

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

The Middle East and North Africa: Political Succession and Regime Stability

August 29, 2003

Amy E. Thayer
Research Associate
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Alfred B. Prados
Specialist in Middle East Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

The Middle East and North Africa: Political Succession and Regime Stability

Summary

The recent deaths of several of the region's longest serving heads of state and the ill-health of others, as well as the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, have led to increased speculation about the political future of various countries in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region. With its vast oil and natural gas resources, the MENA region is important to the U.S. economy, and the cooperation of MENA countries in the war against terrorism is central to U.S. security. Consequently, political stability in the MENA region has long been an important U.S. goal, and the subject of political succession raises a number of foreign policy questions. A change in the leadership in these countries, for example, could significantly affect their policies toward the United States and their willingness to cooperate with the United States in achieving the stability needed to advance U.S. interests in this important region.

On the other hand, there can be down sides to stability. Under some circumstances, changes in regimes that are antithetical to U.S. goals or values could support U.S. interests. Moreover, a narrow focus on stability may not always be compatible with another goal espoused by many U.S. policy makers, namely, fostering democracy in the Middle East.

These sometimes competing goals have given rise to a debate over the degree to which the United States should back existing regimes or take steps to encourage the emergence of new ones. A definitive answer is difficult because of the widely differing types of political systems that govern MENA countries and the uncertainties surrounding political succession. Governments in this region include traditional and constitutional monarchies, democratic and theocratic republics, and military and party dictatorships; however, with rare exceptions, power in both the monarchies and in the republics as well remains concentrated in the hands of a head of state supported by a relatively small coterie of key officials or family members.

Although most Middle East regimes have shown a high degree of stability in recent years, questions remain over succession issues in many of these countries. In the monarchies, constitutions or basic laws generally stipulate succession by primogeniture, while granting some latitude to a monarch in designating a son, a brother, or a close male relative as heir to the throne. Factions within the royal family or other groups may contest assumption of power by the designated successor, however, when a ruler dies or otherwise leaves the scene. In the largely nominal republics, constitutional provisions also stipulate arrangements for succession, usually through elections, or to a specified official (prime minister or speaker of parliament) if the incumbent head of state dies or resigns. In actuality, however, key military officials or family members may be more likely candidates for succession. A review and description of the broad spectrum of governments in this region may assist in the formulation of U.S. policies toward Middle East countries.

Contents

The Monarchies	2
Bahrain	3
Jordan	4
Kuwait	5
Morocco	7
Oman	8
Qatar	9
Saudi Arabia	10
United Arab Emirates	11
The Republics	13
Algeria	13
Egypt	15
Iran	17
Israel	19
Lebanon	20
Sudan	22
Syria	23
Tunisia	24
Turkey	25
Yemen	26
Other Governing Bodies	28
Iraq	28
Libya	29
Palestinian Institutions	30
Prospects	32

The Middle East and North Africa: Political Succession and Regime Stability

The recent deaths of several of the longest serving heads of state in the Middle East and the ill-health of others, as well as the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, have led commentators and policy makers to speculate increasingly about the political future of the various countries in this region. With its vast oil and natural gas resources, stability in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region is generally regarded as critical to the U.S. economy. Furthermore, cooperation from MENA governments in the war against terrorism is central to U.S. security. A change of leadership in these countries could significantly affect their policies toward the United States and their willingness to cooperate in the achievement of U.S. goals. At the same time, some argue that U.S. interests would be well served by emphasizing the importance of democracy as well as stability. Also, changes in regimes that are antithetical to U.S. goals or values might foster U.S. interests. (See below, Prospects.)

For some time, there have been several theories regarding how to prepare for the political future in the Middle East and North Africa. One school of thought emphasized stable succession, as a means of cultivating insiders, including heirs to the throne or likely presidential successors and other key officials whose loyalties would be needed to hold existing regimes intact. Another school supported smooth, gradual transitions through cultivation of liberal counter-elites, in an effort to give a higher profile to Western-educated internationalists, as opposed to the Arab nationalists and Islamists who are currently the region's main opinion leaders. This policy would attempt to strengthen democratic institutions in relation to the head of state and security apparatus.¹

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which helped give currency to the idea of removing "rogue" regimes by force, has sharpened these on-going discussions on U.S. policy toward MENA regimes. Underlying these differences in approach is a debate over the degree to which the United States should back existing regimes or take steps to encourage the emergence of new ones. A definitive answer is difficult because of the widely differing types of political systems that govern MENA countries. MENA governments include traditional and constitutional monarchies,

¹ U.S. policies have supported multiple approaches to Middle East countries. On the one hand, the United States continues to give large amounts of economic and military aid to a number of key states in the region, especially Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, thereby demonstrating its commitment to buttressing existing regimes and assuring their stability. But also, under the rubric of democratization and civil society assistance, the United States makes funds available to Middle East countries through large amounts of economic aid and through smaller amounts channeled through non-governmental institutions, such as the National Endowment for Democracy.

democratic and theocratic republics, and military and party dictatorships. Some are mildly authoritarian, while others are more tyrannical. Many have experienced coups d'état, military insurrections, violent uprisings, or other forms of extra-constitutional change.

A review and description of the broad spectrum of governments in this region may help decision-makers assess the prospects for stability and democratization in the Middle East, as well as the likelihood that key Middle East regimes will continue to support, or oppose, U.S. policies. MENA regimes represent a wide array of political systems, although most of them tend to be autocratic to varying degrees. Because of their number and diversity, these regimes have been divided in this study into three broad categories: monarchies, republics, and other governing bodies. Within these three categories, countries (or entities) are discussed in alphabetical order. This report may be updated if extensive changes take place in present patterns of governance in the MENA region.

The Monarchies

In the monarchies — Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — political power remains largely in the hands of the ruler and his family, to a greater or lesser extent. The general principle of hereditary succession is common to all of these countries, with the partial exception of the federally structured United Arab Emirates. The dependence of each of these countries on the ruler's personality creates a potential for instability during times of leadership transition.

In recent years, all eight monarchies have set forth some written guidelines regarding political succession. Even so, the process of succession in practice remains vague and potentially conflicted in many of these countries. Their legal and constitutional framework for political succession may result in a peaceful transition of authority. However, an investigation of each regime reveals that the issue of leadership transition is sometimes marked by uncertainty. In spite of the apparent specificity of legal provisions governing hereditary political succession, criteria for implementing these provisions can prove ill-defined when tested by the unexpected death or departure of a ruler.

Faced with economic difficulties, domestic challenges to their rule, and a more threatening regional environment, several Middle East monarchs have chosen to embark on a limited course of political reform. Many have stepped up efforts over the past decade to integrate the opposition into the political system, and to broaden popular participation in the political process. For the most part, these reforms have enhanced the legitimacy of the regimes at home and abroad. However, representative bodies and institutions, where they exist, remain fragile, and are liable to be suspended or rescinded in times of crisis. Moreover, in many instances, the power of an elected chamber of parliament is counter-balanced by that of an appointed chamber, ensuring that the executive retains overwhelming authority.

Bahrain

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa,² currently 53 years old, has ruled Bahrain since the death of his father, Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, on March 6, 1999. The Al Khalifas have ruled Bahrain since their tribe, originally from the Najd region of present-day Saudi Arabia, expelled the Persians from the area in 1783. Since then the principle of primogeniture has governed succession in the Al Khalifa family, and was codified into law in the Constitution of 1973.³ Although King Hamad has implemented political reforms in other areas, the appointment of his son Salman as Crown Prince seems to indicate the King is not likely to alter the practice of hereditary succession.

The 1973 Constitution provided for a National Assembly, composed of 14 cabinet members and 30 popularly-elected members, although this was dissolved by King Hamad's father in August 1975. In November 2000, the King appointed a 46-member Supreme National Committee to generate proposals for reform of Bahrain's political system. The National Action Charter, as the proposals were called, provided for an independent judiciary and a bicameral parliament comprising a directly-elected House of Deputies and an appointed Consultative Council. In February 2002, acting on the advice of the Committee, Shaikh Hamad formally changed Bahrain into a kingdom and took the title King instead of Emir.⁴ In a move that won international praise, King Hamad submitted the National Action Charter to a national referendum in early 2001. In October 2002, parliamentary elections were held for the first time since the unicameral legislature was dissolved in 1975, and a majority of the seats in the House of Deputies were won by moderate Islamists. Although four opposition parties called on Bahrainis to boycott the elections, voter turnout was still about 53%. The King has retained the authority to appoint the Prime Minister, who in turn appoints the cabinet. Most of the ministries remain in the hands of the Al Khalifa family.

In spite of his smooth accession to power, King Hamad's reign is not without its challenges. There has reportedly been some tension between the King and his powerful uncle Khalifa Bin Salman, who is also Bahrain's Prime Minister. Shaikh Khalifa is said to be a traditionalist, and likely disagrees with some of the political reforms the King has implemented over the past few years.

² A note on transcription of Arabic names. The particle "al-" followed by a hyphen is the definite article ("the") in Arabic and is often incorporated in Arabic names. For example: Bashar al-Asad. The word "Al" means "family" or "dynasty" and is often followed by the name of a major tribe or clan. For example: Faysal bin Sultan Al Saud.

³ According to the Constitution of 1973, rule passes from Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa to his eldest son and then to the eldest son of this eldest son and so forth, generation after generation, unless during his lifetime, the ruler appoints one of his sons other than the eldest as his successor.

⁴ Most Gulf rulers carry the title *Emir* (variant spelling *Amir*), which is usually translated as Prince. Some are also known by the term *Shaikh* (variant spelling *Sheikh* or *Shaykh*), which can mean either a tribal chief, a temporal ruler, or a revered religious figure.

Another challenge for King Hamad has been the tension between the ruling Sunni minority and the Shiite majority in Bahrain. Bahraini society is highly stratified, with families from the Sunni sect of Islam dominating the political scene, although Sunnis form a minority in the country. Shi'ite Muslims make up over half of the indigenous population, and a clear majority of non-nationals in Bahrain. Thus, the Al Khalifa regime represents a Sunni minority ruling over a Shiite majority, who are in the forefront of Bahrainis demanding political reforms. Fears of unrest among Bahrain's Shi'ite majority have continued to preoccupy the ruling regime and motivated an uncompromising response by the government to popular dissatisfaction in the past. These fears were fueled by abortive coups in 1981 and 1996, when the Islamic Republic of Iran allegedly encouraged Bahraini Shi'ites to overthrow the Al Khalifa regime.⁵

Throughout much of the 1990s the regime was besieged by widespread protests, and a few highly publicized terrorist attacks. The government stressed the involvement of Shi'ite clerics and a group it identified as Hizballah Bahrain in the events of the 1990s. However, the protestors, in large part, were calling for the re-establishment of the National Assembly (which had been suspended in 1975), free elections, and a more inclusive democratic process.⁶ A number of socio-economic factors also contributed to the crisis. Rising unemployment, an influx of labor migrants, and the presence of a large number of highly-paid expatriates further intensified resentment towards the regime, particularly among Shiite workers who were disproportionately affected by these factors. King Hamad has moved decisively to try to address the grievances that caused Bahrain's unrest in the mid-1990s, with the National Action Charter adopted in 2001 and other reforms designed to encourage political liberalization.⁷

Jordan

King Abdullah II, currently 41 years old, succeeded to the throne on February 7, 1999, after the death of his father King Hussein, who had ruled Jordan for over 45 years. Two-weeks before his death, the late King named his eldest son Abdullah as Crown Prince and heir apparent, replacing the late King's brother Prince Hassan, who had served in that capacity for over 33 years. Prince Abdullah appointed his younger half brother Prince Hamzah as the new Crown Prince and heir apparent, apparently in accordance with the wishes of their late father.

