

## **Like Father, Like Son: Dynastic Republicanism in the Middle East**

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### **Summary**

Arab autocrats have become quite skilled in public relations, mastering the language of democracy, human rights, and free markets while preserving old and arbitrary means of decision making. In the last ten years, Arab regimes have fallen into what could be referred to as “dynastic republicanism”—a form of government that translates roughly to an oxymoron: “monarchical presidency.”

Whatever outward appearances they project inside Arab regimes, republican governments come with no legal or historical guarantees. Family domination of Arab governments reduces states to vehicles for the advancement of private and particular interests rather than public ones. Arab states with limited political institutions are often beset by tribalism, and tribalism in turn results in skewed and undemocratic political institutions.

In Egypt, the stage is set for Gamal Mubarak to be the National Democratic Party’s sole candidate for succession. The likelihood of Gamal’s succeeding his father is high if succession happens while his father is still alive. Without Hosni Mubarak, Gamal is on his own, as there is no shortage of dark horses that could potentially and literally make a good showing in the race to the presidency.

In Libya, Muammar Qaddafi has designated both military and political heirs; thus nothing is unpredictable about Libya’s hereditary succession. What *is* unpredictable is whether Qaddafi’s tribe puts its weight behind a political or a military successor.

In Yemen, political succession is based on an implicit pact between President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s Hashed tribe and the military, and only a member of the tribe is eligible for the country’s presidency. Saleh appears to be grooming his son Ahmed to take over, facilitating his meteoric rise through the military ranks and charging him with command of the deadliest forces in the land.

A banker (Gamal), a civil engineer/architect (Saif), and two military commanders (Ahmed Saleh & Mu’tasim Qaddafi) constitute the litmus test of Arab republicanism and Western democracy promotion. Their succession could spell the death knell of all republican pretences or what is left of them.

Democratic transition continues to elude Arab countries. Arab “republicanism” has lost much of its meaning as presidential power is increasingly being bequeathed from father to son. This occurred in Syria in 2000. It seemed likely in the case of Saddam’s Iraq, had the regime survived. And it may well happen in the near future in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. This commentary examines the mechanisms of family succession deployed in each of the three cases, explores the countervailing weight of the formal institutional set up, and attempts to draw out relevant policy conclusions.

## **The Context of Hereditary Succession**

There are numerous factors that have conspired to thrust the three unofficial “heirs”—Gamal Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Saif al-Islam Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya, and Ahmed Ali Abdullah al-Saleh in Yemen—into the foray of politics in their respective countries. They were born to powerful political leaders whose longevity in office is both a skill and a resource. And all three of them have exhibited considerable political ambition. Gamal’s key political focus is his championing of free market economics. Saif’s niche has been human rights advocacy and good government. Saleh’s focus has been on gaining influence in the security establishment.

The heirs’ ambitions have been colored by their professional backgrounds. Gamal’s training and experience as an investment banker in England and Egypt along with elder brother Alaa’s economic empire building help explain his business or capitalist proclivity. Saif, trained in engineering and architecture before studying political science at the London School of Economics, seems to be motivated by a grand plan of nation building and construction of a post-Qaddafi democratic Libya. The Sandhurst-trained Ahmed has important security duties with the regime and is also assigned to negotiate regional and international security agreements.

Each of the three “heirs” operates in his country’s own socio-political context—bureaucratic-military with nationalist elements in Egypt; military-tribal with limited institutionalism in Yemen; and military-tribal in Libya. In Egypt there are no clues as to whether the military and security bureaucracies would play along with hereditary succession once the current president is gone. Nor is it clear whether the military would renegotiate the distribution of power with a new president or enter into more broadly-based political “bargains” for a smooth succession. Civic capacity, which is strongest in Egypt, must not be written off for its potential to mobilize and protest against hereditary succession; failing this, it could force a form of “pacted succession”—democratic concessions in the form of inclusiveness in return for conditional hereditary succession.

