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THE NATURE OF SUCCESSION IN THE GULF

The unfolding crisis of succession in the Middle East has received considerable attention in recent years. This is particularly true in the Gulf where four of the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are led by aging rulers and the other two rulers, younger and recently enthroned, have chosen to take their small states on unprecedented and somewhat radical courses. It is disturbing that the mechanisms for the transferral of power remain disconcertingly vague and ambiguous. Effective leadership depends on having the right personalities in charge, and this is never an easy task in a hereditary system. As the Gulf régimes complete their transformation from shaykhly systems to monarchies, the question of succession will become an increasingly difficult problem.

J.E. Peterson's most recent positions have been in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Security and Defence of the Sultanate of Oman and at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London (www.JEPeterson.net). The analysis in this article relies principally on observations and interviews during several decades of travel to and residence in the Gulf. Because these do not lend themselves easily to citation, references to relevant published sources have been provided for each country. An opportunity to update information in the Gulf during January-February 2001 was provided by the International Institute for Strategic Studies and a grant from the MacArthur Foundation. I am also grateful for the comments on an earlier draft provided by Dr. Rosemarie Said Zahlan, H. St. John B. Armitage, and Dr. Hassan al-Alkim.

The unfolding crisis of succession in the Middle East has received considerable attention in recent years. Succession is a problem faced by nearly all Arab states, regardless of type of political system. Hereditary succession is of course a defining characteristic of monarchies but the Arab republics, as autocratic regimes weak in institutionalization, also face serious dilemmas as the current generation of leaders reach the end of their careers. While recent instances of succession in the region – King Husayn to his son ‘Abdullah in Jordan, King Hasan to his son Muhammad in Morocco, and President Hafiz al-Asad to his son Bashar in Syria – appear to have progressed smoothly, a plethora of question marks remain for other countries.

This is particularly true in the Gulf where four of the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are led by aging rulers and the other two rulers, younger and recently enthroned, have chosen to take their small states on unprecedented and somewhat radical courses. Despite widespread awareness of the problem confronting the GCC states, there is little detailed written consideration regarding succession scenarios and problems in the GCC, with the partial exception of Saudi Arabia.¹ The following pages provide brief sketches of the situation existing in each of the six countries.

SAUDI ARABIA

Much concern has been expressed by outsiders over King Fahd’s poor health in recent years because of the attendant question mark for them over succession. In fact, the peril of suitable succession has troubled the Saudi state since its initial emergence in the 18th century. This has been true as well of the Third Saudi State, i.e. the renewed regime founded by King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (commonly known in the West as Ibn Sa‘ud) after he recaptured the ancestral home of Riyadh in 1902. Despite paying lip service to the “traditional Arab” principle that a ruler had no right to name his heir but that succession should go to the strongest claimant who simply seized power, from the early 1930s at least King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz in fact prepared his eldest surviving son Sa‘ud to succeed him, naming him as Heir Apparent and securing family allegiance to Sa‘ud’s succession. This set in train two related phenomena. First, the principle was established of succession through the sons of King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz in chronological order, albeit with some

¹Recent works touching on succession and related political dilemmas in the Gulf states include F. Gregory Gause, III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994); Muhammad al-Rumaihi, "The Gulf Monarchies: Testing Time," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1996), pp. 45-51; Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989; rev. ed.; Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998); and Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democratic Prospects in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

exceptions. Second, because these sons display varying qualities as rulers, a pattern of rivalries between sons has been a feature over the last sixty years.²

The introduction of a Basic Law in 1992 laid down some principles regarding succession but did not answer all outstanding questions. The Basic Law stipulated that succession must go to the next oldest *and* most fit candidate (emphasis added). By requiring that succession remain in the line of the descendants of King 'Abd al-'Aziz, the way is paved for the grandsons to assume the throne in due course. But the Basic Law, probably deliberately, does not explain what methods should be chosen when succession reaches that point.

It is clear that the accession of Sa'ud on the death of King 'Abd al-'Aziz in 1953, instead of his far more capable brother Faysal, came close to destroying the kingdom. Sa'ud's recklessness in spending nearly bankrupted the state and his on/off flirtation with Egypt's President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir [Nasser] at a time when Egyptian troops were threatening Saudi Arabia from across the Yemen border finally provoked the ruling family to persuade Faysal to replace him in 1964. But Faysal's successful reign, marked by stability in external affairs and a measure of liberalization and development at home, was brought to a premature close by an assassin's bullet in 1975. Another son, and Faysal's half-brother, Khalid succeeded – but in tandem with yet another son, Fahd: at first, Khalid reigned while in effect Fahd ruled, as had been agreed, although Khalid soon acquired a taste for rule.³ Khalid's apparent success owed much to Fahd's competent handling of affairs and the prosperity brought about by the first oil price revolution. But Fahd, after he succeeded Khalid in 1982, was hit by the double blow of collapsing oil prices and eventually his own failing health.

Thus the present succession situation in Saudi Arabia bears resemblance to preceding ones, at least in Western eyes. There is no question that the next king – if not the next two or three – will be drawn from the numerous remaining sons of King 'Abd al-'Aziz. But the sons are growing old and their capabilities diminish as one nears the end of the line. As of mid-2001, 'Abdullah was not only Heir Apparent but the kingdom's effective ruler. King Fahd's six full brothers, the Al Fahd (or, as they – plus the king – are

²The perceived importance of succession in the kingdom is illustrated by the number of works on the subject, including: A.R. Kelidar, "The Problem of Succession in Saudi Arabia," *Asian Affairs* (London), Vol. 65 (N.S. 9), Pt. 1 (February 1978), pp. 23-30; Mashaal Abdullah Turki Al Saud, "Permanence and Change: An Analysis of the Islamic Political Culture of Saudi Arabia As It Faces the Challenges of Development with Special Reference to the Royal Family" (Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1982); Gary Samuel Samore, "Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia (1953-1982)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1983); Alexander Bligh, *From Prince to King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); and Joseph Nevo, "The Saudi Royal Family: The Third Generation," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, No. 31 (Spring 1984), pp. 79-90. Three more recent works focusing on the subject are Simon Henderson, *After King Fahd: Succession in Saudi Arabia* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1994; Washington Institute Policy Papers, No. 37); Sarah Yizraeli, *The Remaking of Saudi Arabia: The Struggle Between King Sa'ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997); and Joseph A. Kechichian, *Succession in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

³Muhammad bin 'Abd al-'Aziz was next in age to Faysal but had already surrendered his right to succession and so was passed over without resistance, presumably because of his dissolute reputation and since his full-brother Khalid was next in line.

sometimes called in the West, the Sudayri Seven, after the family of their mother) undoubtedly wish Fahd to hang on as long as possible, in part because every additional year of Fahd is likely to mean one less year for 'Abdullah, who is about 77 years old and only a year younger than King Fahd. But this is a double-edged sword because the next-in-line is Sultan, presently Minister of Defense and Aviation and the next oldest of the Al Fahd at about 76, who is not likely to long out-live 'Abdullah.