Royal succession has not been a major issue in Jordan, as eldest son succeeded father with little or no discussion. Since Jordan emerged as a modern state in the aftermath of World War I, all four successions have been based upon the principle of primogeniture. According to the Jordanian Constitution of 1952, the royal title

⁵ Europa Publications, Regional Surveys of the World, *The Middle East and North Africa 2002*, 48th Edition, London, pp. 212-213.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 213-214. Also, Louay Bahry, "The Opposition in Bahrain: A Bellwether for the Gulf," *Middle East Policy*, May 1997, pp. 42-57.

⁷ See also CRS Report RL31533, *The Persian Gulf: Issues for U.S. Policy, 2003*, and CRS Report 95-1013, *Bahrain*.

passes from the King to his eldest son and thereafter to the latter's eldest son, by a process of linear succession. A constitutional amendment enacted in 1965, however, allows the King to appoint one of his brothers as heir apparent, even if the King has an eligible son.

Questions over succession could reappear, however, as the family becomes larger and a younger generation comes of age. Other sons of the late King Hussein, his nephews, and his cousins could advance future claims to the throne. More important, the expanding Hashemite family could become a larger collegial body in which relatives play an increasing role in addressing questions of succession.

The Jordanian monarchy, however, faces other, more imminent, threats to its long-term stability. Divisions in Jordanian society, notably between East Bank Jordanians and those of Palestinian origin, as well as widespread opposition to some of the government's policies, continue to be potential threats to the stability of the Kingdom. Palestinians, who came to Jordan after the establishment of Israel in 1948, now form a majority of the population. Although most Palestinians have been granted Jordanian citizenship and have been absorbed to varying degrees in the Jordanian society and economy, many Jordanians of Palestinian origin regard their stay in Jordan as temporary and some are at most lukewarm in their support of the Jordanian monarchy. Since the beginning of the second intifada, or uprising of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza against the Israeli occupation, in September 2000, there have been widespread demonstrations in support of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and in opposition to King Abdullah's efforts to normalize relations with Israel. Many Jordanians, particularly those of Palestinian origin, have also criticized the government for not taking a stronger stand in opposition to U.S. measures against Iraq. In this connection, some believe that the King's wife Queen Rania, who comes from a distinguished Palestinian family, may help garner support from the Palestinian community.

Some observers see the Jordanian monarchy as the most likely to be negatively affected by regional instability, and doubt that the Kingdom of Jordan as presently constituted can long survive. A less pessimistic view holds that despite some dissatisfaction with government policies, a significant portion of the population has a vested interest in the relative prosperity and stability Jordan has achieved over the years and would be reluctant to jeopardize it. Moreover, the monarchy derives strong support from key constituencies, including the armed forces, tribal leaders, senior officials, and various ethnic, sectarian, and societal groups. The very diversity of Jordanian society may encourage support for the Hashemite monarchy as an alternative to domination by a specific faction or interest group.⁸

Kuwait

Given the age and ill health of Emir Jaber al-Ahmad Al Sabah and Crown Prince and Prime Minister Shaikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Salem Al Sabah — both of whom are in their early 70s — political succession in Kuwait is a question of some importance. The Emir suffered a serious stroke in September 2001, limiting his

⁸ See also CRS Report 98-703, *Jordan: Succession Issues*.

ability to govern. The Crown Prince (and, until recently, Prime Minister), Shaikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Salem Al Sabah, reportedly suffers from serious health conditions, including recurring colon problems, which could lead to his death before the Emir.⁹ Consequently, much of the responsibility for running the government on a day-to-day basis has been delegated to the 74-year-old former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al Sabah, due to the illness of more senior leaders. In a landmark development, on July 13, 2003 the Emir promoted Shaikh Sabah to Prime Minister, thereby splitting the positions of Crown Prince and Prime Minister, which had long been held by the same individual. There are several younger potential successors with significant experience in government, such as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammad Al Sabah, but they have not sought to persuade the existing leaders to step down.

The guidelines for succession in Kuwait are determined in part by the Kuwaiti Constitution and in part by tradition. Constitutionally, Kuwait is a hereditary emirate, and its leader must be a descendant of the late Shaikh Mubarak Al Sabah, known as “Mubarak the Great.” The Constitution also requires that the Emir nominate an heir apparent within one year of his accession, and that the nominee be approved by a majority vote of the National Assembly. According to a historical agreement made after the death of Mubarak the Great in 1915 between his two sons, Jaber and Salem, leadership in Kuwait alternates between the Ruling Family’s two branches, al-Jaber and al-Salem. Currently, the Kuwaiti Emir belongs to the al-Jaber, and the Crown Prince belongs to the al-Salem branches. Although in most cases succession alternates between the Jaber and Salem clans, should the present Crown Prince die before the present ruler, the current Prime Minister could become heir apparent, even though he comes from the al-Jaber side of the family.

The infirmity of the senior leadership has created significant delays in making key political and economic decisions, and fostered an image of political stagnation. The ability of the ruling triumvirate to govern effectively has been further circumscribed by their association in the minds of the people with the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait in 1990-1991. After the invasion, some opposition groups demanded the introduction of democracy in Kuwait and an end to the dominance of the Al Sabah family. The United States, the guarantor of Kuwaiti security, also pressed the Kuwaiti leadership to implement democratic reforms. The government responded by reinstating the National Assembly, suspended twice since the mid-1970s, and embarking on a limited course of political reform. Islamic fundamentalist opposition to the ruling Al Sabah family has largely been contained within the context of Kuwait’s elected National Assembly, and virtually no anti-regime violence has occurred there since the Gulf war; however, a robust opposition challenges the government periodically on specific issues.¹⁰

⁹ “Kuwaiti Emir Heeds Calls for Domestic Reform and Appoints New Premier,” *Agence France Presse*, July 12, 2003.

¹⁰ See also CRS Report RL31533, *The Persian Gulf: Issues for U.S. Policy, 2003*, and CRS Report 98-600, *Kuwait: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*.

Morocco

King Hassan II of Morocco died on July 24, 1999, and was succeeded by his 36-year old elder son, who became King Mohammed VI. The then unmarried Mohammed VI named his only brother, Moulay Rachid, as Crown Prince. King Mohammed later married, and on May 8, 2003, the King and his wife, Princess Lalla Salma, welcomed the birth of their first son, Moulay Hassan. The royal family also includes the King's sister Lalla Hasna, who has two sons, and two first cousins, Princes Moulay Hisham and Moulay Ismail. Mohammed VI's siblings and cousins are performing official duties of varying importance.

Royal succession in Morocco is based upon the principle of primogeniture, and has not been in contention in the past. According to the Moroccan Constitution, as amended on September 13, 1996, the monarchy is hereditary in the line of the late King Hassan II. Rule passes to the King's eldest son, unless he appoints another one of his sons as successor.

The King enjoys extensive constitutional powers. He has the right to appoint the Prime Minister and choose the ministers of interior, foreign affairs, justice and Islamic affairs (these ministers tend to be chosen from outside the political parties). The King has the power to dismiss the government, dissolve parliament, and rule by decree. He also presides over the judiciary, and is the supreme commander of the armed forces. He appoints the regional governors, or *Walis*, and the heads of public enterprises. Under the previous monarch King Hassan II, the King's closest advisors — including former politicians, businessmen, and senior army officers — formed part of a central administration known as “the Makhzen,” which also had considerable influence over policy. Some analysts looked on the Makhzen as a parallel institution to the government and legislature, which are prescribed in the Constitution. Critics of the regime called for the revision of the Constitution to reduce the King's prerogatives and separate the powers of the monarch and the government. Since assuming the throne, King Mohammed VI has dealt more with governmental institutions and views himself as a constitutional monarch.

In September 1996, the Constitution was amended to provide for the creation of a bicameral legislature. The parliament consists of a lower house, called the Chamber of Representatives, and an upper house, called the Chamber of Advisers. The 325 members of the Chamber of Representatives are elected by direct universal suffrage for a five-year term.

Opposition groups have been largely integrated into the political system. On February 4, 1998, King Hassan appointed the leader of an opposition party to the Premiership who assembled a center-left coalition government. This was seen as the beginning of *gouvernement d'alternance*, a system in which left- and right-wing parties alternate in power. Although small extremist Islamist groups exist and are supported in particular by young militants, since the 1980s the main currents of the Islamist movement sought to reach a compromise with the government. In March 2002, several hundred thousand Islamic fundamentalists converged in Casablanca to protest a program of social reforms that would have substantially improved the social and legal status of Moroccan women, forcing the King to delay its implementation. Islamists and their supporters are likely to oppose other similarly “western-oriented”

changes. Subsequently, the suicide attacks in Casablanca carried out on May 16, 2003 by terrorists allegedly linked to Al Qaeda prompted a crackdown by Moroccan security forces; however, government leaders promised that there would not be a rollback of democratic reforms.¹¹

Oman

Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Bu Said has been the Ruler of Oman since 1970, when he led the coup that deposed his father, who had opposed most modernization measures throughout his reign. Sultan Qaboos is about 63 years old and in good health, but there is no heir apparent or clear successor, should he pass from the scene unexpectedly. Sultan Qaboos is not married, has no children, has no brother or cousin in a position to take over the reins of power, nor, it appears, has he groomed a successor. Moreover, the Al Bu Said family is small and without much influence on the Sultan, unlike the ruling families of some other Gulf States. For much of his reign, Sultan Qaboos has retained the key positions of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Finance for himself.

The bicameral legislature, known as the Council of Oman, consists of the 83-member Consultative Council, elected by limited suffrage since 2000, and the 48-member Council of State, appointed by the Sultan. The Sultan, however, has the right to negate election results. The Consultative Council has some limited power to propose legislation, although both chambers serve primarily in an advisory capacity.

