover, the fall of the old Sunni Arab elites set the stage for the meteoric rise of the Sunni clergy while the veterans of Saddam's ousted regime have assumed the leadership of the opposition to the new order. Conversely, the Kurds have maintained the historical continuity

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of their elite, which has led the community for more than seventy years. Furthermore, the Kurdish elite recently managed to extricate itself from the divisive internal struggles of the 1980s and 1990s.

Among the Shi'is, the clash over the leadership pitted a spiritual leader, 'Ali al-Sistani, against a political leader, Muqtada al-Sadr (despite the fact that Sadr has drawn much of his authority from his family's religious prestige). Sistani has proven to be the prime mover in his community and, for that matter, in all of Iraq, and his departure from the political scene would have left a gaping political void.

In the Palestinian arena the topic of succession has become all the more relevant with the passing of Yasser Arafat. The succession issue is closely related to on-going friction within the Palestinian national movement, which has been fluctuating between two ideological poles since the founding of the PLO: revolution versus statehood. The revolutionary perspective clamors for strict adherence to the objectives set forth in the National Charter and for the liberation of all of Palestine by means of an armed struggle. In contrast, the "statehood" perspective espouses a two-state solution to be achieved by pragmatic and political means and by the construction of the institutions of the state-in-the-making. Thrown into this mix is an inter-generational struggle between the veteran leadership and the ranking members of an intermediate generation that has evolved during the last decade. The old guard has sought to protect itself by preserving the PLO's status, while the members of the intermediate generation, who led the first Intifada, aspire to fill key positions in the PA establishment. During the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, the center of gravity of the PA's political leadership shifted to the Fatah intermediate generation (e.g. Marwan al-Barghuti), who rode the wave of public protest with Arafat's backing and formed the vanguard of the new phase of the national struggle.

Despite anarchy and the damage to the legitimacy of the political struggle as result of the violent confrontation, the intermediate generation did not manage to seriously weaken the veteran leadership, accelerate the succession process, or consolidate its own power base. In contrast, Hamas boosted its power during the years of confrontation. However, the damage that Israel inflicted on its leadership and sources of income during the past year weakened the movement to a certain degree. This setback played a role in the Hamas decision to adopt a

pragmatic approach towards Mahmud 'Abbas (Abu Mazin) after his election to the presidency.

Before Arafat's death, increasing internal violence and anarchy compelled all sectors of Palestinian society to seriously contemplate the future character of the national struggle. Abu Mazin's election as Arafat's successor reflected the Palestinian people's desire to return, at least for the time being, to the logic of statehood.

Islamic movements remained immensely popular among young Arabs and hostility towards the United States was widespread throughout the Arab world. However, in Iran of all places, where an Islamic movement has been in power for over twenty-five years, this is no longer the case. Not only does the younger generation no longer view Islam as a panacea for all the ills of society, it also expresses admiration for the United States and particular aspects of its culture.

The younger generation and women, who constituted the social forces that catapulted Mohammad Khatami to the Iranian presidency in 1997, clamored for reform during his first years in office. Organized student groups pressed for change via mass demonstrations and other means but were suppressed by the authorities. Moreover, they failed in their attempts to advance reform or to repel the conservative counter-attack against the incipient liberalization process. The student protest movement failed because the students never managed to build broad social coalitions similar to the joint efforts responsible for the successes of past protest movements in Iran: the merchants, the clergy and other key sectors of society opposed the students; and the public, as a whole, was by now weary of confrontations and revolutions. The political failure precipitated an exodus of young people from politics and from the country altogether, and the emigration rate gradually increased. Concomitantly, the country's economic hardships contributed to the proliferation of drugs, prostitution, and Aids among the young. On the other hand, the conservatives fashioned a replacement for the liberalization movement in the form of a new conservative trend, which subsequently won the presidential elections in June 2005.

Some observers have been surprised by the stability of the Arab monarchies, but this is less surprising than it may seem. The political power of families is a central element of Arab political tradition, and monarchies are indeed familial entities. Even the reform measures that

have been instituted by sovereigns in the face of mounting pressures from abroad and within have not weakened their regimes. The reforms were actually designed to buttress the monarchies and have indeed attained their goals.

The Saudi Arabian monarchy has not undergone any leadership successions in the generational sense, as inheritance in the desert kingdom continues to be passed on between the many sons of 'Abd al-Aziz al Sa'ud. Thus, in August 2005, the royal mantle passed from one octogenarian, King Fahd, to another, the new King, 'Abdallah. There have been significant generational transitions in the most senior ranks of the religious establishment, but they are conspicuously absent in the highest echelon of government. The primary source of authority of the House of Sa'ud has always been its religious legitimacy, which it draws from the Council of Senior 'Ulama (men of religion), and the government has repeatedly turned to the council whenever it wished to push through some potentially contentious initiative.

Over the past two decades, however, the stature of this council has declined: its most authoritative members have passed away, and its support for the government's controversial decision to allow American troops to enter the country after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait has been openly questioned. Consequently, a group of dissident and younger 'Ulama have risen to the fore, leading an Islamic protest movement formed in the wake of the war. These 'Ulama have earned a reputation as independent judicial-religious scholars, whose moral rectitude has added to their rapidly growing popularity. The regime took note of their ascendance and managed to partially co-opt them into its service. Although these younger 'Ulama began to acknowledge the legitimacy of the government, they have not abstained from criticizing the government and have thus maintained a clearly visible distinction between themselves and the older religious establishment, whom the public have perceived as the servants of the regime.

Unlike Saudi Arabia, Jordan's stability largely stems from the fact that its own version of familial politics extends well beyond the royal family. As a political body, the Jordanian family is a much more important entity than parties and other forms of political and social organization. In fact, the state is essentially a pact or confederation of families and tribes. The Hashemite royal family stands at the head of this structure drawing its

authority, inter alia, from the family's most distinguished forefather – the Prophet Muhammad, who was a member of the House of Hashem. In much the same way as power is inherited from father to son within the Hashemite family, membership in the elite is passed down as an inheritance among the families constituting Jordan's ruling establishment. Therefore, it is only natural that a majority of the Jordanian public have perceived the succession from Husayn to his son 'Abdallah to be the legitimate and natural course of events.

Upon assuming the throne, 'Abdallah buttressed his position by immediately replacing the extremely powerful personalities appointed to key posts on his father's instructions with his own appointees. The passing of the mantle from Husayn to 'Abdallah not only represented a generational change in the biological sense but also marked a significant change in the political outlook guiding and shaping the decision-making of the new Jordanian sovereign. Husayn had matured politically during the Nasserite era, and the psychological scars of this struggle with 'Abd al-Nasir continued to haunt the king to his last days. 'Abdallah, on the other hand, ascended the throne during an era in which the idea of the territorial state had replaced the pan-Arabism of the Nasserite era. As a consequence, he has promulgated a "Jordan first" policy, whereby the interests of the Jordanian state clearly take precedence over pan-Arab or Palestinian interests. This changing spirit of the times also explains Jordan's nearly unreserved support for the United States.

Change is also readily apparent in Morocco since Muhammad VI's ascension to the throne in 1999. In keeping with the king's stated plans for reform, a fair degree of change has actually been implemented: the political arena has been liberalized to a certain extent; freedom of expression has been expanded; the party system has been strengthened; and more progressive social legislation has been enacted. Nevertheless, there have not been any genuine modifications of the elite structure. The *makhzan* (ruling establishment) continues to be dominated by the same wealthy, prominent, and influential families, and its younger generation is taking the necessary steps to preserve the *makhzan's* status and to impede the rise of new forces. The 2002 highly-transparent parliamentary elections, which were touted as an important step in the democratization process, have not catapulted new forces into parliament. Moreover, the king has labored to enhance the status of the monarchy,

*inter alia*, by establishing official committees to deal with central issues on the national agenda; and these committees have enlisted many of the prominent social activists into their service, thus deliberately stunting the growth of Moroccan civil society.

Most of the countries of the Middle East are evidently undergoing political transformations that are the result of leadership succession issues and/or a variety of other internal and external pressures. However, in all the cases discussed here, the regimes and their rulers have sought to maintain the reform processes within the existing political structure, as a strategy for avoiding the implementation of more radical measures that might precipitate genuine change in the existing political order. Perhaps the mere initiation of reform, as limited as it may be, will create a dynamic with the capacity to generate consequences reaching far beyond the original intention of these regimes. The future is anyone's guess, but in the meantime, as one French observer has stated, "The Arab spring is late and cold."[2]

*Asher Susser*
*Director*

### NOTES

1. This introduction is based on the symposium's Executive Summary, which was prepared by Dr. Israel Altman.
2. Gilbert Achcar, "Arab Spring: Late and Cold," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2005.

# FATHERS AND SONS, FROM JUMHURIYYA TO "JUMLUKIYYA"

# The Struggle for the Reins of Power in Egypt

## Yoram Meital

The struggle for power in Egypt has steadily intensified since the beginning of 2005. Presidential elections were scheduled for September 2005 and Husni Mubarak, who was 77 years old, was interested in serving as president for yet another term. The dramatic events that have been reshaping the face of the Middle East over the past few years have also made themselves felt on the Egyptian political scene. On the home front, opposition groups have intensified their protest against the perpetuation of the political order; i.e., the near certainty that the president will hold on to his position for as long as he wanted as well as the possibility that he would bequeath the presidency to his son Jamal. From abroad, the calls for the democratization of the Arab regimes (especially by the American administration) have steadily mounted. Although manifold groups from both within and outside of Egypt aspire to democratize Egypt, they are divided by significant conflicts of interest concerning the extent of the requisite political reform and the question of the actual implementation of these changes by the Mubarak government. The opposition has severely criticized Mubarak's domestic and foreign policies. Moreover, it opposes the Middle East policy of the United States and the administration's declarations concerning the democratization that is required in Arab societies. The present article examines two primary facets of Egypt's complex political reality: the relations between the government and the opposition since the establishment of the Republican regime (on June 18, 1953); and the ramifications of Mubarak's significant proposal to amend the constitution so that more than one candidate could compete in the presidential elections, including the dynamic public discussion that this measure precipitated.

On July 23, 1952, a group of low-ranking officers seized control of the Egyptian government. The military coup that was spearheaded by the Free Officers quickly turned into an intensive effort to establish a "new order" in the land of the Nile. The leaders of the July Revolution and their supporters rapidly dismantled the "old order." Within a year of the military coup, the monarchial regime was abolished and a presidential republic declared. The new leadership introduced significant changes in the political, economic, and social spheres and, at the height of the revolutionary experiment, drastic changes to its foreign policy as well.[1] In addition, the Constitution of 1923 was annulled, and a special committee appointed to formulate a new constitution that would embody the comprehensive transformation evolving in Egypt and the objectives being set by its new leaders. The support that the parties provided the Free Officers during the first months after the coup quickly deteriorated into an all-out struggle between the government and the opposition forces, which in essence constituted a crossroads for the new regime. By March 1954, Egypt was immersed in a deep crisis. Internal disagreements among the new leadership were also quite evident, and these disputes ultimately led to the ouster of President Muhammad Najib and the concentration of most of the governmental authority in the hands of one Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir.[2] Correspondingly, the revolutionaries designated six primary objectives – among them, the institution of full "democratic life" – which were supported by a substantial portion of the public. However, a severe crisis ensued between the adherents of the revolutionary regime and its opponents, both within and outside of Egypt, over the means employed for advancing the democratization process. The revolutionaries suppressed their domestic rivals with an iron fist as all the arms of government – led by parliament, the courts, and the security forces – were harnessed for the mission. Accordingly, the government disbanded all political parties in 1953 and nationalized the press in 1960. The persecution of internal political opponents continued throughout the years of the revolutionary experiment, and the consequences of these policies for the political sphere were quite evident for many years after the collapse of the "revolutionary order," when policies with entirely different goals and characteristics had already been adopted. Following the many long years of revolutionary experimentation, even the most devout Nasserites

realized that the revolutionary regime had failed to advance a democratic government. The struggle against the government's domestic opponents culminated in the destruction of a functioning party and parliamentary system and in serious damage to the Egyptian public discourse.

Against the backdrop of the crushing defeat in the Six Day War, the demands for change steadily intensified. The March 30, 1968 Declaration proved that 'Abd al-Nasir was willing to implement extremely limited reforms only, and the government's critics considered these offers an abject mockery. Early signs of significant change began to emerge immediately following the death of President 'Abd al-Nasir (September 28, 1970) and during the struggle that his successor, Anwar al-Sadat, waged against the "centers of power" that undermined his leadership and bitterly opposed the policies he wished to advance. The very survival of Sadat's government was predicated on the success of his comprehensive policy, which he presented as a practical attempt to rescue Egypt from the hardships in which it was mired as a consequence of the failed policies of his predecessor. Scholars of Egyptian political history are divided over the extent of reform that the leaders of the government sought to engender within the framework of *al-infitah* (the openness) policy, which began implementation in the mid-1970s. Sadat's program advocated dramatic and extensive changes in Egypt's foreign and defense policies, but appreciably more moderate steps in the economy. Moreover, it was marked by patience that bordered on idleness in all matters concerning the political sphere and party system.[3] Nevertheless, senior government officials quickly realized that over the long haul *al-infitah* policies could not be relegated to the economy, strengthening relations with the United States, and peace with Israel. Sadat frequently reiterated his commitment to reform the political sphere, but sought to progress slowly and in a manner that would leave maximum control of the political establishment in his hands. The tools that stood at the government's disposal enabled it to efficiently regulate the opposition groups and curtail the extent of their operations. However, the government was unable to neutralize the motivation of its domestic opponents or completely muffle their scathing criticism. As the commitment to *al-infitah* policy deepened, the attributes that have defined the Egyptian political establishment since the mid-1970s began to take root; i.e., mounting demands for significant change on the part

of the various opposition groups vis-à-vis the government's readiness for limited change that did not significantly undermine the existing political order.

The first buds of political change began to blossom towards the end of the 1970s. The Arab Socialist Union, which was the only political framework permitted to operate during most of the years of the revolutionary experiment, had its authority eviscerated, and the three political platforms (left, right, and center) that were subsequently established quickly turned into political parties. Each of the parties was permitted to publish a newspaper to voice its opinions. Although the renewal of the party system was indeed a significant event in the political arena, it was not enough to weaken the regime's exclusive control of the country's power structure. The president's broad authority was anchored in the constitution and in a series of laws and amendments – particularly the laws governing the parties and press, as well as the law that empowered the government with the authority to declare and maintain a state of emergency. To this day, the legislative branch (parliament) is effectively dominated by the ruling National Democratic Party *(al-hizb al-watani al-dimuqrati)*. The other sanctioned parties assail its policies and have mounted quite a few challenges. Nevertheless, general public support for the party system, particularly the opposition parties, has remained quite negligible. In this context, it is important to emphasize that the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which enjoys the support of millions of Egyptians, is constitutionally prohibited from organizing as a political party. Consequently, this immensely popular movement, whose leaders express their opposition to the government and its policies on a wide range of issues, has been banned from the political scene. The right of the opposition parties and movements to freely express themselves is indeed severely restricted. Particularly debilitating is the inordinate control of the authorities over the media. Newspapers and journals that are published by opposition parties and non-governmental groups are subject to especially harsh publication laws and a stifling censorship. Thus, the internal security forces regulate the political arena in innumerable ways.

In the autumn of 1981, the hostility between the regime and the opposition groups sharply exacerbated. The opposition depicted the comprehensive policy that Sadat sought to advance (especially the peace

with Israel and the heightening cooperation with the United States) as a serious blow to Egypt's national interests. Sadat decided to restrain his domestic rivals by means of extreme draconian measures. He ordered the security services to arrest thousands of dissident activists, who were detained for indefinite periods. These repressive methods drew the ire of many Egyptians. Both the opposition and some of the president's close allies advised him to reconsider these stern measures, but Sadat was determined to settle the score with his rivals.[4] The militant Islamic groups indeed intensified their criticism: they contended that the government's internal and foreign policies violated Islamic law, and Sadat was essentially accused of being an apostate who deserved the death sentence. Against this backdrop, several activists in the Jihad group plotted an attempt on the president's life.

Khalid al-Islambuli, a low-ranking officer in the Egyptian army, led the cell of assassins that murdered Sadat while he was reviewing a military parade on October 6, 1981 – a symbolic date commemorating the victory in the October War of 1973. The trial of the assassins turned into a platform for exchanging accusations between the regime (represented by the prosecution and judges) and the president's murderers (who, in essence, represented all the elements of the militant Islamic movement). The latter claimed that the government was an illegitimate, despotic regime ("We murdered Pharaoh!" al-Islambuli declared in the court room), whose policies were incompatible with the values of the Islamic faith.[5]

As soon as word of Sadat's death was confirmed, Vice-President Husni Mubarak assumed the reins of power and declared a state of emergency throughout the country, which has subsequently been extended by parliament from time to time. Both measures adhered to the constitution, which also confers upon the government absolute authority in all matters pertaining to domestic threats. Although over twenty years have passed since the assassination, the generous use of the emergency laws remains in force, and Mubarak has continued to rule the country throughout this entire period. While the constitution stipulates a six-year presidential term, there is no limit to the number of terms that a president may serve (clause 77). Additionally, clause 76 of the constitution, which pertains to the procedure of the presidential elections, originally granted parliament with the authority to select the

president (by means of a two-thirds majority), while the country's citizens could support or oppose parliament's lone candidate through a public referendum.

Discerning the balance of power between a government and its opponents is essential to securing a meaningful understanding of the political reality of any given society. Accordingly, it is important to take note of the criticism that is expressed by the groups and individuals that comprise the opposition. The alternative narrative that they create by various means is indicative of the extent to which the hegemonic narrative is accepted by different sectors of society. The identification of alternative narratives also contributes to a deeper understanding of the limitations and weaknesses of the agenda that power bases wish to promulgate. Similarly, it is worth examining the means by which both rulers and their rivals disseminate their ideas.

There is no doubt that the party and press laws provide the Mubarak government and the National Democratic Party with a firm grip on the reins of power and enable the authorities to limit the activities of their domestic rivals to a tolerable level of protest, which is subject to constant surveillance. Despite economic hardships – the surging unemployment rates, the problematic disparity between local production and exports and the import of merchandise and technology, the waning purchasing power of the Egyptian pound, and the government's failed privatization policy – the opposition parties have failed to translate the criticism expressed by wide sectors of the population into broad public support for their struggle. The presence of the opposition is primarily felt on the pages of its newspapers and occasionally during debates in parliament, but outside these frameworks its public clout is as insignificant as a drop in the ocean. Like other authoritarian regimes, the government displayed the wherewithal to mold a political reality in which most citizens comprise a silent majority that is excluded from expressing its political views in the political or public realms.

With respect to the importance of discerning the balance of power in a particular society, a greater emphasis must be placed on the claims of the government's opponents than on the extent of the public's support for the latter. In this context, it is worth examining the Egyptian opposition' scathing criticism of the following developments: the corruption that is gradually spreading throughout the government and

society, the diverse ramifications of the strengthening ties between Egypt and the United States, and the West's cynicism regarding the need to accelerate the pace of democratization in Arab societies. Independent speakers and opposition parties in Egypt persistently accuse the American leadership – which boasts of leading this process – of being content with the mere dissemination of lofty declarations, while its policies actually buttress non-democratic regimes (such as the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian governments). According to the opposition, the West is willing to live with these faults because these Arab regimes serve clear American and Western interests. Against this backdrop, a fierce, on-going battle is being waged within Egypt between the Mubarak regime, which above all seeks to guarantee the continuation of the existing political order, and the various opposition groups, which place most of the blame for Egypt's travails on President Mubarak's policies.

Egypt's opposition constitutes a mosaic of diverse groups: the left, liberals, Islamists, and Nasserites. Most of them are organized into party frameworks, but their representation in parliament is severely limited.[6] Considerable political activity is also evident outside the ranks of the party system: for example, the opinions expressed by independent speakers and especially the activity of the veteran Muslim Brotherhood and the fledgling *Kifaya* movement (an in-depth discussion of *Kifaya*'s platform and activities will be presented below). However, the Egyptian Constitution is designed to channel all political activity to parties that are sanctioned by the state authorities, and it explicitly prohibits the establishment of parties advocating religious or ethnic platforms. Consequently, a movement such as the Muslim Brotherhood is prevented from engaging in political enterprise while the legal status of the *Kifaya* movement is deliberately vague. For nearly seven decades, the Muslim Brotherhood has been the "present absentee" of the Egyptian political scene, and it is impossible to ignore the current public protest of the *Kifaya* movement. There is no precise estimate as to the number of activists and supporters of these two movements. Scholars surmise that millions of Egyptians back the Muslim Brotherhood – substantially more than the support for all the sanctioned opposition parties combined. Notwithstanding the law prohibiting the Muslim Brotherhood from engaging in political activity and the continuous struggle the government is waging against it, the movement's leaders have managed

to voice their political views and install representatives in parliament (by virtue of the fact that the election law permits independent candidates to compete in parliamentary elections). In contrast, the number of activists taking part in *Kifaya*'s protests is miniscule, although this does not attest to the extent of support for the movement's agenda and its robust presence in the public sphere.

It must be emphasized that throughout the years of their struggle against the Mubarak government, the opposition parties and movements have refrained from presenting a joint platform with a detailed description of the alternative political order they envision. The primary reason for this is the ideological discrepancies and personal rivalries that inform the array of groups that comprise the Egyptian opposition. In fact, the single common denominator among these groups is their desire to overthrow the Mubarak regime as soon as possible.

# The New Media and its Implications

In recent years, the internal struggle between the Egyptian government and opposition groups has been increasingly influenced by the rise of a new Arab media network in which the press, television programs, and websites have become the primary stage on which the public discourse is expressed. Twofold importance must be attributed to the fact that over the past decade these independent and innovative media channels have covered the dramatic developments in the Middle East – foremost among them, the Kuwait War (1991) and the global war against terrorism, which the United States has spearheaded since September 11, 2001. A growing number of Arab TV channels and newspapers have begun to provide an alternative to the narrative offered by both the Western and official Egyptian media (the vast majority of the latter operating under the auspices of the regime and providing extensive and supportive coverage of its policies).[7] The fact that critical voices long repressed by presidential and monarchical Arab regimes now merit broad exposure has contributed to the construction of this alternative narrative.

The new Arab media consists of satellite television stations, e.g. *al-Jazira* – the most popular of the channels – *al-Arabiyya*, *MBC*, and *LBC*, newspapers, e.g. *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, and countless websites.

These media outlets have precipitated a revolution insofar as the information and commentary that is available to the general Arab public is concerned. They offer intensive coverage of Middle East developments via live reports by reporters who are dispersed throughout the region. More than ever before, news programs, talk shows, and op-ed pieces are brimming with references to national and political topics. "Dishes" for receiving satellite television stations have sprouted up throughout the Middle East like mushrooms after a storm. From the outset, these outlets featured reports and commentaries that were inherently different from those provided by the official and foreign press. Consequently, the wars in Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Iraq were presented in an entirely different light. The critical tone that characterized the reporting and commentaries was frequently directed towards national policy, particularly the United States Middle-Eastern policy and the collaboration between Arab leaders and the American administration. The penetrating criticism upset various Arab rulers who sought to put an end to this sort of reportage by means of a series of punitive measures against the new media's producers. Despite the governments' efforts, many television programs and newspapers continued to espouse the same line. During the Kuwait War, for example, an unprecedented amount of criticism was directed at the support that some of the leaders of Arab states expressed for the destruction of the Iraqi army and the leaders' cooperation with the United States, whose motives, according to many of the new-media journalists, contrasted with the interests of the Arab people. The new-media have increasingly covered topics that until recently were considered taboo by the Arab press, including the oppressive measures taken by Arab regimes against their domestic rivals, the struggle of opposition groups for freedom and democracy, and the status of women in society.

Nevertheless, not everyone has been satisfied with the professionalism of the new-media channels. For example, Arab liberals have contended that most of *al-Jazira*'s coverage is dedicated to the claims of the Islamist and nationalist Arab movements, while liberal viewpoints have received only limited attention. Indeed, some have called into question the independence and professional rectitude of *al-Jazira*. Although the channel spews its invective at most of the Arab regimes, the tongues of its reporters and editors are tied when it comes to commenting on the

government of Qatar, the country from which the channel broadcasts and whose Emir, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, funds its operations.[8]

Like most of their colleagues in the Arab capitals, Egypt's ranking government officials did not realize the consequences of the new-media until it was too late, and their subsequent attempts to curtail the new-media's activities within their jurisdiction failed.[9] The satellite stations frequently report on the continued existence of Arab regimes that engage in the following activities: blatantly trample on individual rights; prevent competition for government positions; limit the purview of parliament and political parties; and incessantly violate civic freedoms and the freedom of expression. Consequently, these stories are also being run by some newspapers, journals, and websites. The new-media have granted the various Arab opposition groups a precious platform. Every day, tens of millions of viewers are exposed to the same, primary message: the United States Middle East policy harms the interests of Arab nations while serving those of Israel, and the only superpower in the world is able to act in this manner because of its close alliances with Arab leaders, who maintain their power by undemocratic means.

Another popular issue in the new-media is the democratization of the Middle East. The American commitment to this process has been quite tangible ever since senior Bush administration officials discovered a direct link between the "Islamist threat" and the repressive regimes under whose auspices movements like *al-Qa'ida* prosper. Democratization, as a recipe for contending with the phenomenon of Islamic militancy, has fast become a cornerstone of American policy. The first significant expression of this commitment was the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which was published by Secretary of State Colin Powell on December 12, 2002.[10] This ambitious, American-backed plan outlines a set of principles for establishing and advancing a new political order in the Middle East. As a result, the Arab polemics on these issues have reemerged with even greater vigor. Almost without exception, the Arab speakers (official and unofficial) have denounced what they perceive to be "reform on the back of a tank;" i.e., the model that the United States forced upon Afghanistan and Iraq. Arab rulers and members of the opposition alike unanimously reject the involvement of external forces in all matters that concern the necessary reforms in their

countries. For example, President Mubarak stated that, "There is no escaping the fact that the pattern of the [political] reform shall stem from an internal willingness, and it is inappropriate to force it [upon us] from outside." These remarks were made during the conference, *Arab Reform: Vision – Implementation*, which was held at the Alexandria Library (March 12–14, 2004). The sentiments evinced by the name of the conference and Mubarak's remarks were reiterated in the introduction to the conference's copious concluding declaration: "The participants have noted that they are absolutely convinced that the reform is a vital and urgent matter and that it stems from within the Arab societies."[11] Most of the attendees also unequivocally objected to the Western refrain whereby the conditions for the advancement of reforms and democracy in the Middle East would never have existed if not for the war in Iraq and the fall of Saddam Husayn's regime.

Most Arab opposition parties and movements believe that the United States and other Western powers have been undergirding the non-democratic Arab regimes for decades and that it is thus up to local forces to oust these regimes. Various opposition groups also reject the American administration's assumption that reforms and democracy may be advanced via the existing Arab regimes and contend that this policy is destined for failure. In fact, they believe that this "faith" in the existing regimes is the most glaring evidence that the United States intends to ensure the survival of its Arab allies. The United States, in their opinion, did not go to war in order to liberate the Iraqi people, and it is doubtful if their situation would have been a top priority of the Bush administration were it not for the events of September 11th and the simplistic manner in which the neo-conservatives tied Saddam Husayn and his policies to Usama Bin Ladin and the *al-Qaʿida* movement. A variety of views was heard from among the ranks of the opposition during the debate over the link between the war in Iraq and the advancement of the democratization process in the Middle East. Most of the speakers refuted the claim that the ouster of the *Baʿth* regime in Iraq and the United States commitment to democratization have bolstered the prospects for significant political reform in the Arab states. Only a handful of pro-Western liberals – whose impact on Arab public opinion is diminutive at best – dared to state that continuous external pressure would ultimately lead to democracy and the founding of a

genuine civil society. Moreover, various members of the opposition, representing an entire spectrum of views and convictions, were willing to admit the positive influence that Saddam's fall has had on their struggle for democratization. An expression of this may be found in a piece by Mona al-Tahawy written for the *International Herald Tribune*, and which was soon translated into Arabic and presented on the *Kifaya* movement's website:

> We are making fools of ourselves if we do not recognize that the American invasion of Iraq was the main incentive. I participated in two demonstrations against the American war versus Iraq, and I was not convinced that the war was carried out for the sake of democracy or change. I was absolutely stunned by the results of the aggression and the casualties among the Iraqis, and I wrote many articles that expressed my support for the right of the Iraqis to be liberated from the American occupation and the occupation of the insurgents. However, I have doubts as to whether the discussion on reform in the Arab world would have possibly erupted were the Americans not present in Iraq today. […] There is a way to discuss the consequences of the war in Iraq on the rest of the Arab world without necessarily interpreting it as support for the war. Likewise, there is a way to discuss democracy and change in the Arab world without it being interpreted as support for the Bush administration's declaration on democracy and change in the Arab world.[12]

# The Struggle over the Inheritance of the Presidency

Since mid-2004, the Egyptian public discourse has steadily focused on the need to implement true political reform. Opposition groups have raised several arguments against the government and its supporters, the most important of which are the following: to abrogate the absolute control of the president and ruling party over the political arena and parliament by revising the constitution; to discontinue the state of

emergency that has lasted for over twenty years; and to liberate the media from the yoke of intrusive government regulation. Invoking the full weight of the lofty status that he has forged over the course of his twenty-four years in power, Mubarak signaled that "business would continue as usual" and sounded determined to maintain the reins of government. The possibility of a fifth term in office triggered a rather heated public debate. Opposition spokesmen deplored the unbearable nonchalance with which the constitution and a series of laws and amendments sanction the perpetuation of a political order that enabled the president and his party to do whatever they pleased in the political realm. Speculation that Husni Mubarak would step down only when he had ensured that his job would be placed in the hands of his son Jamal (born in 1963) quickly spread throughout Egypt and beyond, and the repeated denials of the president and his son were to no avail.

The government's critics have pointed to the fact that over the last few years the president's son has become the most influential figure in the ruling party, which, as indicated, maintains absolute control over the parliamentary arena. By means of public declarations and a drawn-out series of discussions within the National Democratic Party, Jamal Mubarak endeavored to consolidate his image as a reformer who intended to bring about comprehensive change in Egypt. His public appearances steadily multiplied and his statements attracted extensive media coverage. One of the high points of this activity was on display at the Second Conference of the National Democratic Party (September 23, 2004), which was held exactly a year before the presidential elections. The conference assembled against the backdrop of heightened public expectations for political reform, for which the opposition had been consistently clamoring. Pursuant to his position as speaker of the Supreme Council for Policy *(al-lajna al-'ulliya lil-siyasat)*, Jamal Mubarak presided over the discussions with a firm hand. During the concluding remarks of the conference, there was a general call for true reforms by the ruling party and for the advancement of legislation that would allow for the expansion of the democratization process in Egypt.[13] Although the slogan of the convention was "New thought and a set of preferences for reform," it was difficult to discern from the conference's decisions the essence of the reform that they offered or the legislation required for its advancement. Moreover, the decisions lacked any reference to the two

central demands of the opposition: amending the sections of the constitution that touch upon the country's political life and the cancellation of the state of emergency. In response to these claims, Jamal Mubarak noted that one must take into account the disparate agendas of the opposition parties and the National Democratic Party. Therefore, while they may agree on certain issues, their opinions completely diverge on others. The government's rivals countered that the words of the president's ambitious son testified, above all, to his commitment to perpetuate the existing political order and that his image as a reformer was merely a smoke screen.[14] The decisive role that the president's son filled at the conference and the public exposure from which he benefited rekindled the public debate over whether the government would be passed on as an inheritance from father to son. Jamal Mubarak's rare declaration at the end of the conference, in which he stressed that the "principle of bequeathing the rule is invalid," failed to temper the flames.[15]

# Mubarak's February 2005 Initiative

On February 26, 2005, at the height of the heated, public debate between senior government officials and opposition leaders, President Husni Mubarak dramatically announced an initiative that would profoundly alter the proceedings of the republic's presidential elections. As befits such a calculated measure, his words were chosen with meticulous care. The president called for an amendment to clause 76 of the Egyptian Constitution, which would enable more than one candidate to compete for the presidency. In a letter dispatched to the speakers of the People's Assembly and the Consultative Assembly, the president requested that these institutions initiate a discussion which would ultimately lead to the revision of the constitution in accordance with his precise guidelines. Mubarak recommended that the presidential elections be open to all citizens and the ballot secret. He further specified that the candidates have public experience and the support of one of the parties, that a legal commission ensure the integrity of the election proceedings, and that parliament's authority to select the president be abrogated and passed on to the citizens.[16]

A heated public debate ensued both within and outside Egypt over the timing and motives behind Mubarak's extraordinary initiative and especially its ramifications on the political establishment. Mubarak's initiative was presented half a year before the upcoming presidential elections (September, 2005). Perhaps the president and his advisors reached the conclusion that domestic protest and mounting pressure from abroad against his reelection bid had engendered a new political status quo that differed from the limited opposition that accompanied his past reelections. The Egyptian leadership was particularly sensitive to the declarations of the Bush administration, and its demands for the democratization of the Arab regimes were increasingly frequent. These demands reached their peak on February 21, 2005, when President Bush called upon the Egyptian leadership to lead the entire region through the democratization process. In fact, Bush's declaration, whereby "The great and proud nation of Egypt, which showed the way toward peace in the Middle East, can now show the way toward democracy in the Middle East," reverberated throughout the Arabic media and particularly in the Egyptian press.[17]

In any event, Mubarak's declaration that he would support an amendment to the constitution hit the Egyptian public like a bolt of lightening. The headlines of the leading papers described the president's declaration as an "earthquake" *(al-zilzal)* and a "new phase" *(marhala jadida)*. Officials and many local commentators emphasized that this was an additional step in an on-going process in which Egypt, under Mubarak's leadership, was confidently marching towards the establishment of democratic life. Cultural explanations were also offered for the declaration that took everyone by surprise. For instance, Hadia Mustafa claimed that the surprise derived from the local mentality whereby no one fathoms the possibility that one day he or she will be the president of the country: "The 'I want to grow up to be president someday' mentality common among ambitious young dreamers in Western democracies is completely alien to us." Mustafa then outlined Bill Clinton's path from Arkansas to the White House as an example of the Western mindset.[18] The responses of the opposition parties and movements were more complex. By their initial reactions, it was abundantly clear that the opposition leaders were caught completely off guard. However, they quickly regained their bearings, and a broad range

of critical views on the president's initiative and the prospect of the changes it might indeed precipitate appeared in the Egyptian and foreign press.