Much has been made of 'Abdullah's Shammari mother, as well as his Syrian and other Arab connections. Factors with probably more relevance to most Saudis are his conservatism and image of moral rectitude, especially when compared to Fahd's lingering playboy reputation, and the fact that Fahd has become indelibly associated with bad times economically. It is sometimes assumed that Nayif (about 67, presently the Minister of the Interior) and then Salman (about 64, presently the Governor of Riyadh Province) will follow after Sultan. But of course the longer 'Abdullah waits to become King, and the longer 'Abdullah then rules, the less time will be left to these individuals, if indeed they do succeed. More importantly, the longer 'Abdullah is king, the more opportunity he will have to put his stamp on the kingdom. This undoubtedly will include replacing Fahd's men with his own – at least in the Royal Diwan if not the Council of Ministers (which requires maintenance of a delicate balance) – and possibly even altering the progress of succession away from the Al Fahd. It seems safe to say that succession will move beyond the sons of 'Abd al-'Aziz to another generation within this decade. Furthermore, although Salman is noted for his competence and dedication, it seems unlikely that Nayif will prove to be a capable King, should he unexpectedly succeed. Conceivably, another spell with an unsuitable King (as with Sa'ud, Khalid, and latterly Fahd) will speed up the change and deny Salman his turn.⁴

A principal factor in persisting with the present line is the dilemma of agreeing where any change in the procedure will lead. With the number of males from the Al Sa'ud running into the thousands, there is no shortage of potential candidates. King Fahd may well prefer for one of his own sons to succeed him. The most politically prominent of his sons has been Muhammad (born 1950), Governor of the Eastern Province (which contains the great majority of the country's oil production) since 1985. But Muhammad's slim chances of succession are seriously handicapped by his reputation as a high-powered businessman grown wealthy on commissions and his playboy lifestyle. The King's favorite, however, has always been his youngest, 'Abd al-'Aziz (born about 1974). Even as a teenager, 'Abd al-'Aziz accompanied his father on state visits and GCC summits. In 1998, the King appointed this son a Minister of State and sent him on a high-profile visit to the United States.⁵ But 'Abd al-'Aziz is regarded as a lightweight with no place

⁴Some observers caution against counting Nayif out, however, and it should be remembered that, as Minister of the Interior, he controls the most important security agency in the kingdom. Mention should also be made of Ahmad, the youngest of the Al Fahd who strengths include his neutrality between his brothers and his role as member of numerous important councils.

⁵Of Fahd's other sons, his eldest, Faysal (born 1946) served as Director-General of Youth Welfare until his death in August 1999; Sa'ud (born 1950) is Deputy Director-General of Intelligence; and Sultan (born 1951) was the Deputy Director-General of Youth Welfare until the death of his brother Faysal.

in the succession. Given a scenario of King Fahd's early death and a longish reign by 'Abdullah, it is not impossible, although unlikely, that 'Abdullah's sons might also move into contention.⁶

Stronger candidates, however, have been the talented sons of the late King Faysal. Best-known among them is Sa'ud al-Faysal (born 1940), Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1975 and Deputy Minister of Petroleum before that. Highly qualified and dedicated, Sa'ud has suffered from certain intrusions of his cousin Bandar bin Sultan into his realm of foreign affairs, although he is well-regarded by both 'Abdullah and Sultan. His brother Turki al-Faysal (born 1945) has served as the Director-General of Intelligence since 1978, but is not generally considered a candidate. A third capable brother is Khalid al-Faysal (born 1941), Governor of the southern province of 'Asir since 1971 and heavily involved in promoting the King Faysal Foundation. Khalid's advantages are that he is close to his uncle Sultan and is better known to the people on the personal level than his brother Sa'ud.⁷ Conventional wisdom has held that the fortunes of this group have been kept on hold because of the threat they pose to the Al Fahd.⁸ Their natural alliance has been with Crown Prince 'Abdullah and it will be interesting to speculate if they prosper under 'Abdullah as King.

Any discussion of potential successors should include two dark-horse candidates, both grandsons of King 'Abd al-'Aziz. Bandar bin Sultan (born 1949) is the son of Sultan bin 'Abd al-'Aziz (Minister of Defense and Aviation) and the son-in-law of the late King Faysal. An air force pilot by background, Bandar rose to prominence in the diplomatic world when he was named ambassador to the United States in the 1980s. The granting of ministerial rank in 1995 in some ways was simply a recognition of his unofficial role as a roving ambassador and personal emissary of King Fahd – leading some to regard him as Foreign Minister in all but name. Still, the circumstances of his birth and mother probably rule him out. Al-Walid bin Talal has shot to world-wide prominence in recent years for his business acquisitions and by some accounts is reckoned one of the world's richest men. Although occasionally mentioned as a contender, al-Walid's interests have centered on business and not politics (he has never held an official position). Furthermore, he is undoubtedly burdened by his father's reputation. Talal bin 'Abd al-'Aziz was one of the "liberal princes," Minister of Communications and then Finance under King Sa'ud but his advocacy of democratic practices in Saudi Arabia pushed him into several years of exile in the early 1960s. Although he has lived in the kingdom since then, he never held government office again and his influential but controversial pronouncements from time to time on political and social matters keep him at the edge of Al Sa'ud society.

⁶One of his approximately one dozen sons, Mut'ib, presently is a full general in the National Guard, which is controlled by his father, where he serves as Assistant Deputy Commander for Military Affairs.

⁷Another son of note is Muhammad (born 1937), who served as Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Water for Desalination Affairs – which sparked his well-publicized idea of towing an iceberg from Antarctica to Saudi Arabia to provide water – but he left government service following the death of his father and is not a player.

⁸At the very least, they aroused the ire of Fahd when they tried to push through their late father's reforms during King Khalid's reign.

KUWAIT

Succession in Kuwait is constitutionally limited to the descendants of Shaykh Mubarak who reigned from 1896 to 1915 and secured Kuwait's independence from the Ottoman Empire by tying the country to the British. But rivalries within the family produced an ad hoc system of alternation between two branches of Shaykh Mubarak's descendants. These derive from the two sons who followed Mubarak: Jabir (ruled 1915-1917) and Salim (ruled 1917-1921). When the succession moved to the next generation, the penultimate ruler's son Ahmad al-Jabir was chosen instead of Salim's son 'Abdullah. For three decades, the family was split between the Al Jabir, the family of the late Amir Jabir and headed by Amir Ahmad, and the Al Salim, the family of the late Amir Salim and headed by 'Abdullah. The Al Salim regained ascendancy when 'Abdullah finally succeeded in 1950 and they kept the office when Sabah al-Salim replaced his brother as Amir in 1965. But the accession of the present Amir, Jabir al-Ahmad al-Jabir, in 1977, restored the alternation back to the Al Jabir.⁹ Kuwait's constitution also requires that the Amir name his Heir Apparent and that this choice be approved by the elected National Assembly. The Assembly was in suspension at the time of Amir 'Abdullah's death and the selection of an Heir Apparent by the family was never formally approved. It stood to reason that the new Heir Apparent to Amir Jabir should be chosen from the Al Salim according to the principle of alternation. The most prominent candidate was the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Information, Jabir al-'Ali. But he was regarded as too abrasive and uncontrolled and his cousin, Sa'd al-'Abdullah, was picked as a compromise. Of mean origin, inarticulate, and plagued by poor health, Sa'd has not been a popular Heir Apparent and his standing has been diminished even further by constant attacks in the National Assembly against the government which he heads as Prime Minister. It is widely believed that the Al Jabir have encouraged dissent within the National Assembly as a way of weakening the Heir Apparent, and there is speculation that the Al Jabir seek to eliminate the alternation altogether. Certainly, the Al Salim have grown far weaker than their rivals and even though Jabir al-'Ali was still reckoned to have a chance to succeed should Sa'd die before becoming Amir, Jabir died in 1994.

The sole remaining candidate from the same generation of this branch was until recently Salim al-Sabah al-Salim, the son of Amir Sabah and long-time Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense (and previously Minister of the Interior). But Salim was considered weak and not much of a match for his Al Jabir rival, Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir, the brother of Amir Jabir and long-time Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. He also suffers from Parkinson's disease and withdrew from politics in early 2001.