It is widely assumed, due to the effectiveness of his rule to date, that Sultan Qaboos has developed a workable succession plan. However, the only publicly available information regarding succession in Oman is contained in the 1996 Basic Law, a constitutional document defining, for the first time, the organs and guiding principles of the state. According to the Basic Law, rule must pass to a male who is the legitimate child of Omani Muslim parents and a descendant of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan, a great-great-great grandfather of Sultan Qaboos. The Ruling Family Council has three days after the death of the Sultan to choose a successor; and, if the Ruling Family Council cannot agree on one, the Defense Council will confirm the appointment of the person designated by the Sultan in a sealed letter addressed to the Ruling Family Council. These constitutional provisions are, as of yet, untested.

The lack of a direct heir, the paucity of close family members with political experience, and the vagueness of the Constitution make future Omani succession unclear and could give rise to internal family conflict. Under some circumstances, these factors could make Oman vulnerable to outside interference in Oman's succession process. For the time being, however, the Omani regime seems stable. With the exception of an alleged Islamist plot in 1994 that led to a few hundred arrests, Oman has seen little unrest during the reign of Sultan Qaboos. The popular legitimacy of the government has been increased by the numerous reforms the Sultan has introduced, including prohibiting government ministers from holding interests in companies doing business with the state, establishing a bicameral legislature, and

¹¹ See also CRS Report RS20391, *Morocco: Royal Succession and Other Developments*.

guaranteeing basic civil liberties for Omani citizens. Most observers agree that there is no one among Oman's tribal leaders, security services, or religious establishment currently capable of usurping power in Oman.¹²

Qatar

Since Qatar gained independence in 1971, there have been two successions both of which have taken place outside of constitutional guidelines.¹³ In the more recent of these, the reform-minded ruler of Qatar, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, overthrew his father in a bloodless coup in June 1995. Observers have speculated that Hamad, who had begun to push a forward-looking agenda while serving as Crown Prince, may have wanted a freer hand to bring his reforms to fruition. The United States and the United Kingdom quickly recognized the new Emir, helping to solidify his rule. It was the first successful palace coup in the Gulf since Shaikh Hamad's father ousted his cousin Ahmad 23 years earlier. In appointing the third eldest of his four sons, Shaikh Jasim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, as Heir Apparent in 1996 (and in replacing Shaikh Jasim with the fourth eldest son Shaikh Tamim in 2003), Shaikh Hamad broke with the principle of primogeniture. The Emir, who is about 53 years old, has three younger brothers: Abd al-Aziz, who lost his cabinet position in 1992 and has since lived abroad; Abdullah, who is Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior; and Muhammad, who is Deputy Prime Minister. The Emir's cousin and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hamad bin Jasem is also ambitious and politically influential.¹⁴ None of these individuals, however, seems likely to challenge the current Emir.

Shaikh Hamad's program of political liberalization seems to have strengthened the legitimacy of his regime, making usurpation by one of these players less likely. In March 1999, the long-anticipated election for a Central Municipal Council occurred. This was the first time a Gulf country enfranchised all male and female citizens in a nationwide election. In late 1998, the Emir had announced that a constitution would be drafted providing for an elected National Assembly to replace the appointed 35-member consultative council in place since independence in 1971. The Constitution, approved in April 2003, stipulates that rule is hereditary within the Al Thani family; vests legislative power in a 45-member Advisory Council, two thirds of whom are directly elected and one third appointed; and provides for an independent judiciary. Women have the right to vote and can run for office. Furthermore, Shaikh Hamad has lifted some of the restrictions on political expression, and allows the much publicized al-Jazeera news network to broadcast

¹² See also CRS Report RL31533, *The Persian Gulf: Issues for U.S. Policy, 2003*, and CRS Report 95-1071, *Oman*.

¹³ In Qatar, Article 4 of the temporary Constitution restricts the right of selecting the successor Crown Prince to the Prince himself provided that the former is a descendant of the ruling dynasty.

¹⁴ J.E. Peterson, "The Nature of Succession in the Gulf," *The Middle East Journal*, Autumn 2001.

from Qatar uncensored, a periodic point of contention between Hamad and some of his fellow rulers.¹⁵

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia appears to be undergoing a quiet transfer of power from the ailing King Fahd ibn Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, who suffered a stroke in November 1995, to his half-brother and heir apparent, Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz. Although still holding the title King, Fahd has yielded day-to-day governance to Prince Abdullah and other senior princes of the royal family. Approximately 80 years old, the Crown Prince is as almost old as the King (approximately 82), but he appears to be in better health. Defense Minister Prince Sultan, a full brother of King Fahd and now in his mid seventies, is widely considered to be next in the line of succession after Abdullah.

Succession in Saudi Arabia has been a relatively smooth process in the past based on family consensus; however, future uncertainties could arise. Saudi Arabia's founder, King Abd al-Aziz bin Abd al-Rahman al-Faysal Al Saud (often called by his nickname "Ibn Saud") established the practice of familial succession in the Kingdom. The four Kings who have reigned since his death in 1953 (Saud, Faysal, Khalid, and now Fahd) have been among his eldest sons. In 1992, the "Basic Law" promulgated by King Fahd set forth some principles regarding succession in writing for the first time. According to the Basic Law, rule passes to the male descendants of King Ibn Saud, who include 43 sons from various marriages and over 200 grandsons. The Basic Law also stipulates that the King select the Crown Prince from the most "upright" among King Ibn Saud's descendants. In the past, succession has usually conformed to seniority of age, although in some cases an older brother has waived his position in favor of a younger one.¹⁶ However, owing to the advanced age of the men of the ruling generation of the Al Saud family (the youngest is in his sixties), succession will likely pass to a younger generation in the foreseeable future.

Most commentators believe that succession will pass to Crown Prince Abdullah and subsequently to Prince Sultan in a relatively smooth process. The more intricate issues of succession are likely to arise after Abdullah and Sultan pass from the scene. At some point, competing multi-generational claims and internal rivalries could put unprecedented pressure on the consensus that has held the Saud dynasty together in the past, with unpredictable consequences for the stability of the kingdom and its future policies. Several factions, based in part on maternal blood lines, are discernable among the surviving sons of the King Ibn Saud. For example, the so-called "Sudayri Seven," who are sons of King Ibn Saud's favorite wife Hasa bint

¹⁵ See also CRS Report RL31533, *The Persian Gulf: Issues for U.S. Policy, 2003*, and CRS Report RL31718, *Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations*, May 9, 2003.

¹⁶ For example, after acceding to the throne in 1964, the late King Faysal ibn Abd al-Aziz named a younger brother, Prince Khalid, as Crown Prince, thus by-passing an older brother Prince Muhammad, who renounced any claim to the throne. Richard F. Nyrop, "Saudi Arabia: A Country Study," Washington, The American University, Foreign Area Studies, 1984, p. 222. (There is a more recent edition of this book, but it does not provide the same detail on succession.)

Sudayri, form an important faction that includes King Fahd, Prince Sultan, and several other key officials (but not Crown Prince Abdullah).¹⁷

Other factors that could complicate succession are the differences in social and political orientation among members of the royal family. In particular, the princes who occupy the two top positions in the line of succession, Abdullah and Sultan, reflect two trends that have co-existed over the years within the Saudi leadership: the traditional trend, which seeks to preserve the country's national character based on Islamic values and desert virtues; and the modernizing trend, which places great emphasis on acquisition of western technology and is associated with a more western orientation. Even here, however, the picture is complex, as Crown Prince Abdullah has recently spoken out in favor of wider political participation and economic reform.

In the final analysis, differences between the traditional and modernizing segments of the family are likely outweighed by important areas of consensus. Both groups, through belief or expediency, adhere to the cornerstone of Saudi political philosophy of a governmental system based on Islamic law (*Shariah*).¹⁸ Both look with disfavor on the militant Islamic fundamentalist factions that have challenged the Saudi government in the last few years, although traditionalists like Crown Prince Abdullah enjoy some respect in the fundamentalist camp. (On the other hand, some commentators believe members of the royal family have been overly tolerant or even supportive of militant Islamic fundamentalism, especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001.) Saudi leaders to varying degrees seem to support wider participation in the political system, but generally do not support parliamentary democracy in the western sense. King Fahd, after promulgating the March 1992 basic law that created an appointive Consultative Council (which has no legislative functions), was careful to state that traditional forms of consultation between Saudi rulers and subjects are better suited to Saudi institutions and customs than a western parliamentary system would be.¹⁹

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) may see a transition from the ailing Shaikh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahayyan to a successor member of his dynasty in the relatively near term. Shaikh Zayid, who is the ruler of the emirate of Abu Dhabi, helped found

¹⁷ One commentator goes so far as to speculate that rival princes including members of the Sudayri Seven have pressed to keep the ailing King Fahd alive, if only artificially, until Crown Prince Abdullah should pass away, in an effort to prevent Abdullah from acceding to the throne. Robert Baer, "The Fall of the House of Saud," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 2003, p. 56.

¹⁸ The present-day Saudi Kingdom is based on a 250-year-old alliance between the Saud family and the leaders of a Puritanical Islamic movement widely known as the Wahhabi movement, which was preached by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a religious scholar and reformer in the 18th century.

¹⁹ See also CRS Report 96-113, *Saudi Arabia: Succession and Implications* by Alfred B. Prados.

and became President of the seven-member²⁰ UAE federation in 1971. Shaikh Zayid is in his late eighties, and his health has reportedly declined since he received a kidney transplant in 2000. Although Shaikh Zayid remains a well-respected figure in the Emirates and the region as a whole, his involvement in daily policymaking has declined due to his age and health problems. His 19 sons have assumed much of the responsibility of day-to-day politics, particularly Crown Prince Khalifa bin Zayid Al Nahayyan, Shaikh Zayid's eldest son by his favorite wife, Fatima. Crown Prince Khalifa, who is about 45, is likely to succeed his father; however, the issue of succession could be clouded if the rulers of the other six emirates of the UAE federation, or even factions within Abu Dhabi itself, oppose Khalifa as leader. The UAE appears well prepared to undergo this transition because it has faced little domestic unrest, its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is the highest in the Gulf, and there is relatively little dissension in the local society.

Less certain is who will succeed Shaikh Khalifa as Crown Prince. Deputy Prime Minister Sultan bin Zayid Al Nahayyan has been most often mentioned in this regard, although UAE Armed Forces Chief of Staff Mohammed bin Zayid Al Nahayyan is also considered a contender.

According to the UAE Constitution, the President and Vice President are elected by the Supreme Council of Rulers from among its members, who are the rulers of the seven emirates. Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the two most affluent emirates, hold sway over major discussions of the Council. The rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, respectively, have held the positions of President and Vice President of the UAE federation since it was founded in 1971. Thus, barring a major change in the balance of power in the Council, the next ruler of Abu Dhabi is likely to be elected President.