Notwithstanding their ideological and political differences, the vast majority of the opposition welcomed Mubarak's initiative but demanded more extensive reforms than those outlined in the president's amendment. This position was typical of the opposition's reaction in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the president's proposal and during the subsequent discussion in parliament on the revision of clause 76 to the constitution. Al-Sayid al-Badawi, the general secretary of *al-Wafd* party, noted that "the proposed revisions are a victory for democracy…and remove a large obstacle on the way to political and democratic reform."[19] The initial response of the Nasserites was similar; 'Abdallah al-Shinawi, the editor of the Nasserite paper *(al-'Arabi)*, praised Mubarak's declaration and added that it testified to the seriousness of the government's intentions to promulgate reforms. However, he demanded that Mubarak take much more significant steps, foremost among them "to limit the duration that a president can serve for, reduce his authorities, and call off the state of emergency. Without all these steps, the reform will remain limited."[20]

These demands harbored a sophisticated attempt to pressure the president into expediting the reform process. Were Mubarak to respond in the affirmative to the demand to limit the duration of a president's tenure, how could he subsequently compete for the fifth time in the upcoming elections? A similar intent was embedded in the demand to limit the president's authority. The Nasserites' position divulged a weakness in the government's claims that it seriously intended to introduce political reform. While Mubarak called for the amendment of clause 76 to the constitution (in which the procedure for the presidential elections was set forth), the Nasserites focused their criticism on clause 77. This clause placed no limits on a president's tenure in office and had thus enabled Mubarak to be reelected time and time again. Rif'at al-Sa'id, the chairperson of the leftist *al-Tajammu'* party, similarly described the president's declaration as "a positive development…that places Egypt on a new path [in all that concerns] general freedoms and democracy."[21] In contrast, members of the *al-Ghad* party contended that the president's proposals were not enough. As an alternative to the amendment of clause

76, they published their proposal for a new Egyptian constitution. Under the headline "The Constitution of Tomorrow: Their Words to History, Our Words to the Future," they introduced 209 clauses that formed a truly liberal platform.[22]

Yet others concentrated their criticism on raising questions as well as expressing astonishment at the extent of the transformation. For example, the titles of articles published by the renowned professors Sa'ad al-Din Ibrahim and Muna Makram 'Ubayd epitomized the opposition's doubts concerning the proposed reform. Under the heading "Is this Indeed the Democratic Spring of the Arab World?," Ibrahim – a sociologist whose struggle to institute a civil society in Egypt had landed him in jail – declared that Mubarak's offer "is a huge step in the thousand mile trek to achieve democracy throughout the Arab world." Although he found many positive elements in the amendment to clause 76, Ibrahim stressed that they were not enough. He asserted that it was imperative that the duration of the presidency be limited to a maximum of two terms, that the state of emergency be rescinded, and that the press law be revised in order to put an end to the government's inordinate control over the Egyptian media.[23] In her article "Will Civil Society Lead the Reform Train in Egypt?" Makram 'Ubayd provided a lucid account of the limitations imposed on the activities of the civil forces and contended that the chances were slim that the proposed amendment would serve as a sufficient response to the necessary reforms.[24] Although Egypt's dissidents espoused widely disparate agendas, there was an absolute consensus among them with respect to the factors compelling Mubarak to initiate the amendment to the constitution. Activists as diverse as 'Issam al-'Aryan (among the senior activists of the Muslim Brotherhood) and Sa'ad al-Din Ibrahim both stressed that it was domestic and foreign pressure that stood behind the president's announcement.[25]

An in-depth look at the responses of those who opposed the continuation of the Mubarak government attested to the difficult challenges confronting Egyptian society as it made its way towards true political reform. Concomitant to the discussion in parliament on the amendment to clause 76 of the constitution, a list of demands shared by all the opposition groups was drawn up, including the following: the annulment of the state of emergency that has been in effect since October 6, 1981; the revision of many other clauses in the constitution; the

complete discontinuation of the regime's regulation of the media; and the release of political prisoners. Most opposition groups also assumed that foreign intervention was liable to cause more harm than good to the Egyptian reform process. Accordingly, the opponents of the Mubarak regime have regularly depicted the involvement of the United States, particularly the Greater Middle East Plan, as a dangerous attempt to force a pro-American political agenda, which must be firmly resisted. They have also claimed that the United States' policy has helped the non-democratic Egyptian regime consolidate its power for decades. Furthermore, they question the sincerity of the Bush administration's declarations and have emphasized the fact that the United States is directly responsible for a substantial share of the problems in the Middle East.[26]

Alongside their shared demands, each of the opposition parties and movements sought to promote their own traditional agenda. An interesting expression of this can be found in the positions of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mubarak's proclamation to amend the procedure of the presidential elections elicited a complex response from the movement. On the one hand, its leaders graciously commended the president on his initiative and considered it an important development. On the other hand, they pointed out the weak points of the president's announcement. The movement was well aware of the president's objective in the following section of his announcement: "In my request [to amend the constitution], I defined, fundamental principles that will ensure the following objectives: that the elections for the president of the republic shall proceed by means of confidential, general, and direct elections; while granting an opportunity for political parties to participate in the presidential elections; and the provision of guarantees that will enable more than [one] candidate to participate in the elections for the republic's presidency, so that the people can freely elect their desired [candidate]."[27] For years, the Muslim Brotherhood has been demanding that the existing party law be amended so that the movement can operate as a political party and its representatives can thereby fully partake in Egypt's parliamentary life. Already in its initial reaction to the president's announcement, the movement's leadership called on the authorities to allow for "the establishment of parties and the publication of newspapers and for a cessation in the use of the emergency [laws] and the

establishment of an independent committee to supervise the elections and for the release of all the political prisoners."[28] In fact, the movement clamored for the termination of the state of emergency at every opportunity.

At the time of Mubarak's announcement, the Muslim Brotherhood's new leadership was preoccupied with efforts to consolidate its status. Muhammad Mahdi 'Akif began serving as Supreme Guide *(al-murshid al-'Aam)* over a year ago. Like his predecessors, he too was forced to delineate the large opposition movement's policy towards the government. From his frequent public appearances and statements in the press, it appeared that 'Akif was determined to do everything in his power to avert a head-on collision with the regime. 'Akif even declared that he would consider endorsing Mubarak's bid for a fifth term, in light of the Quranic commandment to obey the sovereign. His comments triggered an extensive discussion on the movement's positions. Few noticed that in the very same statement the Supreme Guide had demanded that the government permit his movement to function as a party so that its representatives could be elected to government institutions. In other words, 'Akif offered a package deal in which the Muslim Brotherhood would support the president's bid for a fifth term in office in return for official recognition of the party so that its members could compete in future elections, especially parliamentary elections. With respect to the policy that his movement would seek to advance in the event that it was indeed allowed to participate in the political sphere, 'Akif reiterated the traditional position of the Muslim Brotherhood according to which their ultimate objective was and remains the promulgation of the *Shari'a* as the exclusive source for legislation; i.e., to run Egyptian society and the government in accordance with the movement's interpretations of the sources of the Islamic faith. It is worth noting that this position was not unanimously accepted within the Muslim Brotherhood.

Against the backdrop of the intensifying protests of other opposition groups, the Muslim Brotherhood's activists initiated their own street demonstrations in various cities, the most prominent of which were held in the Egyptian capital. The media provided in-depth coverage of the arrests of hundreds of the movement's activists by security forces. Simultaneously, the Supreme Guide amplified his own criticism of the

government and adopted an explicitly more aggressive public stance. An expression of this can be found in the memorandum that was submitted in 'Akif's name to the speaker of the People's Assembly (March 27, 2005). The document was written in response to the dispersal of a demonstration that the Muslim Brotherhood planned to hold opposite the parliament. In addition to repeating the demand for comprehensive constitutional and political reform, 'Akif called upon the government to desist from utilizing the emergency laws, to respect the right to hold demonstrations, and to cease the military tribunals, which over the past few years had sentenced many of the movement's activists to prison. The Supreme Guide also demanded that many other clauses of the constitution, in addition to clause 76, be revised. For example, he requested the reduction of each presidential term to four years. Moreover, he announced his support for Mubarak's reelection, but wanted the government to permit additional candidates to compete for the presidency. The Muslim Brotherhood also demanded that the president repeal the prior conditions that he set for presidential candidates, which it viewed as an attempt to exclude worthy individuals from competing in the campaign.[29]

## *Kifaya* – the Egyptian Movement for Change

During the month of Ramadan 2003, several Egyptian intellectuals met in order to examine the possibilities for expressing their criticism of the Egyptian government and to discuss developments in the Middle East. During the first meeting, the participants drafted a joint statement that did not merit much attention at the time. Several months later, another meeting was held in which the participants criticized the new government assembled by Ahmad Nazif (July 2004), which they considered to be a superficial and unsatisfactory change. Moreover, the intellectuals contended that the Greater Middle East Plan was a clear indication of the United States' intention to gain control of the entire region in conjunction with Arab regimes. Against this backdrop, the participants announced the establishment of a new framework that would operate in the political arena: *Kifaya* (Enough!). The catchy slogan of the Egyptian Movement for Change *(al-haraka al-misriyya lil-taghyir)*

quickly turned into a brand name that was efficiently marketed in the media throughout the Middle East and beyond. Egyptians advocating a wide array of political views joined the new movement. The common denominator was their opposition to the continuation of the Husni Mubarak presidency and to Jamal Mubarak inheriting his father's position. The rallying cry of the movement was "No to inheriting [the government] ... No to extending the presidency to a fifth term" *(la lil-tawrith ... la lil-tamdid lifatra khamisa).*[30] This slogan was repeated time and again in announcements made by the founders of the new movement and during their rallies. The movement's activists called for the implementation of comprehensive constitutional and economic reform and for direct and free elections to the institutions of government – not least of which the presidency. The *Kifaya* members also espoused extremely critical views of the United States Middle East policy, and many of them held hostile views of Israel. Consequently, they lambasted the shift in Egypt's policy towards Israel (support for the disengagement plan; Mubarak's praise of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon; various gestures towards Israel, foremost among them the release from Egyptian prison of an Israeli citizen, 'Azam 'Azam, who was accused of spying against Egypt; a natural gas deal; and industrial cooperation). The joint declaration published in October 2004 provided a close look at the agenda that Mubarak's outspoken opponents sought to advance:

> We citizens of Egypt agree…with respect to the dangers and challenges that stand before our nation, which are manifested by the American occupation of Iraq and the continued aggression of the Zionists toward the Palestinian people, and the plans for redesigning the map of our Arab homeland [*watanuna al-'Arabi*], the last of which, the Greater Middle East Plan, is a threat to our nationalism and identity. The source of the inability to withstand all these dangers is the dictatorial regime that must be repaired in a comprehensive manner…We posit that there is no saving Egypt except by means of effectively replacing its government.[31]

Despite the fact that *Kifaya* was not a party and its membership was limited, its activities often resonated loudly, primarily in the new Arab media – which usually cover every effort to organize public protests against existing governments – and in some of the local opposition press.

The latter often published statements by its leaders as well as its notices, including announcements of rallies and invitations to the general public to participate in them. It is worth noting that the publication of these notices was an unusual phenomenon in the Egyptian press. In one of the notices, "the nation's pioneers" *(tala'i al-sh'ab)* were called upon to participate in demonstrations that the movement's activists scheduled for April 27, 2005 in fourteen cities throughout Egypt. The content of this notice indicated that *Kifaya*'s demands had become much bolder: the demonstration was "for the sake of the freedom to [submit one's] candidacy for the presidential elections and the establishment of an impartial transition government and an elected assembly to draft a new constitution."[32] This sort of exposure and the phenomenon that the *Kifaya* movement represented firmly attested to the fact that even the protest of a small minority was likely to attain a significant presence in the public discourse of a society with a multi-channel media. The criticism by *Kifaya*'s activists increasingly focused on Egypt's leadership and its policies. In fact, the activists waved banners calling on Mubarak to resign during the *Kifaya* demonstration (December 12, 2004) that was held on the steps of the Supreme Constitutional Court in Cairo (which I had the opportunity of observing from the adjacent street). The large amount of security forces that were sent to interrupt *Kifaya*'s demonstrations testifies to the fact that the government had gradually begun to take note of the movement and its activists. Nevertheless, the rallies continued.

Against the backdrop of the steadily intensifying protest of the various opposition groups, a certain change could be discerned in Mubarak's approach to the public discourse that was taking shape in his country. One prominent manifestation of this transformation was a three-part, seven-hour television interview granted to *al-Arabiyya* (a satellite television channel that competes with *al-Jazira*), which was broadcast over three evenings, beginning on the eve of Sinai Liberation Day (April 24, 2005) and dubbed "a Word to History" *(kalima lil-ta'rikh)*. Never before had Egypt's citizens been provided with such an intimate look at their president's personality: the fearless officer and statesman, a hero of the October 1973 War, and a president that has judiciously navigated his country through difficult conditions by dint of his discretion and wisdom. The attributes that had made Husni Mubarak a ranking officer, absolutely committed to the advancement of national

goals, also served him as the president of the republic. In one fell swoop, the partition separating Mubarak, the officer who planned and led the aerial attack that guaranteed the "October victory," and Mubarak, the president, came tumbling down. The journalist 'Imad al-Din Adib, who conducted this unusual interview did not hesitate to address the president in a direct manner and to raise provocative questions that sought to reveal the president's personality and his positions on politics and policy. All these factors combined to strengthen the impression that the latest presidential campaign would differ from those that had preceded it.

The interview with the president spawned a huge wave of reactions and commentaries. In the struggle over political reform and the general public's support, both Mubarak's supporters and opponents used his statements to serve their arguments. The president's adherents underscored his image as a poised, moderate man, who was confident he was heading down the right path. They also emphasized the fact that he was a war hero whom Sadat aptly chose as his vice president and successor as well as the fact that he was a brilliant strategist who utilized his impressive logic to analyze the situation and make critical decisions. This was the case during the military phase of his career and in the complex political campaigns with which he had to contend as president of Egypt. According to his supporters, then, he was a leader whose military and political experience was a precious asset. Rebroadcasts of the interview and scores of supportive articles in the press sought to consolidate the positive reputation that the President of the Republic had built over the past twenty-four years.

In contrast, the opposition presented the interview as election propaganda. They asserted that the interview was meticulously produced to the finest detail for the purpose of making an impression on the viewers without having to engage in a genuine discussion about the difficult reality currently facing Egypt. To wit, they enlisted a journalist who was trusted by broad segments of the public ('Imad al-Din Adib, the editor of the newspaper *Nahdat Misr*) and a highly reputed movie and television director (Sharif 'Arafa) in order to ensure a professional product. Moreover, the location of the interview was designed to make a lasting impression on the viewers. For the first time, television cameras were given extended access to the Air Force

operations room, while the original operations map of the Egyptian offensive during the October 1973 War hung in the background. The last part of the interview was filmed at the president's home in order to bolster Mubarak's image as an ordinary Egyptian citizen.

The government's opponents claimed that the interview's punctilious attention to detail and the fact that it was edited created the false impression of a revealing and critical interview, while in practice the president and his men controlled the content and produced what the headline in the newspaper of the *al-Ghad* opposition party referred to as "the Mubarak Movie." This headline topped a list of twenty penetrating questions that, according to *al-Ghad*, should have been asked of the president, but were – not coincidentally – missing from the purportedly "daring" interview of "revelations" and "surprises." Apropos of a party named Tomorrow *(al-Ghad)* whose leader, Ayman Nur, sought to forge a new Egypt, the party's newspaper pointed out that most of the president's answers were devoted to past events while the challenges of the present and plans for the future were only briefly mentioned. The paper also argued that the helm of the Egyptian government was not in such trustworthy hands and that the hardships most Egyptians faced clearly testified to the failure of Mubarak's policy. Furthermore, the president's declarations of "reform" were deemed mere chatter lacking substance.[33]

# Conclusion

As expected, the amendment to clause 76 of the constitution was passed by a large majority in May 2005. Parliamentarians representing the opposition parties and the Muslim Brotherhood dissented or abstained. In their view, the reservations that were tacked on to the amendment negated the possibility of significant political reform. The opposition criticized the distinction that the amendment made between independent candidates wishing to compete in the upcoming presidential elections and those running on behalf of existing parties. In particular, they objected to the fact that independents must garner the support of at least 250 members of parliament, the Consultative

Assembly *(majlis al-shura)*, and the local councils in order to secure a spot on the ballot. However, with the exception of the upcoming elections, strict conditions would be imposed on party candidates in all future elections. For example, only parties that had operated for at least five years would be able to field candidates, but only individuals that had merited the support of no less than five percent of the members of parliament and the Consultative Assembly would be able to run. The opposition claimed that under the existing political conditions in Egypt, these requirements favored the candidate of the ruling party and hindered the ability of the other parties to field candidates. Consequently, the government's opponents declared that their hopes that Mubarak's initiative would lead to the coveted changes had not panned out. Above all, the amendment to clause 76 of the constitution revealed the current leadership's intention to hold onto the reins of government and to prevent significant change in the future. The government's critics unanimously concluded that they were still a long way off from true political reform. All the same, they promised that the struggle for democracy in Egypt would continue with even greater fervor.

The revision of the procedure for presidential elections appeared to be a calculated step aimed at furthering several objectives simultaneously. First and foremost, the measure was designed to pull the rug out from under the opposition's two primary claims: that the existing government was incapable of advancing true reform on its own; and that the president's intentions were and remained to bequeath the leadership mantle to his son Jamal. From Mubarak's vantage point, the new election procedure was a clever ploy, primarily because it enabled him to compete in the upcoming presidential elections while essentially neutralizing the very complaint that had been thrust at him from both within and outside Egypt. Many observers, especially in the West, now believed that the revised election procedure allowed for a fairer playing field in which multiple candidates could vie for the senior position. However, given Egypt's existing political reality, this so-called "liberalization" was largely theoretical. Moreover, the new procedure harbored the potential for an even more sophisticated political step. It was likely to pave the way for Jamal Mubarak to run for the presidency in the future, without Husni Mubarak being suspected of bequeathing the government to his son.

In contrast to the conjecture over Jamal Mubarak's future, the Egyptian presidential elections indeed materialized with ten candidates competing for the top position. The ruling party mobilized its resources giving Husni Mubarak a clear advantage over his rivals. Apart from the candidates representing *al-Wafd* and *al-Ghad* parties, the other candidates were nominated by minor parties, were unknown to the general public, and received miniscule support. Some of the opposition parties and movements called upon their supporters to boycott the elections (mainly the leftist parties *al-Tajammu'*, *al-Nasiri al-'Arabi*, and al-*Kifaya*). Similarly, the Muslim Brotherhood movement announced that it would not endorse any of the candidates; however, it decided that its members were free to decide on their own whether to exercise their new-found voting rights. These forms of protest not only expressed the disappointment of members of the opposition with the new election proceedings and its attendant conditions, but sought to sully the legitimacy of President Mubarak's reelection.

Husni Mubarak won the election and begun his fifth term as president. After taking into account the requisite caution that behooves any speculation about the future, the following scenario may be crafted. Husni Mubarak will continue implementing his policy of limited and supervised reforms in the political arena. Mubarak's son, Jamal, will increase his public activity and consolidate his status as the next leader of the National Democratic Party. These efforts will enable Jamal to compete on behalf of the ruling party for his father's position in the next presidential elections (presently scheduled for 2011). Consequently, Mubarak's supporters will be able to declare that their country is not a *jumlukiyya* – a combination of the Arabic words *jumhuriyya* (republic) and *mulukiyya* (monarchy) – a term used by the opposition to describe the possibility that Egypt's republican government will be bequeathed from father to son as is customary in monarchies.[34] From the standpoint of the opposition, the bottom line of this scenario was rather pessimistic: despite their concerted efforts, they lacked the power to significantly change the rules of the political game in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it appeared that they would fail to wrest the government from the hands of the president and/or prevent his son from inheriting the position in free elections. The restrictions that have been attached to the revised procedure of the presidential elections make it very difficult for the

opposition parties to field a candidate with a reasonable chance of defeating either the incumbent or any future candidate of the ruling party.

Naturally, the changing circumstances in Egypt may foil the regime's plans. The fact that ten candidates competed for the leadership mantle has already revitalized the political scene and is likely to revive the long dormant People's Assembly *(majlis al-sha'b)*. The president's initiative to amend clause 76 of the constitution and his promises during the election campaign have indeed raised the expectations of the Egyptian government's domestic and foreign critics for further change. The criticism against Mubarak and his government has steadily surged since mid-2004 by means of an unprecedented litany of public expressions: an abundance of rallies, criticism in the opposition papers (the number of which has also reached all-time highs and is also indicative of this phenomenon), and other forms of protest that have been aimed directly at the president. At this stage, it does not appear as if the intensification of the strident criticism against the government will push Egypt to the brink of dramatic change. The government is firmly on top of things and its steps are well-coordinated with its allies in Washington.

Nevertheless, the future of Egypt's political reform is still shrouded in doubt. The developments over the past year – most notably the amendment to the constitution and the presidential elections – were a significant change relative to the past, but several critical questions remain to be answered. Will the political reforms in Egypt indeed continue, as the president promised throughout the course of his election campaign? Will the heated political struggle persist? Will the opposition parties and movements manage to maintain the positive momentum of the past year and thereby expand the public support for their leaders? And will the international pressure on the Egyptian leadership for further democratization continue as well? The answers to these questions will inevitably shape the future of the largest, and perhaps most pivotal, Arab state in the Middle East.

## NOTES

1. On the changes in the internal political scene, see: Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (New York, Oxford University Press: 1992). On the construction of the revolutionary discourse, see: Yoram Meital, "Revolutionizing the Past: Historical Representation during Egypt's Revolutionary Experience, 1952–1967," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 12 (December 1997), pp. 60–77. For a definitive discussion on the changes in the national arena and Egypt's relations with the Arab states, see: James Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers: 2002); Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nassir and his Rivals, 1958–1970*, 2nd edition (New York, Oxford University Press: 1971).

2. Gordon, Ibid.; P.J. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and His Generation* (New York, St. Martin's Press: 1978).

3. John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: the Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 1983).

4. Sa'ad al-Din Ibrahim, *I'adat al-I'tibar li'l Ra'is al-Sadat* (Cairo, Dar al-Ma'rif: 1993); Ahmad Baha al-Din, *Muhawarati Ma'a al-sadat* (Cairo, Dar al-Hilal: 1987).

5. Shawqi Khalid, *Muhakamat Far'un* (Cairo, Sina lil-Nasher: 1986).

6. For an illuminating discussion on the parties in Egypt, see: Wahid 'Abd al-Majid, *al-Ahzab al-Misriyya min al-Dakhil* (Cairo, Markaz al-Mahrusa: 1993). For a description of the positions of the opposition parties and their scathing criticism of Mubarak's policies on the war in Iraq and the Palestinian uprising, see: Mona El-Ghobashy, "Egypt's Summer of Discontent," *MERIP*, September 18, 2003, pp. 2–4.

7. The new media has slowly begun to have a noticeable affect on the local media. Although the local media has continued to spin the government's positions, most of them have adopted innovative technologies and have broadcast discussions on topics that previously failed to gain their attention.

8. This argument was raised by Ali Salim, the Egyptian playwright, and Shakir al-Nabulsi, the Jordanian publicist, at the conference New Media in the Middle East, which was held at Ben-Gurion University (December 28–29, 2004).

9. Even if it is difficult to assess the extent of the new media's influence on the public discourse in any particular Arab society, the researchers of this phenomenon emphasize its existence: Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism* (Boulder, Westview Press: 2003).

10. For the draft of the initiative and accompanying documents, see the State Department's website: http://www.mepi.state.gov

11. For Mubarak's declaration and a review of the discussions at the conference, see: *al-Ahram*, March 13–15, 2004. Mubarak asserted that there was a link between the attainment of stability and peace in the Middle East and the advancement

of democratization. Extensive portions of his speech were devoted to describing the achievements of the economic reform that Egypt had adopted under his rule. He also noted the importance of making progress in the field of education. Nevertheless, the president barely spoke about the political reform that was needed. An account of the conference, its speeches, and the concluding declaration may be found on the website that its organizers have established: http://www.arabreformforum.com

12. Mona al-Tahawy, "Arabs are Saying 'enough'," *International Herald Tribune*, March 5, 2005. see also the Kifaya website: http://www.harakamasria.com

13. In essence, as early as March 2003, Jamal Mubarak, who was then the head of the Secretariat of the Democratic National Party, announced a series of recommendations for reform, which were subsequently submitted to parliament.

14. As expected, the mouthpiece of *al-Tajammu'* party severely criticized the conference and its decisions. See the article of its editor, Nabil Zaki, "Where is the Pluralism, Competition, and Discussion?," *al-Ahali*, September 22, 2004. For Jamal Mubarak's comments on this topic, see: *al-Ahram*, September 24, 2004.

15. The declaration was made during a press conference that was held at the end of the ruling party's convention and was prominently featured on the front pages of the next day's Egyptian papers as well as many foreign publications. See: *al-Ahram*, September 24, 2004; *al-Hayat* September 24, 2004. It is worth noting that Jamal Mubarak never ruled out the possibility of running for the presidency in the future.

16. For the full version of the message that the president dispatched to the speakers see: *al-Ahram*, February 27, 2005. That same issue contains the full version of the speech in which Mubarak declared his initiative. The supervision of the elections quickly became a controversial issue, pitting the government against its domestic and foreign critics. Even President Bush stated that he felt that international observers were needed. Jamal Mubarak and the speaker of the parliament, Ahmad Fathi Srur, announced Egypt's opposition to such a presence; *Al-Jazira*, May 13, 2005. Correspondingly, a well-attended conference of Egyptian judges was held in Alexandria. Most of the speakers argued in favor of local, legal supervision over the elections, but stressed that they would refuse to undertake this mission unless given guarantees that they would be able to verify that the elections were free of improprieties. From the statements of some of the speakers, it appeared that in prior elections their colleagues had served as rubber stamps and were forced to validate flawed election campaigns.

17. "President Discusses American and European Alliance in Belgium," the White House website: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050221.html

18. Hadia Mustafa, "You for President?" *Egypt Today* (April 2005), 56. The author emphasized that a democracy cannot simply appear out of thin air like some instant recipe. "It will take years of trial and error to develop a new system that

provides the instruments necessary for political participation on every level," Mustafa concluded. Only this sort of evolutionary process is likely to produce "capable leaders that we can trust to take us forward." Ibid., 57.

19. His statement appeared in *al-Hayat*, February 27, 2005. Munir Fakhri 'Abd al-Nur emphasized that Mubarak's proposal had arrived many years late, but the measure itself was positive and would have a positive influence on the political reality in Egypt. Even the quasi-official papers of the government occasionally opined that it was a shame that the president waited so long to offer this proposal. For example, in a cartoon that was published in *al-Ahram* on March 1, 2005, the figure of a woman, representing Egypt, welcomes the receipt of a ballot from Mubarak marked "Amendment to the Constitution." In response, Egypt smiles and tells its president that "I have been waiting for you to give me this gift quite some time."

20. *Al-Hayat*, February 27, 2005.

21. *Al-Jazira*, February 27, 2005.

22. *Al-Ghad*, April 27, 2005.

23. Sa'ad al-Din Ibrahim, "Is this indeed the Spring of Democracy in the Arab World?," in the website *Middle East Transparent*, March 2, 2005; see: http://metransparent.com

24. Muna Makram 'Ubayd, "Will Civil Society Lead the Train of Reform in Egypt?," *al-Hayat*, February 28, 2005. For many years, 'Ubayd served as a member of parliament and a professor at the American University in Cairo. At the beginning of June 2005, she resigned from her position as the secretary-general of the *al-Ghad* party, which she only held for a couple of months. See: *Al-Ahram Weekly*, June 2, 2005.

25. Sa'ad-Din Ibrahim, Ibid; 'Issam al-'Aryan, "The Egyptian Outline for Reform: the First Step Down a Long Road," *al Hayat*, March 4, 2005.

26. See Muna al-Tahawi's thoughts on the *Kifaya* website: http://www.harakamasria.com

27. For Mubarak's speech in its entirety, see: *al-Ahram*, February 27, 2005.

28. See the announcement of the Muslim Brotherhood, in: *al-Hayat*, February 27, 2005. For more on the movement's demands, see: 'Issam al-'Aryan, Ibid.

29. Quoted from the memorandum of the Supreme Guide, in: *al-Hayat*, March 28, 2005.

30. For more on the movement and its slogans see the *Kifaya* website: http://www.harakamasria.com. For a detailed survey on the demonstrations that were organized against the war in Iraq towards the end of March 2003 by the opposition circles in Egypt, see: Paul Schemn, "Egypt Struggles to Control Anti-War Protests," *MERIP*, March 31, 2003.

31. See the *Kifaya* website: http://www.harakamasria.com. A number of articles on this site criticize the United States' call for political reform. The claim that the Greater Middle East Plan does not meet the demands for significant change

is repeated in all these articles. The American administration, according to *Kifaya*, clamors for political reform, but remains obligated to its close collaboration with oppressive regimes, especially those of Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

32. For the text of the notice, see: *al-'Arabi*, April 24, 2005.

33. Printed in red, the central headline on the front page read: "Twenty Critical Questions that the President has not Answered," *al-Ghad*, April 27, 2005. Another opposition paper vociferously demanded to know, "Where is the 'Word for the Future'?" This question similarly served as the title of a long list of questions: *al-Dustur*, April 27, 2005.

34. The expression *jumlukiyya* was introduced to the Egyptian public discourse against the backdrop of the hurried transfer of power in Syria in which Hafiz al-Asad, bequeathed the presidency to his son Bashar from his deathbed. The brief discussion in the Syrian parliament that preceded the passing of the required amendment to the constitution, and the approval of the appointment in a public referendum [June 2000], was met with derision in Egypt. Although the criticism was pointed at the succession in Syria, the arrows were also directed at the Egyptian government, in light of the strengthening of Jamal Mubarak's position in the ruling party. In response to the criticism, the president and his son hurried to declare that Egypt was not Syria and that an inheritance was not in the making.

# In the Name of the Father: Is Bashar in Control of Syria?

## *Eyal Zisser*

The dramatic events in Syria and Lebanon in the early months of 2005, culminating in the humiliating expulsion of Syrian troops from Lebanon, were unprecedented. It is hard to believe that anyone could have fathomed these developments half a year ago – before the storm began – or that the demand for Syria's ouster would be led by forces from within Lebanon, who seek to disarm Hizbullah.

The dramatic events in Lebanon were facilitated by three factors. Each was important in its own right, but only their concurrence could have fomented the revolution in Lebanon. The first factor was the weakness of the Syrian state from a political, military, and economic standpoint and, more importantly, the personal frailty of its leader, Bashar al-Asad. The second factor was the anger at Syria for the murder of the former prime minister of Lebanon, Rafiq al-Hariri. Although the responsible party remains unknown, the prevailing assumption in Lebanon is that the murder was carried out by Syria. It is worth noting that this was the first time Lebanese wrath had spilled across ethnic lines, uniting Maronites, Druze (under the leadership of Walid Junblatt), and Sunnis, the sect of the late prime minister, Rafiq al-Hariri. The final factor was American and French backing for, and even encouragement of, opposition groups in Lebanon.[1]

Nevertheless and after all is said and done, the person who triggered this entire process was Bashar al-Asad. More precisely, his decision in September 2004 to extend the tenure of his ally and dependant Emil Lahud engendered the whirlwind in which Syria now found itself entrapped. This fact naturally turned the spotlight on Bashar al-Asad – his personality, his outlook, and, of course, the extent of his control over Syria. The question as to whether Bashar al-Asad in fact ruled Syria has

preoccupied all observers who have been tracking the country's developments in recent years. This topic appeared to be the focus of every discussion on Syria – its status, policy, and future course of action. It was a question that begged asking given Bashar al-Asad's dubious track record, which for the most part has been riddled with failure.[2]

Since his rise to power in 2000, Bashar al-Asad has been responsible for a litany of fiascos both at home and abroad; to make matters worse, his policy has also been marked by vicissitudes and instability. This state of affairs has elicited repeated claims that, in practice, Asad was not in control of Syria. Whether this was due to his personal weakness and the fact that he did not benefit from the same degree of power, support, and governing legitimacy that his father Hafiz al-Asad enjoyed, or whether this stemmed from his dependence on a series of power bases that were whittling away at his authority and challenging his rule, these conditions were hindering his latitude and forcing him to implement policies that were not always to his liking.

Whatever the reason, in light of recent events – particularly the unprecedented souring of relations between Damascus and Washington – the question that must be asked is not whether Bashar was in control, but "how much longer will he manage to remain in power?"

Bashar al-Asad's rise to power in June 2000 came at an hour of crisis for the Syrian regime. The feeling of many, both within and outside of Syria, was that the Syrian Ba'th regime, which had ruled the country for close to forty years, had reached the end of the line inasmuch as it had become irrelevant, anachronistic, and out of touch with reality. After all, it was the kind of regime Arab states were accustomed to in the 1950s and 1960s: a military regime committed to radical social, economic, and foreign policies; a veritable dictatorship eager to suppress civil rights and to seal the country off from foreign influence; and, finally, a regime that displayed basic hostility towards the West. This regime rose to power in November 1970 under the leadership of Hafiz al-Asad, the founder of the Asad dynasty, after the Ba'th party – from which the dynasty sprang – had already seized control of the country in 1963. Ironically, 1970 (the year Asad rose to power) was the same year that 'Abd al-Nasir's rule over Egypt, which in many respects was identical to the Asad regime, came to an end.

