

ASAN REPORT

Succession Challenges in the Arab Gulf Monarchies

JOSEPH A. KÉCHICHIAN | DECEMBER 2015



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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

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Introduction

Frequent assertions that the post-2011 uprisings changed the way Arab governments operated led policy analysts to opine that existential changes were under way in most Arab societies, including in the all too critical succession arena that, at least in some instances, remained murky. A few years ago, 1999 was described as “a year of changes,” ostensibly because smooth transitions occurred in three Arab monarchies, Bahrain, Jordan, and Morocco, followed with an equally untroubled permutation in Syria in 2000. The first decade of the twenty-first century ushered in relatively smooth changes in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Qatar as well, although violent regime transformations in Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen caught everyone by surprise. On 23 January 2015, the death of King ‘Abdallah bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz in Saudi Arabia ushered in another leadership transformation even if this succession illustrated how relatively smooth such permutations tended to be on the Arabian Peninsula. King Salman bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz ascended the Saudi rulership in what was another peaceful succession in the Kingdom notwithstanding gloom and doom predictions that did not occur. Remarkably, a degree of permanence was visible in the conservative monarchy, whereas high doses of unpredictability dominated most Middle Eastern societies.

It was important to note that the very idea of political succession was seldom uneventful, spanning geography and time throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds that, in contemporary periods created palpable challenges. For most of the twentieth century, for example, after republican regimes overthrew monarchs in several countries and either replaced them with military dictatorships or parliamentary democracies, primogeniture successions became the norm. Even before the 2011 Arab Uprisings that shook the Arab World at its core, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and several other states encouraged primogeniture. Of course, the method continued to function in

Arab monarchies, notably in Bahrain and Qatar, though lateral succession dominated changes in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.¹ Outsiders tried to manipulate existing systems—but with much less success than generally assumed—although everyone focused on the sensitive political issue. In reality, Arab States, especially Arab monarchies, cherished internal harmony and family consensus and seldom tolerated foreign interference in such affairs. Most engaged in the natural winnowing that was part and parcel of succession mechanisms in monarchies, even if the trappings of such institutions paled in comparison to their European, Asian or African counterparts. Foreign governments, for their part, observed and adjusted their policies towards emerging leaders.

In the case of the United States, for example, Washington was presented with leadership succession uncertainties in such countries as Egypt and Syria, even if states deemed sympathetic, including those on the Arabian Peninsula, proved far more elusive to American preferences. Consequently, and as a new generation of leaders emerged throughout the Arab world, Washington—and most of the World for that matter—confronted their powerlessness to predict the outcome of secret and almost tamper-proof deliberations. In fact, because leadership succession processes were and remained amongst the most closely held and jealously guarded prerogatives of monarchs, presidents or even dictators, and because there was no evidence that any Arab leader worth his weight ever asked for assistance or guidance from a foreign power either to entertain alternatives or manipulate the levers of authority, what

1. Ironically, even ‘Usamah bin Ladin, the alleged leader of Al-Qa’idah, was apparently grooming his son Hamzah to succeed him. See, for example, the letters reportedly found in bin Ladin’s Abbotabad, Pakistan holdout, as translated and published in May 2015 by the Directorate of National Intelligence, Washington, D.C., including, “Letter from Hamza to Father,” July 2009, at <http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl/english/Letter%20from%20Hamzah%20to%20father%20dtd%20July%202009.pdf>; and “Letter to Hamza,” n.d., <http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl/english2/Letter%20to%20Hamza.pdf>.

outside forces could only engage in was to simply note the changes and adjust their policies towards a particular country.

The purpose of this report, which updates ongoing Arab leadership succession processes in the six Arab Gulf monarchies that were discussed in a 2008 volume, is to address the complex transformations under way.² As a new era unfolds, leadership succession matters in Oman, Kuwait and the UAE, in particular, will inevitably occur too. Consequently, how Arab Gulf societies adjust and how their allies perceive these changes will likely affect regional stability. To be sure, potential risks loomed over the horizon for the states involved as well as for their allies, though putative leadership transformations, whether gradual or sudden and peaceful or problematic, will most probably highlight the direction that conservative monarchies follow.

2. This study relies on Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Power and Succession in Arab Monarchies: A Reference Guide*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008. Background descriptions and analyses are available in this source and while this paper uses some of the materials first published in it, specific sections for the six Gulf Cooperation Council States [Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Sa'udi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates] are updated below.

Bahrain and the Al Khalifah

Figure 1. King of Bahrain: Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa



Source: Amr Abdallah Dalsh © REUTERS

Despite the modest size of the country, the Al Khalifah dynasty in Bahrain represents one of the largest ruling families on the Arabian Peninsula, perhaps with several thousand members. Even before its evolutionary transformation into a constitutional monarchy in 2002, the Al Khalifah embarked on specific political reforms, to further secure hereditary rule. In fact, the 1973 Constitution adopted specific language regarding primogeniture, and established clear succession patterns, which sought to seal the dynastic consensus that emerged within the family. If the consequences of conquest were 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,” successive uprisings between 1994 and 2011 meant

that the regime was on the defensive.³

When Hamad bin ‘Isa succeeded his father in 1999, many predicted a short-lived reign, insisting that Prime Minister Khalifah bin Salman would be the strongman behind his untested nephew. Over the long-term, many predicted, Khalifah would position his own offspring to gain power, effectively altering the succession line. In reality, Bahraini succession patterns were unambiguously instituted and were secure, because the Al Khalifah consented to specific constitutional emendations that accepted primogeniture. What was problematic was the existence of two major branches within the ruling family that, for all practical purposes, polarized leading Al Khalifah members and their respective supporters. The first pole, naturally led by the monarch, was pitted against one led by the prime minister. Obviously, the Heir Apparent and Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defense Forces, Salman bin Hamad, stood with his father, as did all of his brothers. Conversely, Shaykh Khalifah’s sons backed the prime minister that, without a doubt, represented a clear delineation of the two alliances that existed within the family. This bipolar system did not mean that the two alliances were so far apart that little united them. Yet, and as amply demonstrated time and again, whatever reforms were introduced in Bahrain since 1999 were the result of internal pressures, including violent confrontations with authorities. In the ongoing political and military struggles between Iran and the United States throughout the Gulf region, in which Bahrain played a vital role on account of the presence of the US 5th Fleet in the Island-Kingdom, a “widening split

3. J. E. Peterson, “The Nature of Succession in the Gulf,” *The Middle East Journal* 55:4, Autumn 2001, p. 588. See also Munira A. Fakhro, “The Uprising in Bahrain: An Assessment,” in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick, eds., *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security and Religion*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997, pp. 167-89. For more recent appraisals of the crises in Bahrain, see Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn’t*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013; and Anna Fuchs, *Bahrain—The Exception in the Gulf*, Eberhard Karls University Tübingen: GRIN Verlag, 2013.

between rival bloodlines within Bahrain’s royal family” emerged, though it was unclear whether such a division empowered “anti-American hard-liners” in the strategically critical Kingdom.⁴ Suffice it to say that the post-2011 uprisings preoccupied American civilian and military officials alike, concerned about a vital naval facility in the heart of the Persian Gulf.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the family split that threatened Gulf security and that apparently was “largely hidden from view,” involved the two branches of the Al Khalifah described above. It allegedly pitted the monarch, “whose predecessors nurtured Western ties for decades, against a hereditary line within the royal family known as the Khawalids.” The Khawalids, who were descendants of Khalid bin ‘Ali Al Khalifah (1853–1925), a half-brother of ‘Isa bin ‘Ali Al Khalifah (1848–1932), the Shaykh who ruled Bahrain between 1869 and 1923 but who was succeeded by Hamad bin ‘Isa (1932–1942) and by his sons Salman bin Hamad (1942–1961) and ‘Isa bin Salman (1961–1999), apparently relied on a power base that included hardline Islamists that, the writer maintained, “were long marginalized within the family” but miraculously gained control of important institutions including Bahrain’s security and intelligence forces, the judiciary and the king’s royal court in recent years.” This assessment was attributed to Kristian Coates-Ulrichsen, a scholar of the Gulf region at the London-based Royal Institute of International Affairs [Chatham House], who concluded: “these guys [were] engaged in a huge battle for control of the family.”⁵ The threat was so grave, those concerned by the rise of the Khawalids affirmed, that the current succession line could eventually be shuffled in their favor even if that was probably a far-fetched scenario given the primogeniture system etched in the

4. Charles Levinson, “A Palace Rift in Persian Gulf Bedevils Key US Navy Base,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 February 2013, p. A1, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324595704578239441790926074>.

5. Ibid.

Bahraini constitution.⁶

Other observers of Bahrain added weight to the putative Khawalid advance, including Emile Nakhleh, a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst and a Bahrain watcher, who was quoted saying: “The King is totally marginalized;... Some elements within this Khawalid faction might begin to think, we should explore another line of hereditary control for the ruling family,” which added insult to injury as it pretended to decipher Khawalid leaders’ thinking on the matter without a shred of evidence to back the assertion. Indeed, while powerful Khawalid Bahrainis surrounded the pro-Western monarch, the latter was amply aware that more conservative elements within the ruling family were suspicious of Washington’s motives, and was probably behind the political agitation attributed to some of their more adventurous proponents. Nevertheless, the ruler’s primary concern was the welfare of his Kingdom and, secondarily, the accession of his son and heir, Prince Salman bin Hamad, to the throne. Ironically, the heir apparent was probably the only member of the ruling establishment that was remotely acceptable to leading opposition forces that engaged Manama since 2011 and, as such, was serene in the knowledge that any likelihood of a change in the sovereign bloodline would dramatically hurt the Al Khalifah. Likewise, Khawalid leaders knew that Prince Salman was eminently qualified to rule, enjoyed widespread support within the country—even among Shi’ah opposition members—and, equally important, was well-placed to salvage the body politic from committing suicide. What preoccupied the monarch and his heir were various rumors that US military figures lost some of their enthusiasm for Bahrain that, if accurate, was a far more serious assertion than many assumed.

6. Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-101.