The UAE lags behind some of the other monarchies in political liberalization. The President appoints a Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (cabinet). Proposals submitted to the Council require the approval of at least five of the Rulers, including those of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The Federal National Council, a consultative body, comprises 40 members appointed from the seven emirates (eight each from Abu Dhabi and Dubai, six each from Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, and four each from Ajman, Fujariah and Umm al-Qaiwan) for a two-year term. The Federal National Council reviews laws proposed by the Council of Ministers and can reject them or suggest amendments.²¹

The federal government does not usually intervene in the internal affairs of the component emirates. A rare succession crisis in the small emirate of Ras al-Khaimah in June 2003, however, prompted the UAE President (and ruler of Abu Dhabi) to send an armored force into Ras al-Khaimah to quell a challenge by the former Crown Prince of Ras al-Khaimah to the current ruler of that small emirate. The former Crown Prince had been removed from the succession by the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, who appointed a half brother of the displaced Crown Prince in his stead. Although

²⁰ The seven emirates are Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Ajman, Fujayrah, and Umm al-Qaywayn.

²¹ See also CRS Report RL31533, *The Persian Gulf: Issues for U.S. Policy, 2003*, and CRS Report 98-436, *United Arab Emirates: U.S. Relations and Prospective F-16 Sale*.

the short-lived rebellion appears to be over, some analysts think the succession issue could arise again in Ras al-Khaimah or possibly another emirate.

The Republics

The republics — Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen — have all had some experience with multi-party politics, even if fleeting and superficial. Each has a constitutional mechanism in place delineating the succession process in theory. Even so, in many cases, it is difficult to predict who the successor will be. In practice, several presidents heading nominal republics seem to be laying the foundation for creating a process of dynastic succession, resembling a monarchy. This has already occurred in Syria, for example, where the late President Hafiz al-Asad was succeeded after his death by his son (see below). This incipient practice may bode ill for democracy, and could reduce the parliamentary system many of the leaders formally espouse to a symbolic function.

Over the last 50 years, all of these states, with the exception of Tunisia, have experienced international, civil, or domestic strife, and most have undergone extra-constitutional governmental changes. These historical circumstances have contributed toward a pattern in the Middle East of leaders with military backgrounds coupled with an emphasis on large standing armies. The reliance of many republican leaders on the state security apparatus to stay in power has often stymied democratic reforms.

Algeria

Abdulaziz Bouteflika, who is 66 years old and had been considered a possible successor to the presidency on two previous occasions, has been President of Algeria since April 27, 1999. Bouteflika became the clear front runner in the 1999 election after his candidacy was endorsed by the National Liberation Front (FLN), the Rally for National Democracy (RND), and former Defense Minister Khaled Nazzar. The six other presidential candidates withdrew the day before the election, alleging voter fraud and demanding cancellation of the election results.

According to the Algerian Constitution, as amended in 1996, the President must be an Algerian Muslim and at least 40 years of age. He is elected by universal, secret, direct suffrage for a five-year term, which may be renewed once. If the presidency becomes vacant, the President of the Council of the Nation (upper chamber of parliament) temporarily assumes the office, and organizes presidential elections within 60 days, on condition that he may not be a candidate for the presidency. The President appoints the Prime Minister, who in turn appoints the Council of Ministers (cabinet). The Constitution also provides for a bicameral legislature. Members of the lower chamber, the National People's Assembly, are elected by universal, direct, secret suffrage for a five-year term. Two-thirds of the members of the upper chamber, the Council of the Nation, are elected indirectly by regional and municipal authorities for a six-year term; the remainder are appointed by the President.

The constitutional provisions regarding succession obscure the role of the army leadership, Algeria's most powerful political institution, in selecting candidates for the presidency. Since 1965, however, when Armed Forces Chief of Staff Houari Boumedienne overthrew founding President Ahmed Ben Bella, the military establishment has exercised extensive political power. Although the army's decision-making process remains opaque, the men it has selected for the presidency have certain traits in common. Since Algeria gained independence from France in 1962, all five Presidents (Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumedienne, Chadli Ben Jadid, Liamine Zeroual, and Abdulaziz Bouteflika) have been military leaders, or were leaders in the nationalist struggle against France, or both. Boumedienne, Ben Jadid, and Bouteflika all ran unopposed. Prior to 1992, however, the army had exercised its influence more or less indirectly, working through the country's ruling party, the FLN, which had been in the forefront of Algeria's struggle for independence and governed the country from 1962 until 1992.

In October 1988, widespread dissatisfaction with the secular FLN prompted then President Chadli Ben Jadid to institute reforms, including the separation of state and party and the legalization of opposition parties. The fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), a party seeking a state governed according to Islamic law, won the first multiparty local elections in 1989, gained 188 out of 430 seats contested in the first round of voting for parliament in 1991, and was expected to win a majority of legislative seats in a second round. Before the second round could be held, however, the secular-oriented army intervened in January 1992, forcing Ben Jadid to resign and canceling the election. An extra-constitutional High Council of State took over, with army officers in charge despite civilian figureheads. FIS was banned and its leaders imprisoned. As the political path was closed, militant Islamists resorted to violence, which the state countered with harsh measures. The resulting civil war between government security forces and Islamist militants continues to this day, although at a somewhat reduced level of intensity and violence.²²

In January 1994, with the impending expiration of the High Council of State's mandate, the military high command appointed General Liamine Zeroual president for a three-year transitional period. In November 1995, Zeroual's presidency gained more popular legitimacy when he won the first contested presidential election in Algeria's history. With his position enhanced, Zeroual promulgated constitutional amendments granting greater authority to the executive and prohibiting political parties based on differences in religion, language, race, gender, or regional origin. Talks held by Zeroual with imprisoned FIS leaders through intermediaries proved fruitless, and some speculated that a group of "eradicators" in the army, intent on eliminating Islamism in Algeria, may have blocked his attempts at political

²² The Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the military wing of FIS, was responsible for attacks against the regime prior to its declaration of a unilateral cease-fire in 1997. Two other groups, however, have been responsible for the more indiscriminate acts of violence against civilians and foreigners: the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and, more recently, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which is now considered the most violent group in Algeria. Both of the latter groups are identified as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the State Department, and the GSPC has been linked by some to Al Qaeda.

accommodation. Others, however, disputed this explanation.²³ In September 1998, Zeroual announced that an early presidential election would be held the following year and that he would not be a candidate.

A former Foreign Minister, Bouteflika, who appeared to enjoy military support, won the 1999 elections after other candidates withdrew from the contest, claiming election fraud. Shortly after coming to power, Bouteflika proposed a peace initiative under which Islamist militants who surrendered by mid-January 2000 would be granted amnesty. The government estimated that 80% of members of armed groups surrendered as a result. Fighters from the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS, the military wing of the FIS) were also granted amnesty in return for helping the army combat Islamist militants who remained active. Although the FIS has ceased to be a significant factor in the domestic political scene, two moderate Islamist political parties, Movement for a Peaceful Society and En Nahdah, have operated legally within the political system since 1992. Meanwhile, the former ruling FLN, which had been in eclipse during the military rule of the 1990s, won a majority of seats in parliamentary elections held in 2002. Presidential elections are scheduled in 2004 and President Bouteflika, a former FLN member but now heading a new party, reportedly plans to run.

Egypt

Muhammad Hosni Mubarak has been President of Egypt since October 13, 1981, after his predecessor, President Anwar Sadat, was assassinated by a group of militant Islamists. The National Democratic Party (NDP), the President's party, has been in power since it was established by the late President Sadat in 1978. President Mubarak, elected in September 1999 to his fourth six-year term, is 75 years old and reported to be in good health. The President has been the target of several assassination attempts.

The Constitution provides only a partial explanation of the succession process in Egypt. According to the Constitution, the President, who must be of Egyptian parentage and at least 40 years old, is nominated by at least one-third of the members of the People's Assembly (Parliament), approved by at least two-thirds, and elected by popular referendum to a six-year term. Constitutionally, if the President passes from the scene without a Vice President, the President of the People's Assembly temporarily assumes the presidency. If the People's Assembly is dissolved at the time, the President of the Supreme Constitutional Court takes over, on the condition that neither one nominates himself for the presidency.

In practice, since the death of President Gamal Abd al-Nasser in 1970, the Vice President has twice succeeded the President with little question.²⁴ The issue of

²³ See, for example, "Betchine Leaves," *The Estimate*, October 23, 1998, pp. 1, 11; "Power Struggle Heats up as Betchine Resigns," *Middle East Economic Digest*, Oct. 30, 1998, p. 10. (General Betchine was a close aide to President Zeroual.)

²⁴ Since the 1952 revolution, which resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic, all four Egyptian Presidents have been their predecessors' (continued...)

succession in Egypt is complicated by the fact that President Mubarak has never appointed a Vice President, perhaps out of fear of creating a rival.²⁵ In the absence of a clearly designated successor, there have been rumors that President Mubarak is grooming his 37-year-old son, Gamal Mubarak, for succession.²⁶ In any case, the military and security forces, who back the current regime, will likely play a central role in the selection and accession of a successor because they control the principal levers of power in Egypt.

By most accounts, Egypt's progress towards democracy has been slow. Emergency laws, which give the security forces wide powers to arrest and detain suspects, have been renewed at regular intervals since the assassination of President Sadat. President Mubarak's autocratic leadership style and forceful suppression of the regime's opponents have drawn international criticism. In its most recent annual report on human rights, the U.S. State Department says there is convincing evidence that the Egyptian police use torture to extract confessions. According to Amnesty International's 2002 Annual Report, thousands of suspected supporters of banned Islamist groups have been detained without charge or trial.²⁷ The government closely monitors, and sometimes prevents, public demonstrations because such events risk providing a forum for expressing resentment toward the regime, and possibly violence. Recently, however, the Egyptian authorities have tolerated some rather large demonstrations against Israel and the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

With respect to governmental institutions, the relative independence of the judiciary represents a noteworthy example of Egypt's progress towards democracy in recent years.²⁸ According to State Department human rights reports, some judges are becoming more independent and are deciding cases against the government. Egypt also has a largely elected bicameral legislature, wherein the Shura Council (upper house) serves in an advisory capacity, and the People's Assembly (lower house) debates, but rarely proposes, legislation, which is usually submitted by the government. In the People's Assembly, 444 members are elected for five-year terms, and another ten are appointed by the President. In the Shura Council, 176 members

²⁴ (...continued)

second-in-command. In 1954, Deputy Prime Minister Nasser deposed President and Prime Minister Muhammad Neguib, and subsequently became President. Anwar Sadat, Vice President under Nasser, became President after Nasser's death in 1970 and governed until his assassination in 1981. Mubarak, Vice President under Sadat, has been President ever since.

²⁵ Some commentators have speculated that former Field Marshal Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala was removed from his position as Defense Minister because he had become too popular.

²⁶ These rumors appeared to gather momentum after President Bashar al-Asad succeeded his father as President of Syria. President Mubarak has emphatically denied these rumors, saying "We are not Syria." "Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak Dismissed the Idea that One of His Sons Would Replace Him," *Middle East and North Africa Today*, July 5, 2001.