According to logical protocol, should Sa'd succeed Amir Jabir, Sabah should be appointed Heir Apparent as the Al Jabir candidate. But this is by no means certain. Sabah is not well-liked, lacks basic

⁹Sources on the recent political situation in Kuwait include Abdul-Reda Assiri and Kamal Al-Monoufi, "Kuwait's Political Elite: The Cabinet," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 48-58; Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Abdullah K. Alshayji, "Kuwait at the Crossroads: The Quest for Democratization," *Middle East Insight*, Vol. 8 (May-June 1992), pp. 41-46; Mary Ann Tétreault, "Designer Democracy in Kuwait," *Current History*, Vol. 96, No. 606 (January 1997), pp. 36-39; and Shafeeq Ghabra, "Kuwait and the Dynamics of Socio-Economic Change," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 359-372.

political skills, is resented for his extensive business interests, and bears part of the taint of "losing" Kuwait to the Iraqis in 1990.

The experience of invasion and occupation, so traumatic for most Kuwaitis, in fact has changed the country's political climate and has worked both to discredit the present generation of Al Sabah leaders and to bolster popular opposition to the ruling family's political dominance. Amir Jabir is said to be a shadow of his former self; Shaykh Sa'd is at the helm only fitfully; Shaykh Sabah is discredited and in feud with Shaykh Sa'd; and Shaykh Salim is out of the picture.¹⁰ For the future of the family, it may well be necessary to select the next Amir – or, more precisely, the next Heir Apparent after Sa'd – from a new generation. But the present generation took up public positions when in their 20s and 30s and have spent the last 40 to 50 years proving themselves and running the country. The following generation has never had the opportunity to prove themselves even though they are now into their 50s.

None of the ruling triumvirate's sons hold senior government positions. Although Amir Jabir is said to have fathered between 30 and 100 offspring, none are in prominent government positions nor is there a sign of any being groomed for succession. The most capable appears to be Salim al-Jabir (born 1947), who earned a doctorate from the Sorbonne during his career in the Foreign Ministry and served as ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva at the time of the Iraqi invasion. But he has spent most of his career abroad and is not well known in Kuwait.¹¹

The older children of Shaykh Sa'd were all daughters and his only son Fahd was born in 1960, who shows no aptitude for politics. Shaykh Sabah's sons Nasir and Hamad are active partners with their father in running one of Kuwait's biggest commercial concerns but there is no indication that Hamad is interested in politics. Nasir apparently is quite interested in becoming Amir and recently acquired a position as adviser to Shaykh Sa'd, thus strengthening his ties to the al-Salim branch.¹² Still, many feel that Nasir is more interested in spending his time outside the country and is not willing to do the work necessary to succeed. Sons of Shaykh Salim, such as Basil (born 1959), have not shown interest in politics either.

When Shaykh Salim retired from politics, he suggested that one of his brothers take his place. The most qualified was Dr. Muhammad (born 1955), who had received his Ph.D. in economics from Harvard University, taught at Kuwait University, and been appointed ambassador to the United States in 1993. Muhammad apparently had long resisted his brother's efforts to bring him back to Kuwait to groom him

¹⁰The fifth member of the Al Sabah pentarchy running the government at the time of the invasion was the Amir's brother Nawwaf al-Ahmad. Appointed Minister of the Interior in 1978, he was shifted to Minister of Defense in 1988. Widely regarded as a non-entity holding high position only to keep the senior ranks within the hands of the Al Jabir, Nawwaf was widely condemned for Kuwait's lack of preparation in 1990. He was shifted to Social Affairs and Labor in the first post-liberation government and then dropped entirely in 1992.

¹¹In fact, there is some speculation that this has been a deliberate strategy by his opponents. After Geneva, he was named ambassador to Malaysia and then Oman.

¹²Nasir and his wife Husa (the daughter of former Amir Sabah al-Salim) have been prominent collectors of Islamic art and their loans have formed the core of the Kuwait National Museum, most of which miraculously survived the Iraqi invasion in 1990.

for succession but was appointed Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the new cabinet of February 2001.¹³

The new Council of Ministers contains five Al Sabah outside the ruling triumvirate, none of whom is closely related to the present Amir. The most capable of these appears to be Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalid al-Hamad, from another branch of the ruling family but a great-grandson of Shaykh Mubarak (ruled 1896-1915), probably the most renowned of the Al Sabah Amirs. Muhammad has held the key post of Minister of the Interior since 1996 and also received the title of Deputy Prime Minister in 2001. Another Deputy Prime Minister and the replacement for Shaykh Salim as Minister of Defense is Shaykh Jabir al-Mubarak al-Hamad who had been out of politics since resigning as Minister of Information shortly after the Iraqi invasion in 1990.

The other two Al Sabah (aside from Dr. Shaykh Muhammad) are Ahmad al-'Abdullah al-Ahmad, a banker and former Minister of Finance who was named Minister of Communications, and Ahmad al-Fahd al-Ahmad. The latter, named Minister of Information, had succeeded his father Fahd as head of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee and soccer federation after Fahd was killed resisting the Iraqi invasion. Shaykh Ahmad was also active in the resistance and made headlines in 1996 when he declared his intention to be the first Al Sabah to be elected to Kuwait's National Assembly. In short, there are no obvious candidates as the next Heir Apparent, even amongst the younger generation of Al Sabah, despite the advancing ages of the family's inner circle.¹⁴

BAHRAIN

The death on March 6, 1999 of the Amir of Bahrain, Shaykh 'Isa bin Salman Al Khalifah, removed one of the questions marks regarding succession in the Gulf for the foreseeable future. The unchallenged accession of his son and Heir Apparent Hamad bin 'Isa (born 1950, Heir Apparent since 1964) marks the fourth consecutive occasion in this century that primogeniture has governed succession in Bahrain. Yet the emergence of Amir Hamad still leaves a considerable number of questions unanswered.¹⁵

¹³The other brother suggested, Badr (born about 1958), is a businessman with no government experience.

¹⁴Another prominent member of the family is Shaykh Sa'ud al-Nasir al-Sa'ud. A career in the Foreign Ministry culminated with ambassadorial posts in London and Washington. As a result of his favorable performance in Washington during the period of occupation, he was given the portfolio of Minister of Information in 1992. However, opposition by Islamists within the National Assembly led to his transfer to Minister of Oil in 1998 where he remained until dropped from the cabinet in 2001. But Shaykh Sa'ud has not been very popular and he belongs to a distant branch of the Al Sabah which resided in Iraq.

¹⁵Recent treatments of Bahraini politics include: Munira Fakhro, "The Uprising in Bahrain: An Assessment," in Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G. Potter, eds., *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security, and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 167-188, Louay Bahry, "The Opposition in Bahrain: A Bellwether for the Gulf?" *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 1997), pp. 42-57; and Abdul Hadi Khalaf, "The New Amir of Bahrain: Marching Side-Ways," *Civil Society*, Vol. 9, No. 100 (April 2000), pp. 6-13.

Amir 'Isa was a "hands-off" ruler, largely content to enjoy life and to serve as a respected and beloved head of state. The day-to-day business of running the government was left in the hands of his brother and Prime Minister, Khalifah bin Salman, and it had long been thought that 'Isa would have abdicated years ago if he could have been certain that Khalifah would step aside and allow Hamad to rule as well as reign. But Khalifah seemed to have no intention of retiring from the center of power, especially since his activities as Prime Minister dovetailed closely with his business interests and this combination has made him one of the wealthiest men in Bahrain.

The first few months of Amir Hamad's reign seemed to indicate, however, that the two men are able to work together. The new cabinet announced on May 31, 1999 was largely unchanged from the previous one – and thus full of Shaykh Khalifah's men. In addition, there was some indication that the new Amir was prepared to make some conciliatory responses to defuse the tensions and unrest that plagued Bahrain during the 1990s. But far more substantial steps were required to address Bahrain's serious underlying problems. The Al Khalifah ruling family of Bahrain is one of the largest in the Gulf. More significantly, they are the only family that has come to power by invasion and conquest. The consequence has been an often arrogant Al Khalifah attitude toward the state and its population and the polarization of Bahraini society to a degree unmatched elsewhere in the Gulf.