Table 1. Bahrain and the Al Khalifah: Key Figures

Hamad bin ‘Isa Al Khalifah King (b. 1950, r. 2002-present)	Khawalid Faction
Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah Heir Apparent (b. 1969) (relation: eldest son)	Khalifah bin Salman Al Khalifah Prime Minister (relation: uncle)
	Khalifah bin Ahmad Al Khalifah Commander-in-Chief, Bahrain Defense Force
	Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah Court/Foreign Minister

In what must have come as a complete surprise to most Bahrainis, retired US Navy Admiral Dennis C. Blair, a former Director of National Intelligence and Commander in Chief of the US Pacific Command reportedly, urged the Pentagon to move the Fifth Fleet’s headquarters out of the Island-Kingdom. “The Fifth Fleet headquarters should be moved back on board a flagship, as it was until 1993,” wrote Blair in *The Hill*, a publication that covered Congress.⁷ That article acknowledged that such a decision would be expensive but was apparently “necessary” because “permanent basing in a repressive Bahrain undermines our support for reform and is vulnerable if instability continues.”

7. Dennis C. Blair, “False Trade-off on Bahrain,” *The Hill*, 12 February 2013, at <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/282337-false-trade-off-on-bahrain>. It was important to note that Admiral Blair signed his essay as a member of the Board of Trustees of “Freedom House,” a US-based non-governmental advocacy organization that conducts research on democracy, political freedom, and human rights. After 2011, Freedom House concentrated on Bahrain, and produced a variety of documents that severely criticized the Al Khalifah.

The retired officer added: “American military officers should use their personal and professional influence to convince their Bahraini counterparts that a peaceful and gradual transition to a constitutional democratic monarchy is in Bahrain’s best long-term interest,” which was an eminently fair argument to make even if his assertion that “Bahrain need[ed] the United States, from both the security and economic points of view, more than the United States need[ed] Bahrain,” was not.⁸ Indeed, this was not an original argument or even a Dennis C. Blair “idea” since Toby C. Jones, Professor of History at Rutgers University, wrote a similarly titled essay in *The Atlantic* a year earlier. The author of *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* and an editor at *Middle East Report*, Jones went a step-further than the officer when he called on Washington to simply disband the Fifth Fleet because it, allegedly, became “a political liability, irrelevant, or possibly even both.” Jones added: “The cost of maintaining a large military presence in the Gulf drains American resources and limits the United States’ flexibility in dealing with regional crises. Most importantly, its presence enables regional allies to act recklessly. Saudi Arabia would almost certainly not have sent its troops into neighboring Bahrain—a sovereign country—if the Saudi and Bahraini leaderships did not assume they were protected by their patrons in the US military,” he wrote, which bordered on the disconcerted since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sent its troops as part of a GCC assistance effort to fulfill an alliance requirement to respond to a call from a member-state when that entity requested such aid.⁹

Notwithstanding the Jones and Blair calls to distance the United States from its vital ties in Bahrain, other US officers disagreed and emphasized

how critical those ties were. In reality, there were and probably are no deep ruling-family rifts with the Khawalids or anyone else for that matter, even if bloodline princes engaged in healthy debates in the aftermath of the uprising that shook the Al Khalifah family to its core. Moreover, and not a negligible point among all monarchies including the twelve Arab Gulf ruling families, competition for government appointments, persisted. Leading claimants angled to eventually succeed Prince Khalifah bin Salman Al Khalifah, the 80-year-old prime minister who took office on 16 December 1971, although the king’s uncle—who was one of Bahrain’s most powerful men—wished to have a say in what happened in the country next. Buoyed by the 2011 protests, which the Khawalids wished to oppose with a vengeance, some members of the establishment may have given the impression that they stood far from the monarch’s more moderate positions to compromise with activists. Indeed, Manama was cornered into a tough response, which led many to conclude that the Khawalids prevailed even if whatever victory was claimed by some proved to be pyrrhic because so much blood was shed and, it was worth underlining, without any prospects for a peaceful settlement over the short-term.

Because the clash within Bahrain could be perceived as a microcosm of broader conflicts in the Middle East, pitting Sunni governments like Saudi Arabia against Shi’ah Iran and its local satrapies, it was safe to conclude that what occurred in Manama may well set the tone for much of the rest of the Arab Gulf region for decades to come. Moreover, and while GCC States largely avoided the five-years-old “Arab Spring” into what probably was a generational adjustment, it was natural to see inter- and intra-ruling family divergences surface. For the purposes of this discussion, however, and the critical role that Khawalid leaders may well play in Bahrain’s future, it was critical to note that the revival was not recent and first arose in 1965, when Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifah was named state minister at the royal court to tutor then-15-year-old Heir Apparent Hamad bin ‘Isa Al Khalifah—the man who, today, is King. When Bahrain became independent in 1971, the

8. Ibid.

9. Toby C. Jones, “Time to Disband the Bahrain-Based US Fifth Fleet,” *The Atlantic*, 10 June 2011, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/06/time-to-disband-the-bahrain-based-us-fifth-fleet/240243/>.

heir apparent chose another Khawalid, his tutor's brother, to help build the nation's first army. Consequently, it was fair to conclude that the Khawalids assumed leadership in what must be labeled as the defense burden that, in all fairness, strengthened their positions as loyal members of the family. Not the contrary. After 1999, when Prince Hamad acceded the throne, his two powerful Khawalid aides moved up with him. One, Khalid bin Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifah became a court minister, essentially the monarch's chief-of-staff, and the other, Khalifah bin Ahmad Al Khalifah, remained Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defense Forces before he was promoted to become Minister of Defense. A nephew of Khalid bin Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifah, Ahmad Atiyatallah, became the head of Bahrain's intelligence apparatus and was very close to Saudi officials.¹⁰ All three perceived Iranian attempts to manipulate the country's largely Shi'ah population and, not surprisingly, took measures against any encroachments. Importantly, and while they, along with the King and his heir and other members of the family were disappointed with the lukewarm US backing in the aftermath of the post-2011 uprisings, they nevertheless seldom questioned Washington's commitment to the Kingdom and the Al Khalifah. All recognized that the US was heavily invested in the island's stability and security and could hardly afford to jettison the ruling family.

Bahrain remained a vital state both for the regional powerhouse, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as leading Western governments that have invested heavily in its stability. Who ruled in Manama was therefore critical, though no one doubted that Heir Apparent Salman would accede the throne.

10. Kenneth Katzman, *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and US Policy*, Report Number 95-1013, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 29 June 2012, p. 1.

Kuwait and the Al Sabah

Figure 2. Emir of Kuwait: Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



Source: Carlo Allegri © REUTERS

Every ruler in the Shaykhdom of Kuwait since 1756 was a direct descendent of a certain Shaykh Sabah, who was selected by a family council from among the 'Utub tribal group that controlled the northern trading port city, and that enjoyed uninterrupted power for nearly three centuries in that specific environment. The man who dominated the country's history, nevertheless, was Mubarak al-Kabir or Mubarak the Great, who ruled between 1896 and 1915. His accession was neither by family council nor was it peaceful. Rather, Mubarak the Great—like many men with “great” in their names—gained power by killing his half-brother, who was then the legitimate ruler. As if intra-family conflicts were not acute enough, Mubarak opted to rely on Britain—perhaps to differentiate himself from his fallen brother's Ottoman

preferences—with whom he signed the 1899 agreement that granted Kuwait a “Protectorate” status. London then assumed a literal control over the Shaykhdom’s foreign and defense affairs.

After Mubarak’s reign, Kuwait switched from a lateral succession—a brother replacing another—to a more peaceful system of succession, which alternated between two branches of the family. Mubarak’s two eldest sons, Jabir (r. 1915-1917) and Salim (r. 1917-1921) succeeded him. Salim’s successor was Jabir’s son, Ahmad (r. 1921-1950) and, in turn, authority reverted to ‘Abdallah bin Salim (r. 1950-1965) when Ahmad passed away. In fact, ‘Abdallah bin Salim is widely accepted as the true father of Kuwait, an observation confirmed by commentators who praised his astute maneuvers to empower the Shaykhdom’s leading Al Sabah tribal chieftains, while ushering in relative prosperity and concrete political privileges to many when the country was very much under strict rules of conduct imposed by the United Kingdom.¹¹ Ever since 1915, the rotation functioned rather well, with a single exception in 1965 when ‘Abdallah bin Salim was succeeded by his brother, Sabah al-Salim (r. 1965-1977). The other hiccup was the very brief reign of Sa‘ad al-‘Abdallah in 2006, after Jabir al-Ahmad passed away, when the new ruler could not take the oath of office in parliament as mandated by the Constitution. This mishap created a genuine political crisis for the incapacitated monarch. In the event, an ailing Shaykh Sa‘ad al-‘Abdallah ruled for a mere nine days as the country averted a major dynastic crisis, after senior family members chose Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah to succeed him on 24 January 2006.

Sabah al-Ahmad swore allegiance to the Constitution, and appointed his

brother Nawwaf al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah, the Minister of Interior in the previous government, as heir apparent. The Amir also appointed his nephew Shaykh Nasir Muhammad al-Ahmad Al Sabah, Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs, as prime minister. Simultaneously, the critical position of Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs—the gatekeeper to the ruler—was entrusted to Sabah al-Ahmad’s son, Nasir al-Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah. These appointments reinforced Al Sabah hold on several positions in the government, including the prime ministership, deputy prime ministership, and the ministries of Interior (Jabir Mubarak al-Hamad Al Sabah), Foreign Affairs (Muhammad al-Sabah al-Salim Al Sabah), and Defense (Jabir Mubarak al-Hamad Al Sabah). Because Jabir al-Ahmad was somewhat shy, his brother, Sabah al-Ahmad, was often the more visible representative of the clan. A staunch supporter of the National Assembly, the new ruler conducted Kuwaiti foreign policy for the better part of four decades, certainly in his capacity as foreign minister since 1963 but also as official negotiator. In fact, if ‘Abdallah bin Salim (r. 1950-1965) is considered the true father of contemporary Kuwait, and his son Sa‘ad al-‘Abdallah (2006) the liberator after the 1990 Iraqi invasion, then Sabah al-Ahmad must be deemed the visionary who untangled the Shaykhdom’s alliances within the Gulf region as well as with Kuwait’s powerful foreign patrons.

Notwithstanding his prowess and, in recent times, his mediation roles in various Gulf crises, Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah named both an heir apparent and a prime minister from his own al-Jabir branch of the family, which sidelined the al-Salims.¹² At the time, neither appointment was particularly popular but the shortage of figures in the al-Salim line with suitable government experience and talent, with the obvious exception of Muhammad

11. Ahmad Mustafa Abu-Hakima, *The Modern History of Kuwait*, London: Luzac, 1983. See also Jill Crystal, “Abdallah al-Salim al-Sabah,” in Bernard Reich, ed., *Political Leaders of the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990, pp. 8-14.