²⁷ Amnesty International 2002 Annual Report, [<http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/mde/egypt!Open>].

²⁸ Cases against Islamic militants are tried in military courts where the government prevails and opportunity for appeal is nil.

are elected for six-year terms, and 88 are appointed. The cabinet (including the Prime Minister), which is appointed by the President, is responsible for drafting legislation and submitting it to the legislature. The government party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), won a plurality of seats in both houses in the most recent parliamentary elections.²⁹ Although religious parties are banned, their supporters have been elected to the People's Assembly as "independent" candidates.

Egypt's halting progress towards democracy may be at least partly attributable to the perceived Islamist threat to the government. Some analysts have suggested that the possibility of violent Islamist activity in Egypt has increased, as a result of the swift defeat of Iraq by U.S. forces and the ensuing occupation.³⁰ Many Egyptian officials maintain that the Islamic threat to Egypt is minimal and that only a few militant terrorists are attacking tourist and police facilities, but other Egyptians maintain that the Islamists are the core of wider public dissatisfaction that could lead to the overthrow of the current Egyptian government. Also, in this connection, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is the parent of other Muslim Brotherhood branches seeking to replace current regimes in Jordan, Syria, and other relatively secular countries by more Islamic oriented regimes.

Iran

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has had a diffuse power structure, with an appointed supreme religious leader and a democratically elected President. The establishment of a theocratic regime in Tehran has given the clerical establishment considerable political power.³¹ Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamene'i, who is about 64 years old, has served as the Supreme Leader of Iran since the death of his predecessor, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in 1989. The Supreme Leader holds the highest religious office in Iran for life and exercises considerable political power, with the authority to appoint key officials and to weigh in on legislation as he sees fit.

Hojatoleslam Seyyed Mohammed Khatemi, a reformer, has been President since August 3, 1997, and is currently serving his second, and final, four-year term.³² The President appoints the cabinet, although all ministers must be approved by the unicameral legislature or Majlis before taking office. The political balance in the

²⁹ In the October-November 2000 People's Assembly elections, the National Democratic Party (NDP) won 388 seats, independents won 37 seats (17 of whom were Muslim Brotherhood supporters and several others were sympathetic to the government), the Wafd Party won 7 seats, Tagammu won 6 seats, the Nasserites won 3 seats, and al-Ahrar won 1 seat. In the May/June 2001 Shura Council election, NDP members won 74 of the 88 seats contested with independents winning the other 14 seats.

³⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit - Riskwire, "Egypt Risk: Alert - Iraqi 'Humiliation' May Spark Islamist Backlash," May 6, 2003.

³¹ Divisions between left and right political forces in the country are reflected in the clerical leadership as well. In recent years, a number of liberal clergy have been harassed, and even arrested, by their conservative counterparts.

³² The President is constitutionally barred from seeking a third term.

Majlis has been tilting increasingly in favor of the “reformers”³³ since 1996, and in the 2000 parliamentary elections President Khatemi’s supporters gained majority control. Both the President and the Majlis are elected by universal adult suffrage for four-year terms. The Supreme Leader, however, is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and through his control of the coercive levers of power (the military and police), can override decisions of the elected President and Majlis.

Two constitutional bodies exercise considerable influence over the succession process. The Council of Guardians, composed of six Islamic clerics and six lay lawyers, approves candidates standing for election to the Majlis and the presidency. The Council is presently dominated by conservatives who may use their authority to thwart reform.³⁴ The Council of Experts, composed of 86 clerics, selects the next supreme religious leader upon the death of the incumbent. According to the Constitution, if there is no recognized successor on the death of the supreme religious leader, a three- or five-man body assumes the leadership of the country in the interim.

Since 1989 an increasingly bitter power struggle has developed between conservative Islamic purists and more moderate reformists. President Khatemi’s program of political and social reform has been obstructed by conservatives in the Council of Guardians and the Council of Experts, which vet proposed legislation for compliance with Islamic law and the Constitution, and the Council to Determine the Expediency of the Islamic Order, which mediates disputes between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians. In addition to blocking reformist legislation, hardliners in the judiciary have closed more than 60 reformist newspapers and imprisoned or questioned several editors and even some members of the Majlis. If Khatemi were to resign, as he has occasionally threatened to do if his reforms are undermined, Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref-Yazdi would succeed, with a new election to follow within 50 days. If the Vice President also resigned, the Supreme Leader would appoint an interim President. Without President Khatemi’s moderating influence, some analysts believe the reformist camp may become increasingly radical in its demands for change.³⁵

³³ Political parties in the reformist camp include: The Servants of Construction, the Assembly of the Militant Clergy, the Islamic Participation Front, and the Crusaders of the Islamic Revolution, while the conservative camp is dominated by the Society for Militant Clergy, the Allied Islamic Society, and Society of the Qom Seminary Teachers.

³⁴ For example, many outspoken pro-reform candidates were barred from running in Majlis by-elections in 2001. The Council of Guardians’ influence is likely to be particularly apparent in the run-up to the next presidential election in 2005, when it will play the leading role in determining who is allowed to stand as the next reformist candidate in place of Khatami, who will have served the constitutional maximum of two consecutive terms.

³⁵ See also CRS Report RL31533, *The Persian Gulf: Issues for U.S. Policy*, 2003, by Kenneth Katzman.

Israel

The presidency, the government (Prime Minister and cabinet), and the Knesset (Parliament) are the basic political institutions of the state of Israel. Unlike many other states in the region, the Israel Defense Forces (military) does not, as an institution, play an independent role in politics. Several senior officers,³⁶ however, have had successful political careers after retiring from the IDF, perhaps reflecting the importance Israeli voters attach to security matters. Moshe Katzav, age 58, the formal Head of State, has been President since July 31, 2000, while the 75-year-old retired General Ariel Sharon, leader of the center-right Likud (Consolidation) Party, has been Prime Minister since March 7, 2001. Following the Knesset elections of January 28, 2003, Sharon formed a coalition government comprised of his Likud Party (38 seats), the secular Shinui (Change) Party (15 seats), the moderately religious National Religious Party (6 seats), and the right-wing National Union Party (7 seats) for a total of 66 seats. This mixed governing coalition has held together despite some differences on both domestic and foreign affairs.

The President, whose role is largely ceremonial, is elected by the Knesset for a single seven-year term. The speaker of the Knesset serves as acting head of state if the presidency becomes vacant. The President, in consultation with representatives of the parties in the Knesset, asks one of the members to form a government. In practice, this has usually been the leader of the party with the most seats in the Knesset.³⁷ If the Prime Minister dies, or becomes permanently incapacitated, the government designates another cabinet member from the Prime Minister's faction to serve as interim Prime Minister pending the formation of a new government.³⁸ For example, following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shimon Peres, became acting Prime Minister, and subsequently, with the agreement of the opposition Likud party, was invited to form a new government.

Members of the unicameral 120-seat Knesset are elected every four years under a system of proportional representation. Voters cast their ballots for parties, rather than individual candidates, although the party publishes a list of up to 120 names of

³⁶ Generals Ariel Sharon (Prime Minister), General Shaul Mofaz (Defense Minister), General Ehud Barak (former Prime Minister), and Generals Benjamin Ben Eliezer and Amram Mitzna (leaders of the opposition Labor Party) are among the military leaders who have risen to political prominence.

³⁷ A law passed in 1992 required the direct election of the Prime Minister starting in 1996; however, the law was rescinded in 2001, and the previous system of election on a party basis is once again in place.

³⁸ According to Paragraph 20.(a) of Israel's *Basic Law: The Government (2001)*, "If the prime minister dies, the government shall be deemed to have resigned on the day of his death." Paragraphs 20.(b) states that if the Prime Minister becomes permanently incapacitated, for example due to illness, "the government shall be deemed to have resigned on the 101st day during which the acting Prime Minister served in his place." Paragraph 30.(a) provides that in either case, the President, in consultation with the Knesset, asks a member to form a new government. For text of the this law, see [http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic14_eng.htm.]

its choices for Knesset seats. Deep divisions over such issues as the role of religion in the state, the peace process, the relative prosperity of the Ashkenazi (European) Jewish community compared with Sephardic (Oriental) Jews, and the relative poverty and lack of opportunities of Israeli Arabs compared with their Jewish counterparts have long affected the make-up of the Knesset. This fragmentation of the electorate along ethnic, religious, ideological, and socio-economic lines has led to a proliferation of political parties.

The multiplicity of parties in the Knesset encourages the formation of coalition governments, as a single party has never been able to win the requisite 61 seats needed to form a government by itself. The necessity of incorporating small parties, some with only a handful of representatives in the Knesset, into the coalition makes the government vulnerable to pressure from interest groups whose support is needed to pass legislation, and enables small parties to wield influence disproportionate to their size. The Prime Minister's ability to control the government's actions is limited by the fact that he must consult with his coalition partners in the selection of cabinet ministers and that he cannot dismiss cabinet ministers from office.³⁹ The government's tenure may be terminated by a Knesset vote of no-confidence,⁴⁰ by the resignation of the cabinet or the Prime Minister, or by the end of the Knesset's term in office.

Lebanon

The Lebanese Constitution provides a partial guide to the succession process in Lebanon. The President is elected by the National Assembly for a six-year, non-renewable, term. If the presidency falls vacant, the Assembly meets immediately to elect a new President. The President appoints the Prime Minister and deputy Prime Minister, in consultation with the Assembly. The Prime Minister chooses the cabinet, in consultation with the President and the Assembly. National Assembly deputies are elected for four-year terms representing electoral districts. The total number of deputies from each district and their religious affiliations are determined by the population of the district in accordance with an electoral law passed before each parliamentary election. Contending political factions prepare lists in each district, each list consisting of the appropriate number of candidates and their distribution by religious affiliation. Citizens vote for all candidates on the list of their choice, regardless of the voter's or the candidate's religion.

³⁹ Parties often seek ministries that focus on matters of central interest to them. For example, religious parties focus on the Ministry of Religious affairs, civil-rights-focused parties have a strong interest in the Ministry of Education, and Russian-based parties as well as the secularist Shinui Party have sought the Ministry of the Interior because it controls who can be registered as a Jew.

⁴⁰ 61 Knesset votes are required to pass a no-confidence measure, and the opposition must present an alternative government, with the support of at least 61 votes in the Knesset, to replace the existing government. The only successful vote of no-confidence by the Knesset occurred in March 1990 resulting in the ouster of the government of then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. The withdrawal of Shimon Peres and five Labor party colleagues from a cabinet meeting in protest over further delays to a proposed vote on U.S. plans for talks between Israeli and Palestinian delegations precipitated the crisis.