In the case of Libya and Yemen, tribal solidarity is the second face of both countries’ brand of statism. This tribal dynamic is therefore bound to affect the direction, content, and outcome of political succession. Tribe and army

could push in the same direction in Libya and Yemen, which they already do in safeguarding the current system and its power holders as well as determining the next generation of leadership.

Egypt's post-1952 rulers have all been military officers. The association of leadership with the military was central to the regime's image from the 1950s through the mid-1970s. The Camp David Accords of the late 1970s signalled a period of "civilianization" of the military. Mubarak's first defense minister, Field Marshall Abdelhalim Abou Ghazala, presided over that process. While he sought to integrate the army into the economy with the production of goods geared to supply the civil economy, he simultaneously proceeded with ambitious military industrial programs. The result was a sudden rise in his prestige and visibility. But after becoming too popular in the 1980s—and perhaps because his name was touted as a possible presidential successor—he was removed from his post in 1989. Amr Moussa, foreign minister from 1991, was suggested as a possible replacement for President Mubarak; he was eased out of the post in 2001 and "banished" to head the Arab League. No other name had been seriously linked to the succession until the rise of Gamal Mubarak.

Of course there are many unknowns with regard to the Egyptian succession. Will the army, the country's most resourceful and organized institution, stay out of the political fray on the day of reckoning? Although its Commander-in-Chief, Mohammed Tantawi, does not appear to openly harbor political ambitions, there is no way to guess his real motives or those of other officers. How will the powerful intelligence services, currently led by General Omar Suleiman, act? Will Gamal Mubarak, a civilian with no ministerial experience, in the end be supported by the powerful security branch?

Gamal, however, has a number of elements in his favor. President Mubarak could still engineer the succession while he is alive, and the constitutional loopholes the 2005 and 2007 amendments created would facilitate this. More importantly, Gamal is the sole contender of the Mubarak family. His older brother Alaa has found his niche in business. Moreover, Gamal occupies an official position in the structure of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). He is the second most powerful man in the NDP, but in effect leads from behind the pliant Safwat al-Sharif, NDP Secretary-General and Shura Council Speaker.

In contrast to Gamal, Saif al-Islam has no official status in Libya's political establishment. But this is not surprising in a country where Qaddafi himself claims he is not president. Although bereft of any official political post, Saif still has access to millions of dollars to fund his Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation (GICDF), which has donated millions to humanitarian and conflict resolution projects. What could potentially unravel Saif's aspirations to succeed his father may be the stiff competition he could encounter from equally ambitious and perhaps more powerful male siblings, particularly al-Mu'tasim Billah. Mu'tasim is in charge of the military and

security apparatus and holds the post of national security adviser. This distribution of power among the siblings is perhaps Saif's key handicap. In addition, his open and often seemingly naive liberalism may have caused his father to doubt his political astuteness and caused concern among neighboring leaders.

Ahmed al-Saleh keeps a very low political profile, seen in the media only during state visits to neighboring countries or national celebrations. This low profile might be a necessary strategy in a regime built on a patchwork of jealous tribal alliances. On the other hand, however, in a country with bleak security and economic prospects, the youthful Ahmed represents for many, especially in the North of Yemen, a keystone of tribal solidarity and a promise of future stability. In a country torn asunder by a variety of cleavages, Ahmed is seen by many to represent the promise of a smooth transfer of power along with the preservation of national unity. Unlike Gamal and Saif (both civilians), Ahmed's key asset in any contest of succession is his military position. Like in Egypt and Libya, power more or less flowed from the "barrel of the gun" in Yemen, whose coup mimicked that of Egypt's free officers in 1952 and, to an extent, Libya's own 1969 coup. All three countries are currently ruled by military strongmen. The only prominent contender for power in the three with a military position is Ahmed al-Saleh.

Like Libya, the tribal factor is vital for the Yemeni context, and this may prove to be another asset for Ahmed—especially since the president's powerful Hashed tribe is dominant in the North and is well positioned within the armed forces. This is a feature Yemen shares with Libya. After aborted coups to topple Qaddafi in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, the Qadhadifah tribes regrouped around tribal solidarity to protect the regime.