12. Abdullah F. Ansary, “The Succession Process in Kuwait: A Brief Overview of the Recent Crisis from a Legal Perspective,” *World Law Bulletin*, Number 1, January 2006, pp. 64-74 [a publication of The Law Library of Congress].

al-Sabah al-Salim, may have contributed to this decision. In the event, the Amir surrounded himself with close family members, perhaps to placate more serious challenges ahead. Politically sophisticated Kuwaitis wondered whether the Shaykhdom could afford to rely on an “amiable” figure as heir, especially because Shaykh Nawwaf had little experience in regional and international affairs. Others lamented the sorry state in which the Al Sabah plunged the country, especially when Saudi Arabia and Dubai—perennial competitors—experienced far smoother successions between 2004 and 2006. Many wondered whether the Al Sabah would rally behind their new leaders and cement the established patterns, or whether they will experience a similar shock before long.

The Al Sabah proved to be surprisingly resilient, best illustrated by two recent transitions, although the ruler’s advanced age and various political challenges raised the political ante. Indeed, the 2006 successions revealed “the growing dependence of at least one regional dynastic monarchy on popular forces, social and economic elites, and jointly shaped understandings of the national interest,” that altered the balance of power.¹³ In fact, and while the Kuwaiti parliamentary intervention was a positive initiative towards democratization, it was amply clear that the primary aim of the 2006 experiment was to avoid an open succession imbroglio. Consequently, Kuwait faced the prospects of a constitutional monarchy sooner than many other Arab monarchies and it was in that light that new alliances between members of the Al Sabah emerged that necessitated careful analysis.

In late 2014, rumors circulated in Kuwait that Jassim al-Kharafi, the powerful former Speaker of the Kuwaiti Majlis al-Ummah [Parliament] who also hailed from one of the Shaykhdom’s most powerful merchant families, was charged

with “attempting to topple the regime, laundering money and contacting with an enemy state.”¹⁴ The report was promptly denied by al-Kharafi’s lawyer, who insisted that no such charges were ever filed against his client, a claim buttressed by a government blackout on the topic.¹⁵ Whether this was an isolated development or part of a string of rumors linked to an alleged coup plot, the Al Sabah maintained a solid posture after the public prosecutor, Attorney General Dirar al-Asussi, issued a gag order on all media, which limited discussion of the matter to Kuwait’s famous *hussayniyyahs* (annexes to Shi’ah mosques) where sensitive political discussions are broached at will. The extraordinary measure was followed by a temporary suspension of two major newspapers—*Al-Watan* and *‘Alam Al-Yawm*—for publishing articles about the rumored plot. Interestingly, it was Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah himself who added fuel to the fire when he acknowledged the scandal in late June 2014, saying he “followed with deep concern and sorrow the allegations about certain events which, if proven true, constitute serious crimes that threaten the security of the country.”¹⁶ He further warned against making unsubstantiated accusations on social media and elsewhere, and urged all parties to leave the matter to the Public Prosecution and await a judicial verdict.

What this case illustrated above all else, were the existing family concerns over succession matters, which resurfaced after 2006. For no matter how unpalatable the options were, it was amply clear that al-Kharafi was not

13. Mary Ann Tétreault, “Three Emirs and a Tale of Two Transitions,” *Middle East Report*, 10 February 2006 at <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero021006.html>.

14. Courtney Trenwith, “Kuwait Charges Former Speaker over Attempted Coup,” *Arabian Business*, 2 October 2014, at <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/kuwait-charges-former-speaker-over-attempted-coup-566813.html>.

15. “Former Kuwait Speaker Contests Conspiracy Reports,” *Gulf News*, 26 October 2014, at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/former-kuwait-speaker-contests-conspiracy-reports-1.1404081>.

16. “Kuwait Emir Urges Calm over Coup, Graft Charges,” *The Peninsula* (Qatar), 26 June 2014, at <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/middle-east/289229/kuwait-emir-urges-calm-over-coup-graft-charges>.

motivated to act alone, and may well have received the backing of former Prime Minister Shaykh Nasir al-Muhammad Al Sabah because the current ruler did not apply the alternating principle practiced in the country for generations. While the two men, Shaykh Nasir and Jassim al-Kharafi, denied all of the allegations that surfaced during the past year or so, both were questioned by the Public Prosecution in late September and early October 2014, though few details emerged. Moreover, and this was a crucial detail, the former energy minister and president of the Olympic Council of Asia, Shaykh Ahmed al-Fahd Al Sabah, who is an al-Jabir, may have been responsible for the leak of the story in the first place for it was inconceivable that an outsider could be privy to such developments. Al-Kharafi passed away on 21 May 2015 that prompted the ruler to laud the former speaker's achievements, saying that Kuwait had lost one of the country's "dear sons and loyal men," going so far as to emphasize al-Kharafi's "unforgettable services for Kuwait."¹⁷ Both their heir apparent and prime minister joined mourners at al-Kharafi's funeral services though there were no references made to the 2014 accusations against the universally respected statesman.¹⁸

Naturally, Shaykhs Nasir and Ahmad al-Fahd were contenders to power, or at least for the position of heir, and were thus motivated to publicize the scandal and may well have solicited al-Kharafi's assistance. In any event, and no matter what else motivated such revelations, both Shaykh Nasir al-Muhammad Al Sabah and Shaykh Ahmed al-Fahd Al Sabah were keenly interested in the succession line-up after the office holder passed away. Given

that Shaykh Nawwaf al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah would become the next Amir of Kuwait, the identity of the individual he would elevate to fill the post of his heir apparent—especially if he was an al-Jabir—became essential information. Although a precarious candidacy because many Kuwaiti Shi'ahs liked him, the most likely aspirant to become heir was Shaykh Nasir al-Muhammad Al Sabah, the current Amir's nephew who was stationed as Ambassador to Iran for over a decade. Several merchant families, including the al-Kharafis, favored him too although current religious schisms throughout the region may derail his potential elevation. Of course, Shaykh Ahmed al-Fahd was an equally valuable contender, and enjoyed the support from some of Kuwait's most powerful tribes. This nephew of the ruler, and Shaykh Nasir's most outspoken competitor, Shaykh Ahmad enjoyed Qatari and Saudi backing as well as support from other segments of the Al Sabah including the powerful *Al-Watan* owner Shaykh 'Ali al-Khalifah Al Sabah, a former oil and finance minister.

Little was made public of the alleged coup plot in early 2015, though contenders to power continued to enjoy access to the ruler, with no public recriminations leveled against anyone. Whether the sitting monarch's efforts to help warring factions reconcile helped Ahmed al-Fahd Al Sabah position himself for power was impossible to determine, although he pushed for reconciliation behind the scenes.¹⁹ For now, Kuwaitis waited to see what would happen after the 86-year-old Amir passed away, even if Shaykh Sabah was a fighter through and through but lived with a pacemaker—which was installed in 1999. His health was reasonably good for an individual of his age, though the burden of power took its toll. In March 2014, the Kuwaiti

17. Abubakar A. Ibrahim, "Former Speaker Al-Kharafi Dies, 75—Nation Mourns Loss of Statesman. His Highness the Amir Offers Family Condolences," *Arab Times*, 23 May 2015, at <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/former-speaker-al-kharafi-dies-75-nation-mourns-loss-of-statesman/>.

18. "Al-Kuwayt Wada'at Jassim al-Kharafi" [Kuwait Bids Jassim al-Kharafi Adieu], *Al-Siyassah*, 23 May 2015, p. 4, at <https://docs.google.com/gview?url=http://al-seyassah.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/23-05-15-04.pdf>.

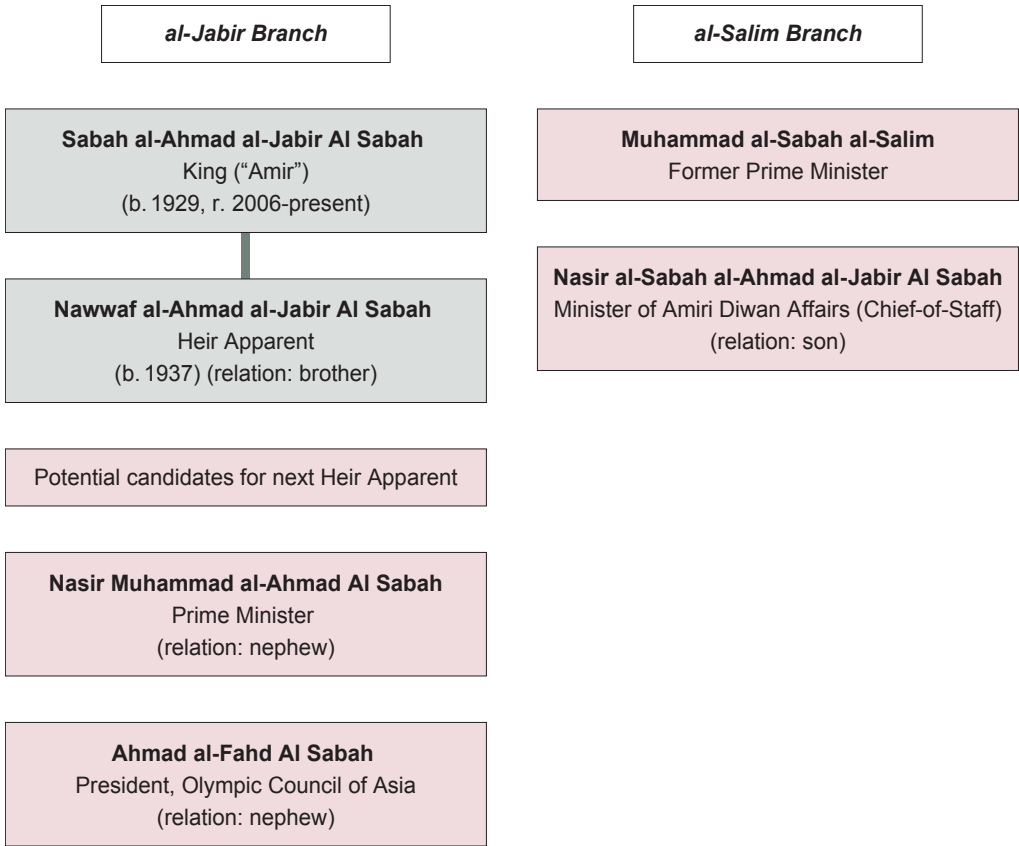
19. For two examples of such developments, see B. Izaak, "MPs. File to Grill PM Over Ties with Iran: Amir Makes Warring MPs Kiss and Make Up," *Kuwait Times*, 23 May 2011, pp. 1, 14; and Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Political Showdown in Kuwait," *Foreign Policy*, 20 June 2012, at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/20/political-showdown-in-kuwait/>.

monarch was hospitalized in the United States for minor surgery, and he was absent from public view over the summer of 2014. Yet, he delivered an annual address to parliament in late October 2014, and embarked on a grueling travel schedule throughout the region to help patch differences between Saudi Arabia (along with Bahrain and the UAE) with Qatar after several conservative Arab Gulf monarchies withdrew their ambassadors from Doha before the annual GCC Summit. More recently, he attended King ‘Abdallah bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz’s funeral on 24 January 2015, participated in several bilateral meetings in Riyadh and other Gulf capitals, and joined Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad of Qatar—along with other GCC representatives—at the 13-14 May 2015 Camp David Summit convened by US President Barack H. Obama to discuss Gulf security concerns.