After Hafiz al-Asad's death and the succession of his son Bashar,

many Syrians asked themselves if Bashar would seek to distance himself from his father's legacy, especially in light of the dramatic changes that had transpired in the 1990s: the collapse of the Soviet Union, a loyal ally and patron of the Syrian regime; the peace process with Israel, which threatened to abolish a central component of the Syrian regime's ideology in all that concerned the struggle with Israel; the economic dead end that Syria had stumbled into; and many other issues.[3]

It must be remembered that Hafiz al-Asad's regime was predicated on two stable pillars. The first was his political or ideological outlook, which was immensely popular among the Syrian public at the time. The second was the regime's social and economic structure. Key sectors of Syrian society supported the government, which they viewed as a faithful representative that protected and advanced their interests. These sectors were not limited to the Alawis – Bashar al-Asad's ethnic group – but also encompassed other groups that linked up with the Alawis. Together they formed what was commonly referred to as "Asad's grand coalition," a framework which enabled him to survive for so many years. In addition to the regime's ideological attrition, dramatic changes to the structure of Syrian society began to take effect in the 1980s and 1990s. The importance of the rural hinterland waned, and the country underwent an accelerated urbanization process. These changes produced social and economic phenomena that harbored the potential for undermining the stability that Syria had enjoyed for so many years: the growth of the poor precincts near the centers of the large cities where radical Islam blossomed, a sharp increase in unemployment, and a decline in the quality of life of the country's inhabitants.[4]

When Bashar first assumed the leadership, it appeared – at least from the interviews that he frequently gave to the Arab and foreign press – that he was cognizant of the problems that Syria faced and that he would attempt to solve them. In contrast to his father, who on more than one occasion boasted that Syria's situation under his leadership was never better – and perhaps even sincerely believed it – Bashar did not hesitate to point out difficulties and promised to handle them in an assiduous manner.[5] However, Bashar's performance over the course of his five years in power has been replete with failures that attest to his inability to confront the challenges facing him and Syria. Bashar's immediate problem was not internal affairs but foreign policy. In fact, if he were

governing Tunisia, Morocco, or Sudan, his domestic policy could very well have enabled him to maintain the country's stability. But Syria's geopolitical location has induced a predicament – or what may better be described as a storm – that goes beyond the abilities of someone of Bashar's stature.

During the past five years, Bashar has attempted to set in motion two important processes on the home front. The first was the gradual implementation of moderate political reforms. The second involved economic reforms with the objective of transforming Syria from a socialist-indoctrinated state into a market economy. On both counts, Bashar has either reaped partial successes or has failed altogether.

The breaking point at which it became evident that Bashar lacked the wherewithal to bring about the necessary changes in Syria was during the outpouring of democracy or political liberalization – by Syrian standards, at least – during the spring of 2001. However, the old guard, or perhaps the same coalition of Syrian power bases, who were content with the status quo and liable to be hurt by the political and economic liberalization process, opposed these measures and called Bashar to order. Bashar succumbed to their pressure and reneged on his commitment to these reforms. Since then, his acquiescence to these forces has been irreversible as he has permanently placed himself at their beck and call. This conduct contrasts sharply with Sadat's initial steps as president of Egypt in May 1971. Sadat incarcerated all competing power bases a mere six months after assuming office and thereby consolidated his position as the country's sole ruler.[6]

A strong possibility also exists that Bashar never intended to introduce any real changes in Syria. Accordingly, once he had released the genie from the bottle, he was terrified with the results and labored to get the ghost of political liberalism back into the bottle. Another possibility is that he really did aspire to bring about change, but was thwarted by reactionary forces within Syria. Perhaps the truth will ultimately come to the surface, but regardless of Bashar's intentions the bottom line essentially remained the same – Bashar lacked the ability to elicit any real reforms or consolidate his status and rule Syria.

It was true that by Syrian standards, a very gradual process of change has begun. In Damascus, for example, there are tens of ATMs from which money can be drawn, and there are several branches of private banks.

However, the majority of Syria's residents still lack bank accounts. There are two million subscriptions to cellular phones in Syria, but exposure to the internet is still minimal.[7] Recently, the uniforms that were the dress code in Syrian schools for nearly forty years were replaced. Moreover, the Ba'th regime has annulled the clause in the platform of the Progressive National Front prohibiting negotiations with Israel. For Syria, these are impressive changes, but relative to those transpiring in the rest of the world, they may be regarded as "too little too late."[8]

As noted above, Bashar's troubles were not connected to internal affairs, but were the result of his foreign policy. On this front, he has been forced to confront a long line of challenges and has failed every time: the Intifada in 2000, the war on terror following 9/11, the Iraq War in 2003, and the more recent Lebanese crisis.

The most glaring consequence of Bashar's failures has been the unprecedented rupture in the relations between Damascus and Washington. In the past, the United States viewed Syria as a problematic ally; in other words, as a volatile country with a great many issues that Washington had to confront, but nonetheless an ally that had assisted the United States in the past (during the first Gulf War, for example). Therefore, the preferred approach to handling Syria was through dialogue. This perspective, espoused by the Clinton administration, was still intact at the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency. However, it has become evident from American statements over the past few months that it has changed its policy. The United States now considers Syria a belligerent state constituting a threat to US interests and inhibiting the progress of its policies in the region, including the peace process, Iraq, Lebanon, and the advancement of democracy. From Washington's point of view, the Syrian Ba'th regime has obdurately chosen to fill the huge shoes of none other than Saddam Husayn.[9]

This diplomatic crisis was less the product of Syrian actions than Syria's lack of enterprise. In other words, despite the sand storm that has beset his country, Bashar has not risen to the occasion by taking bold, historical decisions. He has not sought to imitate Libya's Qadhafi, nor his father Hafiz al-Asad in his prime, and certainly not Anwar Sadat. He has had difficulties comprehending the regional and international picture and has refrained from making the necessary decisions. Instead, he has continued the same course of action that has always characterized

the Syrians: on the one hand, stubbornly clinging to Syria's basic, ideological position, fueled by a belief that in the end it will ultimately guarantee Syria's existence; and on the other hand, cautiously endeavoring not to cross red lines, in the event that Bashar has managed to identify those lines. As previously mentioned, he has often had difficulty identifying the red lines and, from Washington's perspective, has repeatedly crossed them.

A prominent feature of Middle-Eastern politics today is that processes in the region are often determined and decided on in Washington, not in Arab capitals. Consequently, the question of whether Bashar al-Asad will continue to rule in Syria was less dependent on the internal situation in Syria – or on Bashar al-Asad himself – than on the actions of George Bush. This very fact should be a source of concern for Syria's young leader.

## NOTES

1.  Eyal Zisser, "Lebanon after the Murder of Hariri," *Tel Aviv Notes* 126 (February 24, 2005).
2.  Also see: Eyal Zisser, "Does Bashar al-Asad Rule Syria?" *Middle East Quarterly* 10:1 (Winter 2003), pp. 15–24.
3.  Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Syria at a Crossroads* (Tel-Aviv, Hakibbutz Hameuchad: 1999) [Hebrew].
4.  Eyal Zisser, *In the Name of the Father: Bashar al-Assad's First Years in Power* (Tel Aviv University Press and the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle East and African Studies: 2003), pp. 129–160 [Hebrew].
5.  Above, note 3, pp. 214–221.
6.  Eyal Zisser, "A False Spring in Damascus," *Orient* 44:1 (2003), pp. 39–62.
7.  Above, note 4, pp.129–160.
8.  *Al-Hayat*, July 6 and 17, 2003; September 7, 2004.
9.  See: Eyal Zisser, "Syria and the United States: Bad Habits Die Hard," *Middle East Quarterly* 10:3 (Summer 2003), pp. 29–39.

# Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi and Sayf al-Islam – Father and Son at a Historical Crossroads?

## Yehudit Ronen

Sayf al-Islam enjoys spending time with his house pets, rare Bengal tigers. In fact, he demonstrated his fondness for his striped friends by including them in photo shoots for the media during the late 1990s. It is no wonder then, that they have already become one of the trademarks of the man who may succeed his father Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi as Libya's head of state.

One ought to return to an event that occurred in the Vienna airport towards the beginning of 1998. In a jovial and amiable mood, Qadhafi's son stepped out of a plane that had just landed. In a few minutes, he was to arrive at his new residence – a luxurious villa in one of the Austrian capital's prestigious suburbs – where he would live for the duration of his academic studies. However, his joy was dampened by a light cloud: the Austrian government decided to prohibit Sayf al-Islam from lodging the tigers, which had flown in with him to Vienna, in his own house. Instead, he had to transfer them to the municipal zoo, where they would be tended to in upgraded accommodation that suited the beloved pets of the Libyan ruler's son.

This compromise was brokered only after heavy-handed negotiations between Libya and Austria on the eve of Sayf al-Islam's arrival to Vienna. The Austrians refused to approve the tigers' entry, but Sayf al-Islam – who had planned an extended stay in Vienna – found it difficult to part with his predatory pals and insisted on taking them along. Father Qadhafi, sympathizing with his son, rushed to his aid as only he could: the Libyan Foreign Ministry threatened a moratorium on entry permits to Libya for Austrian business people and concomitantly recommended

that all those already in the country start packing their bags. These steps were enough to resolve the bizarre "tiger crisis," as the Austrian authorities were compelled to come up with the "creative" solution of hosting the animals in the Austrian capital's ancient zoo.[1]

Qadhafi's intervention – he threatened to initiate a diplomatic crisis with an important European country at a time when Libya was diplomatically besieged by the West – simply to gratify his son's capriciousness, highlighted the eccentric and unyielding conduct of Libya's ruler in matters that concern his favorite son. It is worth asking whether this episode also indicated a similarity between the two. Has the apple indeed fallen close to the tree? Who is Sayf al-Islam? What is his role in the Libyan establishment? Has Qadhafi already decided to bequeath him the "throne"? Perhaps Libya is already in the midst of a "white revolution" in which authority is being transferred over to Qadhafi's son? What is the attitude in the various government circles towards him? Which of the political stalwarts pose a threat to the inheritance of the "son of" and who are his supporters? The answers to these questions lie at the heart of the present discussion.

Qadhafi has run Libya with a firm hand for more than three and a half decades – a record for political longevity among non-monarchial regimes in the Middle East – and it was no wonder, then, that the country has largely been fashioned in his own image. Sayf al-Islam was a relatively new figure in Libyan politics, but even now, his influence on Tripoli's internal and foreign policies and the manner in which his father ran the country was profound.

At the age of 32, Sayf al-Islam was ensconced at the summit of the Libyan political landscape. For almost five years, he has actively filled a series of impressive, central positions – both official and unofficial – in the country's governing establishment. He began his political career more or less at the age of 27, the same age his father was when he catapulted himself to the forefront of the political stage. On September 1, 1969, while serving as an officer in the Libyan army, the elder Qadhafi carried out a military coup modeled on the Egyptian Free Officers Revolution of Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir – the only Arab leader he reveres. Qadhafi toppled King Idris al-Sanusi, who had ruled Libya since its independence in 1951, and assumed the reins of power. Obviously, the circumstances in Libya at the end of the 1960s differed vastly from its

circumstances at the turn of the twentieth century, and these differences, among others, accounted for the divergent political activities that father and son have pursued at similar stages of their lives. Nevertheless, the proximity between the ages at which they both commenced their political careers is intriguing as is their powerful attraction to the center of the political stage.

In contrast to his father, Sayf al-Islam has not drawn his prestige from military and security achievements. Rather, he is focused on politics, particularly along the state's political, diplomatic and "public-relations" fronts – areas of closely related activity under the complete control of the state. Sayf al-Islam enjoys being in the limelight of the international media and frequently grants interviews to the foreign press – both Arab and Western. Likewise the media enjoys interviewing him, for he is indeed a rising star. This media interest not only stems from his congeniality and eloquence as an interviewee deeply involved in Libya's internal and foreign affairs, but also illustrates the media's assumption that he is already situated at the crossroads of Libyan political decision-making in the domestic, regional, and international spheres. Moreover, it is clear that the media also considers him a likely candidate to succeed his father as head of state or, at the very least, to assume a powerful political position in the leadership.

Sayf al-Islam has inherited his father's verbal skills, charismatic presence, and capacity for diplomatic intrigue as well as his political ambition. He has mastered the English language, is familiar with Western culture, and, most importantly, does not harbor adverse emotions nor contempt for the "Western imperialism", that father Qadhafi and many members of his generation held responsible for the woes of the Arab world. These sentiments have clouded Qadhafi's judgment on more than one occasion and channeled his foreign relations in directions that have ultimately damaged Libya's own interests.

Qadhafi the father has experienced many failures as well as achievements, and his face indeed expresses both fatigue and resolve. He is nearing the age of sixty-five and has now held the reins of power for an extended and exhausting period. On the other hand, Sayf al-Islam exudes vigor and optimism. His radiant smile and fashionable, glistening crew cut have rapidly become his trademark. He frequents European capitals, mingles with VIPs, and graces glamorous cultural events with

his presence. In fact, a painting exhibition of his own work was held in Paris. Sayf's personal charm, etiquette, stylish and youthful Western attire, and his academic education all solidify his reputation as a "man of the world." However, it is not entirely accurate to portray Sayf al-Islam just as a "man of pleasure," rushing from one glamorous event to the next. He is busy carrying out missions in the service of the Libyan state, and his influence is prominent in many of the government's endeavors. Nevertheless, his political ascent has been gradual and has been fashioned under his father's close and watchful eye.

The Libyan leader's son began to make a name for himself during the second half of the 1990s. At the time, Libya reached unprecedented economic and political lows as a result of two exceedingly destructive factors: the drastic and protracted decline in the state's oil revenues due to the downturn in the global petroleum market since the 1980s; and Libya's regional and international isolation that accompanied the economic damage caused by the suffocating UN sanctions during the 1990s. Libya, whose economic backbone is its oil exports, earned $7.4 billion from the export of petroleum and petrol products in 1993 compared with $11 billion three years earlier and $20 billion during the early 1980s. Moreover, the UN sanctions – slapped on in 1992 in order to force Libya to extradite two of its citizens suspected of blowing up a Pan Am jet over Lockerbie, Scotland, some four years earlier – totaled losses of approximately $33 billion.[2] Qadhafi's refusal to extradite the two, and thereby incriminate himself and his country, prolonged the sanctions for seven years. During this period, the country's economic and social vibrancy waned, leading to political complaints, discontent, and an increase in domestic opposition to Qadhafi's rule. Military uprisings and assassination attempts, including a violent struggle waged by radical Islamic organizations against what they referred to as the "heretical" regime,[3] posed a serious threat to Qadhafi.

With the extradition of the accused Libyans and the subsequent suspension of the UN sanctions in 1999, a new era opened in Libya of which Sayf al-Islam became an indivisible part. In order to help his young and inexperienced son develop the required political tactics and leadership skills, Qadhafi dropped him into the frigid waters of public and diplomatic life, and Sayf al-Islam responded with a rapid series of impressive successes. His most prominent achievement was the release

of Western tourists taken hostage in the southern Philippines in 2000 by the *Abu al-Sayyaf*, a radical Islamic organization, in return for a hefty ransom payment.[4] The funds for this transaction were rendered by the International Qadhafi Fund, which was founded in 1997 by Libya's leader, who subsequently appointed Sayf al-Islam to run the organization. The fund is ostensibly independent of the state's financial establishment and is formally designated for philanthropic causes and humanitarian relief. Moreover, it affords the Libyan authorities with a great deal of room to maneuver by enabling them to pursue certain foreign-policy measures with which they do not want to be associated. For example, when the United States accused Libya of bolstering terrorism by agreeing to the ransom demands of the Muslim kidnappers in the Philippines, Sayf al-Islam and other senior government officials claimed that the Libyan authorities did not pay "so much as one Dirham [the Libyan paper currency] or one dollar in return for the release of the captives" and that these funds should merely be viewed as a "humane act" intended to improve their economic lot.[5] The controversy in the international media over the release of the captives by Sayf al-Islam, of all people, focused the regional and global spotlight on the young Libyan and enhanced his prestige.

In the immediate aftermath of this affair, Sayf al-Islam's involvement in Libya's internal and foreign affairs has attracted increasing notice within the country and abroad. Libya has experienced dramatic vicissitudes in the early twenty-first century, which have transformed its status from one extreme to the other, i.e., from a country quarantined from the rest of the world and encumbered by hostile and rigid sanctions to a country courted by the West from both an economic and diplomatic standpoint. This turnaround and Libya's challenging policy shifts are, in part, the fruit of Sayf al-Islam's distinct position vis-à-vis his father as well as his influence on Qadhafi senior and the powerful circles surrounding him.

However, Sayf al-Islam is mindful not to overshadow either his father or other key figures in the upper echelons of the Libyan establishment, particularly Foreign Minister 'Abd al-Rahman Shalkam and Prime Minister Shukri Ghanim. The former is orchestrating Libya's efforts to open itself up to the West. Concurrently, Ghanim is orchestrating the internal reforms, particularly the privatization of Libya's socialist-

oriented market after years of economic stagnation and tight control over all facets of the country's industry. These three figures, Shukri Ghanim, 'Abd al-Rahman Shalkam, and Sayf al-Islam, constitute the Libyan vanguard laboring to transform Libya into a modern and responsible country.

It also appeared that senior members of the security establishment, led by the head of Libyan intelligence, Musa Kusa, completely backed the Qadhafis' – the father and son's – policies, but this façade may be misleading. There may very well be tensions and rivalries simmering beneath the surface, which are liable to erupt the moment the regime weakens. In any event, the country's current ruling elite (in 2005) – of which Sayf al-Islam is a major pillar – boasts a series of distinguished accomplishments on both the internal and foreign fronts. Foremost among these successes has been the galvanization of the economy and its technological infrastructure (with an emphasis on the petroleum sector) and a breakthrough in its relations with the West, particularly the United States. This process of transition was exemplified by Tripoli's position towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, its informal acceptance of both the existence of the Israeli state and Libya's responsibility for its former Jewish citizens, and its recognition of the Holocaust.[6]

In contrast to his father, Sayf al-Islam is not encumbered by animosity towards the West. He was about 14 when American planes bombed Tripoli and Benghazi and caused his family severe mental trauma. Despite that experience, he did not become obsessed with hatred for the West; instead, he internalized the West's pulverizing might and thus cultivated a desire to live in peace with the United States: "You forgive but don't forget".[7]

Sayf al-Islam was indeed the one who spearheaded the dramatic rapprochement between Libya and the West. Moreover, he deserves much of the credit for the denouement of the Lockerbie crisis and Libya's decision to relinquish its weapons of mass destruction. It is no wonder, then, that many observers both within and outside Libya consider him to be a promising leader and a serious candidate to succeed his father as head of state. However, Sayf al-Islam himself makes no effort to promote this impression, nor does he bear an official title.

In fact, Qadhafi has never given himself an official title, and he takes advantage of every opportunity to repeat the claim that it is the people

who rule the state, not him. Consequently, expressions such as Qadhafi the leader, the brother, the thinker, and the colonel are prevalent, while the combination "Qadhafi, the president of the state" has never been heard. Qadhafi also insists that according to Libya's "Authority of the People" (*sultat al-sha'b*) – in effect since the 1970s – every Libyan citizen is a ruler. He has thus reiterated on countless occasions that Libya has no opposition, claiming that it is illogical for people to revolt against themselves. Therefore, he continues to explain, there are no leadership struggles in Libya: "The sole inheritor is the nation that governs itself."[8]

However, his firm grip on Libya and the state's political system attests to the fact that there is no correlation between these modest titles and magnanimous declarations and his complete control of the country's political life. Accordingly, the capital, Tripoli, has not experienced anti-Western demonstrations. One who wanders the city's streets sees the huge, colorful, extravagant pictures of the one and only leader atop central buildings and elevated sites. Indeed, the eyes of the "big brother" are keeping close tabs on the "Authority of the People" system.

Qadhafi claims that Libya has real democracy that is profoundly different from the Western version of democracy, which he considers a distorted, unsuitable form of government. Sayf al-Islam adheres to the "Authority of the People" system that his father instituted in the 1970s and well knows that any public declaration casting doubt on this method of "democratic" rule is liable to whittle away at the status of the ruling regime. Nevertheless, he has expressed his condemnation of the political despotism that dominates the Arab world and his support for the values of democracy. On several occasions, he has declared that "democracy is the future." Even if not explicitly stated, the spirit of these words seems to suggest that he is also referring to the Western system of democracy.[9] Do these declarations, then, point to the possible establishment of a new political order in Libya?

More than anything else, Sayf al-Islam's persistent efforts to abolish the "Revolutionary Committees" attest to his determination to change the face of Libya. Recently, these oppressive organs of power, established by his father in the 1970s in order to serve as security, political, and ideological watchdogs, have increasingly threatened the regime's policies and initiatives. These Committees hold the regime by the throat and have prevented it from securing the breathing space it needed for

opening itself up to the West in an era of globalization. Sayf al-Islam's risky struggle against the Revolutionary Committees – which he has described as "fruitless trees that must be rooted out from the source"[10] – not only testified to his courage and firm hold on the government, but was indicative of his agenda, worldview, and position at the crossroads of Libyan decision making and policy execution at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

In the past, any query regarding Qadhafi's grooming of a successor would have prompted a furious response, and the Libyan leader would have prohibited any discussion on the matter: "Qadhafi's inheritor is the people and any talk of bequeathing political power in Libya is analogous to skiing in the Sahara Desert."[11] However, in 2005, such indignant reactions were apparently a thing of the past. Although the elder Qadhafi diligently refrained from publicly commenting on his intentions concerning the continuation of his own rule or his son's political career, the impression was that he was considering the possibility of passing the leadership mantle to Sayf al-Islam and thus paving the way for his son's entry into the "exclusive club" of second-generation leaders in the Arab world and beyond. The past several years have witnessed the emergence of quite a few new leaders in the Arab states – including Jordan, Morocco, Syria, and others – whereby the political status quo has been perpetuated by keeping the authority within the ruling family.

Will Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi and his son Sayf al-Islam follow a similar path? Has Qadhafi already decided to appoint his son as his successor? Or will he perhaps content himself with merely creating such an impression in order to generate a sense of continuity and thus stifle any undesirable political aspirations from within, while simultaneously encouraging foreigners interested in investing in Libya but uncomfortable about the prospects of a regime change? Finally, was Sayf al-Islam capable of fulfilling the political expectations thrust upon him by his father, internal Libyan forces, and foreign political and economic interests? Whatever the answers may be, it appeared that the Libyan political stage in 2005 was free of any visible complications. In any event, Sayf al-Islam continued to forge his way to the top by dint of his sharp and potent *Sayf* (sword).

## NOTES

1. Smadar Perry, *Yediot Ahronot*, January 30, 1998.
2. Yehudit Ronen, "The Lockerbie Endgame: Qadhafi Slips the Noose," *Middle East Quarterly* 9:1 (Winter 2002), pp. 53–56.
3. Yehudit Ronen, "Qadhafi and Militant Islamism: Unprecedented Conflict," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38: 4 (October 2002), pp. 1–16.
4. Libya's ties with Muslims in the southern Philippines date back to the 1970s when Qadhafi – then an avowed supporter of "Liberation Movements," especially Muslim ones – reportedly provided financial and military support to Muslim rebels in the region.
5. Yehudit Ronen, "Libya," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (ed.), *Middle East Contemporary Survey, Vol. 24 (2000)* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2002), pp. 404–405.
6. The London-based, daily newspaper, *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, January 28, 2005.
7. Craig S. Smith, *The New York Times*, December 13, 2004.
8. Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, "The Solution of the Problem of Democracy, the Authority of the People," *The Green Book* pt. 1 (London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1976).
9. See, for example, his statements to the daily paper *al-Riyadh*, March 24, 2004; and *The New York Times*, December 13, 2004.
10. The Cairo-based monthly *al-Ahram al-'Arabi*, January 24, 2004.
11. Yehudit Ronen quoting Qadhafi in an interview with Smadar Perry, *Yediot Ahronot*, December 22, 2000.

*AT THE* C*ORE*
*OF* R*EVOLUTIONARY* C*HANGE*

# Between Revolution and Statehood – The Palestinians in the Aftermath of the Arafat Era

## Ephraim Lavie

## Introduction

As a consequence of the protracted national struggle, Palestinian society under the leadership of the PLO has wavered between two objectives – liberation and self-determination through "revolution," including "armed conflict," "popular uprising," and "resistance," or state-institutionalization through the establishment of national bodies and institutions and the advancement of other nation and state building processes.

Palestinian society has come a long way towards realizing these goals though it still has far to go. These efforts have been accompanied by social and political upheaval and internal power struggles: new power bases have coalesced while others have weakened; and inter-generational successions have occurred within the nationalist-secular and religious-Islamic leaderships. Conflicts have emerged between the power bases leading the national liberation struggle regarding the representation of the Palestinian people, its national goals, and the desired means for waging this struggle. These occasionally severe confrontations have pitted diverse ideological factions against each other. Some of the crises can be attributed to the institutionalization processes these revolutionary organizations are experiencing, while others have been the result of inter-generational clashes between established and fledgling leaderships, primarily within the two major elites: the national-secular elite under Fatah's leadership and the religious-Islamic elite headed by Hamas.

The internal conflicts among the factions and leadership that constitute the diverse Palestinian entity have been conducted with a high level of awareness of some shared historical lessons:

- "National unity" *(al-wahda al-wataniyya)*: The disintegration of Palestinian society and its leadership during the Arab Revolt of 1936 to 1939 and its serious consequences for the national interest (especially *al-Nakba*, the disaster of 1948) have remained etched in the Palestinian national memory. This has been translated into a profound recognition of the need to avert civil war and preserve national unity at all costs. Moreover, all factions are aware of the fact that the Palestinian people are a distinct political entity sharing a recognized national leadership.

- "Exclusive representation" *(wahdaniyyat al-tamthil)*: In October 1974, during the Arab Summit in Rabat, the PLO was awarded recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, a role subsequently accepted by the Arab world, the international community, and the population in the territories. The PLO subsequently took measures to protect its status by thwarting political plans that were conceived without PLO inclusion (e.g., the Jordanian option and ideas for limited autonomy). Accordingly, the PLO defeated the pro-Jordanian and then the Islamic faction (which mounted its own political platform towards the end of the 1980's) and prevented all attempts to establish an alternative leadership in the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

- The right to independent decision-making *(istiqlaliyyat al-qarar)*: The PLO removed the Palestinian issue from the "custody" of the Arab states, consolidated the Palestinians' right to make independent decisions, and safeguarded this authority. As a result of the Intifada that erupted towards the end of 1987, the Palestinians declared their independence (during the nineteenth session of the Palestinian National Council in 1988) and accepted the 1947 United Nations partition plan. In 1993, they signed the Oslo Accords with Israel despite the fact that other facets of the Israeli-Arab conflict remained unresolved.

This article analyzes the tensions that have arisen within the two primary Palestinian organizations regarding revolutionism and institutionalism at the end of the Arafat era and thereafter:

- An examination of how Fatah – the PLO's principle revolutionary organization, which is considered a quasi-"ruling party" of the Palestinian Authority (PA) – is coping with the shift from dogmatic ideology (including maximalist objectives in the spirit of the National Charter) to pragmatic, practical policy-making as well as the transition from clandestine, military operations to open political activity and vice versa.
- An examination of how Hamas – the leading organization of the Islamic faction – is handling the contradictions between its allegiance to the Palestinian government, which requires it to conform to the conventions of state, and its desire to carry out independent military operations, which corresponds to its declared holy war *(jihad)*.

The article examines the developments in Fatah and Hamas during the past decade (1994–2004) – a decade largely defined by the Oslo process and the al-Aqsa Intifada – as a basis for understanding, within the context of inter-generational conflicts, the emerging trends in Palestinian society as it fluctuates between revolutionism and statehood in the post-Arafat era.

# Institutionalization under Self-Rule (1994–2000): The Clash between Old and New Elites

The first Intifada (1987–1992) provided the activists (who grew up in the territories and constituted the fledgling national leadership) with the legitimacy they needed to participate in the national decision-making process, but it did not engender a leadership succession. Nevertheless, the young "internal" (West Bank and Gaza Strip) leaders managed to persuade the established "external" (PLO Tunis) leadership to adopt a pragmatic policy and set a national agenda that preferred liberation from occupation and national independence within the 1967 borders over revolution through armed conflict to liberate all of Palestine. In essence, they set the stage for the Palestinian National Council's (PNC) acceptance of Resolution 242 in 1988, the decision to solve the refugee problem on the basis of Resolution 194, and, ultimately, the PLO's adoption of the Oslo process.

Although it is unclear whether their acceptance of the two-state model constituted the ultimate solution that the PLO leadership sought or was merely the first phase of a long-term plan to liberate all of Palestine, these developments were nonetheless an obvious victory for the pragmatic national leadership, as a decision was made to give preference to the aspirations of the Palestinian public in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, who wished to put an end to the occupation by means of political negotiations within the framework of an independent state alongside Israel. This step constituted a rejection of the position espoused by the secular opposition – primarily the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front – who favored persisting with the armed conflict. The practical significance of this step was thus a shift from revolutionism to state-institutionalization.

The founding of the PA in 1994, following the Oslo Accords, set the stage for a clash between the established national external leadership and the young leaders of the internal national camp and the Islamic faction. The external leadership wrested control of the civil and security establishments in the territories from the intermediate generation, who were perceived as a challenge to its control. Arafat ousted the intermediate generation – including the majority of Fatah activists who orchestrated the first Intifada (such as Ahmad Ghunaym, Qaddura Faris, and Muhammad Hurani) and the civil activists (such as Mustafa al-Barghuti) – from positions of power and from the decision-making processes on the national level in order to guarantee the ascendancy of the PLO's external leadership as the legitimate representative of the entire Palestinian people. However, the first general elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council in January 1996 catapulted the Fatah intermediate generation to a new starting line[1] and towards a process whose ultimate objective was to oust the veteran leadership and obtain control of the Palestinian entity.

The Oslo years were marked by a clear inclination for a transition from revolutionary logic to the logic of a state. The structure of self-rule that Arafat instituted after the Oslo Accords in 1994 enabled the Palestinians to advance the institutionalization of the state-in-progress. A self-governing body was founded, which was predicated on three independent branches of government: the executive branch, an elected parliament, and the judicial and law enforcement bodies. These

institutions were part of the Palestinian enterprise that laid the foundations for the establishment of a state (with or without Israel's consent) and which constituted a governmental address for the residents of the territories. The national leadership focused on political issues, the administration of self-rule in socio-economic fields, and the enforcement of law and order by means of institutionalized, politically-unaffiliated security apparatuses (although many Fatah activists filled their ranks). Correspondingly, the PLO was essentially integrated into the PA's institutions, thus losing some of its revolutionary traits while retaining its status as both the representative of all segments of the Palestinian people – including the Diaspora – and the exclusive authority for holding negotiations with Israel over the intermediate and final agreements.[2]

One of the more noticeable trends in the political sphere was the shift from clandestine, military operations to institutionalized political and public activity of most of the national factions that relocated their center of operations to the territories. For instance, they established new political bodies, spread party branches throughout the districts, organized political assemblies, and publicized political and social platforms. In fact, this period marked the first time since the beginning of the Israeli occupation that overt political activity was permitted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These activities were accompanied by deliberations and debates within the organizations regarding their inclusion in the political process. The importance of the question of participation heightened on the eve of the first general elections (January 1996), as the various groups realized that eschewing the nascent political framework in the territories would hamper their ability to influence public and political developments.

An especially heated debate over whether to join the political sphere evolved in the Fatah, thus signaling the beginning of a crisis in all matters pertaining to its political orientation. The organization, which had led the Palestinian revolution since the early 1960s, was torn between its revolutionary background and principles and the changing reality that necessitated a shift towards the political and institutionalized conduct of a state. This crisis intensified throughout the Oslo years as a consequence of the difficulties that had arisen in the peace process; it culminated in the cessation of negotiations between Israel and the PA and the violent outbreak of the second Intifada. Meanwhile, the secular

(leftist fronts) and religious (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) opposition organizations, which had rejected the Oslo process, boycotted the general elections and maintained their clandestine organizational framework, gradually becoming more comfortable with engaging in open public and political activity. They allowed their activists to integrate themselves within the PA's civil institutions, thus contributing to society within the framework of self-rule. Ex-leftists and independent activists, who did not belong to the nationalist or Islamic movements, attempted to form a "third movement" but failed to provide a viable political alternative or to accumulate public clout. Tensions also surfaced within the Hamas leadership over the question of its allegiance to the PA and the need to advance its own institutionalization under the new circumstances. The movement thus decided to establish a party (the National Islamic Salvation Party) that would represent it in the political arena and in its interaction with the PA. However, the Hamas leadership maintained the fundamental position that the establishment of the PA and its recognition of Israel were a disaster for the Palestinian people. It refused to recognize the PA and subsequently mounted an alternative political option that endorsed the continuation of the military struggle. Leaders who deviated from the Hamas official position were expelled from its ranks or quit voluntarily and joined the self-government.

# Ideological and Inter-Generational Conflicts during the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000–2004)

## The Transition from Quasi-Government to Revolutionary Anarchy

Within a few weeks, the grassroots struggle against the Israeli occupation, which erupted in September 2000 – and also entailed a vociferous protest against the Authority's malfeasance in the fields of society, economy, and the political process – deteriorated into an armed clash between gun-toting youth and Israeli forces. Armed groups from Fatah's Tanzim under the leadership of members of the intermediate generation (such as Marwan al-Barghuti, Qaddura Faris, Rashid Abu Shbak, and others), some of whom also held positions in the security

organizations, associated themselves with the violent struggle in order to preserve the momentum of protest. Arafat, who considered a moderate level of violence a legitimate tool for advancing his political objectives during the impasse with Israel, gave his blessing to the intermediate-generation activists. He hoped to control the confrontation and harness political utility from it, while continuing to hold negotiations for a permanent agreement. His ability to accomplish these goals was based on the assumption that he could continue to wage a limited conflict by controlling its scope using his security forces.

However, the scores of casualties during the first days of the uprising further roiled the Palestinian public and the violent attacks thus steadily multiplied. Consequently, Arafat's ability to control the "height of the flames" gradually declined. The National Security Apparatus, which was responsible for enforcing law and order, failed in its mission to cordon off the restive public from Israeli forces, while the escalating violence induced some members of the security organizations to take part in the confrontations, either by shooting at IDF troops or encouraging revenge attacks against Israel. A political void developed in the spring of 2001, as efforts to resume the negotiations failed. Arafat sought to exploit the confrontation by requesting the international community and the UN to dispatch an international force to "protect the Palestinian people… [and] remove the siege," as well as to force Israel to adhere to UN Resolutions 242, 338, and 194 (the latter pertaining to refugee return). Not only did Arafat lose control over the field, but he was reproached both at home and abroad for hesitating to throw his full weight into the effort to curb the hostilities. His working premise, whereby the fear that an escalation of the Intifada would undermine regional and international security and would thereby induce international involvement and the dispatch of foreign troops, failed to materialize. Moreover, the Arab world resisted pressures to take substantive measures, e.g. the formation of an international coalition against Israel, finding it sufficient to provide minimal financial support and other limited gestures of solidarity.