There are four main categories of social stratification in Bahrain. The Al Khalifah enjoy a monopoly of political power at the top, supported by their tribal allies, originally from the Najd region of what is today Saudi Arabia, who either accompanied the Al Khalifah during the initial invasion in the 18th century or were subsequently invited to Bahrain. The hawla families constitute the second stratum and are still the principal economic elite. These families migrated to Bahrain from the Iranian coast over the last several centuries but claim to be Arab, Sunni, and originally from the Arabian Peninsula. The largest stratum by far, however, is formed by the Baharina (singular, Bahrani), presumed to be the original farming inhabitants of the islands. Concentrated in Bahrain's villages and increasingly in poorer urban neighborhoods, the Baharina are Arab but entirely Shi'i. The Persian population forms the fourth and bottom stratum. Although Iran – previously called Persia – controlled Bahrain at times prior to the 18th century, nearly all Persians in Bahrain today were immigrants during the 20th century, first as small merchants and then especially as workers in the oil fields during the 1930s and 1940s.

There have always been rich and poor in the Gulf states, powerful and powerless, those with correct genealogies and others without clear origin. But the divisions in Bahrain are sharper than elsewhere and, in part because of Bahrain's paucity of oil and economic opportunities, more persistent. Unrest has been recurrent with periods of sustained and often organized dissidence occurring in 1921-1923, 1934-1935, 1938, 1947-1948, 1953-1956, 1965, 1975, and 1994-1999. The grievances remain remarkably constant: more equitable economic distribution and a measure of political participation. In the earlier years of this century, Sunnis and Shi'is pursued their goals independently and the two communities often clashed. But by the 1950s, an alliance was formed and an underground organization formed to press demands on the ruling family. Although this movement failed, it led to the creation of similarly non-sectarian groups on the secular left during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, with its appeal for Islamic revolution everywhere, and especially the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 served to break the sectarian alliance. The discovery of Iran-sponsored

subversive cells in the 1980s deepened suspicions of local Shi'a. The cycle of opposition, dormant since the mid-1970s, re-emerged in 1994 under the leadership of a younger class of Iran-trained, rural mullahs (religious leaders). This new wave of opposition, while serious and prolonged, failed to fundamentally threaten the regime. Although much of the population shared many of the goals, including greater economic opportunities, an end to discrimination, and restoration of the elected National Assembly (suspended in 1975), the concentration of activists in Baharina villages under the apparent direction of polemical mullahs prevented any wider participation.

By 1999, the unrest had dissipated, but this was due more to the temporary success of the government's policy of repression and the movement's exhaustion, rather than the achievement of any permanent solution of the underlying problems. The regime's response to the demand for participation was the creation of an appointed Majlis al-Shura, which satisfied virtually no one. Soon after his accession, Amir Hamad pardoned the most prominent mullah, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Amir al-Jahri, in what seemed to be a conciliatory measure (although the opposition charged that he was being kept under house arrest). In September 2000, he expanded the Majlis al-Shura. But many Bahrainis remained unconvinced that this marked any significant change in policy. Amir Hamad had lost much credibility during his years as Heir Apparent and was believed by many to be under Saudi influence. But expectations were raised in late 2000 and early 2001 by a series of developments set in chain by the new amir. A National Charter for the country was announced in December 2000, with the most significant provisions promising the independence of the judiciary, the creation by 2004 of a bicameral legislative body, including an elected house, and the provision that Bahrain would become a monarchy (*mamlaka*) and the amir a king. The National Charter was put to a national referendum in February 2001 and was approved by over 98% of the eligible population. During the same period, the amir took other positive steps. Political prisoners were released, the hated State Security Court was abolished, the British head of security much-reviled by the opposition apparently left for good, and an amnesty was announced for all exiles. The mood in Bahrain was suddenly brighter than it had been for decades and anticipation of real political change was widespread.

With his popularity thus soaring, Amir Hamad seems set to remain in power for many years to come. His first decree was to appoint his son Salman (born 1969) as Heir Apparent in a continuation of the policy of primogeniture in conformity with the 1973 Constitution, which stipulates that succession should pass through the eldest son unless the Amir should choose to appoint another son. However, he must carry through on his promises and he has yet to relieve Shaykh Khalifah of his position. Although it is unlikely that Shaykh Khalifah would ever accede, it is not entirely impossible that he will be able to maneuver the line of succession to one of his sons, particularly 'Ali bin Khalifah (born around the late 1950s) who has served as Minister of Transportation since 1993. A recrudescence of popular unrest, combined with a failure to provide employment for a rapidly growing population, may yet place succession and even the Al Khalifah in jeopardy. On the other hand, the closeness of the Bahraini state and the Al Khalifah to Saudi Arabia provides a certain assurance against such a scenario. In Bahrain's case, the generational change in leadership has resulted in considerable promise of change – a welcome situation given the underlying requirements for change and adaptation.

QATAR

Qatar is the other Gulf state experiencing a recent change of rulers.¹⁶ Although its experience is clearly unique, there are aspects that may well apply in the near future for some of its neighbors. In 1972, Khalifah bin Hamad became Amir by deposing his cousin Ahmad bin 'Ali. Although the Al Thani ruling family had agreed that Khalifah should succeed Amir 'Ali bin 'Abdullah, Amir 'Ali instead ensured that succession went to his son Ahmad on 'Ali's death in 1960. The result was a situation similar to others mentioned above: for 12 years, Ahmad reigned while Khalifah essentially ran the country. Finally, six months after independence in 1971, Khalifah ousted his cousin Ahmad during one of the latter's frequent absences from Qatar and added the title of Amir to the duties he had been carrying out already.

Shaykh Khalifah's personality and workload were essential to the operation of the small state, as the Amiri Diwan (i.e. the palace) was responsible for nearly every operation of any import. Having already formed the country's first proper government on the eve of independence, Shaykh Khalifah spent the following years engineering the country's development plans, putting the long-declared Advisory Council into action and later expanding it, and wresting ministerial portfolios away from collateral branches of the fractious Al Thani family. But his refusal to delegate hampered institutionalization and, as his health failed and ennui set in, he handed over more and more responsibilities to his son and Heir Apparent Hamad bin Khalifah (born 1950).

In June 1995, Hamad seized power while his father was abroad. It was the first successful palace coup in the Gulf since that of Khalifah himself 23 years earlier. The Gulf states recognized the new ruler, albeit with some hesitation, and thereby re-legitimized the principle of extra-constitutional succession.¹⁷ It is alleged that Shaykh Hamad acted to prevent his father from regaining powers he had delegated to Hamad. Not surprisingly, given Khalifah's personality, he did not give up easily. He had retained control of finances with the consequence that most of the state's financial reserves – said to be as much as \$3 billion – remained under his power. But when the new regime persuaded the Swiss and French governments in 1996 to block the accounts under Shaykh Khalifah's control, the former Amir was forced to acquiesce in a token reconciliation with his son and successor in Rome at the end of that year.

Basking in his success, the new Amir swiftly moved to put his unique stamp on Qatari and regional politics. In his first months of *de jure* rule, Shaykh Hamad seemed to enjoy deliberately provoking his GCC allies. As Prime Minister, he had already permitted Israel to open a trade office in Doha and drawn closer to Iran. He pointedly accused his neighbors of supporting his father's alleged counter-coup in February 1996. Relations with Bahrain had been troubled for decades over territorial disputes, so it was

¹⁶Qatari developments have been covered in Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*; Louay Bahry, "Elections in Qatar: A Window of Democracy Opens in the Gulf," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (June 1999), pp. 118-127; Andrew Rathmell and Kirsten Schulze, "Political Reform in the Gulf: The Case of Qatar," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 2000), pp. 47-62.