## **Mechanisms of Succession in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen**

### **GAMAL MUBARAK: "SHADOW PRESIDENT"**

Gamal was named to head the ruling NDP's influential Policies Council in September 2002. This move placed him in a strategic position to increase his influence, directly engage in policy making, and boost his chances to succeed his father. Regardless of whether the appointment was the brainchild of Mubarak senior or of the NDP's president, Safwat al-Sharif, what matters here is that this mechanism has empowered Gamal to shadow his father's presidency. Had Gamal not been tied to the president by family ties, he would have been playing a perfectly legitimate and democratic role, namely, counterbalancing the president's executive power and providing a rival center that feeds alternative ideas into the political system, as shadow governments do under Westminster democracies.

Another important move in enhancing Gamal's stature was the naming of General Omar Sulayman, currently Egypt's chief of intelligence and one of the most powerful officials in President Mubarak's inner circle, to serve as a witness in Gamal's wedding in May 2007. By this symbolic act, Mubarak senior appeared to be entrusting Egypt's second most powerful man with his son's future presidential ambitions. Quite conspicuously as well, the wedding was held in Sharm el-Sheikh on the margins of a major international summit on Iraq, with various international leaders in attendance. Mubarak's 2003 fainting episode while addressing the People's Assembly was a strong reminder of the urgency of the succession issue. If the president were to die suddenly, Gamal would need a protector or guarantor. Mubarak has bestowed upon General Sulayman the status of statesman, with Sulayman serving as his special envoy in many missions, including the complex Palestinian dossier. The president might hope that after his death, having Sulayman as king maker would help ease Gamal into the presidency. Of course, it is also possible that Sulayman might act otherwise, either by dragging out his caretaker status indefinitely, or seeking the presidency himself.

Indeed, Sulayman enjoys a preeminent position. He has a reputation of being incorruptible and is widely liked. He is the only chief of Egypt's General Intelligence Directorate to rise to prominence since Salah Nasr, the founding father of the country's intelligence agency (1955–1967). The head of the army, Field Marshal Tantawi, has proven to have only limited political influence, perhaps a reason why he has been Egypt's longest serving defense minister. But the large body of high officers with differing views will also be relevant in case of a sudden power vacuum. The military under Mubarak has been weakened politically but it is still—along with the intelligence services—extremely powerful.

Mubarak senior is very conscious of the importance of the military—the institutional platform that was instrumental in launching his own presidential career. Increasingly, Gamal is being coached in interacting with the army and brushing shoulders with the country's top brass. During national events bringing the president and the military together, such as the annual anniversary of the Liberation of the Sinai (including the latest in April 2009), Gamal Mubarak takes pole position as his father addresses his generals. In 2005, Gamal sat flanked by generals facing the presidential podium. In 2006, Gamal broke protocol and sat with the country's top military commanders immediately behind him—this despite him not occupying an official or constitutional post.

At another level, Gamal's presidential campaign is casting its net wide, seeking to secure the allegiance of the Copts. Gamal has been wooing the Copts in the last few years with his visits during Christmas celebrations. During his 2007 church visit for that occasion, Gamal was met not only with a long and standing ovation, but also, and for the first time, was received by the Coptic Pope, Shenouda III. These visits are no doubt calculated not only to

co-opt the Copts within the country, but also to placate the strong coptic lobby abroad, which is known for its critical stand vis-à-vis the regime.

No such effort is needed to woo al-Azhar's clerical bureaucracy that relies on state patronage. But thus far this early presidential campaigning is yet to be extended to either the secular dissident opposition or the indomitable Muslim Brotherhood. Only time will tell whether Gamal will strike bargains or agree to succession pacts with these political groupings, offering concessions in the form of political inclusiveness.

Having decided not to pursue plans to found his own "Al-Mustaqbal" (Future) Party to mobilize, recruit, and build his own power base from Egypt's youthful graduates and professionals, Gamal has no choice but to constantly seek out political alliances. The business community is not a solid enough launching pad for a presidential career. Gamal is aware of this and of late has been ramping up the nationalist rhetoric, including calling for Egypt to develop a nuclear energy program.