Historically, political succession in Lebanon has been fraught with difficulty. After gaining independence from France in 1943, Lebanon's political leaders came to an unwritten agreement, the "National Covenant," that parliamentary seats would be divided on the basis of 6 Christians to 5 Muslims. Seats were to be further apportioned among the various Christian denominations (Maronite, Orthodox, and smaller groups) and Muslim branches (Sunni, Shi'ite, and Druze, a small sect considered by some to be an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam). Similarly, the President would be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'ite Muslim. The National Assembly elected in 1972 — the last elections prior to the 15-year civil war — was composed of 53 Christians, 45 Muslims and Druze, and 1 representative for "minorities" in general.⁴¹ The civil war that began in 1975 delayed the 1976 election until 1992. At stake in the civil war were a variety of domestic and regional conflicts, but a significant factor in the 15-year civil strife involved efforts by internal political factions (many of which were supported by militias) to impose their respective visions of power sharing in Lebanon.

The political system became deadlocked in August 1988, when the National Assembly convened to elect the next President, but was unable to muster a majority in favor of any one candidate. In September, matters were further complicated when the outgoing President appointed a new Prime Minister, even though the existing Prime Minister, and his cabinet, had not resigned. On October 18, 1988, the National Assembly failed to elect a new Speaker who would preside over the Assembly session that would elect a new President. Thus, Lebanon had no President, two Prime Ministers, a National Assembly 13 years overdue for elections, no permanent speaker of the National Assembly, and a divided army. With the political process stalemated, the Arab League sponsored a meeting in Taif, Saudi Arabia in October 1989 to discuss governmental reforms. The Taif agreements paved the way for substantial reforms, including: increasing the National Assembly to 108 members, evenly divided between Christians and Muslims (including Druze); decreasing the authority of the President by giving executive authority to implement decisions to the Council of Ministers; and increasing the authority of the Speaker and the Prime Minister. In October 1995, in an effort to avoid further factional in-fighting, the National Assembly passed a constitutional amendment to extend the incumbent President's tenure for three years on a one-time basis.

In November 1998 the National Assembly elected the then commander-in-chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces, General Emile Lahoud, as President. General Lahoud's success in reconstituting the army after the civil war and his firm stance against corruption in public life were probable factors in his election, even though Lahoud's election necessitated an amendment to the constitutional provision requiring senior government employees resign from their positions two years prior to seeking political office. Another determining factor in Lahoud's election was his acceptability to Syria, which has exerted overarching influence on Lebanese affairs in recent years (see below). Self-made billionaire Rafiq Hariri has been Prime Minister since October 23, 2000, having served in this post throughout much of the 1990s as well. The breakdown of the National Assembly seats by party is: 64

⁴¹ Usually allocated to small Christian sects.

Muslim (of which 27 are Sunni, 27 Shiite, 8 Druze, 2 Alawite) and 64 Christian (of which 34 are Maronite). Alawites, like Druze, are generally regarded as offshoots of the Shi'ite sect of Islam.⁴²

General Lahoud is currently 67 years old. His six-year term expires in November 2004, at which time Lebanese leaders will have to decide whether to seek an extension of Lahoud's term (requiring a constitutional amendment) or face a potentially disruptive electoral campaign that could tax Lebanon's still somewhat fragile post-civil war institutions. As noted above, a decisive if unspoken factor will be the attitude of Syria, which exercises overriding influence in Lebanon through the extensive troop presence (currently 16,000-20,000) it has maintained in that country since 1976, ostensibly as a peacekeeping force.

Sudan

President Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, approximately 58 years old, and his National Congress Party (NCP)⁴³ dominate the political life of the country, particularly in the Muslim north. Islamic law (*Shariah*) was imposed in 1983 by the previous head of state, General Jaafar Numeiri, leading to the current civil war (see below). Six years later, Lt. Gen. Bashir seized power in a military coup. Since 1996, the President, who is both head of state and Prime Minister, has been elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term. Bashir has twice been elected President, in what have widely been regarded as rigged elections.⁴⁴ Current negotiations between the government and the southern-based Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) call for a new constitution and an interim period of six years. In 1999 and 2000, Bashir imposed emergency decrees, which have been the basis of his authority for the past several years. In the event that Bashir dies or otherwise becomes permanently incapacitated, the First Vice-President, Ali Uthman Muhammad Taha, would serve as interim President until the next election, to be held within 60 days. Bashir has appointed NCP members to most cabinet positions. The unicameral National Assembly is composed of 270 popularly-elected members and 90 appointed members, all of whom serve four-year terms. In December 1999, due to a power struggle with the Speaker of Parliament, Hassan el-Turabi, Bashir dismissed the National Assembly. Following the December 2000 National Assembly elections, the NCP controlled 355 of the 360 seats.

The military has been the main arbiter of power in the Sudan since independence from the United Kingdom in 1956. For much of this time, successive military dictatorships favoring an Islamic-oriented government have dominated national politics. Moreover, the Sudan has been ravaged by civil war for most of this period. Southern Sudan, with a predominantly non-Muslim population, has resisted

⁴² See also CRS Issue Brief IB89118, *Lebanon*.

⁴³ The NCP is an extension of the formally banned National Islamic Front (NIF) Party, a group that split from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1985.

⁴⁴ See State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2002. Sudan.
[<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18228.htm>]

what it perceives as attempts by the North to subjugate it to Muslim/Arab rule. Since the late 1980s, southern opposition has coalesced around the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

In April 2002, U.S. Special Envoy and former U.S. Senator John Danforth concluded that the war is not winnable by either side, and that a negotiated settlement is the only option. The government of Sudan and the SPLM/A have agreed to extend the cessation of hostilities agreement, signed during peace talks in Kenya in 2002. However, significant differences between the parties remain on the issues of power and wealth sharing, security agreements, and whether Khartoum, the capital, should become a secular city without the restrictions of *Shariah* law.

Syria

President Bashar al-Asad, who is currently 38 years old, has been President of Syria since July 17, 2000, shortly after the death of his father, the late President Hafiz al-Asad, from heart disease. The death of the elder Asad removed one of the longest serving heads of state in the Middle East and a key figure in the affairs of the region. The late President Asad, a former air force commander and minister of defense, came to power in a bloodless coup in November 1970. He exercised uncontested authority through his personal prestige and his control of the ruling Arab Socialist Resurrection (Baath) Party, the armed forces, and the intelligence apparatus. Asad also had strong support among members of his Alawite religious sect (a small Islamic sect), which comprises approximately 12% of the population but is disproportionately represented in the country's political and military institutions.

The process by which President Bashar assumed office in July 2000 was carefully orchestrated. In accordance with the Constitution, the first Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam served as acting Head of State during the transition of power. He stood little chance of succeeding to the presidency, however, as the late President Asad apparently had been grooming Bashar for succession since the sudden death of his eldest son Basel in 1994. Within days of President Asad's death, the People's Assembly had unanimously voted to amend the Syrian Constitution by lowering the minimum age required to become President from 40 to 34 years, Bashar's exact age; the Regional Command⁴⁵ of the Baath Party had elected Bashar Secretary General of the party, and had nominated him for the presidency; and, a decree had been passed promoting Bashar from his then rank of Colonel to Lieutenant-General and making him Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Following the approval of Bashar's presidential candidacy by the People's Assembly, 97% of voters voted for Bashar, the sole candidate, in a national referendum. The new President took the oath of office three days ahead of the expiry of the 40 days of official mourning proclaimed following the death of his father.

Fear that Bashar's accession might be challenged by one or more parties may account for the speed with which Bashar's candidacy was approved. On June 13, 2000, the late President's exiled brother, former Vice President Rifaat al-Asad

⁴⁵ The Regional Command is the top decision-making body of the Baath Party in Syria and as such represents an important segment of the Syrian political structure.

declared Bashar's imminent succession unconstitutional. Bashar's supporters may also have been concerned that some members of the Baath Party's "old guard," who had been marginalized by the late President Asad to pave the way for the succession of his son, might challenge Bashar's nomination. There may also have been some concern that the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood, which had long since gone underground, might reemerge and challenge Bashar's rule.

Bashar's early actions suggested a leader who would seek to modernize Syria in both the economic and political spheres. Several groups took advantage of the somewhat freer discussion of political issues initially permitted by the new President. On July 21, 2000, a group of 44 Islamic and professional figures sent Bashar an 'open letter' urging him to liberalize the political system. A group of 99 writers and intellectuals issued a declaration calling for an end to the state of emergency, tantamount to martial law, imposed on Syria since 1963, with the exception of a brief interval in 1973-1974. A National Assembly Deputy, Mamoun Homsy, drew attention to the excessive powers of the various security agencies and called for their merger into one organization.

Under Bashar, however, little has been done to weaken the power of entrenched political elites. There have been no indications that he is willing to allow the dominance of the Baath Party to be seriously challenged. President Bashar himself has warned reformists against attacking the interests of the Baath Party or the legacy of the late President Hafiz al-Asad. Several prominent reformers, including two members of parliament, were subsequently arrested after criticizing the government. The National Progressive Front (NPF),⁴⁶ a nominal coalition in which the Baath is the senior partner, holds 167 of the 250 seats in the unicameral People's Council (Parliament);⁴⁷ independents hold 83 seats. The President retains the sole authority for appointing the Vice-President(s), the Prime Minister, the deputy Prime Minister(s), and the Council of Ministers (cabinet).

Tunisia

Since Tunisia gained independence from France in 1956, it has had two Presidents: Tunisia's founding President and former independence leader, Habib Bourguiba (1956-1987), and Bourguiba's former Prime Minister and Minister of National Security Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-present; Ben Ali is currently 67 years old). In the second half of 1987, Bourguiba's behavior became increasingly erratic. On November 7, 1987, seven doctors declared the 84-year-old President Bourguiba unfit to govern, owing to senility and ill health. In accordance with the Constitution, Prime Minister Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was sworn in as President.⁴⁸ Because Bourguiba's condition was so apparent, there was no apparent opposition

⁴⁶ The NPF includes the Baath Party, the Arab Socialist Party, the Arab Socialist Unionist Party, the Communist Party, and the Syrian Arab Socialist Union Party.

⁴⁷ Members are elected by popular vote for four-year terms.

⁴⁸ At the time (1987), Article 57 of the Tunisian Constitution provided that the Prime Minister would assume the presidency in the event of the death, resignation, or permanent inability of the President. This provision was changed in 1988, as noted above.

to Ben Ali's takeover, which had been approved in advance by the majority of ministers and senior military officers. Ben Ali ran unopposed in the 1989 and 1994 presidential elections, and was reelected with 99% of the vote. In the 1999 presidential election, two authorized candidates opposed Ben Ali, Democratic Unionist Union (UDU) Secretary-General Abderrahmane Tlili and Popular Union Party (PUP) Secretary-General Muhammad Belhadj Amor, and together they obtained less than 1% of the total vote.