¹⁷This was in seeming contradiction to the stance taken in Sharjah in 1987 when the ruler was briefly ousted by his brother (see below). It should be noted, though, that Sharjah is a constituent member of the UAE and not an independent state and that the UAE federal government officially acted to restore the legal ruler.

not surprising that Hamad would accuse Bahrain. Although Qatar traditionally has been close to Saudi Arabia, relations with Riyadh had worsened in the past decade, in part due to a 1992 border skirmish. Finally, Qatar and Abu Dhabi had been traditional rivals and the reaction of Shaykh Zayid of Abu Dhabi may well have been to support a legitimate ruler of his own generation against a coupmaker – a development in reaction to possible repercussions up and down the Gulf.¹⁸

Furthermore, faced with criticism over his new policies, Shaykh Hamad deliberately strengthened his relations with the United States as a counter. Some of Shaykh Hamad's domestic policies may have unnerved his neighboring monarchs as well – among them the abolition of Qatar's Ministry of Information and press censorship, municipal elections in 1999 (in a promised preview of parliamentary elections) and granting permission for a provocative satellite television channel ("al-Jazira") which gathered controversy for its airing of subjects generally kept hidden in the Gulf.

In appointing his third son Jasim (born 1978) as Heir Apparent in 1996, Shaykh Hamad broke with the principle of primogeniture but confirmed descent through Amir's offspring.¹⁹ Once again, the action raised questions for the future. Does this mean that succession by primogeniture in Qatari politics was just a momentary aberration? And, although the new Amir chose a son to succeed him, will that be accepted by the other sons? Will the next succession be constitutional or not?

The possibility still exists of a struggle between competing sons of ex-Amir Khalifah. Khalifah's second son, 'Abd al-'Aziz, had been sacked from the cabinet reshuffle put together by Hamad as Prime Minister in 1992 and subsequently lived abroad.²⁰ On the other hand, an alliance exists between Amir Hamad and his brother (Khalifah's third son) 'Abdullah, who was appointed Prime Minister by his brother to go along with his existing position of Minister of the Interior. Khalifah's fourth son Muhammad, Minister of Finance at the time of the coup, initially appeared to join his father in exile but soon returned to Doha to take up a position as Deputy Prime Minister.²¹ Al Thani waters have been further muddied by the failed

¹⁸When Shaykh Khalifah made his first post-coup trip to the Gulf in December 1995, his first stop was Abu Dhabi (followed by Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia) and Shaykh Zayid permitted the deposed ruler to remain in Abu Dhabi. It appears that Saudi Arabia also offered asylum to Khalifah on condition that he refrain from political activity.

¹⁹There had been some speculation that Shaykh Hamad's eldest son Mish'al, an official in the Foreign Ministry, would become Heir Apparent, but the role went to Jasim apparently because of his better education and perceived leadership qualities – he passed out of Sandhurst two months before the announcement. The second son Muhammad allegedly was passed over because of his religious conservatism and lack of interest in government. Constitutional changes after the coup limited succession to the Amir's son and provided for the removal of the Heir Apparent should he prove unsatisfactory.

²⁰Although 'Abd al-'Aziz had taken over the finance portfolio from his father in 1972, he was reputed to be primarily interested in his playboy pursuits. Consequently, another reason for Hamad's action in 1995 was said to be his father's attempt to bring 'Abd al-'Aziz back to Qatar.

²¹'Abdullah and Muhammad are full-brothers whose mother also raised Hamad after the death of his mother. Shaykh Khalifah's three other sons were not involved in politics in 1995 because of their youth.

February 1996 counter-coup and the new regime's decision to place those accused of involvement on trial – 33 defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment in early 2000.²²

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

In the late 1960s, Britain, knowing that withdrawal from the Gulf was just ahead, began urging the nine small states of the lower Gulf to unify in protection against the challenges ahead. But it was a difficult task. Bahrain felt its longer period of development entitled it to special status; Qatar was reluctant to share its oil income; Abu Dhabi held the same attitude until its ruler was ousted in 1966; and the six smaller states simply were unable to agree amongst themselves. The accession of Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan as Amir of Abu Dhabi in 1966 was a key turning point as he threw his weight and his increasing income behind the project.²³ Although Bahrain and Qatar both chose to go it alone in 1971, the remaining seven shaykhdoms banded together in the United Arab Emirates. The early years of the UAE, however, were full of questions about what union really meant and how the responsibilities and obligations were to be sorted out. Constitutionally, the UAE remains a union of monarchies with legislative and executive authority vested in the Council of Ministers.²⁴

The fundamental question during the UAE's nearly 30 years of existence has been whether the union constituted a federation or a confederation. On the one hand, the UAE unquestionably is a single state, with a capital, flag, bureaucracy, currency, and international recognition. On the other, the writ of the federal government, although increasing, has been limited. Individual emirates have been able to resist some federal dictates and regulations and to retain local control over perceived core areas of domestic administration.

Integration has not been helped by the diffusion of the constituent states into three ranks because of wealth, size, and personality of individual rulers. The two largest states, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, compete over opposing conceptions of the federal role. Abu Dhabi pushes for greater integration since, as the

²²According to the Qatari government, the "coup" involved an attempt to capture a tank at a border post by bedouin retainers of the former Amir, backed by former Minister of Economy and Trade (and police chief) Shaykh Hamad bin Jasim bin Hamad. More than 100 people were arrested and Shaykh Hamad was captured by subterfuge in 1999; he was one of those sentenced to life imprisonment the following year.

²³Another important factor was the strong relationship between two key advisers, Ahmad al-Suwaydi in Abu Dhabi and Mahdi al-Tajir in Dubai, who did much to bring their pivotal rulers together.

²⁴Relevant politics in the UAE has been the subject of Christian Huxley, "A Central American Situation in the Gulf," *MERIP Reports*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (September-October 1987), pp. 33-34; J.E. Peterson, "The Future of Federalism in the United Arab Emirates," in H. Richard Sindelar, III, and J.E. Peterson, eds., *Cross-Currents in the Gulf: Arab, Regional, and Global Interests* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 198-230; William A. Rugh, "The United Arab Emirates: What are the Sources of Its Stability?" *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 1997), pp. 14-24; *ibid.*, "Leadership in the UAE: Past, Present and Future," in Joseph A. Kechichian, ed., *A Century in Thirty Years: Shaykh Zayed and the United Arab Emirates* (Washington, DC: Middle East Policy Council, 2000), pp. 235-271; and Joseph A. Kechichian, "From Trucial Shaykhdoms to a Federation: Sociopolitical Origins of Emirati Leaders," in Kechichian, ed., *A Century in Thirty Years*, pp. 49-72.

largest and richest member, a stronger federal unity will increase its control. Dubai opposes Abu Dhabi for the very same reason, seeking to maintain as much control of its domestic affairs as possible while accepting only what it perceives as beneficial aspects of federal membership. The middle two – Sharjah and Ra's al-Khaymah – seek to steer a middle course and maintain a measure of independence as far as is financially possible. The only choice of the small trio – al-Fujayrah, Umm al-Qaywayn, and 'Ajman – is to follow along. In practice, this tends to mean keeping on Abu Dhabi's good side because of that emirate's control of the federal government and the largesse it bestows.²⁵

If Shaykh Zayid's accession was necessary for the formation of the UAE, it follows that his continued leadership may be essential for the future health of the union. In part, his election and subsequent re-elections as President of the UAE were due to his personal capabilities and qualities of leadership.²⁶ But even more, Shaykh Zayid has served as President since 1971 because he heads the richest and most powerful constituent state. Herein lies the difficulty, as future UAE leadership is dependent on succession in Abu Dhabi. The next set of UAE rulers is likely to pit Shaykh Muhammad of Dubai, as the strongest and most capable personality of the lot, against a weaker successor to Shaykh Zayid in Abu Dhabi. Under the present system, it is inconceivable that the office of UAE President should be held by anyone but the ruler of Abu Dhabi, serving as a sort of quasi-king of the country. It would require a radical change in the mix of rulers' personalities and considerably more political participation for the most capable of the seven rulers to be selected as President. And the substitution of a system of rotation, as in Malaysia, with the *de facto* executive authority selected from outside the Council of Rulers, is only a distant prospect.

