

**In Memoriam:
Celebrating the Lifelong Contributions of a Marvelous NELC Scholar at IU**

Universities as educational establishments devoted to the production and dissemination of knowledge, when aiming to carry these heavy responsibilities conscientiously, contribute to the real and permanent good in this world, and as such they are the true philanthropic institutions—performing *sadaqah jariyah*. Small numbers of teachers and researchers in these learned institutions manage to leave powerful legacies of scholarship through their publications and, more importantly, a *silsilah* of accomplished pupils. Even smaller numbers succeed in leaving behind the most eternal and valued of societal capital: a personal reputation, a good name. As Shaykh Muslihuddin Sa'di of Shiraz has sagaciously said:

*Sa'diyaa mardi nekunaam Namirad hargiz
Murda aanast ke naamash ba neku-yi nabarand*
(Oh Sa'di, a person of good name shall never die;
Dead are those whose names are not uttered for good deeds!)

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) at Indiana University, during its short history that now approaches a half a century, has faced and met considerable challenges, and has been blessed by the leadership and services of some remarkably dedicated scholars, teachers, mentors and leaders such as Professors Wadie Jwaideh (the founder and longtime Chairman of NELC). This scholar of Middle Eastern history, languages and literature was a pioneer of his fields at Indiana University. NELC owes much to him for his many contributions.

Not long ago we encountered a series of crises, which briefly threatened the very existence of NELC as an academic unit on our campus (1999–2000). We are however very pleased to have regained our academic strength and administrative credibility, and emerged more determined to keep NELC as an important part of IU's mission for providing and promoting international education in the United States. We are especially pleased to be able to celebrate the accomplishments of our former colleagues through the annual Wadie Jwaideh Memorial Lecture in Arabic and Islamic Studies and Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies. Both of these Memorial Lectures were inaugurated during the academic year 2002–2003, and we are delighted to publish the lecture (No. 9) by Professor Roger Owen, *In Memoriam*, to honor our colleague and to share their cherished memories with you.

The Memorial Lecture in this volume was made possible with the generous support from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (COAS) of Indiana University, members of the

Jwaideh family, their close relatives, students and friends around the world. We are grateful for their help.

It is with great pleasure that we can now announce that the Jwaideh Memorial Lecture Fund originated in 2003 and administered by the Indiana University Foundation to insure future funding for these important memorial lectures have surpassed our initial target and are fully endowed and its continuity assured thanks to those who have made generous contributions. We are delighted that these lectures will continue for decades to come, and thanks to you, future generations will continue to benefit from the latest social sciences and humanities research and analysis on the Middle East.

Dr. Alice Jwaideh's enthusiasm and dedication, widely supported by other members of her extended family, combined with equally important organizational support and financial contributions from our colleagues Professor Suzanne Stetkevych and Dr. Robert Olson of the University of Kentucky, were critical to the creation and success of the Jwaideh Lecture Fund during its first year. We are gratified by the generosity of many who have made donations to the Jwaideh fund and we are happy to gratefully acknowledge them in this publication. Many members of the Jwaideh family, especially Dr. Alice Jwaideh (Professor Wadie Jwaideh's widow) and Professor Albertine Jwaideh (his sister), have honored us by their presence at the lectures every year since its inauguration.

It is our hope that through the publication of these lectures, we are able to perpetuate the legacies of great teachers, true scholars, and inspiring guides. Indeed, it is the hope of immortalizing the memories of such exemplary colleagues and their good name and reputation that, with your generous help, we will be able to undertake presenting these Memorial Lectures for years to come.

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**Arab Republican Presidents for Life in the
Middle East and North Africa**

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Arab Republican Presidents for Life in the

Middle East and North Africa

In 2009, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika changed the Algerian constitution to allow him to stand for a third term - making him, in effect, president for life. By so doing he completed a process in which, across the Arab world from Morocco to the Gulf, most states are ruled either by presidents or monarchs all of whom fully intend not only to govern until they die but also to pass on their office to a son or a close relative, whenever possible. The only exceptions are Lebanon and Iraq. In Lebanon, the system of sectarian accommodation has so far prevented the emergence of a strong presidency. In Iraq, the president for life, Saddam Hussein, was overthrown by military invasion in 2003 to be replaced by a system of sectarian representation with, if anything, a weaker presidential and coalition structure than that of the Lebanese.