The protraction of the violent confrontation and the cessation of the political process endangered the national camp's state-institutionalization policy and enhanced the prestige of the revolutionary camp. With the shift from a "popular uprising" to "armed, popular resistance" *(muqawama sha'biya musalaha)*, a militant-revolutionary

coalition consisting of all the Palestinian organizations was formed. The coalition combined the elements of a popular uprising with the utilization of armed force, which the insurgents defined as "self defense" against the IDF. Although the coalition's organizations cooperated from an operational standpoint, throughout the course of the entire conflict they never negotiated a joint ideological pact. In practice, each of the organizations strove to achieve its own, disparate objectives without agreeing on any shared national objectives for the confrontation:

- Fatah activists from the intermediate generation attempted to distinguish themselves from the old guard. Moreover, they sought to recapture Fatah's traditional position as the leading adherents of the "armed struggle" by means of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (despite the objections of its veteran leadership).

- Dissident factions of the national camp (the left-wing fronts) – who had objected to the Oslo process from the beginning and whose status withered during the Oslo years – sought to rehabilitate themselves and build a reputation as the force that defended the public against the IDF's power with their armed bands.

- In principle, the Islamic faction under the helm of Hamas rejected all dialogue with Israel and asserted that *jihad* was the only legitimate means for ending the occupation. The Islamists viewed the Intifada as an opportunity to form a coalition with the nationalist factions and perpetuate the military conflict. Furthermore, it sought to thwart any possibility of the PA resuming negotiations, forcing the latter to abandon its peace-process policy, which would thus essentially annul its raison d'être.

The escalating confrontation signified a reverse transition from institutionalization to revolutionary anarchy. Armed members of all the organizations became the dominant players insofar as setting the Palestinian agenda and managing society's affairs were concerned, while the PA's institutions and security organs – the embodiment of the Oslo Accords – were pushed to the side-lines. Furthermore, the PA was a target for attack and retribution on the part of Israel, which held the Authority solely responsible for these developments. As a result, the PA was gradually rendered dysfunctional (except for the fields of health and education).

The escalation of the military struggle was primarily due to the

anarchy *(fawda)* that prevailed once Arafat lost his grip over events in the field. The organizations competed over which of them could carry out the most lethal "quality attacks" or, alternatively, cooperated with one another in order to withstand the IDF's power. As long as the political vacuum persisted and violence was the most prominent feature of the Israel-Palestinian relationship, the power bases continued to close ranks and display a willingness to temporarily overlook their competing agendas. This was especially true of the lower echelons in the field, where organizational differences were not readily visible: activists from Fatah and the secular left adopted the operational methods of Hamas and Islamic Jihad while all the disparate groups carried out joint operations and cooperated in the enlistment of volunteers for suicide attacks.

From Israel's perspective, the Palestinian Authority was directly responsible for the violence. Therefore, Israel intentionally inflicted damage on the PA, gradually turning it into an empty vessel, especially following Defensive Shield (the Israeli military operation in the spring of 2002). In its place, a revolutionary system emerged, which maintained some ties with PLO factions and which established a lax inter-organizational body (the National and Islamic Forces). However, its components operated independently and without any central command, completely unaided by the PLO or the PA. Under these circumstances, controlling the population was transferred to field activists and armed insurgents.

The violent confrontation was neither an "armed struggle" in the post-1967 sense of the term– when force was the exclusive strategy for liberating all of Palestine – nor a tactical means in conjunction with the political struggle, as was the case after 1974 – when the PLO adopted the "strategy of phases" and sought to make it clear to both Israel and the world that no political process could be pursued without the PLO. In contrast, the second Intifada began as a popular protest under Arafat's control that was initially accompanied by political negotiations (for about four months, until the end of the Taba talks). However, once the negotiations ceased and a political vacuum took form, the Intifada steadily snowballed into an armed conflict between armed fighters from various organizations – who were subsequently reinforced by elements from the security organs – and the Israeli army.

Although the revolutionary system and the IDF essentially

determined the agenda for Palestinian society, the general public continued to hold the Palestinian Authority responsible for its predicament. However, the PLO and the PA's complex, centralized governmental structure was completely ineffective, and all that it managed to salvage was its symbolic leadership. The consequent void in manifold civil fields was primarily filled by religious, non-governmental groups. Hamas, whose various philanthropic associations and affiliated civil bodies provided welfare, medical, and educational services as well as economic assistance to the populace, thus succeeded in pulling the rug out from under the PA's feet and portraying it as an empty vessel in the public's eyes.

## The Crisis in Fatah: Revolutionism, Institutionalism and Inter-Generational Conflict

Fatah activists from the intermediate generation – who participated in the first Intifada and spent years in Israeli prisons – rode the public wave of protest during the al-Aqsa Intifada and were among the leaders of the violent confrontation. The heads of both the Fatah Supreme Council in the territories and the Tanzim (Marwan al-Barghuti and Ahmad Hillis) sought to rehabilitate Fatah's identity as a leading national movement as well as their personal public stature, which had reached a nadir. They had been left out of the PA's circles of influence and decision-making during the Oslo years, but the public still identified them with the leadership's failing political and governing performance and its feeble ethical reputation.

The frustration intensified once it became obvious that the leadership lacked the ability to bring an end to the occupation, and the public expressed its lack of faith in Fatah's political direction. Consequently, the intermediate-generation activists were determined to rehabilitate their public reputation by convincing the public that the Fatah's identity was distinct from that of the Authority. They presented themselves as a conscientious leadership that was committed to nationalist principles (*"al-thawabit al-filastiniyya"*) and to its national responsibilities to liberate the people from the occupation. Moreover, they sought to prove that they possessed the inner strength and vitality to wage a relentless national struggle to oust the Israelis from the territories. Accordingly, they aspired to expand their political power, terminate the veteran leadership's

monopoly over the national struggle, and take part in determining the direction in which the Palestinian nation would proceed.[3]

The Intifada's rapid escalation was interpreted by the leadership and the public as an Israeli plot to force the Palestinians into accepting its "terms of surrender." Arafat reacted to these developments by giving the green light for the continuation and occasional escalation of the conflict. These events compelled the intermediate generation of the Fatah leadership to seize the reins of power. Following internal consultations and deliberations, they decided to form armed groups of young Fatah activists,[4] which subsequently developed over the course of the Intifada. These groups readopted Fatah's revolutionary platform and past slogans (e.g. "liberation of all of Palestine" and "the armed struggle is not a tactic but a strategy") and eventually came to be known as the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades – the inheritors of Fatah's fighting tradition.[5] The intermediate generation thus restored the movement to its days as the vanguard of the armed Palestinian struggle, putting an end – even if only temporarily – to the crisis over its political orientation. As the Fatah activists' popularity soared and they rode the wave of public protest against the occupation with Arafat's blessing, they found themselves swept away by expressions and declarations that became increasingly more radical. Senior members of the Tanzim in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with Marwan al-Barghuti at the forefront, directed the activities in the field in "the spirit of the commander" (Arafat) and thus served as tools in the implementation of Arafat's "double game." By virtue of these actions, the intermediate generation managed to accumulate political power and prestige.

Nevertheless, the founding of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades roused considerable resentment among Fatah's veteran leadership. In essence, the Brigades were a tangible expression of the intermediate generation's protest against the veteran leadership, which stemmed from an obvious desire to "clean out the stables" and end their monopoly over the leadership. Nasir 'Uways, one of the founders of the Brigades, expressed the objectives behind their establishment in a newspaper editorial:[6]

> Although the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades were the fruit of deep thought, which was aimed at finding solutions to the problems of the hour and the challenges on the national level and the Fatah movement level, their establishment stirred much anger amid the

movement's official framework [the veteran leadership, E.L.]. This framework has become a burden on the movement: it is not a leadership, it is not productive, it lags behind at the back of the line instead of standing at the front; it searched for prestige, it is alienated from its power bases and activists; it is submissive and considers the situation to be a destiny from which there is no recourse. As an official framework, it prevented the movement's revival and even contributed to a decline in its popularity; it is no longer capable of reading the situation by which the nation and movement are bound; it remains captive to slogans and clichés, which the members of the movement are weary of hearing over and over […]. The Brigades appeared as a result of the anger towards the PA and the corruption that has clung to it…This Authority has attempted to lead the PLO, Fatah, and all the factions…with a most corrupt and failed regime, without institutions, with unworthy appointments, in a manner that has hurt the Palestinian citizen, his security, and his life. We, in the Brigades, could have caused damage to all the corrupt officials, but the fear of an internal confrontation and anarchy led us to reconsider the matter each time [and to thus refrain from doing so, E.L.]… The al-Aqsa Brigades are not an ephemeral phenomenon, but rather a permanent one, one that comes as a response to the Israeli attack against our people. They constitute a clear message to the occupation: the members of the Fatah organization are ready to return to battle, because it is illogical for us to sit with our hands folded while members of our people are being slaughtered day after day by the occupation forces. Although they are in favor of peace, the Brigades have appeared as defying the logic of submission, and they have unhesitatingly sacrificed the best of their sons in this campaign as martyrs on the road to freedom, [refugee] return, and independence.

The protest against the veteran leadership and the founding of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades did not stem from ideological considerations concerning the return to armed struggle within the "strategy of phases." Rather, they constituted a pragmatic response to a new reality. Although the intermediate generation viewed the use of arms as a new phase in its struggle with Israel – unlike Hamas and Islamic Jihad – it did not deem

force to be the exclusive means for attaining its objectives. Instead, the armed struggle was considered a mere tool for advancing the negotiations, which were only to be forsaken upon the attainment of an accord predicated on the pertinent UN resolutions.

As a result of the Intifada, however, the crisis in Fatah only intensified the fear of anarchy. Among other reasons, the power vacuum stemmed from the sense that Fatah had lost control over the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and other armed groups resulting in the waning international legitimacy of the national struggle. As a result of these developments, senior members of Fatah's veteran leadership and intermediate generation reevaluated the efficacy of the military conflict.

In light of the failure of its political direction, Fatah – its leadership and activists included – essentially stumbled into a crisis over its character and orientation. Would it turn its back on the establishment of a state, revert to the "revolution," and thereby emulate Hamas and Islamic Jihad? Or would it attempt a hybrid solution, similar to its conduct during the Intifada, whereby it would strive for a state while simultaneously re-embarking on the path of "revolution?" The crisis apparently stemmed from this last line of thinking, which did not present a solution and left a cloud of ambiguity over which particular course of action it would choose (not only in the eyes of Israel and the international community, but among the general public and the Fatah members themselves).

Against this backdrop, the intermediate-generation activists reiterated their demand that Arafat adopt a plan of action that entailed social reforms aimed at strengthening society and enabling it to wage a non-violent, popular, civil uprising, which they considered a necessary, subsidiary means for orchestrating the political struggle. In addition, they clamored for extensive government reforms that would allow for the founding of a democratic "state of institutions" (*"dawlat mu'assasat"*) and for the rehabilitation of the Fatah movement.

Once it became obvious that reforms were not going to be implemented, the intermediate-generation activists challenged Arafat and the veteran leadership, demanding that they accelerate the transfer of power into their hands. This request was clear evidence of the fact that the intermediate generation felt that time was running out on the political ascendancy of the Fatah-led national movement and that the

militant line of Hamas and Islamic Jihad was gaining ground. Accordingly, the intermediate-generation activists sought to advance initiatives for a cease fire and the resumption of the political process by either intermittently involving Europeans and Israelis or by collaborating with figures in the veteran leadership.

Similar efforts were made by others who had previously filled important roles in the national struggle and construction of the state in-progress, such as civil activists and other figures who were identified with the intellectual and economic elite. These individuals took part in a nation-wide "soul searching" that was conducted in the public discourse and demanded that Arafat and the veteran leadership take measures to restore the popular civil confrontation, advance administrative reforms in the government, and adopt an agenda that would also attend to social problems.

A severe crisis occurred within the Fatah movement in mid-2004 for a number of reasons: the mounting public criticism of the PA's performance and its ineffectiveness with respect to Israel's operations in the Gaza Strip (in response to the firing of *Qassam* rockets, the separation barrier, and the Disengagement Plan), its inability to enforce law and order, and the concommitant decline in public support for Fatah.[7] Furthermore, the public perceived Fatah as an organization in decline and preoccupied with internal rivalries, while the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades were the ones dictating the social and national agenda.[8] The possibility that Israel would unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip increased the likelihood that Palestinian impotency in the struggle against the occupation and the control of the masses would be revealed to the world and that the PA would miss the opportunity for realizing Palestinian independence in part of Palestine.

Members of the Fatah intermediate generation, including Muhammad Dahlan (who saw in the Disengagement Plan an opportunity to become the dominant figure in the Gaza Strip) and various other public figures, reiterated their demand that Arafat institute comprehensive reform *(islah)* in the PA. Their pleas found resonance in the public discourse, e.g. newspaper articles and discussions in the Palestinian electronic media. In contrast to the past, the blame for the internal crisis was not passed on to the Israeli occupation, but was directed at Arafat and the Authority. The criticism focused on Arafat's

exclusive and paternal leadership style and the maladies that had taken root in the PA and Fatah – in its role as the ruling party. Apparently, the crisis did not stem from internal-external relations or inter-generational feuds, but from the disparity between the populace's expectations for liberation, political independence, and economic security and the actual state of affairs. The gap between hope and reality continued to widen until it reached the point of despair in which the populace no longer believed that the abyss would be bridged. To make matters worse, this was transpiring as Israel was on the verge of pulling out of the Gaza Strip.

Despite the broad public consensus with respect to the need to reevaluate the armed struggle and modify its modes of operation and objectives, the members of the intermediate generation failed to loosen the veteran leadership's grip and expedite the transfer of power into their own hands. Although they drew their power from the public, they lacked a charismatic leader. In addition, Arafat's "divide and conquer" strategy achieved its aims: in the West Bank, Marwan al-Barghuti and Husayn al-Shaykh's factions neutralized one another while in the Gaza Strip, Muhammad Dahlan's camp neutralized that of Ahmad Hillis. Likewise, power struggles festered between members of the intermediate generation and the second tier of the veteran leadership – e.g. Hani al-Hassan, Abbas Zaki, and Sakhr Habash – who felt threatened by the power amassed by the intermediate generation and their own inability to impose their authority on the "young generation," particularly the members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Moreover, Fatah lacked a realistic and relevant political program that could be distinguished from that of Hamas. All these obstacles prevented the intermediate-generation activists from fashioning a coherent power base and precipitating change during the Arafat regime.

## Hamas in the Intifada: Community Work, Preaching *(Da'wa)*, and Holy War *(Jihad)*

During the Intifada, Hamas attracted public support, earned political legitimacy, and augmented its power. Towards the end of the Arafat era, it became the primary opposition and thus constituted a challenge to intermediate-generation Fatah activists and moderate groups in society. Hamas claimed that the Fatah's political option, which boasted the ability to reach an agreement with Israel that would strike a balance between

Palestinian national principles *(al-thawabit)* and the maximum amount of concessions that Israel would be willing to make, had failed. Whereas the national leadership had a reputation for being corrupt, unfocused, and bereft of clear political aims, Hamas continued to project a clean image, present a coherent political platform, and tend to the needs of both society and the individual in the fields of welfare, education, medicine, and more. Its leadership took advantage of the confrontation, expanding the movement's civil (social and relief) organizations and religious (preaching Islam – *da'wa*) infrastructure while bolstering its military power. The leadership's primary objectives were to persist with the armed struggle in order to prevent any possibility of the PA resuming the political process – thereby obviating its raison d'être – and to consolidate its status as a legitimate political power base, so that all future governments would need its support the "day after" Arafat's departure from the scene.

Hamas leaders called into question the integrity of Fatah members who raised the banner of reform. Hamas was aware of the fact that the PA and its security organs were infected with ethical, financial, and political corruption, but they extended their recriminations to the personal level as well. For example, Hamas accused Dahlan and other figures of being personally responsible for PA corruption, believing that their demand for reforms stemmed from their desire to gain control of the Gaza Strip after Israel's withdrawal and thus accommodate the latter's plans. Moreover, Hamas urged the PA to refocus its efforts on removing the occupation and called for the establishment of a "united national leadership" to be composed of all power bases and factions, which would effectively put an end to the Fatah and the PA's monopoly and would serve as a national decision-making authority. This united leadership would be charged with preparing the groundwork for general elections and implementing a "comprehensive reform program" in all fields – including foreign (i.e., the conflict with Israel) and internal policy – in order to enhance the Palestinian's capacity for contending with Israel.

After Arafat's death, the call for the founding of a united national leadership was reiterated by all members of the opposition, including the leftist fronts. The veteran PLO leadership was accused of intentionally suspending the activity of the PLO's institutions for the

sake of strengthening the PA. Moreover, the opposition demanded that the PLO be severed from the PA and that the above-mentioned collective national leadership serve as a provisional framework representing all segments of the Palestinian nation, including the nationalist and Islamic factions. Both the veteran and fledgling Fatah leaderships rejected the idea of a united framework and made it clear that the Palestinian people's sole source of authority was the PLO. Alternatively, the Fatah leadership declared that it was interested in having all the factions incorporated into the PLO, so that all the groups that took an active part in the struggle could participate in the decision-making process on national issues, while simultaneously preserving the PLO's position as the Palestinian's sole legitimate representative.

Despite the surge in Hamas' public appeal during the Intifada, its leadership ranks were beleaguered at the end of the Arafat era. As a consequence of the damage that Israel inflicted upon the movement's founders and senior activists in the territories, young men who lacked policy and decision-making experience advanced to leadership roles. Today, these men represent the movement in its dealings with the PA, while devoting most of their energy to public relations. Similarly, there has been a decline in the amount of assistance given by Hamas to the population because of international and Israeli counter operations against terrorism funding and the PA's decision to freeze the assets of Islamic philanthropic associations. Given its role as a social-political movement, Hamas has been forced to reassess its policy for the new, post-Arafat world in which Abu Mazin won the presidential election by a comfortable margin with his pragmatic platform. The movement's leadership is conscious of the changing currents amongst the public. It understands that the majority of Palestinians now tends to favor putting an end to the military conflict. Consequently, Hamas has been forced to strike a compromise that will safeguard its gains and elevated public stature and translate these achievements into political power.

# After Arafat: From Anarchy Back to State-Building

The limitations of Arafat's leadership with respect to Israel and his inability to lay the foundations for an effective Palestinian regime underscored his historic failure to realize the Palestinian people's aspirations for liberation and political independence, especially in light of the impending Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The public call for soul-searching and the abandonment of the military conflict intensified due to the damage that was caused to both Palestinian society and the very legitimacy of the Intifada.[9]

With Arafat's passing and after over four years of armed, popular uprising, the Palestinians again found themselves at a crossroads with respect to their national aims – i.e., an ideological choice between revolutionism and the state-institutionalization, coupled with succession in their ruling elite. These matters had to be dealt with against the setting of an intensifying debate between the national camp (under the leadership of Fatah) and the opposition (headed by Hamas) over the future of the Palestinian struggle, the determination of national priorities, state-building, and the nature of central government. Nevertheless, the balance of power between the Fatah and Hamas, their shared apprehension of a civil war, and the continuation of the conflict have prevented decisions from being made on these issues and have preserved a measure of national unity. The protraction of the Intifada, however, has also led to internal social instability, and to the collapse of government. It has created a sense of urgency within the public and the national camp regarding decisions on the future of the national struggle, administrative reforms, and the issue of succession in the ruling echelon.

Arafat's departure and Abu Mazin's succession as both the Chairman of the PLO and President of the national authority has also placed Palestinian society at a crossroads in all that pertains to the future of the national struggle. Abu Mazin is aware of the fact that the PLO has failed to carry out the transition from a national liberation organization operating outside the region, preaching patriotic values and objectives (revolution, liberation, independence), to an autonomous entity that must contend with the tangible goals of leading a population and

constructing institutions for the state-in-progress. In addition, Abu Mazin realized that the PA's legitimacy in the eyes of the world and the Israeli public had been compromised as a result of the interminable confrontation. Therefore, he sought to enlist political and public support for the following objectives: to put an end to the internal Palestinian debate over the military nature of the struggle; to institute a new ruling establishment free of the ills of the "Fakahani Republic" (Fakahani is a Beirut precinct where the PLO headquarters used to be); and to present a practical program with realistic national objectives for ending the occupation and establishing a viable state.

Immediately following Arafat's death, Abu Mazin outlined the general direction of his policy: restoring governmental norms in adherence with the rule of law and the principles of democracy and the separation of powers. True to his word, the transfer of power within the PA was executed in accordance with the law: after Arafat's passing, the speaker of the Legislative Council was appointed provisional president; presidential elections were held within 60 days; and Abu Mazin was elected as Chairman of the PLO by the members of its Executive Committee. He ran an election campaign that featured a coherent political platform, which called for discontinuing the armed Intifada and dismantling the coalition of militant forces that was formed during the insurgency. Moreover, Abu Mazin explained the damage that the violence had caused to the Palestinian national interest, and he declared his intention to work for an extended period of calm to rehabilitate the PA's security forces, governing establishment, and the Palestinian economy. Finally, he made it clear that he wished to renew the dialogue with Israel in order to reach a permanent agreement that would fully resolve the conflict on the basis of "two states for the two peoples."[10]

Abu Mazin's election on the merits of this platform afforded him the legitimacy to pursue his policy. He envisaged a non-violent, popular struggle alongside the political one and the abandonment of the armed conflict being waged by groups illegally bearing arms. The broad public support for his vision and the expectations for a return to normalcy, with law and order enforced, were clearly discernible in opinion polls and op-ed pieces in the Palestinian press.[11] The various powerbases – moderate-pragmatists and revolutionaries alike – have not been blind to the pervasive currents in society and their positions have been swayed by public opinion.

These developments have also presented an opportunity for rehabilitating the Fatah organization and turning it into a stable, political prop for the new regime. The members of the intermediate generation viewed Arafat's passing and Abu Mazin's pragmatic political approach as a golden opportunity for promulgating a swift change in their status and for getting closer to the government. They have united around Abu Mazin in order to ensure that government posts are transferred in an orderly, lawful manner – in other words, to prevent the veteran leadership from exploiting this process in order to build a coalition that would exclude the intermediate generation from the centers of power and decision-making. During his election campaign, Abu Mazin reunited the various parts of Fatah, including the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and promised to convene its Sixth Conference within several months. He thereby laid the foundations for restoring Fatah to its former status as the leading organization in the Palestinian national movement with a political approach that merits the support of the majority of the nation and that is distinct from the militant ways of Hamas.

Abu Mazin resuscitated the hopes of Fatah's intermediate generation for a prompt changing of the guard in the leadership ranks, and today they consider him the bridge upon which the succession will occur. From their standpoint, the leadership mantle will soon pass into their hands. Galvanized by Abu Mazin's support, the intermediate generation compelled the prime minister, Abu Ala, to form a government (in February 2005) that included figures who were identified with the intermediate generation. They believed that this was the first step towards ousting the veteran leadership and reforming the government's conduct. Additionally, the intermediate generation hoped to cash in on their success in the near future, thus restoring the nation's faith in them before the final round of elections for the local councils (in April 2005),[12] the general elections for the Legislative Council, and the elections for Fatah's institutions during its Sixth Conference. They aspired to form the next government after the elections to the Legislative Council and finally get their hands on the prize that was kept out of their reach throughout the Arafat era.

The formation of a government of young technocrats undermined Arafat's old ruling establishment. The "permanent" ministers, who Arafat appointed by virtue of their membership in the PLO Executive

Committee, considered themselves subordinate to the Palestinian National Council (PNC), not the elected Legislative Council. Accordingly, the ministers essentially neutralized the ability of the Legislative Council to regulate the executive branch. The ministers justified their behavior by claiming that they were members of the PLO and thus represented the Palestinian Diaspora; in other words, they constituted (together with the "internal" leaders) the provisional government of the entire Palestinian people. From a practical standpoint, this conduct stemmed from the need to continue placing the collective destiny of the Palestinians, including the refugee question and the negotiations with Israel, in the hands of the PLO. Therefore, veteran PLO members and publicists assailed the government's new composition. They emphasized the fact that the PLO was the exclusive source of authority *("marja'iyya")* of every government and every national body that will be established and that it was the only institution with a mandate for managing the affairs of the Palestinian people and signing political agreements on its behalf. Accordingly, the responsibility for these matters will remain in its hands until a permanent agreement is attained and the state of Palestine is founded with Jerusalem as its capital.[13] Others have suggested that the members of the intermediate generation were considering a gradual succession, keeping in mind their obligation to respect the national movement's founding fathers.[14]

# Conclusion

The Oslo years (1994–2000) were the period of transition from revolutionary logic to the logic of state, whereas the violent confrontation (2000–2004) constituted a regression from institutionalization to a violent anarchy that threatened the sacred Palestinian principle of "national unity" *(al-wahda al-wataniyya)*. The juxtaposition of these two watershed events at the end of the Arafat era has induced Palestinian society to engage in intense soul-searching with respect to the future and the nature of their struggle for freedom and independence. These developments have been accompanied by an inter-generational conflict over leadership and relative stature. Consequently, the Palestinians now find themselves at an historical crossroads, where they must choose between a return to

the path of revolution for national liberation under the leadership of the Islamic camp or a revival of the efforts of nation and state-building under the leadership of the national camp.

In accordance with these circumstances, Abu Mazin's election as Arafat's successor is the manifestation of Palestinian society's lofty expectations for a comprehensive overhaul in its security, economy, and political situation. Abu Mazin's pragmatic political approach and readiness to forgo violence, as well as the credit he has been given by the international community, dovetail with three crucial developments in the post-Arafat Palestinian entity that are likely to point the way to change (albeit under conditions of extended calm and a return to the political process):

- Resuming the state-building process for the purpose of establishing a sovereign state in accordance with the terms of a future political agreement. This will be accompanied by an end to Arafat's centralized methods, the abandonment of the revolutionary system that seized control of society, and a return to the logic of a state system. The latter entails the restoration of governmental and civil society institutions, adherence to the law and to the principles of democracy and the separation of powers.

- An organizational and ideological rehabilitation of Fatah as a leading national movement, whereby the composition of its ruling echelon is altered and members of its intermediate generation are advanced to positions of leadership. This process is already underway inasmuch as the organization conducted a successful election campaign in which the intermediate generation's candidate was elected president of the Palestinian Authority and technocrats identified with the intermediate generation have been sworn into government. It is expected to continue with the convening of Fatah's Sixth Conference, which will entail elections to the Central Committee and the drafting of a new political platform.

- The integration of Hamas into the PA's institutions.[15] The movement's leadership has decided in favor of participating in the elections to the municipal councils and the Legislative Council, with the objective of asserting its political power on both the local and national levels.

## NOTES

1. For information on the results of the first elections to the Legislative Council and their significance see: As'ad Ghanim, *The First Palestinian General Elections: a Challenge for Democracy* (the Institute for Peace Research, Givat Haviva: 1996) [Hebrew].

2. For more on the critical, internal discourse over the withering of the PLO see: Ephraim Lavie, "Institutionalized, Mutual Ties between the PLO and PA-Political Ramifications," *The Palestinians after the Arafat Era* (Tel-Aviv University, the Moshe Dayan Center: 2005), pp. 17–28 [Hebrew].

3. According to Khalil al-Shikaki, the Intifada resulted in an inter-generational struggle in which the old guard was losing ground to the young leadership, which was taking part in the confrontation with Israel and regaining national legitimacy. See: Khalil al-Shikaki, "Palestine Divided," *Foreign Affairs* 81:1 (New York: Jan/Feb 2002), pp. 89–105.

4. Nasir 'Uways testifies to this in his article: "Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades between Action and Obligation *(Kata'ib Shuhada al-Aqsa bayn al-fi'l wal-iltizam),*" *al-Quds*, February 1, 2005. 'Uways quotes the oft-repeated refrain of his friend Yasir al-Badawi from the Balata refugee camp, who was amongst the founders of the Brigades and was killed in a targeted assassination: "We will turn the Brigades into the sword of Fatah and the heart and conscience of the poor."

5. See the platform of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades on the organization's website: http://www.kataebaqsa1.com/arabic

6. Nasir 'Uways, Ibid.

7. Support for Fatah stood at 26.4% in June 2004 compared with 29% in October 2003. This contrasted with the stability that characterized the public's support for Hamas despite the damage that Israel inflicted on its leadership and financial sources: support for Hamas was 21.7% in June 2004 compared with 22% in October 2003.

8. In essence, an internal contradiction developed with respect to the conduct of the al-Aksa Martyrs Brigades. While protesting against corruption and anarchy *("fasad wa-fawda")*, they took steps in the name of law and order that actually exacerbated the state of anarchy, such as abducting French citizens and setting a police station in Jenin on fire. Consequently, many ordinary Palestinians did not believe that the weapon bearers were representing the general public's best interests.

9. Dr. Ahmad Majdalani, senior advisor to Prime Minister Abu Ala, offered the following advice: "We must maintain the popular comportment of the Intifada, distance ourselves from the militarization of the Intifada…[and] instantly put a stop to the sacrifice missions against citizens in Israel…We must draw conclusions from the bitter experience of the Intifada years, from the suffering and the victims, in order to enhance the dialogue in the direction of a consolidated po-

litical plan for an Intifada with coherent political targets …", *al-Ayyam*, October 6, 2004.

10. The policy that Abu Mazin sought to advance during his short-lived government in the summer of 2003 is indicative of his pragmatic approach. Since then, he has repeatedly explained his perspective in the media, even before Arafat's passing. See for example the interview with Abu Mazin in the Jordanian newspaper *al-Ra'y* on September 27, 2004.

11. See for example: *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, January 15 and 25, 2005; and *al-Ayyam,* January 24, 2005.

12. Hamas triumphed in the two previous stages of the election to the local councils. Moreover, it garnered substantial successes in the partial municipal elections that were held in the Gaza Strip on January 26, 2005. See: *al-Hayat al-Jadida,* January 29, 2005.

13. Yusif al-Kizaz, *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, February 24, 2005.

14. Dr. Husayn Abu Shanab, *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, February 28, 2005.

15. Hassan al-Batal, *al-Ayyam*, January 29, 2005.

# Upon the Fall of the Ba'th:
# The Struggle between the Elites
# in Iraq

## Ofra Bengio

*He was between two centimeters and seven meters of paper plaster bronze stone*
*His paper plaster bronze stone boot trampled over us in all the city squares*
*His paper plaster bronze stone shadow loomed over our trees in the public parks*
*His paper plaster bronze stone moustache glided through restaurants into our*
*    soup*
*His paper plaster bronze stone eyes fixed on us inside our rooms*
*One morning it was as if he never was*
*His boot disappeared from our squares*
*His shadow from over our trees*
*His moustache from within our soup*
*His eyes from our rooms*
*And the weight of thousands of tons of paper, plaster bronze stone was removed*
*    from atop our chests.[1]*

In the contemporary Middle East, Iraq is unique in all matters concerning
inter-generational successions among the ruling elite. In contrast to other
Middle Eastern states, where in the past decade long-term internal
processes have produced natural successions, Iraq's changing of the
guard is the result of a single, aggressive, externally-generated action,
especially with respect to the ruling center in Baghdad. Whereas in other
countries the heads of state and a few high officials have been replaced,
in Iraq an entire elite class was purged as a consequence of the war in
the spring of 2003. In some respects, the latest events in Iraq may be
compared to 'Abd al-Karim Qasim's revolution in 1958, which resulted
in the purge of the Hashemite monarchy and the upper echelon of

government. Notwithstanding the similarities, there is a significant difference between the two events inasmuch as in 2003, non-Iraqi forces precipitated a comprehensive reshuffling of the establishment, along with all the ramifications that such a process has for the resilience, stability, and legitimacy of Iraq's new elites. Today, Iraq is undergoing a unique experience that can be defined both symbolically and literally as an "explosion of elites." Since the war, there has been an accelerated, or perhaps more precisely an explosive, expansion of new elites and political forces filling the void created by the expulsion of the old elites. This development has accentuated the conflict not only between the new and old elites but also among the new elites themselves. These clashes have become so brutal that it may be said that members of these disparate elite circles are literally being blown-up in a continuous cycle of terrorist attacks that have seriously hindered their ability to consolidate their rule and establish themselves as the new elite. Although violence has been a recurring theme throughout the annals of modern Iraq, the bloodshed triggered by the current power struggle is the most severe that this country has ever known.

# The Collapse of the House of Cards – What Lies Beneath?

The deck of cards – each with a picture of one of the fifty-five leaders of the Ba'th regime and Saddam Husayn as the first – distributed by the Americans at the outbreak of war precisely symbolized the social and political upheavals that have beset Iraq since March 2003. Overnight, the once omnipotent Ba'th leaders were rendered dangerous criminals with large bounties on their heads. The leadership's ouster did not resemble any of the country's previous power struggles insofar as the political elite was not removed as a consequence of internal challenges by the Iraqi military or a coalition of the army and a party, but by a foreign military force. Moreover, the manner in which the leadership was removed from the political stage was unprecedented. In contrast to past incidents in which the leaders were murdered or managed to escape from the country, the present overthrow did not entail the liquidation of the

leadership (with the exception of Husayn's sons, Udayy and Qusayy), and the leaders were scheduled to stand before a public trial for the first time in Iraqi history.[2] The objective of this process was not only to establish new social and political norms commensurate with the practices of reputable democratic regimes, but also to condemn publicly everything that symbolized the old regime and to uproot it from its source.

Although the Ba'th regime collapsed with astonishing speed immediately after the war, uprooting a regime that dominated a country for more than thirty-five years has necessitated a thorough revamping of all the power bases and old elites. The Americans and their allies have indeed defined their objective in Iraq as a "regime change," but a literal interpretation of this term is rather misleading. In truth, the events that have transpired in Iraq did not resemble an ordinary regime change or any other analogous processes that occurred in the past. Until 2003, Qasim's revolution constituted the most far-reaching example of regime change. However, it did not involve the eradication of all the power bases and certainly did not alter the inherent status quo with respect to the division of power between Iraq's three dominant sectors – the Sunnis, Shi'is, and Kurds. The current upheavals were the product of the last war and were responsible for the intensity, scope, and duration of the current unprecedented power struggles.