Abu Dhabi

With Shaykh Zayid advancing in years and facing increasing health problems, the time for a successor cannot be far off. A few years ago, Abu Dhabi confronted the possibility of a schism within the ruling Al Nahyan family through the posting of a challenge by the Bani Muhammad, a group of brothers from another line of the family. In the 1980s, three brothers were prominent: Hamdan (UAE Deputy Prime Minister), Surur (President of the [Abu Dhabi] Amiri Diwan and married to one of Shaykh Zayid's daughters), and Tahnun (Chairman of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company [ADNOC], [Abu Dhabi] ruler's Representative in the Eastern Region [i.e. al-'Ayn], and also married to a daughter of Shaykh Zayid). Of these, Surur stood perhaps the best chance of succeeding: although his formal role was limited to Abu Dhabi, he acted much like a *de facto* Prime Minister for the UAE (especially after the *de jure* Prime Minister and ruler of Dubai, Shaykh Rashid, slipped into a long coma that only ended with his death in 1990). But the threat of the Bani Muhammad faded in the 1990s. Hamdan died in 1989, Surur lost

²⁵This situation is evolving, however. The prospect that Dubai's oil reserves will be depleted by 2010 has led the emirate to integrate its local armed forces into the federal structure, with local control over internal security, police, and health administration to follow. A similar prospect of an imminent end to oil income affects Sharjah's attitude as well. As a consequence, the federation will likely be strengthened as the authority of individual emirates gradually fades.

²⁶The term of the UAE President is fixed constitutionally at five years and is renewable.

influence (and his position) to the growing numbers of adult sons of Shaykh Zayid, and Tahnun – though regarded by Shaykh Zayid almost as a son – was probably never a viable candidate for succession anyway.

Shaykh Zayid's health has deteriorated markedly in the last few years. He spent several months in 1996 recovering from surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota and another four months at the Cleveland Clinic in 2000. His eldest son Khalifah has been Heir Apparent apparently since the late 1960s and there is no question that he will succeed his father. Although dull and lacking in charisma, and plagued by his own history of health problems, Khalifah has filled in more than adequately for his father. A few years ago, it was speculated that Khalifah might well choose to abdicate after an acceptable period of rule, say one or two years, but this scenario clearly depended on his Heir Apparent. More recently, however, Khalifah has strengthened his control over much of Abu Dhabi's affairs and shows every sign of ruling capably if and when he succeeds.²⁷

Khalifah's appointment as Heir Apparent was a departure from Abu Dhabi norms – the four rulers between 1909 and 1928 were all sons of Zayid bin Khalifah, the father of the modern Abu Dhabi state, and three became rulers following murders by brothers. Shaykh Zayid himself overthrew his brother Shakhbut to become ruler in 1966, although this act was accomplished without violence but with British complicity and was widely welcomed in the emirate due to Shakhbut's inability to lead Abu Dhabi into the oil age. Thus the Al Nahyan face the dilemma after Khalifah of whether to accept his brothers as rulers in turn, as the emirate did in the past and as Saudi Arabia still does, or to stick to the short-lived principle of primogeniture.

There is no dearth of sons of Shaykh Zayid to choose from – he has at least 19. The next oldest after Khalifah is Sultan (born ca. 1955) who was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces by his father in 1978 but allegedly scandalous behavior drove him to the sidelines. Over the last 10 years, though, Sultan has clearly captured his father's eye again and has worked himself back into positions of responsibility as Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE (1990), Deputy Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council (i.e the cabinet for the emirate) and Chairman of Abu Dhabi's Public Works Department (1991). Sultan faces formidable competition if he should seek succession himself and most likely will support Khalifah against Muhammad bin Zayid. Muhammad bin Zayid is next in age (born ca. 1960) and he is well-known for his ambition. Muhammad has parlayed an early career as an air force pilot into Commander of the UAE Air Force (about 1987), Deputy Chief of Staff of the UAE Armed Forces (about 1991) and Chief of Staff (about 1993). His supporters have grown increasingly uneasy, however, over his over-reaching actions and behavior.

Muhammad undoubtedly will benefit as well from his support network of full-brothers, sons of Zayid's most beloved wife, Shaykha Fatima. This is an advantage neither Khalifah nor Sultan, their respective mothers' only sons, can claim despite their apparent greater general popularity. The brothers

²⁷Shaykh Khalifah is Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council (which serves as the cabinet for the emirate) and heads both the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority. In fact, he seems to be in control of almost everything except defense (although in fact he also holds the title of Deputy Commander of the UAE Armed Forces and it has been reported that he has formed his own Amiri Guard, to serve a similar function as the Saudi Arabian National Guard).

include Hamdan (UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs), Hazza' (Director-General of Intelligence), 'Abdullah (UAE Minister of Information and Culture), Mansur (Director-General of the President's Office), and Tahnun (Chairman of the President's Private Department).²⁸ The alternative to the path of brotherly succession is continuation of primogeniture. Khalifah bin Zayid has been grooming his son but Sultan bin Khalifah is still young, inexperienced, more interested in being a playboy, and, most importantly, faces the combined opposition of his many uncles.

Dubai

So much of the modern history of Dubai was embodied in the person of Shaykh Rashid bin Sa'id. Although his father Sa'id laid the foundations of the merchant state that Dubai has become, Rashid undoubtedly was responsible for the present success and prosperity of the emirate. Taking over the day-to-day reins from his father in the 1940s, Shaykh Rashid crafted a strategy that made the most of Dubai's modest oil revenues and central location to create a *laissez-faire* entrepôt that remains without equal in the Gulf. His reign was marred only by the serious illness that struck him in the early 1980s and left him comatose in his final years until his death in 1990. Since then, his son Muhammad has thoroughly and competently taken up the *de facto* reins in Dubai.

But Rashid's decision to rely to primogeniture and his wife's injunction to her sons not to fight each other has left the process of succession in Dubai in a muddle. Rashid's eldest son Maktum succeeded in 1990 but it was clear well before Rashid's death that the third son Muhammad held the real power in the emirate. The situation was formally normalized by Maktum's decree in 1995 to appoint the second of Rashid's four sons, Hamdan, Deputy Ruler but to make Muhammad the Heir Apparent.²⁹ While Muhammad was likely to succeed in any case, the question now is whether succession will revert to primogeniture in the future, i.e. to Muhammad's eldest son Rashid.

Sharjah

The problem of succession in the two middle-rank UAE members should be mentioned as well. Until the 1960s, Sharjah was perhaps the leading settlement and the seat of British representation on what was known as the Trucial Coast. Its ruling family is from the al-Qawasim, or al-Qasimi in the singular, who had constituted the leading power of the southern Gulf until vanquished by the British in the early 19th century.

²⁸Other sons of Shaykh Zayid with prominent positions are Ahmad (Under-Secretary at the UAE Ministry of Finance and Industry), Diyab (Director of the Presidential Court), `Isa (Under-Secretary in the Abu Dhabi Public Works Department), Sa'id (Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Seaports Authority), and Sayf (Under-Secretary in the UAE Ministry of Interior).

²⁹Hamdan continues to hold the federal appointment of Minister of Finance and Industry while Muhammad serves as the UAE Minister of Defense; the fourth – and far younger – son is Ahmad.