As a result, Arab republics have become more like Arab monarchies – what the Egyptian sociologist, Saad Eddine Ibrahim, has dubbed ‘*Gumlukiyas*’ (from *gumhuriya* – republic – and *malakiya* – monarchy) – while the monarchies have borrowed many of the authoritarian practices and institutions from the republics. Meanwhile, whatever the mechanism, politics is

dominated by the question of succession - as this is basic to the permanence of the regime and the continued prosperity of its associated networks.

Such systems have been decades in the making, having their origins in the mostly military leaders who came to power beginning in the late 1960s and who were able to learn how to build themselves the coup-proof regimes necessary to allow them to remain as presidents for the rest of their lives. These include – in chronological order - Muammar Gadhafi, who deposed of the Libyan monarchy in 1969, Husni Mubarak of Egypt (1981-), Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali of Tunisia (1987-), Omar Hasan al-Bashir of Sudan (1987-) and Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen (1990-). So far just one, Hafiz al-Asad of Syria (1970-2000) has managed to pass on power to his son. But there is every reason to suppose that others such as Mubarak, Saleh and Gadhafi, fully intend to try.

Given the novelty of such systems of personal and family rule, their rationale, structures, politics and the ways in which they seek to legitimize themselves are still little known. There are a few researchers who have begun to explore the political dynamics of individual countries, notably Tunisia, Algeria,

Egypt, and Syria. It is understood, for example, that each country now has an interlocking and relatively small elite composed of senior army officers, bureaucrats, and cronies who have a vested interest not only in regime preservation but also, in most cases, in limiting and controlling the impact of western-inspired political and economic reform. It is also becoming understood that in such systems, members of the presidential family are enormously involved in business and elections are managed to secure a reasonable turn-out and a predictable outcome. Additionally, opposition is co-opted or repressed and information about the major mechanisms of privatization and the award of state contracts is unobtainable, making rumour the only source of political information. Finally, some good work is being done on the mutations of Arab armies in the direction of becoming economic as well as military actors in the interest of reducing the demands they make on the financial resources of the state.

What so far has been lacking, however, is any attempt to evaluate all these aspects on a systematic basis as an example of a new form of rule. This system appears to be practiced intermittently across the non-European world but seen at its most concentrated form in the Arab world where incumbents benefit from the same context – oil revenues, western support in the war

against Islamic extremism, and to an increasing extent, from the type of demonstration effect in which ruling families and their advisers learn quickly from each other. Looked at from this perspective, almost every piece of domestic news coming from the Arab Middle East and North Africa can be seen as evidence of the same form of rule, its problems and, most of all, its necessary obsession with the matter of the presidential succession.

In the discussion that follows, I will try to answer four interlocking sets of questions:

One: Why republics and why presidents for life?

Two: What are the politics and what are the particular problems of family succession?

Three: Can the *gumlukiya* system - that of presidential monarchies - be considered stable and what are the possible future trajectories?

Four: Is this a particularly post-colonial, Third World phenomenon or does it have specific Arab features? If so, what are those features?

QUESTION ONE: Why republics and why presidents for life?

This is probably the easiest set of questions to answer because much the same phenomenon can be observed all across the post-colonial, newly independent world, beginning one might say in the Americas in nineteenth century and then becoming almost *de rigor* in the new Afro-Asian states after the Second World War. Republics were established in direct response to the system of rule by European Kings and Emperors from which they had just freed themselves. Presidents for life were instituted as the leaders of the new, post-independence regimes, often emerging from the military and usually legitimizing themselves in the name of a ‘revolution’. These figureheads saw the process of both safeguarding their country’s complete sovereignty and of insuring its ability to survive and prosper in the modern world as a lengthy one which they themselves were best prepared to supervise. As Mohamed Ayoub has reminded us in his seminal work, ‘The Third World Security Predicament’, the situation of the newly independent nation states was one of a perpetual insecurity in which they were constantly in danger of re-occupation, attack or a new form of neo-colonialism. From this perspective, strong leadership look like the only safe way forward.

But it appears there is a bit more to it than this. The notion of a republic had two very attractive features. One was that the pace set by the debates in Rome and the newly-independent United States did not necessarily imply creating a democracy of the “one man, one vote” variety. The other, and the more important, concerned the notion that sovereignty lay with ‘the people’ giving rulers ample scope, both to justify their rule and to legitimate practically anything they did in the name of this amorphous entity. All one had to do was to organize a referendum with, for example, 99 percent *yes* votes, and declare that ‘the people have spoken’. In a favourite recent example, Jehan Sadat, the widow of the late president Anwar Sadat of Egypt, argued that Husni Mubarak’s son, Gamal, has the right to stand as a candidate in some future presidential elections. She furthered this claim by stating that in the event he would be elected, it would be by the people’s will and therefore should not be considered “as inheritance of power.”