The incident that most exacerbated these struggles was the decision to purge immediately all previous power bases of the regime: the Ba'th party, the army, and all other security organs. The Ba'th party, which totaled 2,000 members when it first assumed power in 1968, steadily ballooned to roughly one million members and supporters who became the country's vanguard in all walks of life: from government offices, the army and economic establishments to the various social institutions, with education at the forefront. The decision to disperse and then outlaw the party as well as to initiate a comprehensive campaign to purge all public institutions and organizations from Ba'thist influences (dubbed as *ijtithath* or de-Ba'thification) not only harmed the established social and political elites but also an entire class of Iraqis who had joined the Ba'th – willingly or under duress – and who instantly lost their livelihood, status, and party-affiliated social network.[3] Moreover, this undertaking left an administrative void that only intensified the chaos, making it considerably harder for the new elites to establish their control.

Given the fact that the army was the first institution to be founded in Iraq, its dismantlement proved to be a far more extensive undertaking than that of other institutions. In fact, its establishment preceded that of the monarchial regime.[4] In addition, there was an almost continuous effort throughout Iraq's entire history to expand and strengthen the army, which at its height on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War consisted of some one million soldiers and on the eve of the 2003 war totaled about 400,000.[5] The decision to disband the army thus undermined the state's central symbol – an institution that had endowed Iraq with a sense of continuity, especially in light of the changes and vicissitudes that had beset all its other institutions and political organizations. Furthermore, dismantling the army destroyed the only source of livelihood and pride of hundreds of thousands of individuals and their families, some of whom until recently had been members of the Iraqi elite.[6]

Thrusting aside so many people whose only expertise involved the use of weapons converted their opposition to the new army into one of the most vicious conflicts in Iraq's history. It contributed to the anarchy in the country and left the borders unsecured. In an attempt to diminish the mistake of dispersing the entire army, the authorities retroactively claimed that the army had "dissolved" of its own accord when the war broke out and that the Americans and their allies simply gave it their official stamp of approval. If there is some truth to this claim, it is the fact that these words harbor a clear political statement: the allies did not recognize the legitimacy of the Army or the possibility of rehabilitating it, and thus presumed its generals and other elites to be persona non grata.[7] The de-legitimization of the army, the party, and other security organs is indeed one of the cardinal reasons behind the most deleterious developments in post-Ba'th Iraq.

In addition to the Ba'th's power bases, there was also a comprehensive and systemic redistribution of power within the governing institutions among the country's various sectarian and ethnic groups. The Sunni monopoly over most of the positions of power was immediately destroyed and replaced with a distribution formula designed along sectarian and religious lines (*muhasasa*). The Sunnis criticized this re-allotment, contending that it bolstered the country's sectarian allegiances at the expense of Iraqi national cohesion.[8] The real reason behind the Sunni's ire was obviously their acute political marginalization under the

new formula. For example, among the twenty-five members of the provisional government, which functioned between July 2003 and June 2004, there were only five Arab Sunnis compared to thirteen Shi'is and five Kurds. The picture was much bleaker from the Sunnis' perspective because their representatives had not received any key posts either.[9] However, this configuration was in accordance with each sector's relative share of the general population.

# The Rise of New Elites

The void left in the wake of the Ba'th regime's collapse and the steps taken by the allies to ascertain, once and for all, the elimination of the old elites induced a bewildering ascent of new forces that sought to assert themselves as legitimate replacements of the old elites. There were four claimants to the throne: natural powers that rose to the surface; power bases and elements that were parachuted in or organized by the coalition; factions from the periphery that had released themselves from the yoke of the central government or pushed the latter to the fringes; and elements from the periphery that arrived at the center in order to take part in the national government.

The first group consisted of the tribal heads, clergymen, long-standing parties that have emerged from the underground, and the numerous new parties that have sprouted up. Saddam Husayn's regime began rehabilitating the status of the tribal elite, or at least some of its leaders, during the early 1990s, after an extended period during which he attempted to downplay their existence. A weakening of the central government led to a reciprocal expansion in the tribal leaders' power. These developments induced the Ba'th to collaborate with the tribes or utilize them as a means for bolstering its legitimacy among parts of society that still maintained strong tribal affiliations. Similar events transpired following the war in 2003, but on that occasion there was no central government to fend off or counter the tribal powers. Consequently, the tribes strengthened themselves considerably, albeit by constructing coalitions with other forces in the field.[10] There was no more obvious evidence of the recognition that has been granted to the tribal elites than the appointment of Ghazi al-Yawir, one of the leaders

of the Shammar tribe, as provisional president of Iraq in the summer of 2004.[11]

The ascent of the religious elite has been more impressive than that of the tribal leaders. During the Ba'th era, the clergy were pushed to the political margins; the Sunni and Shi'i religious leadership went into hiding or were severely persecuted. However, by the time the war had reached its peak, there was already a pronounced increase in the role of all segments of the religious leadership. This upsurge was triggered by the tribulations that the war had engendered and the lack of a central government capable of responding to civilian needs or thwarting the clergymen, who displayed organizational skills apparently preserved during their days in the underground. The person who best exemplified the ascendancy of the religious elites was Ayatullah 'Ali al-Sistani. From his seat of residence in Najaf, he not only succeeded in imposing his authority over the majority of Shi'is but also managed to dictate critical political decisions to the coalition forces.

Similarly, established parties, which for years had operated in the underground or had only existed in name, suddenly resurfaced. In fact, one of the ironies of the recent war was that the revival of the Iraqi Communist Party was made possible by the Americans, of all people. This party, which began its activity in the mid-1930s, was the most impressive of the rejuvenated parties. Its members have displayed competent managerial skills; after the fighting, they soon took to the streets to organize demonstrations and national assemblies and to participate in other political enterprises that had been forbidden to them by the Ba'th regime – their arch enemy since the late 1970s. Another party completely neutralized by the Ba'th was the National Democratic Party, which for years was headed by Kamil al-Chadirchi. One of the signs of the times was that Chadirchi's son Nasir appeared to have brought about the party's revival, or at the least stood at its head. This has become a recurring theme, as the ranks of the various parties and political organizations were beginning to form a new elite with members of the same families that had led them before the Ba'th swept into power.[12]

Factions that emerged spontaneously were competing with other power bases: groups or individuals who arrived from abroad with the occupation forces; sectors within the Iraqi population encouraged by the allies to imbue society and the new regime with a more Western and

liberal character; and new power bases established by the allies in order to replace those that were purged. The first group consisted of all the anti-Ba'th, dissident organizations that initially operated in a clandestine manner from within Iraq and were subsequently forced into exile in neighboring countries, Europe, and the United States. Among the most prominent of these organizations were the Shi'i *Da'wa* party, the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SAIRI), the Iraqi National Congress (INC), and the Iraqi National Accord (INA). These former expatriate groups attempted to form the backbone of the new political elite, but not all of them have met with success.

As part of their efforts to construct a new Iraqi society, the Americans and their allies have placed a special emphasis on the political status of women, for they have realized that it would be impossible to establish democracy in a country that lacks equitable representation for its women. This was obviously a sharp reversal from the Ba'thi era during which women did not fill any important political positions, with the exception of one case during its first years. Although women had a certain degree of representation in parliament, their function was no more than a rubber stamp for the regime. In other words, Iraq's women were on the margins of the political map for thirty-five years (as well as before then).[13] American pressure, as well as lobbying by Iraqi women themselves, was responsible for the inclusion of women in the provisional National Assembly (which functioned until the elections in January 2005), where they constituted 25% of its members.[14] Moreover, 33% of the candidate lists for the January 2005 elections were comprised of women, including clearly Islamic lists.[15]

The dismantling of the Iraqi army and other security organs created an urgent need for replacements. This void was highlighted by the continued state of anarchy within the country itself and the lack of control along the borders, which have become porously traversable – including to citizens of neighboring states and Islamic terrorist organizations. Police work and the enforcement of law and order fell entirely to the allies, who were thus compelled to establish a new Iraqi army and police force, just as the British had done in 1921 following a period of rebelliousness and anarchy that accompanied the inception of the British Mandate in Iraq. Like the Americans, the British constructed an entirely new Iraqi army, with the one major difference that the present

new army and police must contend with all the former power bases and individuals that were ousted from their posts – a fact that has rendered all the new institutions prime targets for attack.

The major upheavals that have beset Iraq within such a short time frame have fomented intense struggles between the old and new elites as well as within each of these groups. As long as the Ba'th ruled Iraq with a firm hand, the window of opportunity was shut to anyone not a member of the elite class. With the Ba'th's ouster, all the forces that for years had been pushed to the margins have burst onto center stage. Instead of a single Ba'th party, approximately one hundred parties competed for the top position in the elections.[16] This attests to both the new pluralism that is taking shape in the country and the atomization of its politics. Consequently, the confrontations that we are witnessing today have not only pitted the veteran Ba'thi elite against the new parties and groups but also, perhaps primarily, set the new groups against themselves. Competition also exists between the Iraqis who remained in the country and those who returned from abroad following the occupation.

In two respects, the collapse of the Sunni center in Baghdad has resulted in an unprecedented strengthening of the peripheries: factions residing in the outlying regions have enhanced their positions at the expense of the central government; and political forces from the peripheral governments have arrived at the center where they have formed part of the new political elite. The leaders of the political revolution – which was triggered by the violent ways of war and to a large extent has been forced upon the country from the outside – seek to attain legitimacy and a permanent status via the modus operandi of Western democracies, including elections, a national referendum, and an amended constitution. The systemic contradiction between the collapse of the Sunnis and the ascendancy of the periphery has triggered the following developments: a desperate attempt to restore the status of the old Sunni center; the enhancement of the periphery's autonomy; power struggles between competing groups from the peripheries themselves; and clashes between various peripheral groups that are now part of the elite. Moreover, the weakness of the new center, despite American backing, also contributed further to the strengthening of the peripheral forces.

# The Rupture of the Sunni Elites

One of the most conspicuous paradoxes with respect to the Sunnis is that despite the fact that they were the rulers of the modern Iraqi state since its inception in 1920, there is no historical continuity among their elites. Instead, their history has been marred by continuous purges or dislodgments and the subsequent ascension of new elites. During Qasim's coup in 1958, for example, the Sunni, Hashemite elite under the leadership of Faysal – who the British imported and enthroned in Iraq – was almost entirely purged together with Sunni politicians from outside the royal family, such as Nuri al-Sa'id.

Less than five years later, Qasim and his attendant elite were also purged; the first Ba'th regime that replaced them did not even manage to form a genuine ruling elite before being violently removed after a mere nine months. The five years between the two Ba'th regimes naturally did not leave enough time for the new elite to strike roots, and it was replaced by the second Ba'th regime. The second Ba'th regime's fledgling elite was characterized by the fact that its members did not hail from the heart of Baghdad's ruling consensus, but from Tikrit, Dur and other remote areas. While the second Ba'th regime endured longer than any of the previous elites, rifts also erupted within the party, e.g. the violent succession in 1979 involving the outgoing President Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and the incoming President Saddam Husayn. Notwithstanding these ruptures, the Ba'thist elite became so deeply rooted that the task of eliminating it after the war proved to be more difficult and complicated than any "regime change" that preceded it.

The developments in Iraq stand in stark contrast to the developments in the Jordanian Kingdom during the corresponding period. Jordan was also an artificial creation of the British, who similarly imported a Hashemite elite to Amman. However, in contrast to Iraq, the Jordanian elite struck roots and became a unifying force that to this day imparts continuity and stability to the entire country. The comparison with the Jordanian Monarchy strengthens the hypothesis that it is neither the "artificiality" of the state nor the fact that the sovereign was a foreigner that is responsible for Iraq's woes. In searching for the reasons for Iraq's erratic politics, the most likely culprit would be the systemic weakness of the Sunni elite. Not only were they a minority (comprising some 20%

of the population), but they failed to display the necessary foresight to forge a sense of internal unity, even among the Sunnis themselves. In addition, they failed to develop a formula for sharing power with the two other major sectors, the Shi'is and the Kurds, which perhaps would have offset the conflicts of interest between these camps.[17] Another important factor contributing to the Sunni elite's weakness has been the internal struggle over Iraq's identity, which has concerned the country since its inception, i.e., Iraqi nationalism versus pan-Arabism. Even the Ba'th, which ruled for such an extended period, wavered between these two alternatives. All these factors thus compelled the Sunnis to rule Iraq with an iron fist. The brutal nature of their governing style automatically carried over – and in a much more severe fashion – to their new role as the opposition forced to assume a "defensive" posture.

The lack of internal unity that characterized the Sunnis while they were still in power was profoundly exacerbated by the loss of their monopoly. Unlike the Kurds and Shi'is,[18] they have immense difficulties identifying themselves under the Sunni label, as this is liable to yield the following results: it will underscore their numerical weakness in comparison to the Shi'is; damage their reputation as the fervent adherents and representatives of supra-Iraqi unity; and perpetuate the sectarian-based allotment of power, which is detrimental to their interests. The Sunni government's abrupt collapse also had a noticeable effect on this sector's ability to unify its ranks and stand up to the new power bases. Unlike the Kurds and Shi'is who established alternative organizations and opposition parties over the years, the Sunnis saw no need for such measures, as throughout the years of its rule the Ba'th regime was identified with the Sunnis and represented the Sunni interest. Consequently, the Sunnis' weakness has been exacerbated sevenfold: their power bases have been eradicated and they have not forged any alternative political organizations with a coherent orientation or clear objectives.

Nevertheless, which are the Sunni forces that have risen on the ruins of the former elite? First of all, it is worth noting that the inner-core of the disposed Ba'th regime (who have been derisively dubbed "Saddam's orphans"[19]) have spearheaded the all-out war against the new elites, whoever they may be. Accordingly, the ex-Ba'this are collaborating or hiding behind anyone who can assist them in their struggle, be it

members of al-Qa'ida under Abu Musa'b al-Zarqawi (who have turned Iraq into their primary front against the Americans and their allies in Iraq) or local Islamist groups that were once the Ba'th's arch enemies.[20] Over the course of the insurgency, all the rules have been broken and all the red lines have been crossed. Anyone likely to be a member of the new social and political elite or suspected of helping it take root has become a legitimate target for attack. This accounts for the scores of attacks not only against members of the new Iraqi administration but also against the entire intellectual strata – including university professors, judges, clergy, and doctors – that might form the infrastructure of the new regime.[21] Finally, the former Ba'this have several advantages over the new Sunni groups: considerable experience, intimate knowledge of the terrain and the players involved, and the fact that they have nothing to lose.

A highly influential, socio-political power base that has emerged since the 2003 war consisted of Sunni clergymen who spent most of the Ba'th era in the underground or in exile. Their meteoric rise has been facilitated by the gaping administrative and governing void that developed during the war. This state of affairs necessitated immediate solutions for the populace, such as the administration of medical care, the transport of food, the reconstruction of the destroyed infrastructure, and police work to mitigate the war's attendant acts of vandalism and robbery. Under the circumstances, the mosques became veritable islands of sanity and stability, and the clergy took charge of the situation even after the immediate danger had passed. Although the Shi'i clergy filled a similar role in their own region, the assistance made a much stronger impression on the Sunnis because the extent of the battles in the Sunni region – during the war itself and the ensuing war of attrition – was much greater and demanded a more protracted effort. The new social and political networks established by the Sunni clergy have gradually turned into quasi-institutionalized organizations; the most prominent of these organizations are *al-Hizb al-Islami*[22] led by Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamid and *Hay'at 'Ulama' al-Muslimin* led by Harith al-Dari. Notwithstanding the significance of these Islamist groups, they are hindered by quite a few weak points: the Sunni groups are new and inexperienced; unlike the Shi'i Islamist groups, they are apprehensive about engaging in dialogue with the Americans and certainly not eager to negotiate agreements with

them; and they lack positive objectives and a clearly defined direction. To make up for these limitations, they have attempted to form ad-hoc partnerships with former Ba'thists, who either crossed the lines and joined the religious camp or continued to operate pockets of resistance in the Ba'thist underground. In fact, *Hay'at 'Ulama' al-Muslimin*, which functions in the open, has unequivocally affiliated itself with resistance operations (*al-muqawama*).

Other Sunni elements seeking to take the plunge into the political cauldron were individuals and groups that previously operated in exile. They too prefer to eschew the Sunni rubric, but their identity can clearly be distinguished between the lines. One in particular is 'Adnan Pachachi, who served as foreign minister under the monarchy and returned to Iraq after the war. The party that he has established tows a moderate, liberal, pro-Western line,[23] including candidates from throughout the political spectrum on its list for the January 2005 elections. Despite – or perhaps because of – this heterogeneity, he has failed to attract a significant portion of the Sunni public. In fact, his list failed to win so much as one seat in the January 2005 elections, but this was primarily due to the miniscule Sunni turnout for the elections. Another Sunni personality that failed to sweep the masses off their feet is the Sharif 'Ali bin al-Husayn, the last scion to the Hashemite throne, who sought to restore Iraq's glory by reestablishing the constitutional monarchy. The monarchy never managed to attain legitimacy over the course of its thirty-seven year existence, so it was hardly surprising that al-Husayn's list did not win any seats in the new parliament.

The Sunni's systemic weaknesses were accentuated after the war, as the limitations of the entire sector have become abundantly clear. The Sunni elite is hindered by an overabundance of leaders and claimants to the throne, and unlike the Kurds and Shi'is, it lacks one or two leading, consensual candidates. Moreover, the Sunni elite have not offered a coherent political orientation or a vision amenable to large segments of Sunni society. Most importantly, many of its leaders endorse negative objectives, e.g. as preventing the ascent of other power bases. The fact that the brunt of the terror attacks and military activities have been carried out in the area known as the Sunni triangle has had disastrous consequences for the Sunnis who have already been stifled economically, socially, and politically. The boycott of the elections by leading Sunni

groups and the vast majority of its electorate has further exacerbated the extent of their political marginalization.[24] Were the Sunnis to be incorporated into the new government in a proportional manner, the government would still not reflect the desire of the Sunni populace who did not elect their representatives. Consequently, many Sunnis are quite concerned about a "dictatorship of the majority over the minority."[25] The extent of their marginalization has been underscored by the words of the Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani on the eve of the January 2005 elections: "The Sunni Arab brothers are a fundamental component of the Iraqi nation and their full rights must be guaranteed."[26] A more dramatic turnaround in the discourse and positions assumed by the Sunni and Kurdish elites would be difficult to imagine.

## Continuity and Change among the Kurdish Elites

In contrast to the ruptures among the Sunni leadership, the Kurds have paradoxically managed to maintain a fair degree of historical continuity. This has been attained despite quite a few periods in the history of modern Iraq in which the Kurdish leadership or ranking community members were expelled from their homes and driven into exile. All these tumultuous periods can be attributed to the wars between the Kurds and the central government in Baghdad, beginning with the Second World War, followed by the internal war between 1974 and 1975, and culminating with the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988. The elite that most embodies this continuity is the Barzani tribe, which has passed on the leadership mantle from hand to hand since the 1930s. The Barzanis have managed to survive all the crises and safeguard their leadership crown, if not over all the Kurds then at least over a significant portion of the Kurdish populace. Their continuity can be credited to several factors, foremost among them, the personality and charisma of Mulla Mustafa Barzani, who underwent a metamorphosis from tribal leader in the 1940s to national leader in the 1960s and early 1970s. Another possible factor is the unity within the Barzani tribe itself, which has enabled it to force competing tribes to the margins or forge treaties with them and thus hold

on to the crown. Mulla Mustafa's propitious navigation of the internal struggles also enabled him to devote his energies to the conflict against the central government. The difficulty the central government had in reaching the Barzanis' mountain redoubt is yet another factor that helped them maintain their leadership status and the loyalty of the other tribes.[27]

From the 1930s till the mid-1970s, Mulla Mustafa was the undisputed leader of the Kurds. Throughout this period, he focused his attention on the struggle against the government in Baghdad. Quite a few opponents arose from within the Kurdish camp over the course of his fifty years of military and political activity, but none of the contenders managed to unseat him from the leadership position or alter his political decisions. Because an authentic, alternative leadership did not emerge during his period of exile in the Soviet Union between 1946 and 1958, Mulla Mustafa was able to reclaim the helm immediately upon his return to Iraq, at which time he began to cultivate his sons as potential successors by having them join his inner circle.

Efforts to nurture his son 'Ubaydallah failed completely, and the latter conspired with the Ba'th regime against his father in the early 1970s, ultimately finding asylum in Baghdad. His other two sons, Idris and Mas'ud, accompanied him throughout his political career and joined him in exile in Iran following the collapse of the insurgency in the spring of 1975. Mulla Mustafa himself never returned to Iraq and died in yet another exile – the United States – in 1979; however, Idris and Mas'ud, both of whom returned to Iraq shortly after, attempted to follow in his footsteps. They endeavored to regain the leadership over the entire Kurdish people, but failed to replicate their father's achievements. Idris died of a heart attack in 1987 at the age of 42, while Mas'ud, who is two years younger, continued to hold onto power. However, Mas'ud has had to contend with a rival camp that he has ultimately been unable to contain or defeat.[28]

As a result, Iraqi Kurdistan has been divided into two camps since the passing of Barzani the father: at the head of one faction stands the traditional leadership of the Barzanis, while Jalal Talabani leads the more urban, educated modern camp.[29] Why did this rift transpire and who is the rival elite? It is worth noting that Talabani was Mulla Mustafa's rival from the 1960s. However, as long as the latter was at the helm, Talabani was unable to mount a challenge to the Barzani leadership, as Mulla

Mustafa managed to unite both the tribal and urban forces – such as the intellectuals and the members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party – around his leadership. Nevertheless, the failure of the Kurdish revolt in 1975, the lackluster leadership of Mulla Mustafa's sons, the difficult post-war conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the demand for new leadership that would steer the Kurds on a new path all paved the way for the rise of the Talabani camp.[30]

The conflict between the two camps took on several different forms: personal, political, economic, and military. It also entailed an inter-generational struggle in which the younger camp, led by veteran leader Jalal Talabani, was primarily identified with the urban, intellectual class, while the established camp, headed by the young Mas'ud Barzani, was identified with the tribal leadership.[31] This inter-generational and inter-personal rivalry triggered a conflict between the two elites and their respective parties: the long-standing Kurdistan Democratic Party and the less established Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which were the Kurdish community's two leading political parties.

The power struggle between these two elites was so intense that it ultimately deteriorated into war in the middle of the 1990s – a period in which Kurdistan was disengaged from the central government and ideal conditions ostensibly existed for realizing the Kurdish dream of unity and autonomy. The war ended with the partition of Iraqi Kurdistan into two spheres of influence. Ironically, this schism laid the foundations for a rapprochement between the two factions and their rather united stance on the eve of the war in 2003 and thereafter. The Kurds' relative cohesiveness, the fact that the Kurdish elites, unlike other opposition groups, have not left Kurdistan since their return following the great disaster of 1975, and their experience with over a decade of self rule have endowed the Kurds with tremendous advantages over the other Iraqi elites that have come to the fore since the war.

These advantages, which have obviously been projected onto all Kurdish society, have stemmed from the disparate experiences of the Kurdish elite in comparison with the Sunnis. Not only was their leadership immune to purges or assassinations, but since the struggles of the 1990s, the extent of cooperation between the belligerent factions has progressed to the point of meaningful modus vivendi. Well before the 2005 elections, the decision was made to integrate the two Kurdish

camps and present a single joint list before the electorate, consisting of the two leading parties as well as the rest of the small parties, with the exclusion of the radical Islamists. The radical groups – the most prominent of which was *Ansar al-Islam* – were a fairly new phenomenon among the Kurds, but overall the Islamist groups have not managed to take root among the Kurds to the same degree as their Sunni and Shi'i counterparts.[32] In fact, the main parties in Kurdistan have become the leading advocates of a democratic, secular state. Regardless of whether this occurred by coincidence or by design, they have advanced a new political order that merits the full support of the Americans.

Kurdish representation in Washington since the mid 1990s, a period in which the Ba'th regime had no representation there whatsoever, gave their leadership an additional head start over the others in relations with the United States. Furthermore, Kurdish troops have filled a significant, active role alongside the Americans in conquering regions that were under the Ba'th's control in the spring of 2003. Consequently, they have become the primary supporters of the Americans and the continued presence of the coalition forces in Iraq. For instance, Talabani has denounced the calls for an early withdrawal of allied troops because in his estimation such a withdrawal would precipitate a disaster: civil war, partition of the state, and mortal damage to Iraq's social and economic infrastructure.[33] Another crucial advantage is that the Kurds have been allowed to maintain their irregular forces, the *pesh merga*, which helped the coalition forces capture the city of Falluja – a center of Sunni resistance – in November 2004.

Today the Kurdish elite constitute a counterbalance to the other elites. During this pivotal moment when power is being redistributed in Baghdad, the Kurds' more crystallized objectives and orientation have provided them with superior maneuverability and negotiating skills.[34] Consequently, the Kurdish region is not only entirely independent of the central government, but the Kurdish elite have also secured a solid foothold in the national government.[35] For example, following the Ba'th's ouster, Hoshyar Zebari served as the foreign minister until the establishment of the provisional government in 2005 and has continued in this capacity under the new elected government. Five other Kurdish leaders – including Barzani and Talabani – served on the provisional government, where for the first time the Kurdish representation was

more or less equivalent to its relative share of the population. Moreover, the Kurds have filled the position of president and important cabinet posts in the new Iraqi government of April 2005.

# The Shi'i Momentum

Whereas one can speak of the eradication of the Sunni elites and the Kurds' historical continuity, the Shi'is have undergone a total revolution that has affected everything they have known and recognized for hundreds of years. The war instantly transformed them from a numerical majority that nonetheless found itself on the political margins into the likely candidates to govern the country. However, in contrast to the Sunnis and Kurds, the Shi'i elites have had to start building a power base from scratch. Throughout the period of Ottoman rule, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, the Iraqi Shi'is were prohibited from participating in the central government and never enjoyed periods of autonomous rule like the Kurds.

In effect, this state of affairs was bequeathed to modern Iraq, as the Shi'is rarely managed to attain key positions in its various governments, nor did they establish strong political organizations or parties capable of representing and fighting for their interests. Moreover, there was no set of coherent objectives uniting the Shi'is, their primary concern being survival. Nevertheless, several reservoirs existed that now serve as a source for a potential Shi'i elite: Shi'i members of the disposed Ba'th regime, who did not serve in truly influential positions and certainly did not represent the Shi'is as a sect; clergymen, who mostly provided spiritual leadership whenever they were permitted to do so by the regime; and underground dissident organizations that were forced to operate from outside of Iraq so long as the Ba'th was in power.

With the fall of the Ba'th, a struggle began over the leadership that not only pitted these Shi'i elements against the Sunnis and Kurds, but also precipitated internal feuds within the Shi'i camp. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the leadership reins were in the hands of Shi'i figures, including members of both secular and religious organizations, who arrived from abroad with the blessing and encouragement of the Americans. The secular organizations were led by Shi'is (but also

consisted of ranking Sunnis) who had close ties with the American administration. Although these organizations were heterogeneous, all of them refrained from defining themselves on a sectarian basis. Within a short time, the two leading organizations – The Iraqi National Accord headed by Iyad 'Allawi and Ahmad Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress – were immersed in a power struggle. The rivalry between the two camps already existed when they were in exile, but the tensions were exacerbated several-fold once the competition began for the country's leading positions.

'Allawi and Chalabi became arch enemies and also dragged their two camps into the fracas. For a while, 'Allawi was in the ascendancy; he was awarded the key position of provisional prime minister in the summer of 2004, primarily because the Americans threw the full weight of their prestige behind his candidacy. 'Allawi, a former member of the Ba'th, earned the reputation of a strong man capable of restoring security and stability after a trying period of anarchy.[36] Other advantages that he had over Chalabi in the eyes of the Americans were his consistent support for secularism and the fact that his list was open to a broad array of candidates from various sectors, including Sunnis and former Ba'th members.[37] From this standpoint, his platform was different from the vast majority of the Shi'i camp, which demanded that the Ba'th be totally uprooted.[38] Despite these attributes, 'Allawi could hardly be deemed a popular leader in the eyes of the Shi'is or a figure that commanded country-wide legitimacy; in fact, his party won only 40 seats in the January elections.

Although Chalabi, in contrast to 'Allawi, was originally the Americans' favorite son, he rapidly lost appeal in their eyes. There are many possible explanations for his fall from grace: the flawed (and thus suspicious) information with which he provided the United States concerning Saddam Husayn's unconventional weapons; his tendency for being too independent; the ties he cultivated with Iran; and his decision to ally himself with Shi'i clergymen. Chalabi's ouster from the center of the political arena reflected the general unpopularity of secular Shi'i leaders. Chalabi was only placed in the tenth slot on the Shi'i list supported by Ayatullah Sistani for the January 2005 elections. Likewise, Chalabi's decision to join ranks with the clergy indicated that he lacked popular appeal. He reached the conclusion that if he wished to remain

on the political scene, he had to conform to the growing trend of acquiescence in the authority of religion and the clergy.

In addition to the secular or partially-secular Shi'i groups, strictly religious Shi'i parties or groups also arrived in Iraq with the allies. Prominent among those groups were *al-Da'wa*, founded at the end of the 1950s and the most prestigious of these organizations, and the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq, an umbrella organization founded in Iran in 1982. Unlike the secular Shi'i leadership, whose primary ties were with the West, most of the religious Shi'i leadership was strongly connected to Iran, which not only provided Shi'i clergy with political asylum, but also offered them financial, organizational, and logistical assistance. This support explains the religious leaders' dependency on Iran and why these alliances could not be extinguished immediately after the war. Nonetheless, their relationship with Iran since the war has become considerably more complicated and ambivalent.

First, a religious-ideological debate has erupted between 'Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's supreme Shi'i leader, and the religious leadership in Iran over the doctrine of "the guardianship of the jurisconsult" (*velayet-i-faqih*) – a stance to which Sistani has adamantly objected. Secondly, there is a conflict of interest over the presence of foreign forces in Iraq. Iran hopes that the troops will depart as soon as possible, while most of Iraq's Shi'i leadership prefers that they remain until they consolidate their power. Nevertheless, the reliance of certain Iraqi Shi'i groups on Iran has persisted, and the mutual relations between Shi'is in both countries have tightened. This allegiance exists not only on the leadership level but also among ordinary Shi'is as a consequence of the newly porous borders between the two countries. These close relations were particularly salient when compared to the relatively independent Kurdish leadership, which lacked an external patron directly involved in their political decisions and behaviour. In addition to the special bond with Iran, the Shi'i elite differed from their Kurdish counterparts in the following respects: the decentralization of the Shi'i leadership, the abundance of leaders, the existence of a religious authority that dictated to the political leaders, and the power struggles that occasionally deteriorated into violence.

The most important power struggles, those that reflected on the whole of Shi'i society, were among the ayatullahs, the supreme religious Shi'i

authorities. Five individuals have filled the position of ayatullah since the Ba'th's rise to power over four decades ago: Muhsin al-Hakim, Abu al-Qasim al-Kho'i, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, and 'Ali al-Sistani.[39] The first four ayatullahs were succeeded by their progeny, but the second generation never attained the same level of spiritual leadership. On the contrary, most of the successors' energies were directed towards political activity and the establishment of clandestine political organizations. For example, al-Hakim's three sons were senior leaders, if not the founders, of the three most important underground organizations: Madi al-Hakim was involved with *al-Da'wa*, 'Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim was the head of the *Mujahidin* movement, and Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim founded the umbrella organization The Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq, which subsequently co-opted the first two organizations. These developments have indeed conformed to the popular expression, "Everything remains in the family."

The post-war political void has provided an opportunity for the second generation of the three families of ayatullahs to realize their political aspirations, which only intensified the friction among them. Two of the second-generation sons failed to realize their ambitions: in 2003, Baqir al-Hakim was murdered in Najaf in an attack that appears to have been orchestrated by Sunni factions, while Majid al-Kho'i was killed as a consequence of internal Shi'i strife.[40] With the abatement of major hostilities, a conflict flared up between Abu al-Qasim's son 'Abd al-Majid al-Kho'i and Muqtada al-Sadr, the son of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and the son-in-law of Baqir al-Sadr; the confrontation ended in the murder of Kho'i, with Sadr considered the prime suspect.[41] This conflict contains various dimensions that have resurfaced in later clashes. It was a struggle between figures from abroad and personalities who had stayed in Iraq, as Kho'i arrived from exile in London immediately after the war, while Sadr remained in Iraq under the specter of persecution. Similarly, it was a clash between an individual of Iranian descent, Kho'i, and one who boasts of being a pure Iraqi Arab, Sadr. Moreover, it was a struggle pitting Kho'i's quiet, apolitical approach – referred to as *al-hawza al-samita* – against Sadr's activist approach – *al-hawza al-natiqa*. The latter disagreement lingered on from the preceding generation, as Kho'i the father espoused an apolitical outlook while the two Sadrs championed

the opposite approach. These feuds did not end with Kho'i's death and passed on to the more conspicuous power struggles between Muqtada al-Sadr and Ayatullah 'Ali al-Sistani – two figures who stand at opposite poles of the Shi'i elite.

The power struggles between Sistani and Sadr may be viewed as a test case as well as a reflection of the events that have transpired on the Shi'i front since the war. Sistani, who became the supreme Shi'i religious authority after the murder of Sadiq al-Sadr (Muqtada's father) in 1999, underwent a metamorphosis after the war from a spiritual leader who excluded himself from politics to the most powerful spiritual-political leader in Iraq. Sistani continues to be depicted as an apolitical figure who opposes a government composed of clergy, but in practice Sistani has become the kingmaker behind the scenes; i.e., the authority that dictated developments in a country whose citizens revered his every word. This implicit activism, which was indicative of the changes that have affected the entire Shi'i community, rapidly immersed Sistani in conflicts with Muqtada al-Sadr.

On one level, their rivalry was an inter-generational struggle in which Sistani, who was in his seventies, represented the old generation, and Sadr, who was in his thirties, represented the young generation. In fact, many of Sadr's supporters – who referred to themselves as *Sadriyyun* – were young men from poor socio-economic backgrounds. This rivalry also contained a sectarian-ethnic dimension: whereas Sadr ostensibly personified the authentic Iraqi Arab, Sistani, who was of Iranian descent, was painted by the Sadr camp as a foreigner unworthy of leading Iraq's Arab Shi'is.[42] Yet another element was the feud between the ayatullah families: Sistani was a disciple of Kho'i and thus supported the return of his son, Majid Kho'i, to Iraq. This allegiance automatically pitted Sistani against Sadr, and Majid's murder severely heightened the tensions between the two.