This memory of past glory probably contributed to the independent attitude of Shaykh Saqr bin Sultan, the ruler with Arab nationalist leanings from 1951 until his deposition with British assistance in 1965. The troubled political history of the emirate continued when Saqr's failed attempt to regain control in 1972 ended with the death of his cousin and successor, Khalid bin Muhammad. Since then, the emirate has been ruled by Khalid's brother, Sultan bin Muhammad, the only ruler in the Gulf to have earned a Ph.D.

But his ambitious brother 'Abd al-'Aziz, one of Sharjah's leading businessmen and commander of Sharjah's Emiri Guards, took advantage of one of Shaykh Sultan's trips abroad to seize power in 1987, justifying his action by pointing out that the emirate was approximately \$1 billion in debt and alleging that Sultan was avoiding his responsibilities by his preoccupation with academic pursuits.³⁰ The matter would have ended there had not the Al Maktum of Dubai welcomed Sultan to come back to Dubai and then persuaded King Fahd of Saudi Arabia to mediate and convince Shaykh Zayid of Abu Dhabi to use his considerable influence to annul the coup days later.³¹ Ten days after the coup, Shaykh Sultan returned to Sharjah in his capacity as ruler.

Although 'Abd al-'Aziz was formally named Heir Apparent, this appeared to be little more than a face-saving device and he left for exile in Abu Dhabi two years later.³² Since then, Shaykh Sultan named Ahmad bin Sultan, younger brother of former ruler Saqr bin Sultan, as Deputy Ruler in 1990 in an apparent attempt to heal the breach between the two branches of the family. But speculation that this solution might evolve into a formula of alternating power between the two al-Qasimi branches on the Kuwaiti line faded when Shaykh Sultan named Sultan bin Muhammad bin Sultan, his cousin and the brother of his beloved wife Juwahir, as Heir Apparent in May 1999.³³ The rivalries and violence within the family makes charting the path of succession in Sharjah particularly unpredictable. It is not inconceivable that the position of Heir Apparent might be switched to one of Shaykh Sultan's younger sons when they grow older.

³⁰Although 'Abd al-'Aziz was older than Sultan, he had not succeeded in 1972 because he was believed to have been responsible for plotting an assassination of his brother Khalid bin Muhammad in 1970.

³¹It was widely believed in the UAE that 'Abd al-'Aziz had been encouraged in his actions by either by Shaykh Zayid directly or the Bani Muhammad of Abu Dhabi, acting during a time when Shaykh Zayid was in *de facto* semi-retirement outside the country. The role of Dubai in restoring Shaykh Sultan, the ruler of Dubai's traditional rival, to power was remarkable and would have been inconceivable if (a) Shaykh Rashid had still been on the scene, (b) Sultan had not already recommended himself to the Al Maktum by his willingness to compromise over the Dubai-Sharjah boundary, and (c) Abu Dhabi had not been implicated in the coup attempt.

³²This put Shaykh Zayid in the unusual position of playing host to two failed Sharjah putschists: Saqr bin Sultan, who Shaykh Zayid had brought back from exile in Egypt, and 'Abd al-'Aziz.

³³The decree was issued barely a month after British media reported that Shaykh Sultan's eldest son Muhammad died in England from a drug overdose.

Ra's al-Khaymah

The situation in Ra's al-Khaymah is not so complicated but perhaps more urgent. If the al-Qawasim of Sharjah resented their decline in political position, this was even more true of Shaykh Saqr bin Muhammad, ruler of Ra's al-Khaymah since 1948. The al-Qasimi branch in Ra's al-Khaymah long ago fell out with the other branch in Sharjah and the political subservience of Ra's al-Khaymah to Sharjah until 1952 has not been forgotten. Like his namesake, Shaykh Saqr of Sharjah, Saqr bin Muhammad flirted with Arab nationalism in the 1960s as a way of escaping British influence and then held aloof from the founding of the UAE in late 1971 when it became clear that Ra's al-Khaymah would not be regarded as the equal of Abu Dhabi and Dubai within the union. But he was forced to swallow his pride and join the UAE a few months later when his hopes of a major oil discovery were dashed. Ra's al-Khaymah's relative lack of resources leaves it poorer than the three larger states and thus more dependent on federal assistance, to Shaykh Saqr's fury. Primogeniture applies in Ra's al-Khaymah as Saqr's eldest son Khalid (born 1940) has been Heir Apparent for many years. Educated in Cairo, Britain, and the US, first commander of the Ra's al-Khaymah army, and formerly active on the federal scene, Khalid has been patient and his turn must come soon with Shaykh Saqr entering his 80s.

OMAN

Unlike the ruling families of the other Gulf states, the Al Bu Sa'id in Oman constitute a small and relatively weak ruling family.³⁴ There is no strong son for the ruler to rely on or brother to take the day-to-day reins of state (and conversely of course the Sultan is free from threats from close relations). The family is small and, for historical reasons, without influence on the ruler. There is no inner circle of family members who must be consulted on every significant decision and their consensus obtained. Because the father of Sultan Qabus bin Sa'id married in the country's southern region of Dhufar and Qabus remains single,³⁵ there are no pressures from nonsanguineous relations.

Indeed, the Sultan rules with few constraints from any direction. Naturally, he must appear just and rule according to Islamic norms but otherwise he is free from domestic challenge. There are no key national families occupying the next rungs of power. All senior members of the government, as well as all other important political figures such as tribal leaders, are fully dependent on the Sultan's blessing for the retention

³⁴The situation in Oman has been discussed by J.E. Peterson, "Legitimacy and Political Change in Yemen and Oman," *Orbis*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter 1984), pp. 971-998; Calvin H. Allen, Jr., "The Sultanate of Oman and American Security Interests in the Arabian Gulf," in Robert W. Stookey, ed., *The Arabian Peninsula: Zone of Ferment* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), pp. 1-16; Ian Skeet, *Oman: Politics and Development* (London: Macmillan, 1992); and Calvin H. Allen and W. Lynn Rigsbee, II, *Oman Under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970-1996* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

³⁵Qabus married his first cousin Nawwal (later known as Kamilah), daughter of Tariq bin Taymur, in 1976 but he divorced her soon after.

of their positions. Traditional religious leadership remains in the background and there is little evidence of any popular Islamic dissent.

But Sultan Qabus is unique among Gulf rulers in another way. The lack of a direct heir and a paucity of reliable close family members mean that succession to Qabus is dramatically problematic. This situation is unique in modern Omani history as well. From the latter part of the 19th century until now, a pattern of primogeniture (specifically succession through the eldest son by a suitable Arab mother) governed the Sultanate. That this is no longer being possible has raised decades-long concern in Oman, the Gulf, and elsewhere over who shall succeed the Sultan and whether it will be a peaceful process.

For years, Sultan Qabus seemed oblivious to these concerns. Not only did he fail to groom an heir, he refused to give up the formal post of Prime Minister and seemed to deny would-be contenders any opportunity to prove their suitability. The only indication he had even considered the matter remains the Basic Law, promulgated in 1996.³⁶

There is no viable candidate outside the ruling family. Many of the prominent ministers and merchants come from Muscat families, especially ethnic and/or sectarian minorities, and have no power base outside the capital. The Dhufari ministers owe their positions to this Sultan and most likely will lose their jobs on his disappearance from the scene. No tribal leader seems to possess sufficient standing to make a run for power and in any case any ambitious tribal leader would be opposed by competing tribes. The primacy of the religious establishment died with the demise of the Imamate in the 1950s. There is no sign of politicization in the security forces.