Gamal also campaigns on the platform of change and a "new future." This rhetoric is common to both Gamal Mubarak and Saif al-Islam, whose futuristic imagery and designs for Libya resemble Gamal's own for Egypt. A new language is being deployed to match both young heirs' goals of 'renewal.' Gamal presents himself as the driving force in the NDP's engine of change. His vision is not only for a new Egypt, but also for what might be termed a "New NDP," as if Gamal were borrowing a page from Tony Blair's political playbook. Gamal is presented as the master engineer of *qiyadat al-taghyeer* (leadership of change). Terms like *jeel al-mustaqbal* (future generation), the youth organization sponsored by Gamal, and *al-'uboor ila al-mustaqbal* (crossing to the future)—the motto of the 2005 NDP conference and President Mubarak's presidential campaign—capture Gamal's attempt to cast himself as an innovator and modernizer of the party and the country.

Egyptians are dissatisfied with the state of corruption, nepotism, questionable deals involving sale of land and gas and oil reserves, underdevelopment, dependence on external aid, exclusionary politics, stagnation of leadership of the Arab world, and official hostility to resistance movements in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon. Many voices also question the peace treaty with Israel and the humiliating conditions of the return of the Sinai to Egypt, granting it only partial sovereignty. This record is burdensome for Gamal Mubarak. His privileged position comes with a price: regime underperformance is a liability and has affected him negatively. His name seems to be irreparably associated and tainted by the NDP's failure and the emergence of a new class of billionaires who are seen by many as pillaging the country, a country ruled by powerful families and business interests backed by coercion or the threat of it.

Ultimately, despite his efforts to burnish his image and strike alliances with various groups, Gamal will inherit power only if the military and intelligence

services back him. Even so, for such a transition to be successful and smooth, he would also have to reach some kind of understanding with the Muslim Brotherhood and the secular opposition, as well as a “new deal” with Egyptian civil society.

Should fate intervene to sabotage any plans for Gamal to inherit power during his father’s presidency, a few scenarios could unfold. A Syrian-style succession could be engineered in haste, but this could prove difficult to sell to the Egyptian people. A second scenario would be Sulayman stepping in as care-taker. He could be acceptable, at least as a transitional figure, for the military and a large part of society. This scenario would weaken Gamal’s succession and, possibly, rescind it indefinitely. A third scenario would be succession following a “constitutional” route, with elections being held within a few months. If the army and intelligence services cooperate, Gamal’s electoral victory could be engineered. But there would remain tough questions about his legitimacy unless credible and heavyweight candidates (including independent and Muslim Brotherhood candidates) are allowed to run.

### **SAIF AL-ISLAM: BETWEEN “SHADOW PRESIDENCY” AND HEREDITARY SUCCESSION**

Libya is already a self-contained dynasty par excellence. It is a rare example of a country where the leader more or less owns the state; the official line is that Qaddafi senior holds no official post, i.e., he is no more than a de facto leader. Interestingly, his eldest son from his second marriage, Saif, provides the function of loyal opposition.

Saif’s Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation has been a vital space that has since its establishment in 1997 given him political muscle, prominence and visibility at home and abroad, and credit for steering Libya out of the ignominy of incoherent foreign policy, international isolation, grotesque human rights abuses, and costly misadventures. His sister, Aicha, also runs an “autonomous,” “civic” body, the Wa‘tasimou (Solidarity) Charity. His brother Sa‘di heads the country’s football federation, and his younger brothers (excluding the unruly Hannibal, with his reputation for fast cars and short temper) Mu‘tasim, and to a much lesser extent, Khamis, run the security and military apparatus. This dynastic circle is at once an oligarchy that holds political, financial, coercive, and infrastructural resources not available to any other Libyan citizen or organization—including high state officials who are hired and fired at whim—and a quasi “plurality” whose separate inner centers compete among each other for influence and resources. This plurality within the family helps strengthen their stranglehold on a society with no means to challenge its ruling family.