Today, few Kuwaitis are willing to publicly discuss the power struggle developing in their country’s ruling establishment, and while most continue to support the Al Sabah as the legitimate rulers of Kuwait, many remain concerned with recent signs of instability. A largely open society, clampdowns on dissidents raise various eyebrows, even if a certain degree of acquiescence is observed as very few Kuwaitis complain about the State’s decision to strip the citizenship of those who vocally oppose specific government initiatives. Opposition activists, academics, and journalists prefer to observe instead of voice disapproval, which is uncharacteristic in Kuwait given its relatively free wheeling approaches to treating politics as a contact sport. Many wonder whether Shaykh Ahmad al-Fahd Al Sabah is the ideal successor given a variety of corruption scandals that implicate him directly or indirectly, including the alleged coup episode discussed above. Some believe that he may be beholden to Qatari interests, which pose its own set of problems in the currently overcharged environment of Gulf politics, which is not necessarily a good omen. Regrettably, certain Qatari steps vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after 2011 generated blowback effects in the area that made Doha and the Al Thani particularly unpopular in Kuwait and elsewhere. Other observers concluded, however, that Shaykh Ahmad

was a better option for the country because few considered Shaykh Nasir as the unifying figure he pretended to be and, on the opposite scale, someone who was deemed to be far too close to Iran to represent and defend Arab Gulf interests. Under the circumstances, additional contenders to power are well positioned to take advantage of rising opportunities, including men like the current Prime Minister, Shaykh Jabir al-Mubarak, or Shaykh Nasir Al Sabah, the Amir’s son and head of the Amiri Diwan, or even the ruler’s brother, Shaykh Mish‘al al-Ahmad Al Sabah. All are eminently qualified even if none stand out as stellar performers.

Table 2. Kuwait and the Al Sabah: Key Figures



In early 2015, the Kuwaiti succession trend seems fairly straight, with no controversies on who would come after Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah. Under normal circumstances, Heir Apparent Shaykh Nawwaf al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah, the ruler's 77-year-old half-brother, is ensured the throne. The key question that preoccupies observers of the Shaykhdom is who would be the next heir apparent, as family members position themselves on the large family checkerboard.²⁰ The next transition is likely to see the al-Salims reassert themselves, even if they lack an obvious candidate who could lead the family, as well as the country. In the larger context of tribal politics, and despite the stacking of al-Jabir members in various parts of the hierarchy, the other branch of the family is not about to surrender and move into a special form of primogeniture. For many, alternance is still a valuable tool that maintains internal harmony, something that the overwhelming majority of Kuwaitis deem worthy of preservation.

20. Kristin Smith Diwan, "Kuwait's Royals Are Taking Their Feuds Public," *The Washington Post*, 8 May 2014, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/08/kuwait-royals-are-taking-their-feuds-public/>.

Oman and the Al Sa'id

Figure 3. Sultan of Oman: Qabus bin Sa'id Al Sa'id



Source: Fadi Al-Assaad © REUTERS

When Sultan Qabus acceded the throne, Oman was not the vast empire that once comprised the Sultanate itself, the future states of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, parts of the Iranian and Pakistani coasts, and Zanzibar and the East African littoral. That empire was long gone, both due to foreign incursions and, regrettably, domestic nonchalance. Muscat and Oman, as the land that three successive rulers, Faysal, Taymur and Sa'id once ruled, was isolated and more or less exclusively reliant on Britain (and to a lesser extent on India) to guide it. Qabus bin Sa'id, the leader who was called upon to end the Sultanate's self-imposed seclusion, faced the urgent task of salvaging Al Sa'id rule while reinvigorating the nation.

To his credit, the Sultan quickly tackled the many challenges his nation faced, appointed his uncle Sayyid Tariq bin Taymur as prime minister, removed from power key figures associated with the old regime, dismissed the British Consul General for “incompetence,” declared slaves and prisoners free, supported the inauguration of an independent weekly newspaper, authorized the establishment of two radio stations, one each in Muscat and Salalah, amnestied Omanis in exile for plotting against his father, appealed to them to return and contribute to a reinvigorated society, and pledged to invest in an Omanization program that would take over from “guests” serving Muscat.²¹ Within months, Qabus changed the name of the country to the Sultanate of Oman [from *Muscat and Oman* that illustrated divisions throughout the land], adopted a new flag, and devoted a great deal of attention to the Dhuffar War that threatened domestic, regional and international stability. Furthermore, he adopted a plan to forge national unity, no longer tolerating de facto divisions between North and South.

Forty-five years after Qabus assumed power, and in what must be one of the greatest transformations of a people over such a small period of time—literally going from total isolation to modernization in less than a generation—that changed everything on the ground, Oman reinvented itself. Yet, it did so without any concessions to full authority, which His Majesty exercised with aplomb. A majority of Omanis were satisfied in the knowledge that their ruler was reliable and that he placed the interests of the State above his own even if multitudes wondered why the Sultan was not more forthcoming in clarifying who his successor might be or how he would rule, to ensure continuity and

21. Sultanate of Oman, *Oman: A Modern State*, Muscat: Ministry of Information, 1988, p. 7. See also J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State*, London and New York: Croom Helm and Barnes & Noble, 1978, pp. 52-59. See also, Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy*, Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1995, pp. 6-11.

stability. Just about everyone speculated on a potential legatee, especially since the Sultan did not have an heir.²²

The legal question as to who may succeed Qabus was resolved in 1996 when Muscat issued a “Basic Law” that clearly delineated the method through which senior members of the ruling family would be called to select an inheritor of the throne.²³ Article 6 of the Basic Law specifically declared that “the Ruling Family Council shall within three days of the throne falling vacant, determine the successor to the throne.” It further stated: “if the Ruling Family Council does not agree on the choice of the successor to the throne, the Defense Council shall confirm the appointment of the person designated by the Sultan in his letter to the Ruling Family Council,” and added that, if the family council—and not the family as it is generally assumed—were unable to agree on a successor within three days, then the “Defense Council” should appoint the person named in a letter left behind by Sultan Qabus. Speculation about the putative letter preoccupied observers of the Sultanate ever since, with the most obvious “candidates” likely to succeed the monarch one of the following men: Fahd bin Mahmud, now deputy prime minister for cabinet affairs, Haytham bin Tariq, the Minister of Heritage and Culture, Shihab bin Tariq, appointed advisor to His Majesty but, until February 2004, the Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, and As‘ad bin Tariq, now representative of the Sultan, who previously commanded the Sultan’s Armored Regiment [an army unit] and was secretary-general of the Higher Committee for Conferences. The three bin Tariq brothers are the sons of Sayyid Tariq bin Taymur, His Majesty’s late uncle, and first prime minister. Sayyid Fahd, another cousin of His Majesty, effectively fulfilled the Sultanate’s day-to-day affairs, presiding over its premier political institution, the Council of Ministers, when the ruler delegated him the task. Sayyid

22. Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-161.

23. See Sultanate of Oman, *The Basic Statute of the State*, Muscat: Diwan of Royal Court, 1996, p. 3.

Yahtham filled in for Sayyid Fahd as necessary too.

The Sultanate of Oman stood out among Arab Gulf monarchies in terms of the pool of potential successors, which was rather limited, simply because the Al Sa'id family was minute compared to neighboring ruling families throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, succession affairs were mandated to pass to male descendants of Sultan Ahmad bin Sa'id who, according to the Basic Law, must be an "adult Muslim of sound mind and a legitimate son of Omani Muslim parents," further shrinking the pool from which a potential candidate might be drawn.²⁴ This particular ruling left out several Al Sa'ids who happened to be of mixed parentage and while some analysts believed that the system in place was impractical because the number of frontrunners was too small, it was nevertheless not as problematic as many assumed.

First, and this was important to note, the Al Bu Sa'id were not ready to jettison their responsibilities and involve non-royals in the decision-making process, even if the Basic Law contained provisos to that end. Naturally, the Law called on the Defense Council to intervene, but only in case the Ruling Family Council failed to select a Sultan. Qabus was wise to anticipate potential disagreements although contemporary Al Bu Sa'id officials did not display any appetite for sanguine competition. In the event that sharp disagreements arose, a mechanism was available to resolve pending disputes, although—and this was worth repeating—there was no evidence that such disputes existed. Of course, and now that the Sultan returned from his long convalescence in Germany, it was possible that he might designate an heir before he died precisely to avert a putative competition between candidates, though other possibilities existed too. Indeed, and because of growing tensions and rapidly evolving developments throughout the Gulf region, one cannot exclude such a decision especially if His Majesty were determined to ensure a smooth

24. Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

transition and continuity in his policies. Consequently, naming a successor during his lifetime to confer on that individual a maximum dose of legitimacy, as well as preempting any family disputes, would be vintage Qabus.

Although there were no fundamental disagreements within the ruling family on succession matters, and while Sayyid Fahd seldom received the praise he rightly deserved for acting as a patriarchal figure, few should dismiss his abilities to oversee the succession process when the time comes to see the Sultanate cross the psychological hurdle of having a leader other than Sultan Qabus. Still, those who hammered that Oman lacked exceptional candidates were, by the same token, underestimating the three sons of Sayyid Tariq bin Taymur, all three of whom wished to avoid family and tribal tensions. In fact, the reason why there was no risk that strains between family members would arise to the level of a crisis was precisely due to the characters of the contenders to power, none of whom was adamant, or desperate, to fill a post.