To make matters worse, both men represented a different style of leadership: Sistani's traditional and quiet demeanor vis-à-vis Sadr's charismatic and activist style. Sistani's spiritual leadership has spilt over into the political sphere by dint of traditional tools such as legal rulings and what may be referred to as political *ijtihad* (jurisprudence). In contrast, Sadr espouses a political leadership that extends into the spiritual realm via military and political tools. On the other hand,

because of his young age and dearth of religious erudition, Sadr lacks the requisite religious authority. He has tried to make up for these weaknesses by affiliating himself with luminaries, such as his father, who was revered as the living embodiment of political activism as a consequence of his active resistance to the Ba'th regime. Sadr has thus attempted to prove that he was worthy of the support of all Shi'is by simultaneously endeavoring to glorify his late father's name as a supreme religious authority who transcended death and to present himself as the disciple of his father's way. Accordingly, he has utilized the social and religious networks that his father built and has reinforced them by establishing a militia that he has dubbed *Jaysh al-Mahdi* – the Army of the Mahdi.

Another luminary with whom Sadr has paradoxically attempted to associate himself is the Iranian Ayatullah Qazim Husayn al-Ha'iri. The latter supported the ambitious young man at the beginning of his career, but distanced himself from Sadr once he became familiar with his independent streak, which the ayatullah found intolerable. In order to imbue his leadership with religious validity, Sadr has even begun to grace himself with the title *Hujjat al-Islam*, the third highest rank in the Shi'i hierarchy. As a result, he has undermined Sistani's prodigies, 'Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and Ibrahim al-Ja'fari, the leader of *al-Da'wa*.[43] Another aspect of the profound disagreements between the two is that Sadr has sought to perpetuate his father and cousin's political activism at the expense of the Americans; i.e., Sadr believes that Iraqis must continue the violent resistance against foreigners until they withdraw from Iraq. Sistani, who understands how important American support is to the stabilization of the Shi'is' position, has been willing to exert his spiritual authority in order to prevent this sort of resistance – at least until the power rests in Shi'i hands.

In fact, the internal Shi'i conflicts have become so entangled with external conflicts that it has become difficult to distinguish one from the other. Two prominent clashes are indicative of the integrated nature of these struggles. Sadr and his adherents initiated a violent struggle against the Americans between April and June 2004, which was followed by a second episode in August – the uprising in Najaf, the Shi'is' holiest city and the seat of residence of their most eminent scholars. Although the direct target was the Americans, Sadr's implicit intention was to call into

question the legitimacy of other Shi'i leaders, especially Sistani. Moreover, he sought to offer a young, activist, anti-American alternative that called for the founding of a fundamentalist, Shi'i state in Iraq. In both incidents, Sistani gained the upper hand by virtue of his wisdom and the fact that the majority of the Shi'i elite bowed to his authority. He managed to fend off Sadr and his supporters and, for all intents and purposes, has become the Shi'is' most influential religious and political authority. Nevertheless, Sadr's continued control over the internal Shi'i opposition sowed the seeds for a rift in the Shi'i camp, which might come to fruition once the Americans have left and no longer constitute a target for the opposition or serve as the primary enforcer of law and order in Iraq.

# Conclusion

The abrupt upheaval in Iraq's leadership ranks is the greatest in its history as well as in the annals of the entire Middle East: from a single, all-powerful sovereign to a litany of rulers, leaders, and claimants to the throne; from the one and only Ba'th party to a vast array of parties, factions, and organizations; from a systemic and rigid ruling hierarchy to a large tapestry of powers, each pulling in its own direction; from an ideologically one-dimensional regime to a government attempting to uphold an ideological pluralism; from a centralized government whose center of gravity was in Baghdad to a decentralized government emphasizing the power of the peripheries; and from a government entirely predicated on unbridled force to a government in which compromises and coalitions have become a fundamental component of its very existence. Nevertheless, it must be reiterated that, despite the proliferation of factions in the Iraqi political game, a certain degree of historical continuity has been preserved, as power has remained in the hands of certain families, such as the Barzanis, Talabanis and the families of Shi'i clerical leaders. Tribalism has also played a role; not only has it refused to step off the world stage, but it has endured and intensified.

The Iraqi elections in January 2005 and preceding and ensuing events accurately reflected the developments that have been discussed here. Over a hundred lists of new and old elites who competed in the elections

constituted the intricate mosaic of Iraqi society. Marginalized and underground factions vaulted to the center of the political stage, while formerly omnipotent forces during the Ba'th era were mercilessly repulsed to the fringes. The lists that won the most votes were coalitions composed along religious or ethnic lines: the Shi'i coalition garnered about half the votes, but less than a majority; and the Kurdish coalition attained about a fourth of the ballots. The Sunnis hardly received any votes, as they did not form a coalition of their own and most of their people boycotted the elections. Similarly, the secular lists of the supra-sectarian alignments never managed to get off the ground.[44]

From the dawn of its existence, the Iraqi state's various regimes and leaders have endeavored to establish a stable polity that could boast of internal unity and a supra-sectarian allegiance with a measure of historical continuity. To date all attempts have been utter failures. Consequently, the question that begs asking is whether the new elites will succeed where their predecessors have failed, or whether Iraq is a systemically flawed state that is liable to ensnare any new leadership that appears on the scene? Alternatively, the events that we are witnessing today may very well be the opening shots in a struggle between two national movements, Arab and Kurdish, and between two states-in-progress, Shi'i and Kurdish.

## NOTES

1. A poem written by the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet after the death of the Soviet dictator Stalin (originally translated from Turkish to Hebrew by O.B.).
2. Although Qasim held public trials that were referred to as the Mahdawi trials (after the individual in charge), these took place after the leadership had already been purged. Consequently, they deteriorated into show trials aimed at hammering away at the enemies of the regime.
3. The decision to render the party illegal automatically precluded its members from engaging in political activity, which obviously included participation in the January 2005 elections.
4. The Iraqi army was established on January 6, 1921.
5. *The Economist*, January 15, 2005.
6. Despite the fact that he did not support Saddam Husayn and his regime during the war, Ghassan 'Atiyya, a researcher and Sunni political activist, lamented over the United States' decision to dismantle the army, which he considered a

colossal blunder. *Al-Mada*, January 24, 2005.

7. According to one source, the number of generals stood at 12,000. *The Economist*, January 15, 2005. This huge number might refer to officers of different ranks.

8. One of the opponents of this method was 'Adnan Pachachi, an expatriate Sunni who returned to Iraq after the war. His group participated in the provisional Iraqi government. See: *al-Nahda*, January 17, 2005.

9. This was one of the major reasons why Islamist Sunni parties and other groups boycotted the elections in January 2005. One of these organizations, *Hay'at 'Ulama' al-Muslimin*, conditioned their participation in the elections on the establishment of a designated date for the withdrawal of the allies – conditions that were rejected by the provisional government and the allies. *Al-Ahali*, January 12, 2005.

10. At a fairly early stage, the tribal leaders established a national umbrella organization called *al-Rabita al-Wataniyya li-zu'ama' wa-shuyukh al-'Asha'ir al-'Iraqiyya*. Mas'ud Barzani, one of the leaders of the Kurdish factions, met with their representatives on the eve of the January 2005 elections in order to persuade them to help hold the elections on time. *Al-Ta'akhi*, January 12, 2005. Senior government members – such as the defense minister, Hazim al-Sha'lan – also cultivated ties with the tribal leaders before the elections. *Al-Manara*, February 23–26, 2005.

11. While it is true that the presidency did not have any real authority in its new incarnation, the preference of Yawir over Pachachi constituted a telling indicator of the importance of tribalism. It is worth noting that the relations between the Sunni president and 'Allawi, the Shi'i prime minister, were acrimonious. Perhaps this animosity was the result of a struggle over authority or due to sectarian reasons. *Al-Ittihad*, February 23, 2005.

12. The new movement with the secular-liberal tone consists primarily of Sunnis.

13. For a discussion on the status of women under the Ba'th, see: Ofra Bengio, "Women in Iraq, between Conservatism and Revolutionism" in Ofra Bengio (ed.), *Women in the Middle East between Tradition and Change* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2004) pp. 95–107 [Hebrew].

14. Maysun al-Damluji, the deputy minister of culture, recounted the pressure that was exerted by women in: *al-Nahda*, January 24, 2005.

15. The allotment of such a large percentage of women enraged one journalist, who claimed that Iraqi women are not politically mature enough and that such a high proportion of women does not even exist in the United States or Britain. *Al-Ghadd*, January 9, 2005.

16. A similar number of lists, totaling approximately 7,000 candidates, competed in the January 2005 elections.

17. After the war, statistics were circulated claiming that the Sunnis presumably constitute a majority of the country's population. *Al-Ahram al-'Arabi*, February 28, 2004.

18. The Shi'is established what they refer to as *al-Bayt al-Shi'i*, the Shi'i house. As alluded to by its name, this group promotes partisan Shi'i interests, including Shi'i groups and organizations that aim to unite the ranks and set distinct Shi'i goals, to the exclusion of other sectors of society.
19. A term used by the Kurdish leader, Jalal al-Talabani. *Al-Ittihad*, January 27, 2005.
20. The provisional deputy prime minister, Barham Salih, claimed that a tight and "lethal" collaboration existed between "Saddam's people" and members of Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's World Jihad. *Al-Sabah*, January 18, 2005.
21. There were reports of a gang that kidnapped doctors and VIPs for ransom. On one occasion, they demanded as much as $100,000. *Al-Ahali*, November 3, 2004. Saddam's physician, who wrote a book about the Iraqi dictator, explained that he left Iraq after the war because of the violence that was aimed at doctors and intellectuals. See 'Ala' Bashir, *Kuntu Tabiban Li-Saddam* (Cairo, Dar al-Shuruq: 2005), p. 11.
22. This party is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which began operating in Iraq in 1946 under the name *Jam'iyyat al-Ukhuwwa al-Islamiyya*. It was an underground organization throughout most of the republican regimes. *Al-Hayat*, January 23, 2005.
23. The name of the organization that Pachachi founded was *Tajammu' al-Dimuqratiyyin al-Mustaqillin*; its slogan is, "A united, democratic Iraq." *Al-Nahda*, January 26, 2005.
24. One of the demands made by the Islamist groups as a condition for their participation in the elections was the establishment of a designated date for the withdrawal of the Americans from Iraq. Their request was rebuffed. *Al-Ahali*, December 29, 2004. The expression "death triangle" appears in *al-Manara*, February 13–15, 2005.
25. *Al-Nahda*, February 5, 2005.
26. *Al-Ittihad*, January 27, 2005.
27. This can be compared to the Shi'i religious leadership, to whom the Ba'th regime had easy access and thus managed to assassinate many of its ranking clergymen.
28. Of the two brothers, Mas'ud was the more natural and active leader. At the age of sixteen, he abandoned his studies and joined the *pesh merga* – the Kurdish guerilla army. He inherited the position of secretary-general of the Kurdistan Democratic Party from his father after his death in 1979. It is worth noting that Mas'ud was born in Iran on August 16, 1946, on the same day and at the same location that the party itself was founded.
29. Idris's son Neshirvan became Mas'ud's right-hand man. Accordingly, he was appointed as prime minister of Kurdistan in 1999 on behalf of the Barzani faction at the age of 33.
30. In May 1975, at around the time the Kurdish revolt collapsed, Talabani founded his organization in Syria.

31. Mas'ud also evinces his tribal identity by means of the traditional Kurdish garb that he diligently dons during public appearances.
32. Ansar al-Islam, which was connected to al-Qa'ida, was ousted from its bases near the Iranian border by joint, allied forces composed of the US army and Barzani and Talabani's troops.
33. *Al-Ittihad*, January 27, 2005.
34. The leadership presents itself as a body that has always served as the common denominator uniting all Iraqis. *Al-Ittihad*, February 3, 2005.
35. Before the elections in January 2005, a Kurdish organization (supported by both leading parties) sought to conduct a public referendum among the Kurds on the topic of Kurdish independence. *Al-Ahali*, December 29, 2004.
36. There were those who voted for his list for this very reason. *The Economist*, February 5, 2005.
37. 'Allawi furiously opposed the fast-growing trend of involving Ayatullah Sistani in political matters. He claimed that it was detrimental to both religion and politics. *Al-Zaman*, March 3, 2005.
38. The Chalabi camp's primary accusations against 'Allawi were that he had returned Ba'th members to government posts and that his administration was corrupt. *Al-Ahali*, February 23, 2005. Chalabi headed a committee charged with purging the Ba'th even before 'Allawi became prime minister and promised to restore the committee after the elections. *Al-Ahali*, February 23, 2005.
39. Baqir and Sadiq al-Sadr are cousins. Although Baqir did not officially attain the position of ayatullah, his religious and intellectual influence spanned the entire Shi'i world.
40. Another version contends that Muqtada al-Sadr stood behind the attack on Hakim, but there was no way of verifying this.
41. Sadr was to stand trial for his suspected involvement in the Kho'i murder.
42. According to one source Sistani has only recently requested an Iraqi identification card. *Al-Jazira*, cable television, March 14, 2005.
43. One of Sadr's supporters severely reproached these and other figures. He claimed that they were worse than Saddam and that if only Sistani knew the truth about them, he would stop supporting them. *Al-Zaman*, February 8, 2005.
44. The united Shi'i list, *al-I'tilaf al-Iraqi al-Muwahhad*, won 140 seats; the Kurdish coalition, *al-Tahaluf al-Kurdistani*, 75 seats; the Iraqi list, *al-Qa'ima al-Iraqiyya*, led by the outgoing prime minister, Iyad 'Allawi, took 40 seats; *al-'Iraqiyyun*, under the leadership of Ghazi al-Yawir, the outgoing Sunni president, won 5 seats; Sadr's supporters (though he himself did not participate), *al-Kawadir wal-Nukhab al-Wataniyya*, 3 seats; the communist list, *Ittihad al-Sha'b*, took 2 seats; and the rest of the tiny lists took between one and two seats at most. *Tariq al-Sha'b*, February 20, 2005. Consequently, out of the multitude of lists, only 12 managed to enter parliament.

# Iran's Rebellious Youth

## Meir Litvak

Iran's young generation is different from the rest of the youth in the Muslim Middle East, but this dissimilarity is to a large extent a negative reaction to the program of the ruling clergy. Islamic movements, which contend that the establishment of an Islamic regime is a panacea for the hardships of the region, enjoy immense popularity in Arab states. In contrast, the attraction of religion has actually waned among Iran's youth as a consequence of the prolonged rule of the clerics acting in its name. For example, in 2000, senior clerics lamented the fact that 85% of the youth were not performing the daily prayer commandment, and there was little reason to believe that there has been a significant change in these numbers. In fact, since 1999, the youth – primarily university students – have attempted to lead Iran's struggle for democracy by organizing demonstrations and confronting the regime.

Anti-Americanism is a dominant attitude throughout most of the Middle East and Europe, but the United States and various aspects of American culture are quite popular among Iranian youth. For example, in contrast to the common reactions in the Arab world to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 – ranging from expressions of satisfaction with the blow the United States had received to minced justification for "the motives that drove the terrorists" and accusations of Israel's responsibility for the attacks – thousands of Iranian teens held memorial vigils in which candles were lit in memory of the victims. In 2002, a public opinion poll conducted in Iran showed that 75% of the respondents were in favor of renewing relations with the United States. The two editors of the survey – former radical activists who have since moved to the liberal-democratic wing – were immediately incarcerated on charges of distributing propaganda hostile to the Islamic regime, and they remain in prison to this very day.[1]

As in past cases, the youth have failed in their struggle against the Islamic regime. Moreover, in view of Iran's cultural tradition, their story is far from reaching a "happy end." Nevertheless, a credible assessment of Iran's future necessitates an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of Iran's rebellious youth and the reasons behind their failure. To understand this phenomenon, it is worth reviewing the basic outline of Iran's socio-economic development since the Revolution. With unofficial sources claiming that 70% of its population is under the age of thirty, Iran is a country of young people, over half of whom were born after the revolution. In other words, most of the country has no recollection of the Shah's regime. Consequently, the current regime's stories about the terrible period that preceded the Revolution and its great accomplishments since then make less of an impression on this generation than their current tribulations. Every revolution experiences a withering of the revolutionary fervor after the first generation. However, in Iran's case, this phenomenon is particularly pronounced given the regime's failure to fulfill its presumptuous objectives to forge an ethical, religious society in the spirit of the clergy's strict Islamic interpretations and given the unrealized aspirations of the youth for a better life.[2]

The sharp rise in oil prices in the last two years has triggered an impressive economic growth of 6% during the past year. While the oil boon has greatly benefited the regime, it has not solved the Iranian economy's fundamental structural problems, especially high unemployment among the country's youth. The youth-heavy demographic composition of its population has generated an additional 700,000 new job-seekers a year, but the Iranian economy created only 440,000 new jobs in 2001/2002 and 470,000 in 2002/2003. While the official unemployment rate in Iran decreased from 14.7% in 2002 to 11.2% in 2004, the Iranian press reported that unemployment reached between 16% and 20%, i.e., the addition of another half a million individuals to the ranks of the unemployed every year, while unofficial sources have placed the unemployment rate at a much higher 27%. Furthermore, salaries have yet to catch up with inflation, which reached a rate of 17% in 2004, a disparity that has precipitated a decline in the standard of living of the lower classes.[3]

Similar travails in the Arab states have induced many of their youth

to turn to Islamic movements, which offer a wonder drug – "Islam is the solution." However, after twenty-six years of an Islamic government in Iran and continual indoctrination with Islam's spiritual and moral superiority, the allure of the Islamic regime's simplistic slogans has considerably weakened in the face of political and cultural oppression, economic difficulties, and rampant corruption at every level of government, including the religious establishment. Iranian youth are well aware of the fact that Islam lacks miraculous solutions to the country's serious social and economic problems and that people claiming to act in the name of religion are not necessarily more conscientious than other rulers. After the failure of the authentic Islamic solution (in contrast to imported solutions), Iranians also understand the fallacy of blaming the region's woes entirely on the West.

In an article published under a pseudonym in the conservative American journal *National Review* in June 2003, an Iranian student offered a heart-wrenching depiction of the feelings of Iran's young generation. He asserted that his generation, which he dubbed the "burnt generation," had lost its childhood and the innocence of youth to the clergy's policies. Instead of protecting the children from the traumas of the bitter war against Iraq, the leaders of the regime sought to exploit those same traumas for their political purposes; every day children were forced to watch the enraged masses carrying coffins of the dead and screaming "death to Saddam, America, and Israel." Moreover, he described the sense of betrayal felt by hundreds of thousands of children whose parents were either killed or disabled in the war. Over the years, the assistance they received from the government during the war steadily declined, and today the beneficiaries of welfare payments have been those closest to the regime, who are also privy to the workings of a broad cycle of corruption controlled by people the students call "Islamist crooks." He concluded with a description of the cultural and political suffocation experienced by Iranian teens who aspire to the same basic liberties enjoyed by their Western counterparts: "the liberty to dress [the way they please], the liberty to talk, freedom of association, the freedom to love, and the freedom to dream."[4]

These tribulations have triggered two disparate processes. The first refers to the emergence of social ills reminiscent of every Western society. For example, the employment crisis and the sense of suffocation have

compelled many young people to emigrate. In fact, according to several sources, Iran suffers from one of the most acute "brain drains" in the third world in that as many as 200,000 people leave the country on an annual basis.[5] Secondly, the situation has intensified the politicization of Iranian youth (discussed below) and their attempts to replace the regime.

Of even greater concern is the proliferation of drug use. Unfortunately for Iran, its neighbor Afghanistan is the world's largest exporter of hard drugs. One of the negative ramifications of the Taliban's fall has been the appreciable increase in the amount of land that is designated for opium growth. Iran is the primary route for smuggling opium from Afghanistan to the West, with a considerable amount of the contraband remaining in Iran, where according to semi-official sources about five tons of opium are consumed daily. Many teens suffering from alienation and frustration are attracted to drugs, which provide an escape from their depressing reality. Official statistics point to more than two million addicts, while other sources place the figure at seven million.[6]

The difficult economic situation and attendant drug crisis have forced many young women into prostitution. According to official sources, the number of prostitutes has swelled by 635% over the past five years with an estimated 84,000 female prostitutes in Tehran alone. The average age of these women has dipped below twenty, indicating that thousands of girls have fallen into this profession after running away from home. This figure is supported by unofficial sources estimating that there are about 25,000 homeless children roaming the streets of Tehran. Moreover, the decrease in the number of marriages among young people affected by the country's economic ills has increased the demand for the services of these women, while the combination of drug use and prostitution has led to an increase in HIV carriers (between 30,000 and 40,000 infected individuals, according to official figures). All this is occurring in a country where sexual conservatism is an official, ideological objective of the first order.[7]

The sense of frustration and suffocation has also engendered processes that contrast sharply with these negative social and economic developments. A case in point is the impressive politicization of the youth. Iran is likely to become a fitting example of what the German philosopher Hegel referred to as "the guile of history." Hegel claimed

that a policy course slated to achieve a certain target ultimately leads to vastly different results that tend to march society or the state onto the road to progress. In this sense, one of the Islamic regime's most formidable successes also stands at the heart of the country's unrest – its enormous investment in education. Since the Revolution in 1978–1979, the level of education in Iran has risen impressively: the illiteracy rate has fallen to under 15%; the number of university students has reached 1,673,000 in 2004, including a small majority of women (848,000 vis-à-vis 825,000 men); and Iran took first place in the Youth Mathematics Olympics. The bolstering of education alongside the regime's political indoctrination has forged a new generation that is more educated and savvier than its parents. However, although the youth have undergone a politicization process, it has not necessarily progressed in the direction that the regime had intended.

According to Farhad Khosrokhvar, an Iranian researcher living in Paris, the rise in the level of education has homogenized Iran's ethnic mosaic. The children of Iran's minorities, which comprise some 50% of the population, speak Persian much better than their parents do. Consequently, they are less willing to accept Persian arrogance and ethnocentrism or the discrimination of the periphery vis-à-vis the center. Improved communications between various parts of the country and increased contact between different groups have sharpened the young generation's political consciousness. These developments, in Khosrokhvar's opinion, have reduced the state's ability to manipulate Iran's disparate groups.[8] Compared to the period before the Revolution when only certain sectors had access to subversive writing, the enhanced education system and the homogenization processes have also engendered a notable increase in the amount of people exposed to and interested in the works of Iranian intellectuals. The tremendous popularity of the religious intellectual Abdol-Karim Soroush and the liberal clergyman Mohsen Kadivar is a prominent expression of this trend.

As a result of these developments, a change of consciousness has begun to coalesce among wide sectors of the young public. In fact, the youth and women were the two primary social forces behind Mohammad Khatami's election to the presidency, despite the fact that he was not the preferred candidate of the regime. His supporters had

hoped that he would fulfill his promises concerning the institution of a more humane version of Islamic rule and the advancement of both democracy and the rule of law. During the first years of his tenure, the youth were the dynamic force that clamored for change. Their main aspiration was for a democracy that expanded the autonomy of the individual; in other words, the freedom to dress as they wished or befriend whomever they wanted without being forced to conform to the dictates of the clergy.[9]

The protest of the youth took two forms. The first, milder expression adopted new modes of conduct that deviated from the clergy's stern code of behavior: applauding esteemed speakers – an activity the clergy defined as anti-Islamic; mass celebrations in the streets involving thousands of youth following the victories of the national soccer team, during which unmarried young men and women dared to kiss; and the renewal of the *Chaharshanbeh-ye Suri*, a Persian, Zoroastrian fire ceremony, as a riposte to Islamic indoctrination that also underscored Iran's non-Islamic national identity.[10]

Nevertheless, the mounting revulsion toward the Islamic regime and these expressions of protest were not necessarily indicative of a mass alienation from religion or an indiscriminate adoption of Western culture. On the contrary, the immense popularity of figures who were attempting to forge a genuinely liberal, Islamic replacement for the present regime – such as the philosopher Abdol-Karim Soroush and intermediate-generation clergymen Mohsen Kadivar and Yusefi Eshkevari – pointed to the existence of a broad spectrum of classes searching for a synthesis between a liberal, humanistic Islam and modern Western culture. It also pointed to the fact that Islam continued to be considered a central component of Iran's cultural identity. Accordingly, many young people did not reject religion in its entirety, only particular interpretations of it. That is, they sought to separate or distance religion from politics and government, not from life.

A second, more serious expression of student discontent was the freedom and democracy demonstrations organized throughout the years of the Khatami presidency. Two events stood out in particular, as they embodied the failure of the protest movement. On July 8, 1999, thousands of students took to the streets for six days of demonstrations in order to protest the closing of the reformist newspaper *Salam*. However, much

to their chagrin, Khatami publicly defended the regime against the students. In June 2003, broadcasts by opposition television and radio stations – operating from outside Iran – spurred thousands of students to participate in another mass demonstration. On both occasions, the protests were put down with a heavy hand: hundreds of students were arrested; many were brutally beaten by activists of the *Basij* Militias; and dozens were sentenced to various prison terms. To make matters worse, the students were left on their own, as no other social group joined them.[11]

The brutal suppression of the demonstrations and the youth's inability to prevent any of the oppressive measures implemented in the wake of the conservative counterattacks against President Khatami's liberalization efforts – such as the closure of liberal newspapers, the vetoing of all reformist legislation raised in parliament, and the wholesale rejection of reformist candidates from election lists – clearly illustrated the students' political failure and the victory of the conservative, religious old guard.

The student failure could be attributed to several factors. All the Iranian protest movements that succeeded in the past – beginning with the Tobacco Rebellion in 1891, the Constitutional Revolution between 1906 and 1911, and particularly the Islamic Revolution of 1977 to 1979 – were spearheaded by diverse social coalitions united against a common enemy. The students, on the other hand, failed to persuade other groups to take up the cause.

The merchants, who were the heart and soul of past protest movements, largely, if not unanimously, identified with the regime, whether because of their conservative social approach and revulsion for liberal ideas or because their economic situation was not all that bad. The middle-class wage earners, who played a decisive role in the Shah's fall in 1978–1979, apparently feared the long arm of the regime. Despite their economic troubles, the working-classes were still far from reaching the point at which they had nothing left to lose. Dozens of strikes have indeed erupted over the past few years, but the strikers have always concentrated on questions of salary – with the exception of one lone incident in which political slogans appeared among the raised banners. The laborers struck on issues such as overdue wages, salary erosion and demands for pay hikes, but never managed to translate their demands

to the political sphere, whether for a lack of awareness, organizational and recruiting difficulties, or a sense of alienation from the students.

However, it would appear that the central factor behind this passivity was the weariness of most of the public after twenty-five years of revolution, war, and dashed hopes for reforms that never materialized. The public no longer possessed the strength for a prolonged struggle against the government. Or, as *the Economist* explained, Iranians have learned a bitter lesson after the fall of the Shah; as bad as things may be, an insurrection can only make matters worse.[12]

In all past protest movements, the intellectuals never managed to lead the masses directly, primarily because of the cultural and social gaps separating them from the rest of society. Their primary power rested in the behind-the-scenes influence exerted on the merchants or the clergy leading the protest movements and in their impact on the public mood. Unlike the intellectuals, the clergy played an important role in all the protest movements. By utilizing the corpus of Islamic symbols and slogans amenable to the entire population as well as the recruitment facilities of the mosques and other religious institutions dispersed throughout the country, the clergy managed to build a coalition of disparate social groups. At times the clergy themselves led the protest movements, while on other occasions they fronted for others. It was hardly surprising, then, that the absence of the clergy from the dissident ranks and their opposition to the students in their role as incumbent leadership had a profound affect on the fortunes of the latest protest movement.

Furthermore, the students themselves lacked a leadership capable of attracting a national audience. Leaders in Iran usually require charisma, which derives from the prestige of a religious position – such as the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1978–1979 – or from the prestige of leading an extended national struggle – such as Mohammed Mosaddegh, who served as prime minister from 1951 to 1953. At the moment, however, both the students and reformist circles lack a leader on a national scale capable of sweeping the masses. Despite the fact that the youth were a majority of the country, it appeared as if most of the population, including many of the young people themselves, found it difficult to accept the leadership of an individual who was still in his twenties. Therefore, without the support of other social groups, the student

protests had no chance of convulsing the regime and the movement ultimately petered out. Moreover, the student ranks have been divided by a series of arrests and ruses on the part of the regime, and some of the students have even collaborated with the authorities.

Against the weaknesses of the youth, the regime has also displayed a greater political sophistication than that which is usually expressed by the combination of measured oppression and manipulation. The regime has been wise enough to refrain from employing the brutal means of oppression used by Saddam Husayn, as such brutality was ill-suited to Iran's relatively sophisticated society. Such a policy was liable to stoke the public's pent up hatred; and believing it no longer had anything to lose, might take to the streets in violent protest.

As an alternative strategy, the regime operated a system of restrained oppression. For example, the regime established militias known as *Ansar Hizbullah*, which were mostly comprised of members of the lower classes or students who had entered the university within the framework of its reverse discrimination policy and the government's programs for orphans of the Revolution and the war. These activists apparently harbored a sense of antipathy towards the rebellious students, whom they perceived as pretentious intellectuals or spoiled members of the upper classes; on the other hand, they felt an obligation and a sense of gratitude to the regime for the opportunity it had granted them. As a result, the militia activists displayed considerable enthusiasm for pounding their co-students with clubs during demonstrations.

Unlike the Shah, the regime refrained from completely muting public discourse. Nevertheless, it did not allow the liberalization process to precipitate unrest (such as the chaos that marked the end of the Gorbachev regime) and also curbed Khatami's reform measures. The candid statement made by Hashemi Rafsanjani – the former president, considered the second most important figure in Iran and known as a wily manipulator – served to illustrate the regime's approach: the Shah made a cardinal error in granting freedom to the clergy, and the latter exploited this in order to oust him. We, Rafsanjani promised, would not repeat the Shah's mistake.

In fact, President Khatami, who was elected by virtue of the youth vote, played a central role – whether by design or accident – in the destruction of the opposition. Notwithstanding his reformist inclinations

and his aspirations to endow Islam with a more humane face, Khatami was above all a member of the clergy loyal to the regime; while serving as president, he thus considered himself obligated to save the Islamic government from decay or collapse. Therefore, at the moment of truth, when forced to choose between loyalty to the regime and support for the popular protest, he chose the regime. Overall, he turned out to be a weak leader who excelled at giving frank speeches on the importance of democracy and enlightened values in Islam, but who failed to display the endurance required to withstand the pressures of the job or the ingenuity of his rivals. In fact, the claim can be made that Khatami became an asset to the conservatives. Representing the smiling face of the regime to outsiders, his statements and actions served as a safety valve for letting off steam and a means for dividing the opposition. There were, moreover, rumors that the Supreme Leader Khamene'i rejected Khatami's resignation because he understood that Khatami's presence in the government benefited the interests of the conservatives.

Khatami's decision to position himself to the right of the conservatives during the mayhem of July 1999 symbolized the beginning of the rupture between the president and the student associations as well as the acrimonious dissension within the reform movement. On the one hand, the reformist politicians – especially the Islamic Iran Participation Front under the helm of the president's brother, Reza Khatami – were in favor of continuing to advance reforms within the framework of the regime despite the fact that the conservative circles thwarted all their attempts at reform. On the other hand, many students – primarily the radical elements – lost all hope of precipitating change via the legitimate, political route and reached the conclusion that the solution was not to reform the regime, but to replace it.[13]

In contrast to the fecklessness of Khatami and the reformists stood the salient determination of the conservatives to protect the regime. The fact that the reformists took 70% of the votes in each of the last four elections, between 1997–2004, indicated that a decisive majority of the country was in favor of change. However, these statistics also revealed a hard core 30% of the electorate, more determined, better organized and more effective, that supported the regime due either to sincere ideological convictions or to the fact that they were satisfied with the pace of social progress and the economic advantages the regime offered

them. In contrast to the Shah, who lost the determination to fight for his throne during the Islamic Revolution that swept the clergy into power, the conservatives did not hide their intention of employing brutal force against anyone who threatened the existence of the Islamic regime. For example, a notice of the Revolutionary Guards warned that the enemies of the Revolution must "'feel the reverberating impact of the hammer of the Revolution upon their skulls' so that they would never be able to concoct plots or commit crimes."[14]

Nevertheless, the conservatives, finding threats and the use of force insufficient, have been wise enough to promote a positive vision aimed at countering the demands for liberalism. This platform has been formulated by a new conservative grouping that is largely comprised of technocrats. Although their personal support and allegiance to the Islamic regime is absolute, the members of this faction stressed the need to introduce reforms aimed at economic development and the overall advancement of Iran. For example, they condemned Khatami for emphasizing cultural and political development instead of contending with Iran's true socio-economic problems, which the conservative faction promised to address within the framework of the Islamic regime.

The newly elected president Mahmud Ahmedinezhad ran on a populist platform to combat corruption, improve the lot of the lower classes, and implement Islamic justice. In other words, he proposed a return to the core values of the Islamic Revolution, whose appeal, in his opinion, had not dissipated; they had, rather, not yet been fully implemented. The coalition indeed won a crushing victory in the June 2005 presidential elections and thus became the most influential faction in parliament. In fact, the Islamists had now completed the conservative takeover of all the country's power bases. That said, they have learned from the mistakes of the past and were thus working to lower expectations so that the populace did not build lofty expectations for the establishment of an Islamic utopia in Iran.[15]

Foreseeing imminent demographic changes that are likely to play into their hands, these technocrats believe that time is on their side. They claim that the population boom, which Iran has been experiencing since the Revolution, essentially drew to a close in 1985 and that there has been a continuous decline in the birth rate ever since. In other words, the social pressure exerted by hundreds of thousands of youth entering the job

market every year will soon reach its peak to be followed by a steady decline. Moreover, they believed that age would ultimately run its course and that the fuming children of the early 1980s will mature, forsake political radicalism, and take a greater interest in their personal needs.[16]

The failure of the student protest movement has led many to abandon politics and to enter what one could refer to as "internal immigration." For example, young Iranians reportedly read copious amounts of foreign literature as well as books on psychology and entrepreneurial success. Other popular forms of escape for young Iranians included group trips to the mountains outside the city, reading poetry in the natural countryside, watching movies, participating in study groups, and dreaming of emigration.[17]

Another escape route from politics – though it was likely to have important political implications – was the riveting phenomenon of "net diaries" or what were commonly known as "blogs" (an abbreviation of the term web-log, i.e., diaries or columns that were published on the internet). Because there were presently more than 75,000 Iranian blogs, this phenomenon was considered exclusive to Iran. In contrast to the Arab world in which only 2% of the population was connected to the internet (and therefore its cultural influence was marginal), there were five to seven million people surfing the internet in Iran, and Persian was the fourth most prevalent language on the world wide web, according to the International Telecommunications Association. In terms of information dissemination, the blogs fill the media void that resulted from the government shut down of more than 150 newspapers in Iran during the past five years. Moreover, the blogs served as a medium for expressing frustration and protest, distributing portions of censored cultural works (for example, Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses), and organizing activities. However, the authorities have quickly caught on to the latent danger of the blogs, and over twenty journalists or bloggers have been arrested and charged with subversion against the Islamic regime. Notwithstanding the substantial influence of these blogs, they were apparently insufficient for ousting the regime; political activity was still needed.[18]

# Conclusion

Unless there are processes evolving deep beneath the surface, which are indiscernible to the outside observer, Iran's old guard is likely to continue defeating the frustrated youth on the political front for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the long-range biological, social, and economic trends are working against the regime. It is difficult to estimate how much time it will take to transform Iranian society, but these developments perhaps signal that the future belongs to Iran's rebellious youth.