Saif al-Islam is seeking succession in a very different context than Gamal Mubarak. While Mubarak must heed the powerful security services and is subject to scrutiny and protest by a fairly dynamic opposition and civil society that has had the benefit of 150 years of political development, Saif al-Islam

operates in a society where institutions, including the army, are among the weakest in the Arab world and where civic bodies, political parties, autonomous opposition, and political organizations ceased to exist since the 1969 coup.

Saif is by any standards more of a visionary than Gamal Mubarak. He is inventing a leadership role for himself by setting out to implement an ambitious agenda. This route was opened up with his daring founding of the GICDF in 1997. Libya was in the throes of a major crisis—under siege by the international community abroad, and shaken domestically by a witch-hunt for traitors. Executions were common practice and in both 1995 and 1997, many dissidents were executed following grossly unfair trials. All opposition, peaceful and violent, was proscribed and punished severely. Libya was experiencing its share of the type of “republic of fear” activities typical of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Saif’s “Truth for All” human rights campaign aimed to curb the excesses of that period and to rebuild ties with society.

Through the Truth for All human rights campaign, Saif has worked to disarm the revolutionary committees, punish those guilty of murder and torture, and compensate victims. His ultimate objective is to pave the way for national reconciliation; he is also the force behind the drive for a written constitution and a new social pact. While he works tirelessly as a human rights crusader, Saif also acts as an envoy for his father, a trouble-shooter for Libya’s compensation and conflict resolution issues, such as those surrounding the Lockerbie bombing and the Bulgarian nurses; and mediates in humanitarian cases, even funding ransom payments. In addition, Saif has worked openly to liberalize the media, promote privatization, and reform the health and educational sectors.

Saif has made the human rights agenda his exclusive bastion. Prisoner of conscience Fathi al-Jahmi, however, was never given freedom to criticize the regime or struggle for human rights. While Saif mobilized state resources and protection in his quest to be the sole human rights “crusader” in Libya, al-Jahmi was punished for trying to be proactive and vocal in the name of the same goal—human rights and good governance. He was imprisoned, dying a few days after he was allowed to leave Libya to receive medical attention in Jordan. Why Saif failed to free or defend al-Jahmi is a question that will likely haunt Qaddafi’s heir for a long time.

It is clear that Saif gains his influence directly as a result of his father’s tolerance and support, and in the end cannot venture far from the fold. For example, while devoted to his human rights crusade, Saif has repeatedly absolved his father from blame, even defending the current record of the revolutionary committees, despite his previous criticism of them. Saif seeks to disinherit his father’s misdeeds while at the same time he considers his father’s leadership as a redline—a given that cannot be negotiated or challenged. In a slew of upcoming trials backed by Saif relating to past crimes, it is unlikely that top figures close to his father will be touched. Furthermore,

Saif has made more promises than he could deliver: jobs have been promised but not created, grandiose housing projects are years behind schedule and grossly over budget, and so on.

Although Saif currently enjoys public prominence, especially abroad, his succession is seriously challenged. His most formidable rival is his younger brother Mu‘tasim. With the security apparatus under his command, Mu‘tasim has the means to emerge as Libya’s future strongman.

In Libya, whoever succeeds Qaddafi will not need a partner to legitimize the succession. Libya has very little institutional or civic capital—no political parties exist, no formidable and autonomous dissidents occupy a special status, and all of the key players come from within the ruling house. Any major challenge would come from within the family, not without. Saif and Mu‘tasim might agree to share political and military power, at least for a while; alternatively, the succession might be quickly decided by force, perhaps in Mu‘tasim’s favor. What is certain in any Libyan succession is that the tribal-military complex will be a definitive factor in engineering and concluding it. But there are no guarantees that the next leader could keep the ship of state afloat as long as his father or prevent a mutiny. Libya is an amalgam of four entities—Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Fezzan, and the northern reaches of Kanem Bornu—that have not historically been unitary; the western part of Libya, especially, is increasingly growing disillusioned with the Qaddafi republic.