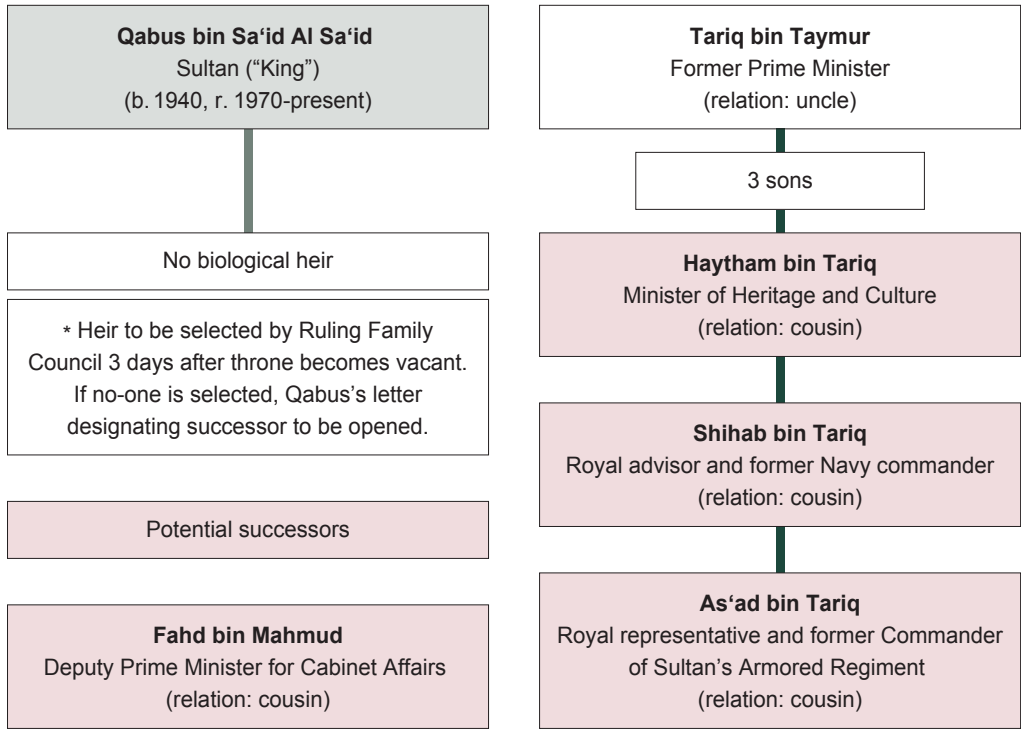
Sultan Qabus' cousins were genuine Al Bu Sa'idis. Sayyids As'ad, Haytham and Shihab, along with Sayyid Fahd, as well as As'ad's son Taymur—who may also be a potential candidate despite his relatively young age—were all devoted to Oman.²⁵ To impugn otherwise, and to imply that these men would engage in a power-struggle is facile, especially since no evidence existed to reach such conclusions.²⁶ Observers of the Sultanate monitored all

25. Sayyid Taymur bin As'ad is believed to be born in 1980 and is thus 35 years old. See Ambassador Gary A. Grappo, "The Royal Guessing Game: The Next Generation," *Wikileaks*, Document Number 07MUSCAT1126, 15 December 2017, at <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/12/07MUSCAT1126.html>.

26. Jennifer Hunt, "A Looming Succession Crisis in Oman and Saudi Arabia," *The Interpreter*, [Sydney, Australia: Lowy Institute for International Policy], 5 February 2015, at <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2015/02/05/succession-crisis-Oman-Saudi-Arabia.aspx?COLLCC=3547361197&>. See also Martin Dokoupil, "Succession Question Fuels Uncertainty in Oman," *Reuters*, 23 May 2012, at <http://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFL6E8F806720120523>.

contenders, to determine which one received exceptional attention during a given period, although such speculation did not cut the proverbial mustard. For example, if Sayyid As‘ad, who was the Sultan’s personal representative since 2003 and who attended most League of Arab States meetings to speak for Oman, received more press coverage, this did not necessarily mean that the winnowing was completed in his favor. Neither was the Sultan attending Sayyid Taymur bin As‘ad’s 2004 wedding to “Salma bint Mustahail bin Ahmed al-Mashani, whose father is the brother and senior surviving male relative of the Sultan’s revered late mother, Shaikha Mazoon,” mean that the young man was a shoe-in to succeed Qabus.²⁷ Having an edge on his half-brothers Haytham and Shihab may well meet certain criteria for Sayyid As‘ad but what influenced succession matters in the Sultanate, as elsewhere

Table 3. Oman and the Al Sa‘id: Key Figures



throughout the region, revolved around national security questions, family affairs, and internal stability concerns.

For nearly five decades, Qabus bin Sa‘id seldom stopped surprising as befitted an original revolutionary who ushered in his share of fundamental changes to a deeply traditional society. In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising that shocked and surprised the ruling establishment, and in less than two weeks, the Omani ruler surprised anew as he issued no fewer than 28 royal decrees, which literally pulverized preconceived notions that entrenched regimes were too indecisive to act. Observers unaccustomed to tectonic shifts, marveled at the speed with which these changes were introduced and, more important, at their substantive features.²⁸ The most recent, which empowered the sultanate’s two advisory councils—the elected Majlis al-Shurah and the appointed Majlis al-Dawlah—with legislative authority, was historic as well.²⁹ Under the circumstances, it was fair to ask what Oman would look like after these latest reforms and whether the next ruler may successfully manage similar tensions.

An examination of Muscat’s immediate responses to the 2011 uprisings provided a few clues to this key question. Indeed, several days after demonstrations in Sohar surprised everyone, Sultan Qabus made modest changes, replacing ministers and undersecretaries, advisers, and Majlis al-Dawlah members. Against a wave of protests, and instead of delaying,

27. Grappo, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

28. “The Sultanate of Silence...Full Scale Crackdown on Omani Democracy Activists,” *Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies*, 18 December 2012, at <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=5336&lang=en>. See also Ra'id Zuhair al-Jamali, “Oman, Kind of Not Quiet,” *Foreign Policy*, 7 November 2011, at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/07/oman-kind-of-not-quiet/>.

29. Fahad Al Ghadani, “Oman Elections: Citizens Call for Female Quota in Majlis Al Shura for Parity,” *The Times of Oman*, 2 February 2015, p. 1, at <http://www.timesofoman.com/News/46713/Article-Oman-elections-Citizens-call-for-female-quota-in-Majlis-Al-Shura-for-parity>.

he dismissed key aides, espoused freedom of speech by tolerating dissent, supported calls for accountability, and agreed to share some of the absolute powers he exercised. The sum total of these incredible transformations shook the political establishment even if they reaffirmed the ruler's bold outlook. Still, what surprised most was Muscat's unabashed honesty in tackling what many assumed would never change. The first wave of seven decrees was proclaimed on 28 February 2011, addressing various concerns of the business community along with the appointment of a Supreme Court and an ambassadorial appointment. On 1 March 2011, two decrees set up a Consumer Protection Authority as well as an administratively and financially autonomous Public Prosecution Department, which were followed, two days later, with a significant amendment of the State Audit Institution that expanded its prerogatives. On 6 March 2011, the ruler named replacements for his long-time ministers of the diwan, royal office, as well as secretary-general of the royal court, men targeted by public opinion for less than stellar performance and, supposedly, for enriching themselves at the expense of the nation.³⁰ The monarch's most dramatic announcements came on 7 March 2011, in what one observer referred to as "the night of the long Khanjars," when eight royal decrees restructured the Council of Ministers, appointed a new secretary-general for the Council of Ministers, selected a chairman for the State Audit and Administrative Institution, chose a chairman of the Tender Board, designated an adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court, picked an adviser for the Finance Ministry, assigned two new undersecretaries for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries respectively and, lo and behold, cancelled outright the Ministry of National Economy.³¹

30. Joseph A. Kéchichian, "A Bold Blueprint for Oman Reforms," *Gulf News*, 17 March 2011, at <http://m.gulfnews.com/opinion/a-bold-blueprint-for-oman-reforms-1.778136>.

31. "Ministers Sacked Wholesale. HM Feeds the Entitlement Culture and New (Peaceful) Protests Confirm a Sea Change in Omani Politics," *Muscat Confidential*, 10 March 2011, at <http://muscatconfidential.blogspot.com/2011/03/ministers-sacked-wholesale-hm-feeds.html>.

A few days later, the Sultan granted legislative and audit powers to the two chambers that made up the Majlis Oman, and promoted a respected military officer as the new inspector general of police and customs. Acting fast literally meant that the Sultan listened, adapted, and applied many of the demands that were deemed to be in the country's best interests. Yet, the ruler's sweeping shake-ups, which ushered in many new faces in the government along with pay rises as well as promises to help create over 50,000 new civil service posts, failed to satisfy protesters. Noticeably, young men and women pondered whether the potential appointments would be coveted managerial positions, or whether their dreams would only be fulfilled once they learned to patiently work within established systems.

In the event, the post-2011 developments that shook the Arabian Peninsula just as much as the rest of the Arab World meant that Oman was not immune to such convulsions. On the contrary, Gulf Cooperation Council leaders understood that they needed to mitigate future problems and, towards that end, the regional alliance committed large financial aid packages to both Muscat and Manama. Oman and Bahrain received generous \$1 billion annual stipends until 2021 from the GCC to invest in socio-economic programs.³² Of course, such commitments allowed both governments to create job opportunities even if Sultan Qabus, as well as Omanis in general, knew that the private sector needed to literally invent sustainable long-term employment to satisfy increasingly educated young men and women. Therefore, while it was safe to state that Muscat would certainly fulfill recent boosts to state pensions as well as accelerate payments to families receiving state social security over the short-term, neither Oman nor any of the other Arab states experiencing similar challenges could buy themselves out of

32. Tarek El-Tablawy, "GCC Pledges \$20 Billion in Aid for Oman, Bahrain," *The Washington Post*, 10 March 2011, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/10/AR2011031003629.html>.

needed reforms. For in the long run, Omanis, like their Gulf neighbors, must be willing to dirty their hands, and invest blood and sweat in building their nation(s).