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# THE SURPRISING STABILITY
## OF THE MONARCHIES

# *The Next Generation of Saudi 'Ulama: A New Pillar of Support for the Regime?*

## *Joshua Teitelbaum*

A new generation has come to power in several Middle Eastern states: Jordan and Syria in the Levant, Morocco in North Africa, and Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Emirates in the Persian Gulf. Prominently absent from this list is Saudi Arabia.

The reason for Saudi Arabia's failure to advance to a new generation of rulers is entirely prosaic yet extremely significant – the abundance of wives and the prodigious fecundity of the founder of the modern Saudi state, 'Abd al-Aziz bin 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud, commonly referred to as Ibn Sa'ud. He had strategically utilized the institution of marriage as an integral part of the formation of the Saudi state, taking twenty-two wives from important families and tribes from most areas of the nascent state and fathering forty-four sons.[1] The multitude of sons was the result of a comprehensive plan aimed at preserving the strategic equilibrium of the monarchy after Ibn Sa'ud's passing. As a consequence, the succession has progressed from brother to brother, not to the sons; in other words, all the successors are members of the same generation.

This explains why there has rarely been talk of an inter-generational succession in Saudi Arabia. In principle, this succession method has maintained stability but harbors an obvious critical flaw – the advanced age of potential heirs. King Fahd, who he had not functioned as a monarch since suffering a stroke in 1995, died in August 2005 at approximately 84, while his successor, King 'Abdallah, is about 82. King 'Abdallah's heir apparent, Prince Sultan, is nearing 81, and there are rumors that his health is failing.

The royal family, which is primarily concerned with perpetuating its

rule, already noted the aging problem in 1992, when it passed the Basic Law of Governance stipulating, *inter alia*, that rule shall pass not only to Ibn Sa'ud's sons but to his grandchildren as well. Nevertheless, it appears as if the next generation has a long wait before it assumes the helm; moreover, a thick veil of uncertainty shrouds the identity of its leading candidate. When speaking of processes within the Saudi family, it is indeed best to resign oneself to the aphorism: whoever knows does not talk, and whoever talks does not know.[2]

While an inter-generational succession is unlikely to transpire within the Saudi leadership in the near future, a new generation is nevertheless rising to prominence in the general public. The present article concentrates on the changing of generations among the ranks of the *'ulama*, where several members of the new generation – former and even current members of the opposition – have ascended to elite positions and today constitute a new pillar of support for the regime.

Ruling a state which purports to be based on Islam, the regime has been quite dependent on legitimacy conferred by a clergy called upon to provide approbation for controversial measures and policies. This was the case with the introduction of television in the 1960s, the decision to storm the Great Mosque of Mecca with armed troops after it was captured by radicals in 1979, and the invitation extended to Western troops – whom dissidents refer to as "Christian infidels" – to protect the country following Saddam Husayn's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The regime was assisted by a committee of senior shaykhs and elders belonging to the Council of Senior Ulama *(majlis hay'at kibar al-'ulama)*. These clerics were regularly called upon to legitimize controversial measures and issue religious-legal edicts as per the regime's requests. However, the stature of these clergymen among the younger generation has eroded over the years. The elderly clergy have appeared detached from the modern world and unfit to cope with the challenges of globalization, the internet, and satellite television. Moreover, they have been perceived as the regime's rubber stamp for a series of ostensibly un-Islamic steps, especially their agreement to permit non-Muslim forces to enter Saudi Arabia following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait.

Two relatively young (in their fifties) *'ulama*, Shaykh Salman bin Fahd al-'Awda and Safar bin 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali, viewed by many of the new generation as an alternative to the official religious

establishment, were dubbed *shuyukh al-sahwa*, the shaykhs of the Islamic awakening. They began their dissident activity by distributing recorded lectures. Although well-known before the crisis in 1990–1991, their popularity surged once American troops arrived in Saudi Arabia. Many members of the young generation viewed the American presence as an insult to their honor, and the behavior of some of the American troops only added to the insult; female soldiers drove cars (women are forbidden to drive in Saudi Arabia) and dressed in shorts while military radio stations broadcasted rock and roll from coast to coast.

An Islamic protest movement subsequently arose in response to the shock of the Gulf War. In 1991 and 1992, the religious opposition, under the leadership of al-Hawali and al-'Awda, published two manifestos that contained the following fundamental demands: to grant a central role to all the *'ulama* in the kingdom's decision-making process; to abolish the establishment *'ulama*'s authority as the country's exclusive arbiters in Islamic affairs; and to restore the decentralized and more tribal attributes characteristic of Islam in Arabia before the Ibn Sa'ud era and King Faysal's reforms. These activities reached their peak in 1994 with an unprecedented demonstration and the arrest of the shaykhs. However, by 1999, the regime noticed that the senior establishment *'ulama* had lost quite a bit of their prestige and thus released the shaykhs from prison. This decision may have stemmed from an agreement between the government and the two shaykhs, whereby al-Hawali and al-'Awda would be released in return for a promise to provide the regime with a certain degree of Islamic legitimacy or for an assurance that they would, at the least, not create disturbances. In other words, the shaykhs were co-opted by the regime, at least to a certain extent.

Another development that contributed to the government's decision to look for other *'ulama* capable of better enhancing their legitimacy was the death of two central figures of the Council of Senior 'Ulama: Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Bin Baz, an especially influential figure active since the 1960s, who passed away in 1999; and Shaykh Muhammad al-'Uthaymin, who died in 2001. Since Wahhabism developed as the official ideology of Saudi Arabia and not as a revolutionary movement, it advocated the independence of the sovereign. Bin Baz, who ruled that the sovereign must be supported in order to prevent chaos (*fawda*), became the standard bearer of this approach. However, with the passing of the

leading clergy of the old generation, the regime was left with few distinguished *'ulama* and was thus forced to become increasingly more dependent on the clergy of the new generation. Yet these young *'ulama* were dissidents by their very nature and were unwilling to serve as mere rubber stamps. Consequently, the regime had to tailor its policy to this new status quo.

Following September 11, 2001, the dissident *'ulama* of the 1990s, who had always abstained from violence, began to see the danger of radicalism. This school of thought is led by Shaykh al-'Awda and 'A'id al-Qarni. Since 9/11, al-'Awda has condemned the radicals, to whom he refers as *khawarij* (those who have deviated). The term recalls the name of an early Islamic sect that pronounced all those disagreeing with it as infidels. The regime also refers to the radicals as *khawarij*, indicating that both the former leaders of the opposition and the regime now partake in the same discourse. Al-Qarni has reached prominence only since 9/11, because before that the regime did not give him access to the government-controlled media. Since then he has frequently appeared on television, and it comes as no surprise that Qarni's message is reminiscent of that of the veteran *'ulama* of the old generation. Qarni speaks of unifying the ranks, fashioning a united Islamic discourse that is free of radicalism, and supporting the regime. Moreover, he has urged the youth not to run off to *jihad*.[3]

There are several reasons the regime makes such frequent use of the former dissident *'ulama*. They have earned a reputation as serious clergy without ulterior motives. The young *'ulama* are approachable and can be contacted by phone and email; almost all of them have their own websites. Moreover, the regime has noticed the decline in the public's trust of the official *'ulama* of the old generation. Apparently, the Al Sa'ud also wish to bolster the official *'ulama*'s condemnations of Usama Bin Ladin by enlisting the criticism of Islamic circles that possess more credit than the establishment clergy. From their own perspective, the younger *'ulama* recognize that radicalism is liable to have a disastrous effect on Islam and Saudi Arabia itself and are thus willing to denounce the subversive elements that have operated on Saudi soil.

Let there be no mistaking the fact that these *'ulama* are extremely anti-American, not to mention anti-Israel. Although al-'Awda has denounced the 9/11 attacks as a terrible event stemming from excessive arrogance,

he has also noted that they were the "bitter fruit of the tree that the United States planted." Al-Qarni has expressed similar sentiments.[4] However, al-Hawali has adopted a more radical stance. In an open letter to President Bush, he wrote that a wave of joy swept over the Muslims when they heard of the attacks in New York and Washington. In April 2003, following the American invasion of Iraq, Hawali spearheaded – with the assistance of al-Qarni and al-'Awda – the establishment of the World Campaign to Resist Aggression *(al-hamla al-'alamiyyah li-muqawamat al-'udwan)*, which considered the resistance to American forces in Afghanistan and Iraq to be legitimate.[5] Nevertheless, the regime has not taken any punitive measures against these *'ulama*, since whenever they have been called upon, the young *'ulama* have backed the regime against the more radical elements from within. The regime is therefore willing to let them say what they please as long as their comments are directed primarily towards external affairs. The regime's conduct appears to be a continuation of its policies during the 1980s and 1990s, when it preferred to "export" its radicals to places such as Afghanistan and Bosnia where they were likely to meet a martyr's death.

In May 2003, a group calling themselves "al-Qa'ida of the Arabian Peninsula" carried out a series of spectacular attacks in Saudi Arabia (dubbed "Saudi Arabia's 9/11" by the press) during which many were killed. These attacks posed a continual challenge to the regime, which was grateful for the assistance provided by the shaykhs of the new generation, who condemned the perpetrators. This support was particularly important, especially in light of the fact that when the regime was in pursuit of the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks, three young and extremely radical shaykhs, 'Ali al-Khudayr, Nasr al-Fahd, and Ahmad al-Khalidi, called on the public to assist the fugitives: "They are a few of the best *mujahidin*; they are devout and dedicated, gave of their lives, savings and blood to *God*, and fought with valor against the terrible crusaders in Afghanistan."[6] The regime, therefore, has sorely needed the support of the senior *'ulama* of the new generation, such as al-'Awda and al-Hawali, since with the intensification of internal Islamic terrorism in Saudi Arabia, these scholars of the new generation were a moderating factor. After members of al-Qa'ida in the kingdom kidnapped Paul Johnson, an employee of the American defense industry, in June 2004, official Saudi television broadcasted an appearance of 'Awda and Hawali

in which they condemned the kidnappers for "deviating" from the true Islamic path.[7] They have not relinquished their demands for reforms, but in contrast to the radicals under the influence of Bin Ladin, they are moderate and do not advocate the use of violence within Saudi Arabia.

These *'ulama* grant the regime considerable legitimacy in their struggle against terrorism, and this is presently their most vital role. After the attacks of May 2003, the erstwhile radicals of the 1990s have made a marked effort to position themselves as the adherents of the moderate or middle path and as the rivals of Bin Ladin's jihadist supporters. These young clerics choose to describe themselves as the followers of a policy of *wasatiyya* (meaning middle-of-the-road or balanced) rather than *i'tidal* (moderate), apparently in order to draw upon the Qur'an for legitimacy, where, for example, God says "We have made of you a community of *wasat*."[8]

Al-'Awda continues to raise the banner of reform while simultaneously assailing the radicals and the attacks of 9/11. Although the establishment *'ulama* also condemn the perpetrators of 9/11, al-'Awda weaves his criticism of the regime into his condemnations of the radicals. For instance, he demands tighter supervision of public funds, social justice, and more participation in the decision-making process. It is this very independence that constitutes the source of his strength as well as his usefulness to the regime. In an interview with a foreign paper, a senior Saudi official surmised that Shaykh 'Awda has "repented" and accepted the authority of the government.[9] It is highly unlikely that al-'Awda agrees with this characterization, but there is no doubt that he is currently an asset to the regime.

The younger *'ulama* are also helping the regime in its struggle against the liberals because the liberals seek to reduce the power of the religious establishment. The liberals find their voice in the pages of the daily *al-Watan*, which the Islamists have dubbed – in a play on words – *al-Wathan*, the idol.

It is also clear that Hawali and others are using their positions in order to advance interests that have essentially remained the same: opposition to relations with the United States, greater government accountability, more influence for the *'ulama*, and a more comprehensive implementation of the *shari'a*.

Hawali has claimed to have established a body of 70 *'ulama* from the

young generation for the purpose of meditating disputes between young jihadists and the authorities. The role of this body, according to Hawali, is to remove the jihadists from the path of violence and place them on the path of ideological deviation, which is easier to contend with.[10] Following the deadly attacks of May 2003, the leaders of the new generation of *'ulama* have indeed served as arbitrators between terrorists and the regime. After the authorities declared on June 23, 2004, an amnesty period of one month for al-Qa'ida activists, one of the suspects, 'Uthman al-'Umari, came to Hawali's home. The two proceeded to the house of the interior minister's son, Prince Muhammad bin Na'if, who handled relations with radicals on behalf of his father. According to Hawali, the prince not only greeted al-'Umari warmly "and blessed and praised him for his brave stance in turning himself in at an early stage of the amnesty," but also promised al-'Umari fair treatment and provision for his family's needs.

Several weeks later, the media indeed reported that the authorities paid all of al-'Umari's debts. Moreover, al-'Umari's children expressed their thanks to Prince Muhammad for "his initiative that saved their father from debts amounting to SR 170,000."[11] The entire incident points to al-Hawali's clout among jihadists and his usefulness to the regime. It also illustrates the personal, exceedingly tribal manner of the entire episode: an *'alim*, trusted by both sides serves as the arbitrator; and a noble, generous, and wise amir, possessing the esteemed Arab trait of *hilm* (patience, understanding), negotiates a deal and clears the air. In addition, al-Hawali and other *'ulama* have met with the Saudi Consultative Council, a body appointed by the regime, in order to discuss the surrender of al-Qa'ida members. Six terrorists have ultimately turned themselves in, some as a result of the mediation of the *'ulama* of the younger generation.[12]

In November 2004, before the American attack on the Iraqi city of Falluja, twenty-six young shaykhs published an open letter calling on Muslims to join the *jihad* in Iraq. Among the signatories were al-'Awda and al-Hawali.[13] The government remained quiet because the situation involved an issue of foreign policy. Moreover – similar to Afghanistan of the 1980s and 1990s – it was in the government's best interests for the Saudi radicals to die the death of martyrs abroad rather than to stir up trouble at home. It was also reported that al-Hawali beseeched Salah

al-ʿAwfi, one of the senior al-Qaʿida activists in Saudi Arabia, not to fight within his country but to embark on a *jihad* to Iraq[14] – a position that entirely corresponded with the wishes of the regime. Al-Hawali also repudiated calls for demonstrations in Saudi Arabia issued by the exiled dissident Saʿd al-Faqih from his residence in London. Such activities, stressed Hawali, would trigger chaos.[15]

Whereas in the 1990s, Bin Ladin referred to al-Hawali and al-ʿAwda as "our shaykhs" and called for their release from prison,[16] today the senior *ʿulama* of the young generation are opposed to Bin Ladin and assist the regime in its efforts against religious fanatics and liberals as well. This cooperation not only attests to the transformation that the senior members of the young generation of *ʿulama* have undergone, but – perhaps even more importantly – it reveals that the regime is quite capable of dealing with changing and challenging situations.

The decision by the *ʿulama* of the young generation to encourage young people to depart for the *jihad* in Iraq exploded in the face of Shaykh Salman al-ʿAwda. Several days after the proclamation, the shaykh received the following SMS from his son: "Dear father, I am departing for the *jihad* in Iraq. See you, God willing, in Paradise." The stunned shaykh turned in panic to Amir Muhammad bin Naʿif, who ordered the security organizations to find the boy. In the end, it turned out that the mischievous young man was playing a practical joke in the spirit of the festival of *ʿId al-Fitr*, but the readers of the liberal newspaper *al-Watan* must have smiled at this demonstration of the distinguished shaykh's hypocrisy.[17]

Saudi Arabia has undergone a tough period in recent years. Ironically, the young generation of Saudi *ʿulama* – former members of the opposition – are helping the Saʿudi family navigate its way through the storm. While doing so, these clergy are bolstering their status among both the young generation and the government. The royal family, for its part, is quite adept at exploiting these same clergy for the purpose of remaining in power.

## NOTES

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# All in the Family: Generational Continuity in Jordan

## Asher Susser

## Families, Generations, and the Spirit of the Times

By their very nature, monarchies are familial political entities and Jordan is no exception. In fact, Jordan's own status as a family monarchy is embedded in the country's constitution. This characteristic is clearly visible in its political leadership and the manner in which power is bequeathed. However, the familial dimension of Jordanian politics goes much deeper. Not only does a family (albeit a small one) stand at its head, but from the standpoint of its social structure Jordan conducts itself in accordance to the dictates of familial politics. When the Emirate of Transjordan was established in the early 1920s, "virtually everyone" in the country "was identified by family, clan, and tribal affiliation," a state of affairs that "reflected the territory's low level of urbanization and marginal relationship to centers of power."[1]

Despite massive urbanization and the creation of a highly centralized state, the nuclear family, the extended family, and the tribe all remain units that play roles in a political sphere immeasurably more important than parties, professional associations, and other non-governmental organizations. This determination is predicated not only on decades of observing the Hashemite kingdom, but also on empirical study that has examined the backgrounds of approximately 2,000 government ministers and members of the upper and lower houses of the Jordanian parliament since the establishment of the Emirate.[2] The study found that, similar to the Hashemite family itself, many of the families that comprise

the ruling elite have bequeathed their positions and membership in that same elite to their own progeny from generation to generation.

The successions from King ʿAbdallah I to his son Talal, from Talal to Husayn, and from Husayn to ʿAbdallah II, all enjoyed a high degree of public legitimacy despite the fact that the succession of ʿAbdallah II came as somewhat of a surprise. Literally at the last moment – a short time before the king's death – Husayn ousted his brother Hasan from the position of crown prince (which Hasan had held since turning eighteen in 1965) and appointed his first born son ʿAbdallah in his place. Husayn also instructed ʿAbdallah to appoint his younger brother Hamza – Husayn's first born son from his marriage to Queen Nur – as the heir apparent to the throne. In this way, Husayn kept the order of inheritance within his nuclear family and prevented the crown from passing on to Hasan's sons in the future.

This last-minute change did not raise doubt among the Jordanian public concerning the legitimacy of the succession. On the contrary, the fact that Husayn replaced his brother with his son appeared to be entirely acceptable and, indeed, thoroughly consistent with the customary rite of passage in Jordan's patriarchal society, whereby family or tribal leadership is passed down from father to son. Moreover, it was clear that ʿAbdallah's inheritance was Husayn's express wish and that the continuity of the monarchy was being maintained in a legitimate manner. The smooth implementation of this succession was also indicative of one of the salient advantages that the Middle-Eastern monarchies had over the region's republics, where the legitimacy of the transfer of power was often cast in doubt.

While on the subject of the passing of generations, it is worth noting that succession is not merely a biological matter in which a younger person inherits his father's position. It also marks the beginning of a new era, a change in both the spirit of the times and the historical-political context in which the new ruler functions. Husayn matured politically during the 1950s and 1960s, the heyday of the Nasserist era; whereas, ʿAbdallah II, for whom Nasserism is ancient history, operates in an era in which hardly a remnant of Nasserite pan-Arabism exists. Instead, ʿAbdallah finds himself in the thick of globalization: an era defined by cutting-edge technology, the internet, and cable television, and in which the United States is the lone, undisputed superpower. Each era has had

a poignant influence on the political lexicon, political conduct, and regional perspective of its contemporary Jordanian king. Husayn never fully extricated himself from the shadow of 'Abd al-Nasir and from the permanent scars that his protracted struggle against the Egyptian president left on his soul. Many of Husayn's decisions were undoubtedly influenced by 'Abd al-Nasir, his struggle against him, and even the memory of that struggle.

Because of the adamant objections of 'Abd al-Nasir and his Palestinian allies in Jordan, Husayn hesitantly declined the invitation to join the Baghdad Pact, a pro-Western, anti-Soviet defense pact that the United States and Britain sought to establish in the Middle East during the mid-1950s. Husayn reconciled himself to the founding of the PLO in 1964 – a development that he was against – as the price for a short-lived reconciliation with 'Abd al-Nasir. In May 1967, Husayn was drawn into the Nasserite camp and into war with Israel. Although he realized that he was liable to lose the West Bank, he nevertheless entered the war in order to appease 'Abd al-Nasir and his Palestinian allies in Jordan, who threatened to punish Husayn and his kingdom were he to sit out the war.

Husayn's decision not to support the United States' invasion of Iraqi-occupied Kuwait in 1990–1991 has baffled many observers. Some scholars contend that Husayn felt that he had no choice but to play to Jordanian public opinion, which was largely pro-Iraqi, given the democratization process that was then underway in Jordan. However, only three years later, when the democratization process was at an even more advanced stage, Husayn hammered out a peace treaty with Israel in the face of staunch public resistance. Therefore, it appears as if the decision not to support the United States stemmed from Husayn's intense desire to preserve the honor of the Hashemites in Arab historiography as those who refused to ally themselves with a foreign power in its war against a fellow Arab state. During the years of conflict with 'Abd al-Nasir, the Hashemites were repeatedly accused of betraying the Arab cause. The echoes of 'Abd al-Nasir's scathing criticism were apparently the primary motive behind his steps in 1991 and not the pressures of public opinion.

That said, it is obvious that not all of Husayn's decisions were influenced by the traumas of the Nasserist era, especially those that pertained to the very survival of the regime and kingdom: in 1970, after

two years of wavering, Husayn wiped out the presence of Palestinian *fida'iyyun* operating in Jordan; in 1988, he decided to disengage from the West Bank and thereby abrogate Jordan's historical responsibility over that expanse of land; and in 1994, he signed a peace treaty with Israel without seeking the counsel of any of his Arab brethren. With the persistent decline of Arabism since 'Abd al-Nasir's crushing defeat in 1967, the idea of the territorial state steadily became more institutionalized throughout the Arab Middle East. Jordan was no exception, as Husayn explicitly acted on behalf of the interests of the Jordanian state, while his commitment to the Arab cause in general and the Palestinian question in particular gradually waned.

From the mid-1980s on, Husayn ceased to claim that "Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan," and declared instead that "Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine." The purpose of this shift has been to underscore Jordan's uniqueness and distinctiveness. Since then, Jordanian spokesmen have towed the line with specific references to Jordan's territorial particularism *(al-khussusiyya al-qutriyya)*.

'Abdallah, a product of the post-Nasserist period, has gone much further, as his political thought and expression lack any vestiges of that bygone era, which ended when he was a child. 'Abdallah coined the slogan *"al-urdunn awalan"* (Jordan first), whereby the narrow interests of the Jordanian state take preference over general Arab interests (certainly the Palestinian cause) or any other concerns. Husayn never used such language, and it is doubtful that he would have done so were he alive today. Because 'Abdallah II is the product of another era, the transition from Husayn to 'Abdallah II does not constitute a generational change alone, but a transformation in both regional and international perspectives as well as the political outlooks that have guided their respective approaches. The notable discrepancies between the political context and the spirit of prior and current eras naturally account for the vast differences in the leadership styles of Husayn and 'Abdallah II.

# Jordan's Regional Posture in the Eyes of 'Abdallah II

'Abdallah II's political lexicon differs from that of Husayn and 'Abdallah I. 'Abdallah I's aspiration, if not obsession, to rule over "Greater Syria" was his top priority, and the struggle for Palestine stood at the top of Husayn's agenda throughout most of his years on the throne. 'Abdallah II and his monarchy, however, no longer feel the constant need to prove its loyalty to such concepts as "unionist" *(wahdawi)*, while words, such as "separatist" *(infisali)*, that once conveyed negative connotations no longer stir emotions. "Jordan first," an unequivocally separatist slogan of the first order, is uttered without fear and as a matter of course. Likewise, 'Abdallah II harbors no ambitions of uniting with his neighbors – whether tiny Palestine or huge Iraq. Nor has he any desire to restore the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq or be drawn into the whirlpool of Palestine. His single aspiration is to maintain his kingdom on the East Bank of the Jordan River within its own boundaries.

According to 'Abdallah II (and Husayn before him), all Jordanian citizens, regardless of Palestinian or Jordanian origins, who consider Jordan to be their country are full-fledged Jordanians.[3] The kingdom has not only absorbed the Palestinian refugees that reside within its boundaries, but infrastructure investments in the Palestinian refugee camps are also part of an effort to ultimately turn them into ordinary residential neighborhoods. For 'Abdallah II, Palestine is another country altogether and so it should remain, independent of Jordan, without threatening its national security and without Palestinians, Israelis, or others advancing the idea that "Jordan is Palestine." Consequently, for 'Abdallah, it is imperative that the State of Palestine be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as anticipated by the United States Roadmap, so that it will finally be unequivocally clear to all that Palestine is situated west of the Jordan River and not to its east.

Instability and war between Israel and the Palestinians are Jordan's worst nightmare, lest the conflict end with the forced, easterly migration of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Similarly, the construction of the Israeli security barrier has raised fears in Jordan that the fence is liable to create difficulties that will compel the Palestinian populace living in its vicinity to seek refuge in Jordan.

In the spring of 2003, while Jordan was still preoccupied with the ramifications of the al-Aqsa Intifada, the United States invaded Iraq. The coalition forces ousted Saddam Husayn's Ba'thi regime and thus paved the way for elections in January 2005. The elections institutionalized the control of the Shiites and Kurds over Iraq in place of the Sunni Arabs, who had governed the country in various ways for centuries. As a result, Jordan has found itself caught between two epicenters of instability, uncertain of the consequences of Iraq's defeat and Iran's mounting regional influence or of the direction of the Palestinian Authority in the post-Arafat era. Jordan is ever-sensitive to any hint of regional instability since it has never had the power to shape the regional context in which it operates, and thus has no choice but to constantly maneuver its way through circumstances created by others.

'Abdallah II has placed all his confidence in the United States. Clearly understanding the importance of the United States and its global political weight after 9/11,[4] the king supported the United States in its latest campaign in Iraq. Consequently, Jordan has continued to enjoy generous American assistance. By virtue of a free trade agreement that went into effect in December 2001, Jordan has tethered its economy to that of the United States in an unprecedented fashion, so that within a few years of the agreement the United States has become Jordan's primary export market. With the subsidence of the Israeli-Palestinian war, Jordan has again turned its attention towards Israel and the improvement of relations with its western neighbor. Hemmed in between the crises in Palestine and Iraq, Jordan seeks stability and protection under the American umbrella alongside peace and normal relations with Israel. A cursory glance around the neighborhood reinforces the notion that 'Abdallah II's Kingdom has no other regional anchors on which to cling.

Immediately following his ascent to the throne, 'Abdallah II proved his mettle for decision making, even though some of his choices on occasion have been rather haphazard or impulsive. During his first year in power, he expelled the Hamas leadership from the Kingdom. Moreover, 'Abdallah reformulated Jordan's position concerning its historic role in Jerusalem. Whereas Husayn had demanded and attained recognition of Jordan's special status with respect to Jerusalem's holy places in the peace treaty with Israel, 'Abdallah II announced that Jordan had no special claims to Jerusalem. In 2001, at the height of the Intifada,

he decided to dissolve parliament and postpone elections for the new legislature. The king subsequently revised the election law by means of "temporary legislation," a permissible tactic under Jordanian law when parliament was in recess. 'Abdallah II, like his father before him, exploited this clause in the constitution for the more devious purpose of circumventing parliament when pushing through controversial legislation. In the aftermath of 9/11, he unequivocally stood beside the United States in its war against "international terrorism." 'Abdallah wasted no time in challenging the opposition when it threatened to disturb the peace against the backdrop of the Palestinian intifada's escalating violence in April 2002. He launched his historic initiative of "Jordan First" *(al-urdunn awalan)* in order to reinforce the distinct identity of the Jordanian state and nation, and, more recently in January 2005, he inaugurated a new program aimed at decentralizing the kingdom.

## The Three Pillars of the Jordanian State

The Jordanian state has never been a one-man show, regardless of the talent or charisma of the king. In the not so distant past, many observers wondered what would happen after Husayn. The question assumed that everything depended on the one man, which was, however, never true. The Kingdom rests on three central pillars:

● The first is the Jordanian political elite. This group consists of families and tribes, primarily from the East Bank, bound together by an unwritten agreement of mutual interest. Accordingly, they have tied their destiny to the Hashemite kingdom, their one and only political patrimony, where they freely exercise their right to self-determination.

● The second central pillar is the security and military establishment. This group is composed of the army, domestic intelligence *(mukhabbarat)*, and other security organizations.

● The third pillar constitutes the external support the country receives. Jordan's geopolitical centrality – the fact that it is located at the heart of the Fertile Crescent – endows it with a significance that goes above and beyond its objective power or relative regional weight. Jordan is neither a powerful nor a rich country, nor does it shape the region's agenda. However, regional and external powers have always sought to

support Jordan because of its influence on regional stability, which stems from its strategic location, situated between Israel and Iraq, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and Syria, on the other, and lying at the doorstep of Palestine. As in the past, a collapse of the Jordanian state would not serve the interests of neither regional nor external players. On numerous occasions, the British, Americans, Israelis, and various Arab states have thus backed Jordan politically, strategically, and economically. Someone has always rushed to its aid in times of genuine need.

When, for example, Jordan after the Gulf War in 1991 was in the throes of a deep economic crisis, arising only partially from the consequences of the war, the United States refused to lend a hand, as a way of punishing Jordan for declining to support the United States against Iraq. Instead it was Japan that came to the rescue. The Japanese import most of their oil from the Persian Gulf, and Jordan's collapse was liable to precipitate a state of chaos throughout the Middle East. A disruption in the regular supply of oil from the region would have caused severe damage to Japanese industry. Hence, Japan, together with Germany and several other partners from the European Community, saved the Jordanian economy in the name of regional stability.

# 'Abdallah II Remolds the Elite

The present article concerns itself with only one of the three central pillars – the political elite, with a focus on its identity and familial characteristics. First of all, and to remove any doubt, the king is the "linchpin of the political machine"[5] as well as of the entire system. This is the case with 'Abdallah II, as it was with Husayn and 'Abdallah I before him. The young sovereign swiftly consolidated his status among the upper echelon. 'Abdallah II was older (37) and more mature than Husayn (17.5) when he assumed the reins in February 1999. 'Abdallah had already served as a general in the Jordanian Armed Forces and had earlier been the commander of its Special Forces.

In contrast to Syria, where the question as to whether 'Abdallah's counterpart, Bashar al-Asad, was really in control has been circulating for quite some time, no one asks whether 'Abdallah II was in charge. The question was asked in Syria because, among other reasons, Bashar

was still surrounded by his father's cronies. It was only towards the end of the 1950s, after six years on the throne, that Husayn began to systematically appoint members of the East Bank's new generation (such as Hazza' al-Majali, Wasfi al-Tall, and Bahjat al-Talhuni) to replace 'Abdallah I's trusted advisors, most of whom were of Palestinian descent (such as Tawfiq Abu al-Huda, Samir al-Rifa'i, and Ibrahim Hashim).

Unlike his father, 'Abdallah II began to replace officials and to form a management team from among the members of his own generation from the very outset of his rule. When 'Abdallah II began his reign, he was surrounded by a group of six senior officials who were commonly perceived as Husayn's men, even though two – the Prime Minister and Chief of the Royal Court – were appointed by 'Abdallah himself. This coterie was known in Jordan at the time as the two 'Abds *(al-'Abdayn)*, two Zayds *(al-Zaydayn)*, and two generals *(al-fariqayn)*: 1) Prime Minister 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Rawabda; 2) Chief of the Royal Court 'Abd al-Karim al-Kabariti; 3) Speaker of the Senate Zayd al-Rifa'i (Samir's son and a childhood friend of King Husayn); 4) Former Chief of Staff and Prime Minister Zayd bin Shakir (who was the same age as his cousin Husayn and has since passed away as well); 5) Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 'Abd al-Hafiz Mar'i al-Ka'abina; and 6), Director of General Intelligence (the *mukhabbarat*) Samih al-Batikhi.

Within two years of 'Abdallah's ascension to the throne, not one of these figures remained in a key position, this sextet having essentially been relieved of its duties as 'Abdallah's senior board of advisors. Only Zayd al-Rifa'i has retained his post; but speaker of the senate is a ceremonial position that lacks real power, and advancing or distancing such a figure was largely subject to the king's prerogative. While Rifa'i remained close to the throne, he was not 'Abdallah II's mentor. At the end of January 2005, the king appointed Zayd al-Rifa'i and 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Rawabda to a Royal Commission, charged with the implementation of a new, political decentralization plan. However, as 'Abdallah was set to begin his seventh year on the throne, it was clear to all that these were his own appointments and that these figures no longer filled the role of supervisors on his father's behalf.

Husayn also sought to dictate a successor for 'Abdallah II. The young king was undoubtedly instructed by his father to appoint his half-brother Prince Hamza – Husayn's beloved son from his marriage to Queen Nur

(Liza Halabi) – as the crown prince. However, 'Abdallah II wasted no time in doing to Hamza what Husayn had done to his own brother, Prince Hasan. Deeming his younger brother a potential competitor, in November 2004, 'Abdallah ousted Hamza from his position as crown prince when the latter returned to Jordan from his studies abroad. The king will presumably appoint his first-born son Husayn (born in 1994) as the heir to the throne when the time comes.

'Abdallah II has infused the elite with young blood by appointing people from his own generation to new government bodies he has established. For example, he has integrated a relatively large group of young people from the private sector, including Palestinians, into the Economic Consultative Council that he founded in 1999. It is worth noting that many of the members of this council, including the Palestinians, are the sons of established political figures.[6] This continuity clearly attests to the fact that in Jordan influence is bequeathed from generation to generation within the existing familial framework of the ruling elite.