### **YEMENI SUCCESSION: THE SLOW RISE OF AHMED AL-SALEH**

The imagery of *Arabia Felix* is illusive in today’s Yemen—a country that is haunted by the specters of division, instability, and poverty. Yemenis are preoccupied by a plethora of crises, including tribal and sectarian divisions that continuously threaten and challenge centralized authority. The Yemenis have a different take on hereditary succession than the Egyptians and Libyans. Egypt’s civil society, secular and Islamist, has more or less come out against family succession. And in Libya, many view the Qaddafi family’s long rule and path of trial and error as a nightmare from which the sooner they awake, the better. Past coups and an exiled opposition point to a society that has actively sought change. But its passivity today is owed to heavy policing, coupled with a degree of co-optation. In Yemen, President Ali Abdullah al-Saleh, in power since 1978, is still viewed by many as a keystone holding together a country where the cleavages readily lend themselves to division and disorder. This is his most valued and prized political asset. The image of strength, authority, and decisiveness in safeguarding Yemen’s unity continues to buoy President Saleh’s presidency.

There is no naïveté, however. Like in the rest of the Arab world, there are complaints about corruption, nepotism, state violence, and favoritism in the slicing of the economic pie. To an extent, these ills have contributed to the rise of rebellious and divisive forces. But in wider discussions with officials and activists, there is a grudging admission that President Saleh helps hold

Yemen together. At least, this is the view from the North. In so doing, he wears many hats, acting as tribal chief, tribal mediator, president, commander-in-chief, and party leader. But his status as “Yemen’s Garibaldi” is being tested and may be tattered by rebellion in the North and the South. Indeed, President Saleh is currently juggling stemming the tide of secessionism from the South and trying to put an end to the Houthi rebellion in the North. In dealing with the Houthis, he is acting as a tribal chief, seeking mediation and negotiation and at the same time engaging them militarily, assuming his duty as the embattled country’s top general.

Furthermore, the state President Saleh leads has adapted itself to its tribal surroundings. Thus the state acts, when need be, not as a legal, rational actor but rather as a tribal entity, disbursing tribal justice. Its political behavior mimics that of tribes in its use of violence. It finds itself using bribes in the form of posts or pecuniary handouts to buy off loyalty or co-opt adversaries. President Saleh makes use of informal networks in striking bargains with various tribes and sects. Ruling over Yemen and its plural and, in parts of the country, unruly civil bodies and identities requires the juggling of different skills and roles. He is credited by some for having preserved the country’s unity in the secessionist war against his former southern partners in 1994, and against more recent tribal and sectarian forces in the North and South. Ongoing events may already be dampening optimism about Saleh’s unifying credentials.

To an extent, for the greater part of a more than 30-year political career at the helm, this recognition has partly redeemed President Saleh as a ruler. However, such redemption is not automatically extended to his son. President Saleh derives legitimacy from the founding of the new Yemen in 1990 and deploying his skill, coercion, and cunning to safeguard that state. His son Ahmed has yet to earn such credentials.

Furthermore, unlike Gamal or Saif, Ahmed is not yet a clear heir apparent. He is a prospective one, though, and the opposition is increasingly focusing on this question. What Ahmed shares with Saif and Mu‘tasim is the advantage of tribal backing. This tribal backing could potentially be used to his advantage to succeed his father. Unlike both Gamal and Saif, Ahmed has an asset that neither possesses: access to military power. The tribal-military complex counts in Yemen. Colonel Ahmed’s meteoric rise to the apex of the military command endows him with the means to defend his claim to his father’s mantle of leadership, should he vie for it in the future.

He might not have a choice in the matter, as he may already be locked into the one-way logic of succession. His rapid promotion to the rank of Colonel above others with longer service records is part and parcel of that logic. In 2002 President Saleh put Ahmed in charge of the most sophisticated and best equipped fighting unit in the country, the Republican Guards. Thus far, however, there is no recorded statement by Ahmed to indicate that he wants to succeed his father. But deeds speak louder than words. The fact that Colonel

Ahmed is commander of the country's two deadliest fighting machines, the Republican Guards and the Special Forces, is more than an honorific assignment. By combining the command of both forces, Ahmed is given muscle to defend presidency, tribe, and country.