Ironically, among the many demands made by educated young Omanis camping in the parking lot of the Majlis al-Shurah in Sib—transformed for the occasion into the Sahat al-Sha‘ab [the People’s Square]—were calls to give the elected body real governance powers that, truth be told, necessitated a much larger degree of transparency. The genuinely liked ruler responded with the kind of rejoinder that rose to the occasion, providing his nation with new opportunities, precisely to avert confrontations. In fact, Muscat understood far better than most other Arab capitals facing popular uprisings that any responses ought to be meaningful, rather than simply reflect a scramble to appease demonstrators. When police forces confronted protesters in Sohar with the unfortunate violence that ensued and that resulted in a death of a demonstrator, Sultan Qabus was furious that his troops were obligated to open fire, something that the ruler knew would further alienate young Omanis who wished to assume burdens of power and be trusted to invest in themselves as well as the country to add value. According to a high-ranking security official in Muscat, and although protesters clearly broke the law by destroying public property, the Omani monarch immediately ordered police to back down, judging that a military clash would be counter-productive. He carefully assessed demands made by a crowd largely composed of young unemployed men, and concluded that it was his duty to rush to their assistance, instead of chastising them for their audacity.

The Sultan’s revolutionary instincts served him and Oman well, as he positioned the Sultanate on the path of a new chapter, empowering politicians, insisting on accountability, and encouraging freedom of assembly and speech. He was aware that unemployment and poverty existed in the country and that elite behavior was not always stellar. Nevertheless, while it was correct to surmise that “the personal involvement of most influential

decision makers and cabinet members in business has fuelled the widespread perception of an elite busy safeguarding its privileges while silencing questions about the conflict between the nation’s general interests they are supposed to promote—such as Omanisation policies of employment—and the particular stakes they defend as businessmen,” it was also accurate to state that many opportunities existed for entrepreneurs ready to take risks.³³

Recuperating from a long medical leave period, and even if Sultan Qabus was advanced in age in early 2015, there was no denying that his exceptional reign was full of innovations that dramatically changed the face of the Sultanate, often for the better. There were, nevertheless, serious calls to further boost the system in place, through appeals to help a potential successor rule more effectively precisely to avoid pitfalls. Indeed, socio-economic challenges required a transparent mechanism, perhaps with a designated heir assuming a greater share of the governance burden, which could no longer wait. Sardonicly, Muscat rumor mills opined that non Al Bu Sa‘id personalities will inevitably play a greater role in the future, led by the veteran Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin ‘Alawi, who was one of the Dhuffar Liberation Front’s leaders until 1968, and who gained Sultan Qabus’ trust after 1982. ‘Alawi became indispensable and could potentially remain so, though similarly powerful men were dismissed without fanfare in 2011 when Qabus deemed that to be in the best interests of the nation. Few ought to doubt the ability of a future Sultan to do likewise as several similar cases existed throughout the region to further buttress Arab Gulf ruling families’ “will to

33. Marc Valeri, *Simmering Unrest and Succession Challenges in Oman*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2015 at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/omani_spring.pdf, p. 7. See also Dhafir Awadh Al-Shanfari, *Entrepreneurship in Oman: A Snapshot of the Main Challenges* [Multi-year expert meeting on enterprise development policies and capacity-building in science, technology and innovation (STI) (fourth session)], Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 16–18 January 2012, at http://unctad.org/sections/wcmu/docs/ciimem1_4th_Dhafir%20Awadh%20Al-Shanfari_en.PDF.

power.” Shaykh Khalid bin Saqr Al Qasimi, who was the Ras al-Khaymah heir apparent, was abruptly dismissed by his father in 2003 and replaced by his half-brother Shaykh Sa‘ud bin Saqr Al Qasimi. Khalid al-Tuwayjri, the head of the Saudi Royal Court who acted as King ‘Abdallah bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz’s gatekeeper, was quickly replaced by King Salman bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz on 23 January 2015. In Oman itself, Qabus dismissed Sayyid ‘Ali bin Hamud Al Busa‘idi, the Minister of the Royal Court, General ‘Ali bin Majid Al Ma’amari, the Minister of the Sultan’s Office, Ahmad Makki and Maqbool bin ‘Ali bin Sultan, respectively the powerful ministers of National Economy and Minister of Commerce, Industry and Minerals, in less than a fortnight. There were similar cases in contemporary Omani history, which illustrated that no one was indispensable, though what was bound to remain steady was the ruling family’s succession architecture as devised by Qabus bin Sa‘id.

Qatar and the Al Thani

Figure 4. Sheikh of Qatar: Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani



Source: Amr Abdallah Dalsh © REUTERS

By the early 1990s, the Al Thani ruling family consisted of three main branches: the Bani Hamad, headed by Khalifah bin Hamad; the Bani ‘Ali, headed by Ahmad bin ‘Ali; and the Bani Khalid, headed by Nasir bin Khalid. Reliable sources estimated total clan membership at around 20,000 individuals although this could not be independently confirmed because so little was actually known about family affairs on the promontory. Hamad bin Khalifah’s heirs, of course, were certainly considered *primus inter pares* (first among peers). With the 27 June 1995 coup against his father, Hamad bin Khalifah (r. 1995–2013) ushered into Qatari succession affairs a jump to

the younger generation of leaders. To be sure, Hamad was the Shaykhdom's de facto ruler in every sense of the word and, since at least 1992, controlled every sector of government except the Ministry of Finance. In time, the son eased his father out of power, backed by leading ruling family members who were equally distraught at the political calamities that befell the small country. Whether due to his forward-looking agenda, his munificence, or his genuine belief that future generations deserved better support from their rulers, Hamad was immensely more popular than his father. The heir's spouse, Shaykhah Mawzah bint Nasir Al Misnad, was equally engagée. Her desire to equip Qatar with first-rate education institutions was already in preparation even before the coup that brought her husband to power.³⁴

A man of immense enthusiasm for positive change, Hamad bin Khalifah perceived the slow-pace of regional transformations as an impediment to Qatar's own development. Towards that end, he distanced his policies both from Doha's traditional Arab allies in the Gulf region, and anticipated the winds of change by forging new alliances with the United States while maintaining correct ties with Iran. Even if the period after 1995 was especially troubling for the sovereign, he continued to emphasize internal reforms as the ideal method to address changing relationships between citizens and ruling families. It was that truism that allowed Qataris to justify, as well as accept, the 1995 coup d'état.

34. The proposition that Qatar should pursue education excellence is not a recent phenomenon.

See, Carla Power, "Qatar: Hillary Clinton Stand Back," *Newsweek*, 10 November 2003, pp. 30-31.

Although Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifah married three women, who have given him eleven sons and six daughters—Misha'al and Fahad, sons of Mariam; Jasim, Tamim, Jawa'an, Muhammad, Khalifah, and Mayassah, Hussah and Hind, sons and daughters of Mawzah; as well as Khalid, 'Abdallah, Thani, Qa'aqah and Lulwah, Mariam, and 'Anud, sons and daughters of Nurah—his second spouse, Shaykhah Mawzah, stood out. Her leadership roles in several areas of Qatari society were recognized and indispensable.

Hamad moved quickly to serve his nation and protect his throne. He invested heavily in the country's infrastructure, encouraged entrepreneurship, helped create wealth—and wealthy families—and changed the succession clause in the constitution. Whereas Article 22 had specifically stated that "rulership of the State is hereditary in the [Al Thani] family," Hamad issued a decree that declared succession would go "from the father to one of his sons."³⁵ In October 1996, he appointed his third son Jasim [Shaykhah Mawzah's eldest], as heir. At the same time, Hamad bestowed the premiership on his younger brother 'Abdallah, methodically spreading dynastic authority over several individuals. That sophistication strengthened the Al Thani family, whose senior leaders bestowed their allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the young heir, led by the affable Qatari Foreign Minister (and eventual Prime Minister), Hamad bin Jasim bin Jabir Al Thani.

Following a ruling family council meeting on 5 August 2003, Hamad bin Khalifah informed the world that Jasim bin Hamad Al Thani requested and received permission, to step down from his post as heir apparent. Jasim was barely 25 when he tendered his resignation. The ruler further announced that Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani would replace his brother. Assembled family members and dignitaries led by Khalid bin Hamad Al Thani, Prime Minister 'Abdallah bin Khalifah Al Thani and Deputy Premier Muhammad bin Khalifah Al Thani, all pledged their allegiance to the new heir apparent.³⁶

Shaykh Tamim was born on 3 June 1980 in Doha and is the fourth son of

35. Herbert J. Liebesny, "Qatar," in A. P. Blaustein and G. H. Flanz, eds., *Constitutions of the Countries of the World*, Dobbs Ferry, July 1973, p. 4; see also Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 126.

36. For a discussion of these appointments, including letters exchanged between the ruler and his sons, see Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-220, 453-458.

the ruler. He received his early education at Sherborne (*Dorset*) in Britain, and graduated from the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, when he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the Qatari Army in 1998. For several years, Tamim was the president of the Qatari Olympic Committee, as well as chairman of the December 2006 Doha Asian Games. Tamim married Shaykhah Jawharah bint Hamad Al Thani, daughter of Hamad bin Suhaym Al Thani, a former Minister of State Without Portfolio, on 8 January 2005.

Uncharacteristic of Arab Gulf rulers, what Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifah Al Thani did—abdicate in favor of his then 33-year-old son—changed the rules of the game. As he announced his decision to the nation in a television broadcast, Hamad insisted that the time was right for a new generation to step forward, and shoulder the responsibilities of leadership. To be sure, and beyond the burdens of power, the ruler experienced recurrent health issues and probably prepared his abdication with utmost care, even if the decision surprised most. “As I address you today,” the Amir told his people in a short television broadcast, “I declare that I will hand over the reins of power to Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and I am fully certain that he is up to the responsibility, deserving of confidence, and capable of shouldering the responsibility and fulfilling the mission.” In his final address as outgoing ruler, Shaykh Hamad spoke of the “original and creative initiatives” of the next generation, and told the “children of this homeland” that it was for them to “usher in a new era where young leadership hoists the banner,” a declaration that intended to energize Qatar’s young population. Of course, no one expected Tamim to deviate significantly from the policies of his father, to whom he gave the title *al-amir al-walid* [father-amir]. Interestingly, the 61-year-old leader chose the 25 June date, which was two days before the 18th anniversary of Shaykh Hamad deposing his own father, perhaps to further consolidate the primogeniture system he created. In the event, the transfer of power was smooth, with Shaykh Tamim addressing his countrymen on the 26th for the first time as a head of state. There were quite a few surprises, including a reshuffle of the cabinet, which saw the removal of the über

powerful Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabir Al Thani (HBJ) from office. ‘Abdallah bin Nasir bin Khalifah Al Thani, a former minister of state for internal affairs, was named prime minister and interior minister, while the foreign ministry went to Khalid bin Muhammad Al Attiyyah, who was a state minister for foreign affairs since 2011. Other personalities were brought into government too.