Although 'Abdallah is integrating young people into the political system, he has not given up on the old guard. On the same Royal Commission that Rifa'i and Rawabda are serving, there are a host of other prominent figures from Jordan's political establishment. These individuals are members of Jordan's renowned, powerful families: 'Abd al-Hadi al-Majali is from an immensely powerful family of the southern city of Karak, whose sons continue to make their presence felt in all the corridors of power (members of this family have served as prime ministers, ministers and senior military officers); Hashim al-Tall is a member of a large, famous and influential family from Irbid in the north; Marwan Hamud is from yet another substantially prominent northern family; 'Awad Khulayfat is from an equally prominent southern family; and Raja'i Dajani is one of the two Palestinians to have ever served in the sensitive position of minister of the interior, which oversees the security services (while the second Palestinian is yet another Dajani – Kamal, of an earlier generation).

Alongside the Royal Commission, a steering committee has been formed to oversee the formulation of Jordan's National Agenda. It is composed of twenty-six members who for the most part represent the forces leaning toward change rather than continuity. The committee is

presided over by former Prime Minister Tahir al-Masri (a Palestinian), but the rest of the body consists of members of the younger generation who have backgrounds in politics, business, higher education, the media, and government bureaucracy. Moreover, the committee includes women and at least one known member of the opposition.

'Abdallah II radiates a young, dynamic image of innovation and change. Although, as noted above, he occasionally appears to be somewhat rash, he has not rattled the foundations of society. For example, prime ministers have served for relatively long periods under his reign in order to evince an image of stability. Concomitant to the reform measures, many areas of Jordanian life were still subject to tight controls: the press was closely regulated; there are limitations on freedom of assembly; and steps have steadily been taken to curtail the activities of the professional associations, which for years have constituted vibrant centers of opposition. At least for the time being, then, 'Abdallah II was diligently preserving the fragile balance between stable continuity and necessary change. However, one occasionally hears rumblings of disaffection as the kingdom did not seem to have a steady sense of direction in these rather unsettling times.

## Kinship, Politics, and the Stability of the Elite

Kinship is the foundation stone of Jordanian politics. For generations, Jordanian kings have been referring to the nation as the "Jordanian family" *(al-usra al-urdunniyya)*. At the head of the large Jordanian family stands, of course, the Hashemite family, around whom Jordanian identity has always united.[7] Not only have the Hashemites been the founders and builders of the Jordanian state, but they are the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, who was also a member of the house of Hashem. Thus, the Hashemites are *"ahl al-bayt"*, members of the Prophet's family. These prestigious origins are obviously of political value, and the Hashemites have put them to use for generations in order to enhance their legitimacy. In fact, the very first line of 'Abdallah II's official biography notes that he belongs to the 43rd generation of the Prophet's descendents, and he opens his speeches in praise of God and his Prophet – "the Hashemite Arab" Muhammad.

The kingdoms of the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia are referred to as "familial monarchies." That is, they are immense dynasties, with hundreds or even thousands of princes, in which family members control all the key positions.[8] Given the modest size of the Hashemite family, which totals only a few dozen people, Jordan was not a familial monarchy in this sense of the word, and Hashemites rarely serve in senior government or military positions. Instead, a confederation of families and tribes rule the Jordanian kingdom in concert. At the head of this alliance stands the Hashemite monarchy, which Zayd al-Rifaʻi once defined as "the unifying essence"[9] of this extensive familial treaty or confederation and the central pillar of the entire system.

Jordan's kings have always governed the country as a family, using a patriarchal rhetoric replete with metaphors of family intimacy when speaking about their rule. By the twilight of his life, Husayn had mastered his role as national father figure. In contrast, ʻAbdallah II has thus far limited himself to cultivating the image of the older brother. The Hashemites preside over a political society in which families and their heads are much more important than voting districts, public opinion, or the rights of individual citizens.

In their capacity as power bases, families are incomparably more significant than political parties.[10] Informal personal connections *(wasta)* and family ties – not necessarily institutional ties – are proven methods for attaining and exerting influence.[11] Consequently, what foreigners may perceive to be nepotism and patronage is simply inherent in the Jordanian system.[12] This system is an integral part of the historic alliance between families and tribes that stands at the heart of the Jordanian political structure, which one Arab observer has dubbed "bedoucracy" since tribalism is such a central motif in the unique Jordanian identity.[13] There is obviously nothing wrong with political kinship in the Jordanian system, for any monarchy by its very definition is the embodiment of nepotism.

Jordan's familial political establishment consists of a long line of families that have dominated the country from one generation to the next. An unwritten covenant exists between the Hashemites and the Huwaytat, the Banu Sakhr, and the Adwan tribes (an accord preceded by several collisions some of which were quite severe). Since the days of ʻAbdallah I, many families have been integrated into the ruling elite.

There are, for example, the Zu'bis, Khasawnas, 'Uwaydats and the Talls in the north; the Nusurs, 'Adwans, Fayizs, and Rifa'is in the center; Jazis, Habashnas, Tarawnas, Krayshans, and Majalis from the south; the Abu Jabirs, Haddads, Haddadins, Muashshars, Qaqishs, and Qa'wars among the prominent Christians; the al-Mufti and Mirza familes from the Circassians; and the Tuqans, Masris, Dajanis, 'Abd al-Hadis and many others among the Palestinians.

Few women participate in Jordanian politics, and most of those who have penetrated the elite circles serve in appointed rather than elected positions (government ministers or members of the Senate). It was indeed difficult for women to obtain seats in the "bedoucracy," and the few women who have been elected usually owe their jobs to the quota that has recently been reserved for women in parliament. It is especially noteworthy that the women who did manage to penetrate the political establishment hailed from the very same elite, which perpetually rejuvenates itself from the very same families.

# Elections, Legislatures, and Criminal Law: The "Bedoucracy" as a System

The following examples from Jordan's parliamentary and legal systems illustrate the way "the bedoucracy" functions in practice. Originally, every Jordanian voter was entitled to a number of votes equal to the number of deputies representing his or her particular constituency. For instance, if a certain constituency had nine representatives in the Chamber of Deputies, every voter was entitled to vote for nine candidates from the list of those running for election. The nine candidates who won the most votes were then elected. The Muslim Brotherhood and their allies stunned the regime by winning 40% of the seats in the 1989 elections, which were held according to the aforementioned method and which were the first elections in twenty-two years. As a result, the regime neither canceled the elections nor ceased holding elections, but hastened to change the election law.

The new law ostensibly adhered to the democratic principle of "one man (woman) one vote." Henceforth, voters were permitted to vote for

one candidate regardless of the number of deputies in their constituency. In other words, if a certain constituency had nine representatives, the voter could choose only one candidate, and the nine candidates who won the most votes were elected to parliament. This system, however, was deliberately designed to encourage familial or tribal voting. When voters had the opportunity to select several candidates, they could select a familial or tribal candidate as well as other candidates who represented different parties or other interest groups. The old method suited the Muslim Brotherhood, who were by far the best organized political group. However, elections have become much more familial or tribal since the revision that preceded the 1993 elections, and the number of seats that the Muslim Brotherhood and their party, the Islamic Action Front *(Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami)*, have in parliament has gradually declined.

The Muslim Brotherhood was unwilling to reconcile itself to the damaging affects of the amendment and demanded that the election law be revised once again before the 2003 elections. However, the changes to which "Abdallah II agreed did not pertain to the "one man (woman), one vote" issue. Instead, the number of seats in parliament was increased from 80 to 110, of which six were reserved for women representatives. The new parliamentary system was said to be more democratic, representational and modern, but in practice the increase in the number of representatives served the traditional interests of the familial political establishment. Due to the increase in the number of deputies, constituencies were smaller, a change that only reinforced the politics of familial control. Elections were indeed more intimate and familiar in the full sense of the word, that is, more familial and tribal.[14]

In January 2005, King 'Abdallah II unveiled a plan to hold elections for representative provincial councils. This reform was ostensibly aimed at decentralizing authority and enhancing democratization throughout the kingdom, as it promised to enhance the general public's authority over its own affairs by increasing the extent of its participation in the decision-making process. However, the underlying motive behind this initiative was the localization of politics as a means to weakening the national parliament and diverting the public's attention to local matters such as education, development and infrastructure, which by their very nature were less political and less controversial. Moreover, this reform was likely to bolster the familial complexion of Jordanian politics, for

the more local-oriented the elections, the more familial they become. What localization means in practice in today's Jordan can easily be discerned from the following striking data: in the 1999 elections to Jordan's local councils, 2,038 men were elected alongside a mere eight women. This enormous gap was indicative of Jordan's patriarchal, familial-tribal society in which it was generally unacceptable for women to represent the family.[15]

Throughout Jordan's entire history, only one woman, a Circassian named Tujan al-Faysal, has been elected to the Chamber of Deputies and for only one term (in contrast, the upper house, or Senate, has a much higher representation of women because the king appoints its members). In the 1993 elections, Faysal competed for a seat in an Amman constituency that had one place reserved by law for Circassians. She won a relatively small number of votes, but since no other Circassian candidate garnered more votes than Faysal, she was elected to parliament. However, such an extraordinary coincidence has yet to repeat itself in Jordan. In order to enable the election of women and thus confer upon the parliament a somewhat more advanced image, there was no choice but to establish a quota for women in the new election law, which 'Abdallah indeed promulgated via the above-noted, extra-parliamentary procedure.

Another issue relevant to the status of women and family values in Jordan's patriarchal, tribal society pertains to the murder of women as a means to preserving "family honor." The regime was in favor of changing this accepted custom, but its efforts in this area proved to be much less successful than its other initiatives. According to clause 340 of the Jordanian Criminal Code, those found guilty of murdering for the sake of family honor (some twenty-five cases per year) are subject to a relatively lenient punishment. This clause stems from an understanding that the murderers' motives are inspired by codes of conduct that have been an acceptable part of Arab society since time immemorial. However, supporters of women's rights from both within and outside of Jordan contended that in this day and age the existence of such a law was simply unconscionable in an egalitarian society. Following their ascent to the throne in 1999, both King 'Abdallah and his wife Queen Rania embarked on a public campaign to revise this clause. However, that was a battle even the king was destined to lose. The royal couple ultimately withdrew

their support for the amendment once they realized the extent of public opposition. Both the Chamber of Deputies and the general public perceived the amendment to be an affront to the accepted conventions of the patriarchal, family values of Jordanian society.

# 'Abdallah II – An Interim Assessment

Zayd al-Rifa'i spoke of the institution of the monarchy as the "unifying essence" of Jordan's familial-tribal tapestry. The question that begged the asking was whether 'Abdallah was filling this role with the efficiency and aplomb of his father Husayn? Did he possess the monarchial presence that his father evinced over much of the course of his forty-six years on the throne? In July 2002, after 'Abdallah II had already been in power for three years, *The Times* of London praised his openness to the West and his political savvy. Moreover, the same article noted that 'Abdallah spoke the language of Western leaders, which afforded him an undeniable advantage in all that concerned his relations with the West.[16] In his own home, however, this was actually a huge disadvantage. 'Abdallah's rich spoken English was better than his Arabic. Consequently, the king sought to avoid spontaneous, unrehearsed appearances before Arabic-speaking audiences. The fact that he interviewed brilliantly on the BBC or CNN was not enough to compensate for the relatively few public appearances that he made at home or in the Arab media, and the monarchy has thus lost some of its institutional presence.

'Abdallah could have availed himself of the assistance of his uncle Hasan or brother Hamza, both of whom were profoundly eloquent Arabic speakers. However, he chose to eschew such a course, as he feared that he would become politically dependent on them, a step coinciding with his decision to prevent Hasan from assuming any influential positions and to remove Hamza as well. Instead, 'Abdallah has been working with a private tutor for the past few years to overcome the Arabic stumbling block, and there have indeed been results. In August 2004, he granted an interview (albeit pre-planned) to the television station *al-'Arabiyya* in which the king displayed an impressive level of self confidence and enhanced oratory skills.

In the same interview, which took place several months before Arafat's death, 'Abdallah settled historic scores with Arafat and the Palestinian National Movement. 'Abdallah's critique, both in style and content, was reminiscent of Husayn's best performances. 'Abdallah has indeed matured into his position, yet the language issue remained an obstacle, and he still refrained from making public appearances at the intensive pace to which Husayn was accustomed. Although this weakness has indeed detracted from the institutional presence of the monarchy, at present it appears to be a tolerable flaw and 'Abdallah's efforts to remedy the problem are at least partially successful, leading *The Times* to conclude that 'Abdallah has quickly grown into his father's giant shoes.[17] In fact, 'Abdallah's settling in to his monarchical role is still an ongoing process, and domestic discontent with his performance is still to be heard. In any event, it is worth remembering that it took quite some time for Husayn to achieve the elevated status by which he was known at the end of his career.

## NOTES

1. Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 57.
2. My student, Yael Weiss, assisted me in this project. She collated and sorted the lists of names with most impressive diligence and skill.
3. An interview in *al-Siyasa* (Kuwait) that was published in its entirety in *al-Ra'y* (Amman), June 29, 2002.
4. The interview in *al-Siyasa*. Ibid.
5. This expression in its Jordanian context was coined by Uriel Dann, "Regime and Opposition in Jordan Since 1949" in Menahem Milson (ed.) *Society and Political Structure in the Arab World* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973), p. 146.
6. Andre Bank and Oliver Schlumberger, "Jordan: Between Regime Survival and Economic Reform," in Volker Perthes (ed.), *Arab Elites; Negotiating the Politics of Change*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004), pp. 42–43.
7. Curtis Ryan, *Jordan in Transition; From Hussein to 'Abdallah* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p.90.
8. Michael Herb quoted in Curtis Ryan, p. 88.
9. Schirin Fathi, *Jordan: An Invented Nation?* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1994), p. 125.
10. Andrew Shryock and Sally Howell, "'Ever a Guest in Our House:' The Emir 'Abdallah, Shaykh Majid al-'Adwan, and the Practice of Jordanian House

Politics, as Remembered by Umm Sultan, the Widow of Majid," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (2001), pp. 247–269.
11. Andre Bank and Oliver Schlumberger, p. 38.
12. Curtis Ryan, p.124.
13. Fathi, p. 185; Asher Susser, "The Jordanian Monarchy: The Hashemite Success Story," in Joseph Kostiner (ed.), *Middle East Monarchies; The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), p. 94.
14. Curtis Ryan, p. 134.
15. Ibid. pp. 101, 134.
16. *The Times* (London), July 29, 2002.
17. Ibid.

# Political Elites amid a Changing Reality in Morocco

## Daniel Zisenwine

Morocco, situated at the Western edge of the Middle East, far from the heart of the Arab world, finds itself in the thick of a transformation, which has accelerated following King Muhammad VI's ascent to the throne in July 1999. These processes had already begun in the 1990s – at the twilight of King Hasan II's reign – and entail a broad spectrum of topics: democratization; expansion of freedom of expression and freedom of the press; strengthening the party system; the release of incarcerated political leaders; the repatriation of political exiles; and reforming civil law. Moreover, an extremely courageous attempt has been undertaken to confront the darker sides of the past, as special committees have been established to investigate the torture of dissidents, compensate the victims, and disclose these incidents to the public. The changes that Morocco (whose population is around 30 million) is undergoing are obviously influenced by the king's personality and his outlook concerning the country's future. From his first day on the throne, the new king has cultivated the image of an accessible ruler who understands the plight of his subjects and sympathizes with them.

As part of these efforts, Muhammad VI has been forced to contend with the Moroccan political elite. These groups have considerable impact on the actual implementation of the palace's policies and on the king's image in Moroccan society. Similar to almost everything that is now happening in Morocco, these groups are undergoing changes in all that pertains to their internal composition, aspirations, and the extent of their participation and influence on official policy. This elite – its political agenda and discourse – constitutes the subject of the present study, which examines its status in present-day Morocco and its impact on contemporary events, particularly the democratization processes and the

expansion of political pluralism. The primary questions that we will attempt to answer are as follows: What was the extent of the elite's involvement – if at all – in the democratization processes? Was it in favor of reforms and contributing to their advancement, or was it an obstacle to change? In answering these questions, we will also shed light on the less optimistic aspects of Morocco's current political reality.

From a methodological standpoint, the elites have long been a prominent subject of studies on the Middle East and North Africa. There have occasionally been practical reasons for this approach. First, it is easier to investigate elites and their activities than other groups. In addition, many researchers were influenced by the outlook according to which political processes correspond to the agenda of a country's prominent political players (the "actor-oriented" approach). Consequently, many scholars tended to concentrate less on the developments and processes that took place among wider echelons of society. Against this backdrop, a counter response has emerged, which has demanded that the focus of attention be shifted from the elites to the general public. The logic behind this approach is that elites do not accurately represent the public and that it is difficult to draw assumptions on all of society from the behavior and statements of the elite. However, in light of the understanding that elites are an important segment that has a significant impact on the political and social developments in the Arab states, it appears that both sides of the debate are now heading toward a compromise. Studies on the changes that elites are undergoing – to which the present survey may be included – now employ an approach that emphasizes the need to compare elites with all of society and then discern the interaction between the two groups. In other words, elites should not be viewed as an exclusive factor that is detached from the rest of society, but as a component of the general public. In this context, it is worth noting that the study of elites is not an exact science which produces unassailable prophecies or quantitative statistics, and the evidence used to formulate assessments is occasionally based on anecdotal findings.

Any study on elites must refer to the definition it has adopted for the group in question. The present study has chosen the definition that Volker Perthes has coined, "politically relevant elites." These are people with political sway and local power who in some way participate in the

decision-making process, contribute to the establishment of norms and political values, and have an impact on the political discourse over strategic topics. Accordingly, the elites obviously include socialites, government and military officials, various consultants, business people, media members, and in certain regions the religious leadership. The condition, then, for being classified as a "political elite" is the possession of some sort of relevance to the state's political life. Individuals do not necessarily have to hold any official position to be considered a part of the elite and opposition forces can also be members of the club (in fact, this approach constitutes a change vis-á-vis previous studies that compared mainstream elites with dissidents, or what is referred to as "contra elites"). The political elite is thus perceived as a rather flexible group that lacks clear borders. Its members are affected by phenomena such as social mobility and political change, and their composition and status are susceptible to the shifts and vicissitudes that transpire in their vicinity.[1]

Every study of political elites must obviously identify its subject. Accordingly, it is imperative that scholars closely examine the hierarchal structure and the work methods of the particular political system: where and how strategic decisions are made; and what are the formal and informal bodies that affect these processes (for example, which groups can impose a veto on certain issues)? Morocco presents a serious challenge to all scholars who wish to track its decision-making processes. Despite the relative openness of the current regime, many topics are still decided upon in the inner chambers of the palace with only a minimal degree of transparency. Consequently, observers are often only capable of determining the positions and reasoning behind certain political actions after the fact.

The succession in Morocco during the summer of 1999 had an undeniable impact on the elite. The ascension of new political forces and groups to the elite of society has subjected these circles – beginning with the small circle of people that is closest to the king, by way of the second circle that encompasses the senior bureaucracy and commanders of the security forces, and ending with the broader, third circle of politicians and other figures that shape public opinion – to quite a bit of change. Some of these groups are perceived by the West as more amenable than the veteran elites to the challenges of globalism and political

liberalization. That said, they are not necessarily willing to relinquish what they perceive to be the regime's interests or those of their own.

The elite has historically assumed an important position in Moroccan politics. Morocco has always been characterized by the centralization of political power, wealth, and prestige in the hands of a small coterie of leading families that comprised the *makhzen*, the kingdom's political establishment. Some of these families derived from three extended, sharifian families that claimed ties to the royal family or lineage to the family of the Prophet (such as the Filali and 'Alaoui families). Other members of the *makhzen* were the families of the *ulama*, which enjoyed institutionalized religious and intellectual authority, and distinguished merchants (such as the Belhiyyat and Taidilli families). By dint of their ability to exploit their capital and properties, these families have been major players in Moroccan politics for what is now approximately a hundred years, or at least since the granting of independence in 1956. Therefore, the *makhzen* is an historical, sociological, cultural, and psychological phenomenon that merits considerable scholarly interest.

The first months of Muhammad VI's rule foreshadowed the rapid transformation that was about to transpire in Morocco. Among other issues, the new king emphasized his desire for political liberalization, and political exiles were thus granted permission to return to Morocco. One of the first to return was Abraham Zarfati, a communist who had been in exile since 1991. Moreover, the family of Mehdi Ben Barka, who was kidnapped and murdered by the Moroccan security services in 1965, was welcomed back by official government representatives. Their repatriation was perceived as an attempt on the part of the monarchy to heal old wounds and pave the way to a new future. Furthermore, the king "reached out" to his subjects by means of a highly publicized trek throughout the kingdom. These visits were part of a series of measures that the king pursued in order to centralize his authority and bolster popular support for the royal family. For example, in October 1999 – two months after his coronation – the king began a ten-day trip up north and also visited regions that his father had ignored. During these trips, he met with residents and mingled with the masses that took to the streets to greet him. Muhammad thereby demonstrated his desire to be more involved in the affairs of the nation and to avoid isolating himself in the palace.

The most significant step that the king took during the first months of his rule was the dismissal of the minister of the interior, Driss Basri, in November 1999. In addition, district governors and other senior officials who were considered Basri's close allies were also removed. Although Basri was a loyal servant of King Hasan, he was singled out by opposition and human rights organizations as the figure most responsible for the extensive oppression that was perpetrated during Hasan II's reign. Muhammad VI's decision to unequivocally distance himself from Basri after his coronation hinted to the disagreements between the two. For many, the ouster of the long-standing minister of interior symbolized the end of a dark, troublesome era and the beginning of a new period in which personal liberties would be expanded and the government's authority reduced.

Nevertheless, hopes for immediate change in Morocco were not realized. After the first months of momentum and bustling enterprise, the political arena came to what was to some extent a grinding halt. Although the new measures fostered an image of a benevolent ruler who sought reform, the changes have yet to be implemented. The king has emphasized the necessity of balancing the progress of liberalization with the maintenance of social and political control. Accordingly, he has slowed down the pace of reform, whether due to some of the public's opposition or his desire to safeguard the country's internal stability.[2]

The sluggish pace of change has affected the entrance of new forces into the elite. Six years after the rise of Muhammad VI, it would be an exaggeration to talk about either a comprehensive removal of veteran members of the elite from the political establishment or a significant shift in Morocco's public life. Although the changes that have transpired – particularly the improved respect for human rights and the positive general atmosphere throughout the kingdom – cannot be underestimated, on more than one occasion the Moroccan authorities have taken stern measures that allude to their unwillingness and inability to reduce the monarchy's authoritarian nature. This uncompromising stance is especially pronounced with respect to the government's relations with the media, as the authorities have censored reports on topics that the monarchy considered to be "sensitive," such as the question of Western Sahara and accusations of corruption against senior officials and ministers.

Who were the people that comprised Morocco's veteran elite? Besides the general division and families that have already been depicted, the elite primarily consisted of the male progeny of leading families that have enjoyed political power for decades. They were a homogenous group of urban "bourgeoisie," who were influenced by the mutually beneficial, political patronage system that King Hasan cultivated during his reign. The patronage system was designed to stamp out every effort to construct an efficient opposition, while ensuring the regime's legitimacy and control over all the state's institutions. The absence of formal organizations in the political establishment (for the most part, these organizations were, and continued to be, a secondary factor) induced the cultivation of a political-economic vassalage between the royal family and the upper echelons. This system served the monarchy, but hindered the growth of a "civil society" in which non-governmental organizations could advance political and social objectives.

The members of the senior political elite (it is far-fetched to talk of wider circles of relevant elites during Hasan's rule) exploited the personal and family connections that they nurtured in order to gain access to resources, which were not only intended for their personal enrichment, but for hammering out more extensive pacts that intensified their dependency on the monarchy. This was a conservative framework that was composed of a limited number of individuals, which thus allowed for a considerable degree of intimacy among a mostly homogenous membership.

As noted above, this elite was dependent upon the stature of the king as well as their personal relations with him. Therefore, it did not reveal much interest in altering the culture of the political establishment. The elite's cultural orientation was francophone: many members of its young generation studied in French schools and were thus less exposed to Arabic and Moroccan history than the rest of the population. They rarely voiced political criticism and distanced themselves from the centers of decision making and policy execution.

During the 1990s, King Hasan began a political liberalization process that planted the seeds for a more inclusive political system in which other groups could also find their place. These steps were part of the preparations for bequeathing the throne to his son. Moreover, Hasan's liberalization initiative stemmed from the need to bolster the public's

support for the royal family and was also indicative of the king's enhanced self-confidence after over thirty years on the throne. Finally, Hasan was influenced by the international criticism over Morocco's violation of human rights. As a result of these developments, he sought to legislate election reforms that would enhance parliament's political status and allow for a greater degree of freedom of expression and more public criticism of the government. Against this backdrop, the first buds of a Moroccan "civil society" began to emerge, as civil activists devoted themselves to the advancement of a liberal and democratic agenda.[3]

Given the rise of a civil society in Morocco (despite the weakness of society in a country where the monarchy is still the primary, political power base), it appeared as if the veteran elite would lose its monopolistic position in Moroccan politics and society. However, in practice, the changes in the political relations between the monarchy and some of the opposition parties during the 1990s did not alter the nature of the regime. Although the burgeoning democratization process enabled more people to participate in the political process, the monarchy continued to maintain its centrality. Notwithstanding the expectations for reform, this state of affairs has endured even after King Hasan's passing and the subsequent rise of Muhammad VI.

Compared to his father, the new king evinced a more relaxed and open style. He spoke of concepts such as "personal accountability" and underscored the need for a fairer government, which would benefit from public transparency and would be more faithful to the rule of law. In addition, the king expressed his zeal for the advancement of issues that are considered to be sensitive in Morocco, such as the status of women and the campaign against corruption and poverty. These declarations boosted Muhammad VI's popularity, as he was subsequently perceived as the "king of the poor" – a sovereign devoted to improving the welfare of his subjects.[4]

The king rarely intervened in the affairs of the parties and took pride in the parliamentary elections in September 2002. These elections benefited from a high level of transparency and were thus considered an important step in the democratization process.[5] However, the election results also revealed the country's limited potential for political change. The elections did not result in comprehensive changes to the composition of Morocco's political elite, as many members of parliament were

reelected. Despite the nascent rise in the power of the Islamists and the election of 35 women to parliament, it was premature to begin talking about cracks in the *makhzen*'s armor.

Even the government's 'new look' was not all that novel. Only 11% of its members had not previously held an official position, and the personal profile of the ministers was not especially distinct from that of previous governments. Most of the ministers were university graduates, primarily from French institutions. A third of them were between 35 and 45 years old and thus belonged to the generation that experienced the turnaround in the palace's approach during the 1990s: from one of confrontation and oppression to stability and consensus. Consequently, there has been a vast decrease in the tension between the public and the royal family. Due to the changes in the monarchy's policy, many Moroccans did not feel that it was necessary to grapple with the *makhzen*; moreover, the opposition had been considerably weakened by years of government oppression. Many of the ministers in the new government were considered technocrats that were unaffiliated with political parties. These appointments hampered the rehabilitation of the party system, which was considered a part of Muhammad VI's master plan. Nevertheless, at this stage, the king preferred to appoint professional technocrats in order to deal with the difficult structural problems that Morocco was facing. In many respects, the new government was analogous to "old wine in new bottles."

Evidently, the elections to parliament did not change the complexion of the Moroccan political establishment. While improving the parliamentary system, the king correspondingly consolidated the status of the monarchy, which in contrast to expectations has retained its supremacy. He established "royal commissions" and other bodies that have dealt with important questions and strategies: economic investment, education, human rights, and the status of the family. For instance, the Hasan II Development Fund has become the preferred institution in all that concerns economic development and the war on poverty. These institutions, which constitute part of the royal executive, have overshadowed the government ministries and independent organizations that were not connected to the palace. Muhammad has integrated the veteran members of political elite as well as new elements into these committees and institutions.

Consequently, a dual reality has taken shape in Morocco, which consisted of a dominant monarchy alongside the continued reform process, which included the following: the advancement of official democratization initiatives; the consolidation of the party system; and the underpinning of civil society. Nevertheless, several question marks lingered over the emergence of a functioning civil society. King Muhammad has managed to neutralize the growth of civil society by "co-opting" its leaders into bodies and institutions that were affiliated with the palace. In light of these developments, many Moroccans have lately been talking about the establishment of a "neo-*makhzen*." This body will presumably replace the veteran political establishment, but nonetheless preserve the *makhzen*'s allegiance to the royal family. An institution like the neo-*makhzen* will probably come at the expense of other political and civil institutions and will thus prevent truly meaningful change.

Similarly, the change in government did not have a profound influence on the composition of the elite. Many observers believed that the new king's expressed support for economic liberalization and democratization, as well as his commitment to the establishment of a multi-party political system, the sanctification of the rule of law, and respect for human rights, would also affect the composition of the elite. Whereas some of the officials that were close to his father have been allowed to retain their positions (such as André Azoulay, the special advisor to the king), Muhammad VI has nurtured a new elite generation from among his circle of close friends and the country's professionals. Within the first circle of the political elite, we thus find names like Azoulay and Mahmoud Kabbaj alongside figures such as Hasan Orid, the king's personal friend who was appointed to the new position of speaker of the palace. This position bolstered the image of a modern monarchy that Muhammad sought to mold for the royal family.

That said, except for the advancement of young parvenus from the king's generation, it was difficult to distinguish far-reaching changes to the composition of Morocco's senior elite, nor has the second circle of the elite been subject to significant transformations either. As aforementioned, the latter circle consists of army commanders, ministers, ranking bureaucrats, and "nationalist" political leaders. The Moroccan army, which was primarily responsible for preserving the status quo,

remained an important factor, but not a pivotal one. During his first years in power, the king avoided intervening in the military's affairs, whether because Muhammad feared getting embroiled in a feud with the army or perhaps he merely preferred to postpone the confrontation to a more propitious time (for example, after the Western Sahara crisis has been resolved). For the most part, the heads of institutionalized Islam have also been left in their posts.

The most prominent change among the senior bureaucracy has been the appointments of new local governors (in place of the allies of the former minister of interior, Driss Basri). An additional question that arises from this development concerns the disappearance of the political clout that Basri wielded: who filled the void that Basri left? To a large extent, it appears as if this power has been centralized in the hands of the Moroccan security services, which heightened their surveillance over developments in Morocco, especially after the terror attacks that occurred in Casablanca in May 2003, and remained on alert. Nevertheless, a certain void still exists that has yet to be completely filled.

There was no opposition to the palace's ascendancy among the first and second circle of the elite. Most of them viewed the monarchy as the most suitable form of government for Morocco and were suspicious of any change or succession that harbored the potential for instability. Moreover, they were convinced that the present status quo served their interests. They were considered pro-western francophones from a cultural standpoint and were not especially different from the Moroccan elite during the days of King Hasan. Against this backdrop, then, it was premature to talk about the possibility of a significant transformation in public life emerging from these circles.

The most significant change among the elite circles during the reign of Muhammad VI involved those groups furthest from the centers of power and decision making – the third circle. This circle consists of journalists and other figures who shape public opinion and who now enjoyed more vocational freedom. Paradoxically, Islamists may also be included in this circle. The intent here was to moderate Islamists who were seeking some way to enter politics in order to make their voices heard – for example, parties such as the PJD (Parti de Justice et du Development) – and not to the more radical groups (such as Shaykh Yasin's *al-ʿAdl wal-Ihsan*).[6] Many of the parvenus in the third circle

expressed their opposition to the palace-sponsored system of patronage. These groups sought to reallocate political power in a more balanced manner and open the political system to the general public. In contrast to the first two circles, this was a less homogenous group insofar as its makeup, views, and ideas were concerned. Consequently, this segment of the third circle merited substantial attention.

Over all, a general consensus could be said to exist among the majority of the elite with respect to several fundamental issues. The statements of senior Moroccan officials seemed to imply that they did not object to either the endeavors on behalf of democratization or the curtailment of the monarchy's influence on the public sphere. However, they assumed that it would be a protracted process, which would commence with the economic system and only reach the political arena in the distant future. In other words, despite the fact that the palace, in principle, supported these efforts (albeit with various reservations), the elite was not interested in expediting these processes. Together, these factors cast a shadow over the hopes that a change in the composition of the elite would also lead to an immediate change in the political system and power structure. In fact, developments in Morocco over the past few years indicated that the combination of a liberal king and fresh faces in the elite was not necessarily a recipe for instant democracy or sweeping transformations of the composition of the political elite.[7]

That said, the intention of this critique of present-day Morocco was not to convey too pessimistic a tone with respect to developments in the country. On the contrary, it appeared as if Moroccan society has been stirred to its feet and that the monarchy and political establishment were ready to contend with problems that have hitherto been neglected. In many respects, Morocco has passed the threshold of change towards a more pluralistic society. However, the evolving social and political patterns would not come at the expense of the monarchy's status, which remained quite firm, and Morocco was indeed safeguarding its internal stability. The country continued to contend with the consequences of the terror attacks that shook Casablanca in May 2003 and the threats of Islamic terror – the scope of which was difficult to guage. In contrast to what was perhaps expected, it is clear that the changes to the composition of the elite and the extent of their influence on policy and decision making have not been all that dramatic. Similar to other fields of life, tradition remains the most powerful factor in Moroccan politics.

## NOTES

1. Volker Perthes, "Politics and Elite Change in the Arab World", in Volker Perthes (ed.) *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004), pp. 1–32; Volker Perthes, "Elite Change and System Maintenance", *Ibid.*, pp. 301–307.
2. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Morocco," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (ed.), *Middle East Contemporary Survey, Vol. XXIII (1999)* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2001), pp. 424–434.
3. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Morocco: On Route to a Civil Society?" in Yehudit Ronen (ed.), *The Maghrib: Politics, Society, Economy* (Tel-Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 1998), p. 29–38 [Hebrew]; James Sater, "The Dynamics of State and Civil Society in Morocco", *Journal of North African Studies*, 7:3 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 101–118.
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5. *Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent* 2178, October 7, 2002 and no. 2179, October 14, 2002.
6. Daniel Zisenwine, "Islamic Movements Versus Regimes in Crisis," in Yochi Weintraub (ed.), *Zones of Crisis and Conflict: the Middle East in 2004* (Tel-Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2004), pp. 96–101 [Hebrew].
7. Saloua Zerhouni, "Morocco: Reconciling Continuity and Change", in Perthes, pp. 61–86.