Thus it seems rather definite that succession will remain within the Al Bu Sa'id by default. The highest-ranking member in terms of protocol, Thuwayni bin Shihab, who holds the title of the Sultan's Personal Representative (which ranks as the equivalent of a deputy prime minister), is excluded by personality. Next in line is Fahd bin Mahmud, another cousin to the Sultan and Deputy Prime Minister for Council of Ministers Affairs. His chances of succession are rated as minimal because of his aloofness from the family and public alike, the alleged animosity of the Sultan (who seems to have downgraded Fahd in 1994 from his previous position as Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs), the fact that his children are of a French mother and thus not suitable for succession in turn, and the apprehension generated by a history of mental illness in his branch of the family.

The most likely candidates for succession are three of the sons of the late Tariq bin Taymur, the formidable uncle of the Sultan who served briefly as the Sultan's only Prime Minister (in the early 1970s) and died in 1980: Shihab, Haytham, and As'ad. Shihab bin Tariq has served as the Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman since 1990 and generally rates high marks for his seriousness and his successful command. Haytham bin Tariq was appointed Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1986, at the same time that Hamdan bin Zayid received a similar appointment in the UAE. But whereas Hamdan has since become Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Haytham remains in the same position (albeit with

³⁶On succession, the Basic Law stipulates that the council of the Ruling Family has three days in which to choose a successor. If it is unable to do so, the Defense Council, made up of the Minister of Palace Office Affairs (now the Royal Office) and the heads of the security services, is to appoint the individual whose name has been left in a sealed letter from the deceased Sultan.

an upgraded title to Secretary-General), presumably because of his lack of dedication to public service. His continuing reputation as a playboy has left him out of the running in the eyes of many Omanis. The strongest alternative to Shihab thus remains his brother As'ad bin Tariq, who some would say is the stronger of the two candidates. Although As'ad displays the same serious demeanor, his position vis-à-vis the Sultan is not clear. In 1993, As'ad was removed from his powerful – and popular – position commanding the Sultan of Oman's Armor (which has built up to nearly a separate service in Oman), and given the less prestigious job of Secretary-General for Conferences.

FUTURE PATTERNS OF SUCCESSION

The success of ruling families in the Gulf in the 20th century in large part depended upon exceptional leaders who appeared at a propitious point when tribal societies began to coalesce into quasi nation-states. Thus the roles of King 'Abd al-'Aziz bin 'Abd al-Rahman (ruled 1902-1953) in forging the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that of Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah (r. 1896-1915) in creating an independent Kuwait, Shaykh 'Abdullah bin Jasim (r. 1913-1949) in sharpening Qatar's separate identity, and Shaykh Zayid bin Khalifah (r. 1855-1909) in melding the tribes into the discernible state of Abu Dhabi.

By the close of the century, all of the Gulf states had undergone tremendous socio-economic change. In addition to the roads, industrial complexes, and welfare systems, all had built modern governments with professional bureaucracies. Their populations had changed, become much larger in size, dramatically better educated, and more socially diverse, yet the fundamental basis of politics remained much the same. The effectiveness of leadership varied markedly from one ruler to the next and the quality of vision, as possessed by the prominent forebears named above, more often than not was lacking at a time when challenges to the regimes seemed more profound than ever.

Thus it is disturbing that the mechanisms for the transferral of power remain disconcertingly vague and ambiguous. Succession no longer occurs through patricide or fratricide, although palace coups apparently are still not entirely ruled out. The procedure for the immediate hand over of power on the death of an incumbent is no longer in doubt either since the practice of naming and respecting an Heir Apparent has been adopted in all six countries. Generally, there seems to be a trend towards primogeniture, with its advantages in defusing family rivalries and assuring an orderly succession. Of course this method is not accepted in either Saudi Arabia or Kuwait and cannot be the means for the next succession in Oman. But in the end, of course, effective leadership depends on having the right personalities in charge. This is never an easy task in a hereditary system. As the Gulf regimes complete their transformation from shaykhly systems to monarchies, the question of succession will become an increasingly difficult problem.

Table 1. Rulers and Succession in the Gulf States

Country	Ruling Family	Present Ruler (year of birth) (with date of accession and formal positions held)	Heir Apparent (year of birth) (with date of appointment and formal positions held)	Relationship of Heir Apparent to Ruler	Constitutional Rules of Succession	Putative Line of Succession
Saudi Arabia	Al Sa'ud	Fahd bin 'Abd al-'Aziz (1921) King (1982), Prime Minister	'Abdullah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz (1923) Heir Apparent (1982), First Deputy Prime Minister, Head of National Guard	half-brother	yes	sons of the late King 'Abd al-'Aziz in chronological succession, although Basic Law of 1992 stipulates that sons and grandsons should be consulted
Kuwait	Al Sabah	Jabir al-Ahmad (1926) Amir (1977)	Sa'd al-'Abdullah (1930) Heir Apparent (1978), Prime Minister	cousin	yes	alternation between al-Jabir and al-Salim branches of family primogeniture
Bahrain	Al Khalifah	Hamad bin 'Isa (1950) Amir (1999)	Salman bin Hamad (1969) Heir Apparent (1999), Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Defense	eldest son	yes	primogeniture or father-to-son
Qatar	Al Thani	Hamad bin Khalifah (1950) Amir (1995)	Jasim bin Hamad (1978) Deputy Ruler, Heir Apparent (1996)	3 rd son	no	previously primogeniture but now to be governed by stipulations of Basic Law
Oman	Al Bu Sa'id	Qabus bin Sa'id (1940) Sultan (1970), Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, Minister of Foreign Affairs	None	n.a.	yes	election by Supreme Council of Rulers but in effect Ruler of Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates	n.a.	Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan (late 80s?) President (1971)	Maktum bin Rashid Al Maktum (1941) Vice-President (1971), Prime Minister	n.a.	yes	previously mixed, now primogeniture (?)
Abu Dhabi	Al Nahyan	Zayid bin Sultan (ca. 1912) Amir (1966)	Khalifah bin Zayid (1949) Heir Apparent (late 1960s?), Deputy Commander of UAE Armed Forces	eldest son	no	previously primogeniture, now mixed (?)
Dubai	Al Maktum	Maktum bin Rashid (1941) Amir (1990)	Muhammad bin Rashid (1948) Heir Apparent (1995), UAE Minister of Defense	full brother	no	previously mixed, now mixed
Sharjah	al-Qasimi (al-Qawasim)	Sultan bin Muhammad (1942) Amir (1972)	Sultan bin Muhammad (1990) Heir Apparent (1987)	cousin	no	previously mixed, now primogeniture (?)
Ra's al-Khaymah	al-Qasimi (al-Qawasim)	Saqr bin Muhammad (1920) Amir (1948)	Khalid bin Saqr (1943) Heir Apparent (?), Deputy Ruler	eldest son	no	primogeniture
Al-Fujayrah	al-Sharqiyyin	Hamad bin Muhammad (1948) Amir (1974)	Hamad bin Sayf (?) Heir Apparent (?), Deputy Ruler	uncle	No	primogeniture
Umm al-Qaywayn	Al 'Ali (Al Mu'alla)	Rashid bin Ahmad (1930) Amir (1981)	Sa'ud bin Rashid (1952) Heir Apparent (?)	eldest son	no	primogeniture
'Ajman	al-Nu'aymi	Humayd bin Rashid (1930) Amir (1981)	'Ammar bin Humayd (?) Heir Apparent (1993)	eldest son	no	primogeniture

Note: dates of birth for older generations are often approximate.

Table 2. Rulers and Heirs Apparent: Years in Office, Ages, Generations				
	GCC Rulers (6)	GCC + UAE Rulers (12)	GCC Heirs Apparent (5)	GCC + UAE Heirs Apparent (11)
Average years in office	19½	21½	12 (4 without Abu Dhabi)	18 (8 of 11 total)
Average age	68	67	51½	52 (8 of 11 total)
Oldest	ca. 92	ca. 92	76	76
Youngest	51	51	23	23
Change of generation from predecessor	4	9	3	8 (?)