Observers of Qatar concluded that the successor would honor his predecessor’s legacies in both domestic and foreign affairs, as Shaykh Tamim praised his father for being the country’s true political architect, and promised to follow in his paths. He also made clear Qatar intended to remain independent-minded, though he added a twist when he declared: “Qatar is committed to its promises and relations, but we have a vision and we don’t wait for orders from anyone.”³⁷ This first year in office was eventful, even if the young Qatari ruler continued along the path envisaged by his father, though some distinctions emerged in the defense sector. In fact, Tamim authorized massive new equipment orders, introduced national service and, on the domestic front, delivered two speeches that emphasized the importance of making the public sector more efficient. Although he confronted a plethora of challenges, the ruler nevertheless consolidated various planks, and made progress on most, even if critics alleged they seldom understood his policies.³⁸ Many analysts viewed him as a broadly populist leader who was sharply aware of the need to please conservative elements within the population. Others praised his policies to cut dead wood and increase fiscal transparency, both of which

37. “Emir Vows to Follow His Father’s ‘Path,’” *Gulf Times*, 27 June 2013, at <http://www.gulf-times.com/qatar/178/details/357595/emir-vows-to-follow-his-father-s-path>.

38. Hassan Hassan, “Qatar: Blowback for Brinksmanship,” in Fatima Ayub, ed., *The Gulf and Sectarianism*, London: European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2013, pp. 9-12. See also Sultan Barakat, *Qatari Mediation: Between Ambition and Achievement*, Washington, D.C. and Doha: Brookings Institution, 2014.

implied more liberal preferences, though he probably was a realist. It was not a surprise that this first year in office would follow established political and economic planks, especially when one recalled that Shaykh Tamim played such a significant role in the running of the state in the years before his father abdicated. Moreover, because most assumed that the *al-amir al-walid* was still active and undoubtedly a key influence on policymaking, the stable environment that was nurtured after mid-2013 surprised few.³⁹

What was sharply different, however, was the media exposure to which the new ruler submitted. Unlike his father or, Shaykh Hamad bin Jasim who was a frequent guest on global outlets, Shaykh Tamim was less conspicuous, and while he honored official events, meetings, and international appearances as necessary, he rarely spoke in public. The same was true for his prime minister, Shaykh ‘Abdallah bin Nasir, whose low-key persona stood in sharp contrast to that of HBJ. Between June 2013 and June 2014, the ruler delivered three major addresses, his inauguration pledges about his political and economic priorities, at the opening of the UN General Assembly in September 2013, and at the opening session of the Advisory Council in November 2013.⁴⁰ He

39. Martin Dokoupil, “New Qatar Emir Takes Aim at Inflation, Corruption,” *Reuters*, 6 November 2013, at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/11/06/qatar-emir-inflation-idUKL5N0IR1AD20131106>. See also *Qatar National Development Strategy 2011~2016: Towards Qatar National Vision 2030*, Doha: Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2013, at http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/gsdg_vision/docs/NDS_EN.pdf.

40. The ruler’s speeches are available online at dohanews.co. For the three relevant addresses delivered during his first year in power, see, “Qatar’s New Emir Pledges to Stay on Course Set by His Father,” 26 June 2013, at <http://dohanews.co/qatars-new-emir-pledges-to-stay-on-course-set-by-his/>; Shabina S. Khatri, “Emir Calls for End to Suffering of Palestinians, Syrians in UN Speech,” 24 September 2013, at <http://dohanews.co/emir-calls-for-end-to-suffering-of-palestinians/> and Shabina S. Khatri, “Emir Focuses on ‘Building the Homeland’ in First Shura Council address,” 5 November 2013, at <http://dohanews.co/building-the-homeland-focus-of-emirs-first-address-to-shura-council/>.

returned to New York in September 2014 for a repeat performance along the Hudson River and to Washington, D.C. twice in early 2015, first to visit with President Obama on 24 February to discuss bilateral relations and, along with other GCC leaders, on 13-14 May 2015 for a “partnership” Summit at the White House and Camp David to work out differences over the anticipated nuclear agreement between world powers and Iran. While in the United States, the sovereign spoke to a major news outlet in what was his first television interview since he acceded to ruler-ship, to discuss the conditions faced by migrant workers in Qatar, which he deemed as being “unacceptable.”⁴¹

Interestingly, his two addresses at the UN General Assembly dealt with foreign policy, while his November 2013 speech provided the most detailed explanation of his domestic priorities, though he confronted a major crisis in early 2014 after a nearly year-long crisis preoccupied Doha when Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar. This was a serious challenge that shook the young ruler to the core.

Inasmuch as Qatari foreign policy remained broadly unchanged under Shaykh Tamim, Doha’s continued support for the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, was not the monarch’s doing. In fact, both his predecessor and HBJ initiated steadfast attitudes towards the Islamist group, allegedly because of the latter’s popular bases in Egypt, Syria and elsewhere. Still, while Doha stood by Cairo when the Muslim Brotherhood consolidated power and

41. Shabina S. Khatri, “Qatar Emir to Make First Official White House Visit on Tuesday,” *Gulf Times*, 21 February 2015, p. 1, at <http://dohanews.co/qatar-emir-make-first-official-white-house-visit-tuesday/>. See also “Emir Describes Camp David Summit as Fruitful,” *Gulf Times*, 15 May 2015, p. 1, at <http://www.gulf-times.com/qatar/178/details/439279/emir-describes-camp-david-summit-as-fruitful>; and Peter Kovessy, “In TV interview, Qatar Emir Says Poor Labor Conditions ‘Not Acceptable’,” *Doha News*, 26 September 2014, at <http://dohanews.co/tv-interview-qatar-emir-says-poor-labor-conditions-acceptable/>.

elected an Islamist head-of-state, Muhammad Morsi, the military coup d'état that ushered in Field Marshall 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi—barely two weeks after Shaykh Tamim took office—meant that Doha's preferences could not persist without serious consequences given that the leading Arabian Peninsula power, Saudi Arabia, perceived Morsi with suspicion.⁴² Yet, and as the influence of the Brotherhood and affiliated groups in Tunisia, Libya and Syria diminished—and the vitriol from GCC neighbors Saudi Arabia and the UAE increased—Qatar stayed its course, arguing that it never supported the Brotherhood as such, but rather citizens and their representatives in each country. It tried to maintain cordial relations with the new Egyptian government, though this proved difficult because Cairo's anti-Qatari rhetoric reached new heights. Moreover, the jailing of *Al Jazeera* journalists and violent repression of protests throughout Egypt added fuel to the fire. In January 2014, Qatar claimed that Egypt's classification of the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization (something which Saudi Arabia subsequently further affirmed) was, in effect, justifying a shoot-to-kill policy against peaceful protesters. Whether the hurt was truly deep was impossible to know although Shaykh Tamim did not attend the inauguration of the new Egyptian President on 8 June 2013, presumably because he was not invited. In the event, Doha sent a congratulatory cable, suggesting that the Qatari monarch was aware of its long-term interests that, regardless of interpretations, was not to portray itself as a foe of the largest Arab state.⁴³

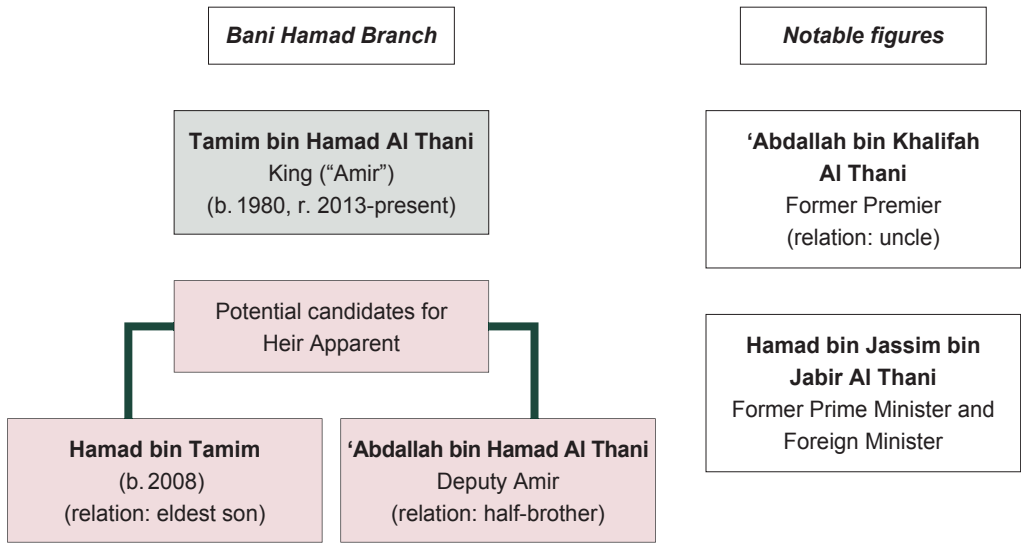
42. Lina Khatib, *Qatar and the Recalibration of Power in the Gulf*, Washington and Beirut: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014. See also Guido Steinberg, "The Gulf States and the Muslim Brotherhood," Washington, DC: The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) at the Elliott School of International Affairs (George Washington University), 21 March, 2014; and Ian Black, "Qataris Give Ground in Gulf Spat," *The Guardian*, 19 September 2014, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/on-the-middle-east/2014/sep/19/qatar-islamists-uae-saudi-egypt>.

43. Azzurra Meringolo, "From Morsi to Al-Sisi: Foreign Policy at the Service of Domestic Policy," *Insight Egypt*, Number 8, March 2015, at http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/inegypt_08.pdf.