QUESTION TWO: What are the politics and what are the particular problems of family succession?

I think that it is generally understood – though not by Jehan Sadat, apparently - that in republics, presidents are not supposed to act like kings, that they

should not live in a palace but rather live in something called ‘The White House,’ and that they ought not to groom their son or some other male relative to succeed them. Indeed, this was the rule followed by the early Arab strongmen - Nasser, Sadat, Bourguiba, Boumedienne, Nimeiri, Qasim – none of whom gave any indication that they wanted a family member, and certainly not one of their sons, if they had any, to succeed them.

Things began to change in Syria with Hafiz al-Asad’s clear determination that first his son, Basil, should succeed him. When Basil killed himself in a high-speed car crash, al-Asad concentrated his efforts on establishing succession by his second son, Bashar. While the reasons for this are difficult to pin down with a degree of accuracy, it would seem to me that it all goes back to President Asad’s hospitalization in Damascus in late 1984. In what appeared to be a situation of mortal illness, President Asad came to believe that the Alawi community wanted his brother, Rifaat, to succeed him. Drawing upon these sentiments, he drew the conclusion – perhaps abetted by his close advisers - that the future of this small and distrusted community depended on permanent Asad rule, although not one by his impulsive, headstrong younger brother.

At any rate, and for whatever the reason, it began to be made clear that Hafiz al-Asad, or Abu-Basil (father of Basil) as he began to be called in the early 1990s, planned for his eldest son to succeed him. Nevertheless, there were obvious problems. Bashar was young, only in his early thirties, and so, compared with most of the president's older colleagues, untried. There were others who thought that they had better skills as well as greater rights to the job. Of course, such things were not supposed to happen in a modern, secular republic.

What one can now say is that, either by clever management or by good fortune, the plan succeeded and must now be seen as a template for those planning the same kind of coup, say in Egypt.

First, there was the process of getting the Syrian people used to the idea. Second, there was a bandwagon effect whereby the members of the political elite saw both their own chances for rule disappearing while having an alternative and predictable focus for their future allegiance. In such a way,

intentions as well as particular grievances could be flushed out, plans made, and potential opposition neutralized. Finally, there was the process of testing, of giving Bashar enough important tasks to assure his father, as well as the more sceptical members of the political elite, that he was up to the job.

Even so, it was not all plain sailing. Apart from the fact that Bashar was singularly less charismatic than his older brother, he was obviously not a soldier – something of great concern to the Syrian military. There were quite reasonable doubts about whether he could be trained in his own father's particular style of reclusive political management, in which all the strings of power came together in one office in the hands of one man.

To my mind, and, again, this is not something about which much is known, it seems to me a stroke of genius to place part of the official management of the succession process in the hands of what in England we would call a 'minder', the retired Minister of Defense, Field Marshall Mustafa Tlas. Not only was Tlas a Sunni, and therefore not a contender to lead what was, in effect, an Alawi regime, but he was also well- known and well-respected besides proving to be a man with considerable diplomatic and political skills. These

he used to help to school Bashar, make him presentable to the old elite, identify and to neutralize potential opponents and, when the time came, and Hafiz al-Asad had succumbed to a heart-attack in the midst of a telephone call with the Lebanese president, to put such a smooth process of succession in place that, within eight hours of his father's death Syrian TV viewers were able to see the son being installed by a hastily-called session of the Syrian parliament.

More success was to follow. Great care was then taken to ease Bashar into his new role, giving him the credentials of a reformer, encouraging the brief period of openness and hope known as the Damascus Spring, while gently easing out some, but by no means all of what had begun to be called 'The Old Guard'.

Finally, after a few more years, one could say that the particular politics of the post-succession period had come to an end. By 2004 or 2005, Bashar was well ensconced: he had a wife – now known as the first lady - and two young sons; and he had certainly established himself as the country's new leader, with a somewhat new style. Moreover, while his efforts at easing the parlous

economic situation were still hampered by vested interests inherited from his father – a subject to which I will return – there was no earthly point in anyone jockeying for position after he had gone. There will not be until he becomes much older or seriously ill for the first time.

Turning now to the succession question in Egypt, Syria has clearly become the model for what to emulate, what to avoid. And not just for Mubarak family and its advisers but for anyone involved in politics, whether in the regime party of the opposition. For this reason, there can be absolutely no doubt that once Mubarak senior dies or becomes incapacitated, we will find that there is a well-oiled process of succession, orchestrated we can also be reasonably sure by General Omar Sulieman, the head of intelligence, who has been groomed to play the Mustafa Tlas role, including that of making sure that Mubarak Junior will receive no trouble from the army.