This raises an interesting dimension about an aspect of succession that Yemen shares with Libya—the existence of a dual succession track. Maximizing options takes care of future contingencies, a strategy that worked for Hafez al-Assad when his older son Basil, who had been given a military career, died in a car crash in 1994. Saddam Hussein was grooming both Uday and Qusay to inherit his rule. When Uday became partially paralyzed following an assassination attempt in 1996, Qusay overtook him as the son more appropriately suited for the presidency. Qaddafi has in Saif a “political” heir and in Mu‘tasim a “military” one. In Yemen, Colonel Ahmed al-Saleh is empowered enough to occupy the center with tribal backing. In fact, the symbiosis between tribe and army is such that no military challenge to Colonel Ahmed is likely to succeed. The most sensitive military posts are held by Hashed tribesmen with direct blood ties to the president. The presidency has more or less been tribalized: this is at the core of Yemen's dual succession. Colonel Ahmed is assumed to be the first heir apparent; the Hashed tribesmen related to the president would be second in line for inheriting the presidency if unforeseen factors rule out Colonel Ahmed. Of these men, three are half-brothers: Brigadier-General Muhammad al-Saleh al-Ahmar, Commander of the Yemeni Air Force; Brigadier-General Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar, Commander of the Northern region; and Brigadier-General Ali al-Saleh al-Ahmar, Chief of Staff of the General Command, and four others are nephews. Many others are direct or indirect in-laws of the president.

One thing must be gleaned from the foregoing. President Saleh shares the economic and political pie but not the military command, which is the exclusive bastion of the inner circle of Hashed's powerful tribesmen. This is a key insurance policy: the presidency stays within Hashed. It is not up for grabs. This may be called Saleh's buffer solution: distributing resources and posts to the country's political and economic groups that serve as an intervening shield, lessening the impact of political challenge and helps in the protection against potential political ruin. This solution works for those tribes whose political prominence and wealth-making opportunities allowed them by Saleh adequately compensates them for missing out on a role in the military and security command. The sons and relatives of the late Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar (paramount chief of the Hashed tribal confederacy that President al-Saleh's clan, the Sanhan, belongs to) are political and economic beneficiaries. His second son, Hamid, has high positions in parliament and in the Islah Party, proving himself in the 2006 elections to be a formidable match to any politicians in the country and a worthy replacement to his father. Dividing the pie among the Hashed tribes and their allies is one of the factors that allowed Hamid to own a majority stake in one of Yemen's largest mobile phone companies, Sabafone, and make a fortune from it as well as from Islamic banking.

The question of succession is not yet part of public discourse in Yemen. Nevertheless, it is a hot item on the agenda of the opposition and civil society. As in Libya, the formal and informal intersect in Yemeni politics, and clan politics translates into aggrandizement of the ruling tribe over rival tribes. Thus the Qadhadifah, who control petroleum wealth, propaganda, military force, and the state apparatus, have refigured the power equation in Libya, transforming themselves from shepherds of cattle to shepherds of people. But there is a degree of distribution in Libya (perhaps thanks to the availability of petroleum bounty) that keeps tribal rivalry in check.

By contrast, tribal rivalry in Yemen is far fiercer. An upshot of this is that the state has more or less been turned into a form of treasure. The center is held together by a complex web of sanguine interconnections that creep into the distribution of power, strategic jobs, and favors in a way that has rendered social relations an endless series of hierarchically-ordered patron-client networks. The president's family and the Hashed northern tribe are all linked by blood ties. These tribal ties are further solidified by being privileged but uneven recipients of state treasure. In turn, these benefits deepen both their tribal solidarity and the material capacity available to them to defend family lineage, and the attendant privilege (including occupation of the state) and patronage. Moreover, their access to state treasure empowers them to develop networks beneath them that function in a similar fashion, using their own forms of patronage to create dependent clients. The president distributes to his immediate progeny (his son Ahmed), then nephews (Yahya and Tariq), followed by his in-laws (such as the al-Akwa' family) and their sons, and so on and so forth. Ministers do the same; and so do their clients, repeating and multiplying the same pattern of clientelism.