On July 12, 1988, constitutional provisions regarding succession were amended to stipulate that should the presidency fall vacant before the end of a President's term of office, the President of the National Assembly, rather than the Prime Minister, was to assume presidential powers until elections were held, but was himself prohibited from becoming a candidate. Moreover, the amendments abolished the position of President-for-life (a position held by the late President Bourguiba), and limited the President to two consecutive five year terms in office. The amendments also required presidential candidates to be between 40 and 70 years of age. A subsequent amendment allowed Ben Ali to run again, and he is now in his third term as President. According to press reports in July 2003, President Ben Ali plans to run for a fourth term in 2004.

Ben Ali's assumption of the presidency in 1987 at first appeared to herald the beginning of democratization in Tunisia. Although President Ben Ali has publicly committed himself to furthering the democratization process and promoting human rights, critics contend that he has done little more than establish a semblance of progressive reform. Opposition parties operate at the pleasure of the President, who countenances only an appearance of pluralism. For most of its history, Tunisia was a single party state. In April 1988 legislation was passed by the National Assembly instituting a multi-party system; in order to gain legal recognition, political parties had to uphold the aims of, and work within, the Constitution, and were not to be permitted to pursue purely religious, racial, regional or linguistic objectives.

Political life, however, continues to be dominated by the President's party, now named the Rally for Constitutional Democracy (RCD). The six legal opposition groups boycotted the 1990 parliamentary elections, on the grounds that they were neither free nor fair. An electoral code adopted before the 1994 legislative election reserved a certain number of seats in the unicameral parliament for the opposition. In the 1994 and 1999 parliamentary elections, opposition parties collectively increased their representation to 12% and 19% of seats in the Assembly, respectively.

Turkey

In Turkey, as in many other parliamentary democracies, the President is head of state and the Prime Minister is head of government. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, age 62, has been President since May 16, 2000. The 49-year-old Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the Islamic-based Justice and Development Party (AKP), has been Prime Minister since March 14, 2003. Following the parliamentary elections of November 3, 2002, the AKP holds 363 seats; the center-left Republican People's Party holds 178 seats; and, independents hold 9 seats.

The President, whose powers are limited, is elected by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Parliament) for a seven-year term. If the presidency becomes vacant, the speaker of the National Assembly serves as acting head of state until a new President is elected. The President appoints the Prime Minister, and the rest of the Council of Ministers (cabinet), upon recommendation of the Prime Minister. If a ministerial position (including the premiership) becomes vacant for any reason, a new appointment is to be made to it within fifteen days. The Turkish political structure is centered on the 550-seat unicameral legislature, with Assembly members elected by universal adult suffrage for five-year terms.

The Turkish military was instrumental in the formation of the Republic, and has played an important role in politics ever since. Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), founder and first President of the Turkish Republic, was a distinguished military commander, and he maintained close ties with the armed forces. Since the days of Ataturk, the military has regarded itself as the ultimate guardian of Turkey's secular parliamentary institutions. Through the National Security Council (MGK), composed of the top civilian and military leadership, military leaders exert significant influence over the political leadership.

Since 1960, the military leadership has deposed four governments, though direct or indirect means. In May 1960, Army leaders mounted a coup and briefly imposed martial law. The previous government was dissolved and many of its members arrested; in October 1961, the former Prime Minister and two cabinet ministers were hanged after being convicted of imposing a dictatorship. After holding a referendum ratifying extensive constitutional checks and balances intended to prevent the situation from recurring, the military allowed elections and the reinstatement of parliament in 1963. In 1971, senior military commanders issued an ultimatum to halt widespread unrest or face another imposition of martial law, forcing the resignation of the Prime Minister. In 1980, following another period of violence and economic chaos, military leaders intervened once more and overthrew the government, allowing a return to parliamentary government in 1983. In 1997, fearing that Turkey's secular institutions were under attack, Turkish military leaders launched a campaign to force the resignation of a governing coalition headed by an Islamist-leaning party. After the coalition resigned, the Turkish President, with military approval, tapped the leader of a moderate secular party to form a new government.

A new party with Islamist roots, the Justice and Development Party, has held a majority in parliament since November 2002. Although troubled by some actions on the part of the Islamist-oriented government, the military establishment does not appear to be poised to act against the government at this time. In fact, the ascendance of the Justice and Development Party, Turkey's active candidacy for membership in the European Union, and difficulties in its bilateral relations with the United States, have led some observers to speculate that the Turkish military leadership may be in retreat as democratization gains strength.

Yemen

Lt. General Ali Abdullah Salih, former President of North Yemen (1978-1990), has been President of the unified Republic of Yemen since May 24, 1990, two days after the Republic of Yemen was created through the merger of the formerly separate

states of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen).⁴⁹ President Salih, who had previously served as President of North Yemen from 1978 to 1990 and is currently about 61 years old, has been twice re-elected as President of unified Yemen, in October 1994 and September 1999. In the April 2003 legislative elections, Yemen's ruling General People's Congress (GPC) secured 210 seats, the Islamic Reform Grouping or Islah 43 seats, the Yemeni Socialist Party 9 seats, and the Nasserite Unionist Party 4 seats. Thirty-five seats remained undeclared.

The President is elected by popular vote for a seven-year term. If the President becomes incapacitated, the Vice President serves as interim President until a new election is held. The President appoints the Vice President, the Prime Minister, and the deputy Prime Minister(s). The Council of Ministers (cabinet) is appointed by the President, on the advice of the Prime Minister. The bicameral legislature consists of an upper house, known as the Shura (Consultative) Council, with 111 members appointed by the President; and a lower house, known as the House of Representatives, with 301 members elected by popular vote for six-year terms.

There has been some speculation that President Salih intends to establish a "dynastic" presidency. He has appointed his eldest son, Ahmed, as commander of a newly-formed elite special forces unit charged with combating terrorism and kidnappings, two serious problems in Yemen. Although President Salih has denied that he is grooming his son as heir apparent, he has suggested that his son might wish to become a presidential candidate.

Some analysts interpreted constitutional amendments pushed by Salih to extend the terms of the President and legislators and expanding the authority of the executive as evidence that he was trying to create a "royal" presidency. The amendments also increased the size of the Shura Council, which is appointed by the President. Critics charged that the influence of the appointed Shura Council had been increased at the expense of the elected lower house. Moreover, the changes would make it more difficult for opposition members to become presidential candidates, because they would now be required to have backing in the Shura Council in addition to the House of Representatives. Others, however, point to the fact that Yemen was the first country on the Arabian Peninsula to have a democratically elected President and House of Representatives, with female suffrage.

In spite of his electoral success, President Salih faces many challenges. Initially, his principal opposition came from the southern-based Yemen Socialist Party (YSP), but its influence has diminished since the failure of an attempt by southern Yemeni leaders to secede from the unified republic in 1994. Deep divisions between north and south remain from the 1994 civil war and previous conflicts, however, and government control has long been tenuous or lacking in more outlying areas. Limitations on effective governmental in more distant parts of the country have

⁴⁹ Smaller in area but much larger in population, North Yemen had been governed by a relatively conservative regime reflecting a more tribal society, while South Yemen's government had been strongly Marxist.

enabled terrorist groups to operate in Yemeni territory, particularly in remote tribal areas. Tribal leaders continue to kidnap foreigners to extract concessions from the government. Moreover, radical Muslim elements pose a threat to the stability of the country. Islah, Yemen's main Islamist party, is a relatively small but powerful force. Led by parliamentary speaker Shaikh Abdullah bin Hussein al Ahmar, Islah draws much of its membership from the powerful Hashid tribal confederation. Although some wings of the party are more moderate, others are inclined toward Islamic extremism. Islah advocates the application of Islamic law (*Shariah*) in Yemen, and the leader of its military wing, Abdul Majid Zandani, reportedly has close ties to Osama bin Laden. The global "war on terror," however, has strengthened Salih's hand in dealing with extremist elements and has brought U.S. support for Sahih's counter terrorism efforts.

Other Governing Bodies

Iraq

Prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March and April 2003, Iraq was governed by a secular one-party regime headed by the Baath Party (a rival wing of the party that governs Syria). Saddam Hussein assumed the presidency in 1979; in 1990, the Parliament made him President-for-life.⁵⁰ In October 2002, Iraq announced that Saddam Hussein was elected to another seven-year term as President with 100 percent of the vote.⁵¹ Hussein ruled the country as a military dictatorship, ruthlessly suppressing opposition.⁵² Although Hussein never appointed a successor, some commentators speculated that he may have been grooming one of his sons for the position. On April 9, 2003, Baghdad fell to U.S.-led forces, and Saddam's rule effectively collapsed.⁵³

The situation in Iraq is fluid, and it is unclear what the mechanism for succession will be in the next government. A former State Department counter-terrorism official, Paul Bremer, has been appointed as the civilian administrator in Iraq by the Bush Administration, replacing General Jay Garner.⁵⁴ The Coalition Provisional Authority, which Bremer heads, appointed a 25-member Governing Council consisting of Iraqis from various ethnic, religious, and political groups on

⁵⁰ "Iraqi Parliament Wants Saddam to be President for Life," *The Associated Press*, July 19, 1990.

⁵¹ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Claiming 100 Percent Vote for Hussein, Iraq Hails Its 'Democracy,'" *Washington Post*, October 17, 2002.

⁵² For example, in May 2003, a number of mass graves, presumably filled with the bodies of the regime's opponents, were uncovered after U.S. and allied forces took control of large parts of Iraq. Scheherezade Faramarzi, "Iraqis Uncover Graves of Civilians, Apparently Slain After 1991 Anti-Saddam Uprising," *Associated Press Newswires*, May 4, 2003.

⁵³ Raavi Nessman and David Espo, "Iraqis Topple Statue to Celebrate End of Saddam's Rule," *Associated Press Newswires*, April 9, 2003.

⁵⁴ Patrick E. Tyler, "New Overseer Arrives in Iraq in U.S. Shuffle," *The New York Times Abstracts*, May 13, 2003.

July 13, 2003, as an initial step toward the creation of an indigenous post-war Iraqi regime.

Libya

The government of Libya is most often associated with the leadership of Col. Muammar al-Qadhafi. Although, under the existing system the country does not have a head of state, Qadhafi, who is approximately 61 years old, carries the unofficial title of “Guide of the Revolution.” On September 1, 1969, Qadhafi and some 70 Libyan army officers and enlisted men seized control of the government, abolished the monarchy, and declared Libya a republic. In December 1969, the 13-man Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) headed by Qadhafi issued a proclamation that replaced the Constitution and confirmed the RCC as the supreme legislative and executive authority. The United States did not oppose the 1969 government change in Libya because the RCC at the time was anti-Soviet and reformist.