Again, just like President Asad in his last months, who went off to King Hussein's funeral in Jordan to meet the other Arab leaders and to make sure his system of alliances was firmly in place, so too is President Mubarak active in cementing his major alliance with the United States, already well-

established by his assistance in the War on Terrorism and the Gaza blockade. Meanwhile, members of what can be called Egypt's loyal opposition, have no temptation at all to boycott the coming elections, lest they fall out of the game at such a vital moment, as well as, one would hope, no temptation either to push the opportunities provided by the expected Cairo 'Spring' so far as to provoke the harsh reaction that took place in Damascus in 2001.

Lessons to be learned elsewhere in the Arab world, where the succession question is also very much to the fore, are less clear-cut. For one thing, the next two most elderly presidents, Bouteflika in Algeria and Ben Ali in Tunisia, do not have sons. Thus, they have the somewhat different, and perhaps more complex task of ensuring the succession of a brother, in the one case, and, it would seem, a son-in-law in the other. Matters are even more complicated in what might be called the 'tribal' republics of Libya and Yemen. Here both leaders have a number of sons, while already facing significant opposition from their colleagues and cronies for seeming to prepare the eldest one as their official successor.

Libya also has the unique problem of actually not having a position of president to succeed to, with the ‘Great Leader,’ Gadhafi, running the country from his tent with none of the institutional apparatus you would expect in a normal Arab state.

These remarks lead on naturally to a consideration of **QUESTION THREE:** Can the *gumlukeya* system of Presidential monarchies be considered stable, and what are its possible future trajectories?

Let me begin by drawing your attention to something of a paradox: for the elite, the whole point of predictable successions is just that. Predictability, the process, by its very nature cannot produce anything with precise certainty. As I will now argue, much of this has to do with the very personal nature of the process, aspects of which either cannot be well-controlled or, at the very least, are so complex as to make it extremely difficult to do so.

First, there is the president himself, his temperament and his health. Neither he nor anyone else can predict how long he is going to live, making the

putative succession timetable difficult to work out. Take Syria, for example. There is reason to believe that the original timetable was based on the assumption that Hafiz al-Asad would live long enough to attend a possible handing-over party conference in 2007 leaving much more time of Bashar's on-the-job training. But that was obviously not to be.

Then there is what seems to be a general unwillingness among old men to hand over power before they breathe their last breath – clearly President Mubarak's position at the moment in Cairo now that it appears to have been decided that he is not actually dying of cancer. Even if one believes that he had something of a scare.

Second, there are the usual problems of the relationship between fathers and sons, beginning with the Arab presidential fathers' general unwillingness to believe that their sons have the skills needed to properly succeed them. Then there are the interests and possible intrigues of the wives and the other members of the presidential family – not to speak of the cronies and general hangers-on - all of them anxious about their future security and fearful that some of their privileges may be swept away by the possible new broom

wielded by new and, of course, younger president and his even younger reforming associates.

It is at the stage that the situation seems to me to become closer to the world of Shakespeare – the mad-cap escapades of a Prince Hal, the petulant interferences in plans already made of a King Lear - than that, say, of your ordinary political scientist. Or of your standard Arab nationalist ideologue either!

Yet another set of arguments concerning potential instabilities involve some of the key necessities of regime legitimization, at least in the eyes of the republican presidential regimes themselves. They appear to believe that they need to hold plebiscites and referendums and elections which the population knows will be rigged. They need to generate a reasonable amount of economic growth. And they need to maintain a charade of openness, which the behaviour of their police and their over-active, over-manned security services constantly belie.

True, these are problems which they share with the Arab monarchies and other authoritarian regimes elsewhere in the non-European world.

Nevertheless, they are all matters that involve some risk - and so take up huge amounts of administrative time. In Egypt, for example, as Lisa Blaydes has shown, the business of managing the next set of elections has become a permanent administrative preoccupation, ensuring the each one of them is run under different – and on some occasions – almost completely different rules, moving back and forward between party lists and individual candidatures, and between large and small constituencies, in an effort to combine control with the appearance of openness that both foreign and domestic interest demands.

Another set of problems involve securing sustained economic growth in a situation in which economic decisions are dominated by political ones and in which many of the regime's closest supporters, as well as some members of the ruling family, have personal interests to protect, such as the maintenance of monopolies or the continued existence of an inefficient public sector which can be looted at will. Egypt is a good example where the policies of opening up to the global economy advocated and sometimes pursued by members of Gamal Mubarak's young team, run counter to the personal instincts for self-

preservation to be found among many of the father's older cronies. Much the same situation obtains in, say, Syria or Libya.