Thus in this case hereditary succession is only one dimension of an overarching dynamic that has rendered both private and public resources hereditary. Public posts and private sector jobs in Yemen are largely passed on from father to son, or at least according to tribal ties. A softer brand of this is found in Libya, but not to the same extent. Distribution of positions is still quasi socialist, especially the allocation of scholarships (which have been used as political bribes and instruments of youth mobilization and recruitment of a power base by Saif). In Egypt, there are some limitations to nepotism and job succession in the army or parliament, and it is not semi-institutionalized as it almost is in Yemen. The brand of nepotism found in Yemen permeates all levels of state distribution of power and of jobs with a particular father-to-son fixture. The Council of Deputies (parliament) epitomizes this practice with many outgoing MPs passing on their seats to their sons or using their status or posts, including in the armed forces, to facilitate entry into parliament. As a result the Yemeni parliament is dubbed *majlis al-abna* (Council of Sons). Significantly, it was criticism against the Council of Sons five decades ago that helped bring down the Imami regime, and many critics are increasingly likening President Saleh's rule to that of Imam Yahya (1918–1948) and his son Ahmed, who succeeded him (1948–1962) in Northern Yemen.

The question of succession in Yemen is more secure than that speculated about in Egypt or even in Libya. Under the current and immediately foreseeable conditions, if President Saleh passes away suddenly, tribe and military will propel Colonel Ahmed al-Saleh into the seat of power. However, without his father's legacy and experience, he will be hard put to manage the escalating political and socioeconomic challenges facing Yemen and the tough secessionist and security challenges coming from the North and South.

## **The Twilight of Arab Republicanism**

The advent of Arab republicanism early in the twentieth-century was championed as a democratizing and modernizing force. It was instrumental in overthrowing monarchies in many Arab states. It raised expectations for a new era in the newly-founded Arab republics. Its rhetoric stressed a legitimating mission to spearhead modernization, secularization, and welfarism. In the twenty-first century, however, Arab republicanism seems to suffer from the absence of genuine republicans with the values and ideals that can uphold popular government and constitutional rule.

Looming hereditary successions in Arab republics do not belong to republicanism, with its classic emphasis on open, egalitarian, and meritocratic standards of public office and public-spiritedness and on anti-monarchism. Rather, they belong to a new brand of populism and re-tribalization of political power. The prospect of hereditary succession in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen is a dangerous trend of backtracking on earlier republican ideals. Should this trend be confirmed in these states, it would signal the further collapse of the ideals of the founders of Arab republicanism and would be yet another blow to the prospects for eventual democratization.

## **Policy Implications**

These scenarios place outside powers in difficult positions. How are they to act in the face of possible succession and the specter of dynastic republicanism? Outside powers should not try to pick winners or meddle directly in succession issues. The succession moments in these three states will be intense, contested, and unpredictable. Outside powers can neither engineer outcomes nor gain ground by getting involved.

Admittedly, some outside powers have much at stake in these states and their possible successions, given the strategic importance of the three countries in terms of oil, the war on terrorism, peace with Israel, relations with the EU, the possible rise of Islamists to power, regional stability, and so on. Nonetheless, outside powers should resist the temptation to influence succession or develop "favorites." Such policies would be costly, whatever the outcome of succession. In the event of favorites failing, the outside power would be caught out. In the case of the favorites winning, their legitimacy would be weakened by their outside association.

With regard to the West, the United States and the EU can and should legitimately press for a democratic succession. This is relevant in Egypt and Yemen, where electoral institutions and habits—weak as they are—at least exist; but not so in Libya, where not even the outline of electoral democracy is in place. The preferred policy in Egypt and Yemen would be to accept a temporary interim arrangement if the current president dies suddenly, but to insist on an open and competitive presidential election within months of that date. With regard to Libya, the West has almost no leverage and there is no democratic skeleton to cling to; while many would prefer the emergence of Saif as Libya’s next leader, the outside world will have little choice but to stand back as the succession issue works itself out.

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