In the 1970s, Qadhafi introduced a number of changes in Libya’s political system, ostensibly to allow the populace greater participation in government. In 1973, he proclaimed a “Popular Revolution” aimed at involving citizens in government through “Peoples’ Committees.” These committees, in turn, send delegates to the General People’s Committee (council of ministers), which approves laws and sets policy guidelines. In 1976, Qadhafi issued the first volume of his three-volume “Green Book” that outlined his vision of the government and economic system for Libya. On March 2, 1977, Qadhafi officially changed the country’s name to the Great Socialist Peoples’ Libyan Arab Jamahiriyah; Qadhafi coined the word Jamahiriyah to mean “state of the masses” or “peoples’ authority.” The system described in the “Green Book” is a participatory democracy, although the actual government of Libya looks more like a dictatorship. Qadhafi himself has held no formal governmental position since 1977, but in practice, Libya has remained a military regime dominated by Qadhafi, with the Peoples’ Committee serving merely to rubber-stamp his policies and to inculcate the populace with his revolutionary ideas.

During his nearly 34 years in power, Qadhafi’s regime has faced many challenges, initially from conservative opponents of his revolution and more recently from Libya’s various Islamist groups. There have reportedly been numerous attempts on Qadhafi’s life and several attempted coups. Despite the emphasis Qadhafi has placed on Islamic values and his staunch opposition to Israel and the West, militant Islamist groups seeking to overthrow his regime have engaged in an armed confrontation with Libyan security forces for over a decade. In the late 1980s, when the Islamist challenge emerged in earnest, the country was suffering a severe economic downturn due largely to declining oil revenues and international sanctions. The army, long a bulwark of the regime, appeared increasingly demoralized as a result of its seven-year embroilment in neighboring Chad.

To shore up support for the regime, Qadhafi initially embarked on a limited course of political and economic liberalization, releasing hundreds of political prisoners and encouraging private enterprise. However, the Islamist movements were

only curtailed in the late 1990s after a decade of repression of Islamist dissent.⁵⁵ The easing of international sanctions against Libya in 1999 may have further helped dissipate the opposition. At the March 1, 2000, session of the General Peoples' Congress, in a move many observers interpreted as a way of deflecting criticism away from himself, the Libyan leader abolished the positions of 12 cabinet secretaries and reassigned their duties to the provincial committees. The key Secretaries for foreign affairs, defense, justice, and finance, however, remain under the authority of the centralized General Secretariat.

Because Libya has no constitution and little is known about the inner-workings of the regime, succession remains an open question. Qadhafi is in his early sixties, and, in spite of rumors that he suffers from psychological disorders, appears to be in good health. While some commentators speculate that the opposition may succeed in ousting him, others maintain that his grip on power is firm enough to enable him to establish dynastic succession.⁵⁶ When, on March 2, 2000, Qadhafi told a political rally that Libya needed a "constitutional reference" that would provide for a head of state, there was some speculation that the position might be intended for one of his sons. The most frequently mentioned in this regard is his second eldest son, Seif al-Islam, who chairs the Qadhafi International Foundation for Charitable Associations and has been sent on a number of formal and informal diplomatic missions; however, there is little doubt that control will remain firmly in the hands of Qadhafi and a small group of his close confidants.⁵⁷

Palestinian Institutions

Yassir Arafat has represented the Palestinian community for more than three decades, in several capacities. He was elected President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1996. He has been Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) since 1969. He was a co-founder of the *Fatah* organization, now a major faction within the PLO,⁵⁸ in the 1950s. Finally, he is the head of the Palestinian State, which was officially declared by the PLO in 1988, although it controlled no territory at the time.⁵⁹ However, Arafat's autocratic leadership style and his apparent unwillingness or inability to curb corruption in the PA have weakened his credibility as a Palestinian leader. Arafat's credibility as a partner in the peace process has been damaged by violence associated with the continuing Palestinian uprising, which

⁵⁵ Yehudit Ronen, "Qadhafi and Militant Islamism: Unprecedented Conflict," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4, October 2002.

⁵⁶ R. Takeyh, "Qadhafi's Libya and the Prospects of Islamic Succession," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (Feb. 2000), pp. 154-64.

⁵⁷ See also CRS Issue Brief IB93109, *Libya*.

⁵⁸ For more information see CRS Report RS21235, *The PLO and Its Factions*.

⁵⁹ On Nov. 15, 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organization National Council declared a Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem. Some 100 nations, not including the United States, recognized the new state even though it did not have a government or any territory under its sovereignty. The 1988 declaration notwithstanding, Arafat has since specified several dates on which he would declare a state unilaterally, but has delayed the declaration each time.

broke out in September 2000. Largely due to his failure to halt Palestinian suicide bombings targeting Israeli civilians, Israel has confined him to his headquarters in the town of Ramallah on the West Bank. Both the Israeli and the Bush Administration would like to see Arafat marginalized and replaced with a new Palestinian leadership. However, at this time, Arafat appears to enjoy strong support among the Palestinians.

Arafat is about 74 years old and reportedly suffers from Parkinson's disease and other physical ailments resulting from a near-fatal airplane crash in 1992. He has avoided appointing a successor, perhaps out of fear of creating a rival. According to the PA constitutional document known as the Basic Law, which Arafat signed on May 30, 2002, if the PA presidency becomes vacant, the speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (Parliament) serves as interim President for 60 days, during which time new elections are held.

Until recently, Arafat retained sole discretion in the appointment of cabinet ministers, and there was no Prime Minister. The United States and others have demanded that Arafat rid the PA of corruption, put an end to the violent Palestinian uprising, and appoint a Prime Minister to assume the responsibility for the daily affairs of the Authority, as prerequisites for resuming the peace process. On March 8, 2003, under intense international pressure, Arafat nominated former Palestinian negotiator and Fatah co-founder Mahmoud Abbas, sometimes called Abu Mazen, as the first Palestinian Prime Minister.⁶⁰ Following Abbas' appointment, Arafat demonstrated that he can not easily be sidelined by staging a ten-day political standoff over the selection of cabinet ministers. In due course, however, a compromise was reached, and President Bush's decision to meet with Abbas in early June 2003, while ignoring Arafat, may have enhanced Abbas' prestige, at least temporarily, vis-a-vis Arafat.

Abbas is 67 years old, and reportedly suffers from prostate cancer. He is widely viewed as a moderate reformer, and was the main negotiator on the Palestinian side of the Declaration of Principles, an Israeli-Palestinian agreement signed in 1993. Abbas' condemnation of the use of violence and his long experience in the peace process, often as an informal intermediary between the PA and Israel, met the approval of many in the international community.⁶¹ Abbas, however, is not as popular among ordinary Palestinians, many of whom resent his conciliatory approach towards Israel.⁶²

⁶⁰ Robert Tait, "Pressure is too Great for Isolated Arafat," *The Times*, April 24, 2003.

⁶¹ See for example, Olivier Knox, "Bush Says Can 'Work With' New Palestinian PM," *Agence France-Presse*, May 1, 2003. Some Members of Congress, however, have urged President Bush to demand more political and security reforms of the PA and a complete cessation of terrorist attacks on Israel. "Mideast 'Map' Gets Push by President; Hill Majorities Cool to Quartet," *Washington Times*, May 9, 2003.

⁶² See also CRS Issue Brief IB92052, *Palestinians and Middle East Peace: Issues for the United States*.

Prospects

As the preceding discussion illustrates, the Middle East is a patchwork of different governmental models roughly grouped into monarchies and republics, but distinctions are fuzzy; many are based on hereditary succession in practice if not always in theory, with power concentrated in a ruling elite and a narrow range of political choice. Despite lengthy tenures, some Middle East regimes tend to be fragile, often without a firm basis of legitimacy. Closely related to stability is the issue of succession, which is sometimes ill-defined in these countries. In recent years, however, the process has been relatively smooth in most Middle East countries. The turn of the century saw the death of four major Middle East leaders including the heads of state in Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco, and Syria, and in each case their sons assumed the leadership in an orderly transfer of power. In Saudi Arabia, a quiet process of succession appears to be under way, as the ailing King Fahd has turned over the reins of government to his half brother, Crown Prince Abdullah.

The situation in the Middle East is complex and fluid in the aftermath of the U.S.-led Operation Iraqi Freedom. Not all of the war's repercussions on the Middle East scene are clear so far. In the past, major military conflicts in the Middle East have sometimes been followed by domestic upheavals in the region. Revolutions that overthrew the old order in Egypt, Iraq, and Libya, for example, as well as some other major governmental changes have sometimes come in the aftermath of Arab-Israeli wars or other significant conflicts in the Middle East. It is probably premature to assess the likelihood that Operation Iraqi Freedom might lead to a such a development.

In recent decades U.S. policy has placed a high priority on stability, sometimes at the expense of compatibility with other U.S. policy goals, to guarantee that vital U.S. interests in availability of Mideast oil, prevention of terrorism, or the security of Israel, are not jeopardized by violence or the emergence of a strongly anti-U.S. regime. Some critics charge that U.S. policy makers are overly concerned with stability and have been too willing to accommodate regimes that do not fully share U.S. values or oppose key U.S. policies.

The recent war in Iraq brings added relevance to this discussion. Some commentators believe that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein could provide the impetus for an overhauling of other Middle East regimes, especially those that support or tolerate terrorist groups in the Middle East or have poor human rights records. Some go so far as to advocate that the United States reduce or end its support even for traditional friends, who do not meet U.S. criteria for democracy or adopt policies incompatible with U.S. values. Saudi Arabia is sometimes mentioned in this regard, in view of a political system based on fundamentalist Islam, alleged laxity in suppressing terrorist funding, and lukewarm support to U.S. strategic endeavors such as the war against Iraq.⁶³ Others, however, question the propriety or advisability of trying to impose new regimes on Middle East countries, thereby

⁶³ Numerous reports indicate that despite their lack of public support for Operation Iraqi Freedom, Saudi and some other Middle East leaders privately welcomed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and provided discreet support to U.S. efforts.

unleashing potential unrest, creating regimes that might be perceived as U.S. puppets, or ultimately creating regimes more hostile to the United States than those they replace. Still others suggest that a successful U.S. effort to put in place a more democratic regime in Iraq could impel other countries to initiate reform measures without the direct intervention of the United States.

The U.S.-led military campaign to disarm Iraq and end the regime of former President Saddam Hussein could have wider effects on governance in Middle East countries. The opportunity to craft a new government together with revised political and economic institutions in Iraq could dramatically increase U.S. influence on other regimes in the Middle East region. At the same time, U.S. intervention followed by an extended U.S. occupation of Iraq could create a backlash, particularly at the popular level, that could make regional states more wary than they already are of accommodating U.S. policies. Important factors in determining the outcome of U.S. post-war efforts in Iraq will be the degree to which the United States and other cooperating nations can bring about a prompt return to stability, a successful process of reconstruction, an early end to the U.S. occupation in Iraq, and long term reforms that are perceived as beneficial to the people of Iraq and the Middle East as a whole. A more orderly and clearly defined process of succession could be a bi-product of changes that may affect the political systems of Middle East countries in the aftermath of the war in Iraq.