Last but not least, such systems of permanent family rule as simply not in the interests of the vast bulk of the population whose liberties, human rights and often livelihoods they damage and constrain and whose future expectations they blight, making it likely that the present practice of resignation and weary acceptance must someday give way to a more active opposition.

Finally to the interesting **QUESTION FOUR**: Are the issues discussed here common to most parts of the former colonial world or has some special features which make it uniquely Arab?

Here, I must begin by saying that what we need to avoid at all costs is any attempt to answer this question with some reductionist or culturally-determined set of explanations based on the assumption that this is what the Arabs – or perhaps the Arab Muslims – like or want or expect or are used to. While it is true, perhaps, that nepotism is widely practiced throughout the

Arab world, say in family firms, of tribes or even many political parties, this is equally true of most parts of the non-Arab world as well. Indeed, the whole thrust of my argument is that the phenomenon of presidents for life comes from much the same post-independence problems that afflicted almost every new state.

Yet, to look at the recent political history of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is to notice some significant differences. There, the military still interfere, on occasions, to depose dictatorial presidents. There, successful father-to-son successions are considerably more rare. Why should this be? Two sets of related explanations suggest themselves. One is that the power of the Arab authoritarian state. Bolstered by oil and aid and Euro-American support, it is simply much greater and more pervasive than in almost all the rest of Africa. The other stems from this observation to argue that a very important part of the explanation for this same phenomenon is that, since independence and as a result of the existence of a host of formal and informal mechanisms, a thorough system of collaboration has been installed to ensure regime continuity. Beginning with the Arab League, intra-Arab cooperation and the very close ties that exist between Arab leaders, the Arab military, Arab security officials and police and so forth insures the spread of what might

somewhat cynically be referred to as Arab ‘best-practice’ as far as regime maintenance and well-being is concerned.

Some of this may seem obvious given the existence of so many pan-Arab meetings with so many pan-Arab training programs put on by so many pan-Arab institutions, such as the Prince Nayef University for Security Sciences in Saudi Arabia or the Arab police academy in Tunis. But it is only when you look at the way power is exercised across the Arab world with some comparative perspective that one begins to notice how widespread this process of mutual example and mutual borrowing has become. To give just one example among hundreds, I would cite the wording of the Egyptian party’s law of 1977 which defines what types of parties can and cannot be formed. I have found such wording by later parties laws in monarchical Morocco and republican Tunisia, as well as for some curious reason, the Turkish military one of the 1980s.

Given this situation of close association, mutual observation and systematic copying, it seems reasonable to assume that the constitutional and legal steps required to create presidencies for life would also be echoed round the Arab

world. So too with the steps taken to pass presidencies on to eldest sons, the more so as this has been the practice in the Arab monarchies as well. And it is this too, so it seems to me, that chiefly distinguishes the Arab state system from those elsewhere in Africa and Asia where no such mechanisms for monitoring, meeting and copying at all levels of the political, economic and social structures exist in such an intense way.

BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION

If what you find what I've just been arguing depressing, I think it is. Far from making the transition to greater political liberalization as seemed plausible in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Arab regimes have gone in the opposite direction, instituting permanent family rule of a crony-capitalist type while cracking down on all sources of opposition to what was taking place – on the grounds, as Eberhard Kienle suggests in his 'A Grand Illusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt', that there was certainly a great deal to criticize. That this was not good for anybody other than the members of a small elite is also very clear. In this respect, we might add parts of the secular middle class, convinced or having been convinced, that it is only the

presidential security regime that stands between them and a radical Islamic government.

That is the bad news. The good news is that such regimes have a built-in instability systematic enough to suggest that one or other of the major states will experience a serious shake-up at some time in the not-too-distant future – after which one or more of their neighbours will be encouraged to trim or to adjust their state practices according to the Arab demonstration effect that I have just been trying to describe.

To generalize greatly, such a shake-up could most obviously come one of two directions. The first involves some obvious form of regime mismanagement – perhaps concerning the succession itself, perhaps a disputed election – which is used by the opposition to create street demonstrations in which some of the new forms of collective action play a part – strikes, ‘flash demonstrations’ organized by cell-phones, poster campaigns and so on. A second direction a disturbance could emanate from is a more economically-driven process in which some of the former cronies, now enormously rich, become confident enough to press for a more predictable system of legal rules and regulations.

Such a movement may perhaps be underpinned by their willingness to form a new and more independent political party as a vehicle for their demands.

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