Whether by his own volition or with the full support of his father, Shaykh Tamim adopted a special attitude vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, whose fury at Doha's continued support for Islamist groups in general provoked a major diplomatic spat in early 2014. In fact, the three GCC states recalled their ambassadors from Doha on 5 March 2014, accusing Qatar of violating a GCC security pact not to interfere in other states' internal affairs. Doha expressed regret as well as surprise and made clear it did not intend to be influenced by other countries' ideas about what its policy should be, though it did not reciprocate by withdrawing its own representatives from the capitals of its GCC allies. More important, and true to local traditions, Shaykh Tamim attended several mediation meetings in Kuwait, which demonstrated his readiness to resolve the spat before the annual GCC Summit scheduled for late 2014 in the Qatari capital. To be sure, details of what actually occurred at these conciliation gatherings remained sparse, though allegations that the UAE was involved in the conflict in Gaza threatened harmonious reconciliation. In the event, rumors most likely spread by Brotherhood officials were picked up by various Qatari news outlets, including *Al Jazeera*. Abu Dhabi demanded a formal apology, which it did not receive, further enlarging the gulf that separated conservative monarchs from each other. What actually occurred in Egypt with the Brotherhood was nothing unusual though the reactions in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Manama were. Leaders in all three countries were angry about the activities of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a highly influential Brotherhood cleric who lived in Qatar after he was expelled from Egypt in the 1960s, and while rumors circulated that Qaradawi would be asked to leave Qatar after Shaykh Tamim acceded the throne, the cleric continued to receive generous airtime when he lambasted Arab Gulf monarchs. Qaradawi was particularly harsh with Abu Dhabi, whose rulers he accused of being anti-Islamic, which was meaningless but wholly irritating. Abu Dhabi's ruling family, most notably Heir Apparent Muhammad bin Zayid Al Nahyan, strongly opposed the Brotherhood and, at least since 2011, spearheaded a crackdown on Al-Islah, its local affiliate in the UAE.⁴⁴

Interestingly, both the Qatari ruler and his prime minister purposefully kept low profiles with no public declarations, which were unlike their predecessors’ preferred styles—though HBJ’s prominence could be explained by his concurrent role as foreign minister. Instead, the capable current foreign minister, Khalid bin Muhammad Al ‘Attiyah, who had been state minister for foreign affairs since 2011, became Qatar’s international public face. Shaykh Tamim’s direct role in foreign policy should not be underestimated, however, since he kept an active travel schedule, and welcomed numerous international dignitaries in his capital. Moreover, and while there were no new grand foreign policy initiatives, Qatar’s relationships with governments and

Table 4. Qatar and the Al Thani: Key Figures



44. "Abu Dhabi's Network of Political Sufism and its Implications on the Security of Saudi Arabia," *Islam Affairs*, 2015, at <https://www.scribd.com/doc/260515315/Abu-Dhabi-s-Network-Of-Political-Sufism-And-Its-Implications-On-The-Security-Of-Saudi-Arabia>. See also Jonathan Benthall, "Building a Reform Movement: Could Muslims Emulate Nineteenth Century Judaism?," *The GloCal*, 30 March 2015, at <http://www.glocal.org.hk/archives/41778>.

independent groups shunned by others—Khartoum, the Taliban, Hamas—ensured that Doha was regularly called upon in times of crisis (even if it also attracted accusations of sponsoring terrorism in times of relative calm). Its efforts to negotiate a ceasefire in Gaza in 2014, for example, showed the strength of the role Qatar carved out under the Father Amir, and which his son seemed keen to maintain, even if he aimed to get his own house in order before considering expansion of Qatar’s engagements abroad.

Naturally, one expected a young monarch to take his time as he devised various plans, settled on long-term strategies, and gradually introduced fundamental changes that benefitted his nation. Towards that end, Shaykh Tamim did not seem to be in a hurry to name an heir apparent, presumably due to the very young age of his sons. As he was only 34 in 2015, this was less of a concern than in Oman, for example, where the heirless sultan is in his seventies (and recovering from a medical regimen in Germany). Nonetheless, were Tamim to die unexpectedly, there would be a lot to resolve. Whether such a possibility crossed his mind was impossible to know even if he issued a decree in April 2014 that promoted Shaykh ‘Abdallah bin Hamad Al Thani, his brother, to assume his duties each time the ruler travelled abroad.⁴⁵ Shaykh ‘Abdallah, the monarch’s half-brother, was the head of the Diwan, a position he filled starting in late 2011 when their father appointed him. In another sign of his proximity to the ruler, ‘Abdallah was named vice-president of the Qatar Investment Authority on Tamim’s accession, to second Ahmad al-Sayyid as chairman (a post held previously by HBJ).

Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad had two wives in 2015 and, according to some sources, married twice more since, although this could not be verified.

45. Peter Kovessy, "Qatar's Emir Names Second-in-Command, and a New Head of the Diwan," *Doha News*, 12 November 2014, at <http://dohanews.co/qatars-emir-names-second-command-new-head-diwan/>.

However, unlike the monarch's prominent mother, Shaykhah Mawzah bint Nasir Al Misnad, none of his wives have taken on the role of official consort. He is thought to have at least seven children; two sons and two daughters by his first wife, Shaykhah Jawahar bint Hamad bin Suhaym Al Thani, and three children, including at least one boy, by his second wife, 'Anud bint Manah Al Hajri. His eldest male child and presumed heir, Hamad bin Tamim, was born in 2008.

Saudi Arabia and the Al Sa'ud

Figure 5. King of Saudi Arabia: Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Sa'ud



Source: Gary Cameron © REUTERS

In 2015, Saudi Arabia held an estimated quarter of the world's proven petroleum reserves and, as a member of the powerful G20 economic group, held one of the largest global economies. Two significant bodies of water, the Persian/Arabian Gulf in the east and the Red Sea in the west, straddle the country. Given the strategic choke points at the Straits of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb, access to blue-water seas was problematic yet, and unlike in the last decades of the twentieth century, the Kingdom was painstakingly transformed into a regional powerhouse. In early 2015, Riyadh led a 10-country coalition to fight Houthi rebels in Yemen, whose fate lay in limbo. Remarkably, and despite unending gloom and doom scenarios, the

Al Sa'ud ruling family exercised substantial international authority even as foreign, defense, and economic policies were increasingly the product of carefully constructed institutions.

In keeping with a traditional monarchy—in which the ruler remains supreme religious leader—the custodianship of the holy mosques at Makkah and Madinah confer on the Saudi ruler an unparalleled degree of legitimacy. Since 1932, when the tribes on the Arabian Peninsula were united by 'Abdul 'Aziz bin 'Abdul Rahman, the Al Sa'ud ruled over the Kingdom with skill and perseverance. Not only were they successful in creating a modern state—where only tribal politics had dominated—they also developed a unique legitimizing framework for their rule. To be sure, 'Abdul 'Aziz and senior members of the family aimed to preserve their power base. They also understood what their interests were and how to fend off threats. Yet, despite their perception of innate capabilities, the Al Sa'ud operated in a vacuum for much of the past few centuries. In essence, it was safe to state that they lacked a coherent political strategy during the first-half of the twentieth century, which could shield the family from internal as well as external threats that ensured the family's continued dominion. The quest to rectify this lacuna led 'Abdul 'Aziz and his successors to create a unique political framework, equipped with a clear ideological basis that, ultimately, legitimized Al Sa'ud rule. In the end, Riyadh developed a will-to-power that benefited from the family's strict adherence to Islamic values and, with oil wealth, transformed the desert into a modern country.⁴⁶

46. For several primers on contemporary Sa'udi affairs, see Karen Elliott House, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—and Future*, New York: Knopf, 2012; Robert Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*, New York: Viking, 2009; and Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007. See also, Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-277.

In addition to this will-to-power, a slew of ideological justifications were advanced to legitimate the elite's uninterrupted rule. These ideological claims generated a set of preconditions that enhanced regime stability. Certain institutional arrangements and political goals naturally arose out of the need to meet ideological preconditions. Indeed, most of the goals were political, military, and economic in nature. For example, to attain doctrinal goals, a set of military, political, and economic strategies were devised. In turn, the purpose of these strategies was to minimize the threats to, and maximize the interests of, the ruling elite. Consequently, strategies were both feasible and credible when compared with the limitations upon the country's capabilities and influence. The context within which Saudi elites operated for nearly a century was one of general competition for power and influence within the country at large and over policymaking in particular. Taken together, the competition of elites and the process of policy formulation constituted national security decision-making. In Saudi Arabia's case, the dominant elite was—and remains—the Al Sa'ud.⁴⁷

King 'Abdallah bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al Sa'ud, eleventh son of the founder, succeeded his brother Fahd as ruler on 1 August 2005, at the age of 82, and ruled until 23 March 2015 when he passed away from illness. His heir and successor, Salman bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al Sa'ud, acceded the throne in a smooth transition. By all accounts, the new ruler adhered to his predecessor's policies and was not about to undo his brother's numerous deeds.⁴⁸ Although King Salman moved with uncharacteristic swiftness to demonstrate his specific

47. Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Succession in Saudi Arabia*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 1-21. See also David Holden and Richard Johns, *The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981; and Anthony Cave Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999, pp. 204-214.

48. Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Legal and Political Reforms in Saudi Arabia*, London: Routledge, 2013.

will-to-power, the ascension to the throne was carefully orchestrated and long planned, which surprised some. Still, many speculated that King Salman's rule would be different from that of his predecessor, and while it was only natural that a distinct personality would want to introduce his own ideas, the monarch was not about to abolish the Allegiance Commission, for example, or set-back most of the advances recorded on socio-economic issues. Because of his consolidation of dozens of committees into two large groups, some ventured to raise concerns that, somehow, reflected the direction towards which the new ruler intended to take the country. A few even jumped the gun, concluding that his alleged "overtures to the Wahhabi religious establishment and the extensive powers invested in his young son," were hazardous.⁴⁹

For one observer of the Kingdom, and apparently based on about two dozen interviews with "Sa'udis holding a variety of political and social perspectives, many of whom declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of discussing royal politics, a recurring theme [emerged, which] was the belief that King Salman may revive the governing style of his elder brother and mentor, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, who reigned from 1982 to 2005."⁵⁰ King Fahd, who was allegedly known for his autocratic style, and who "exerted pervasive social control of the population through religion and the religious police," displayed a sharply different personality. Fahd and Salman were of course full brothers, part of the so-called Sudayri Seven because they were the sons of Hassah bint Ahmad Al Sudayri, although it was facile to conclude that political trajectories in Saudi Arabia could be traced so clearly.⁵¹ Moreover,

while some family affinities existed, policy shifts only emerged over time as individuals asserted themselves within any nascent dynastic arrangement. Consequently, the reemergence of the powerful Sudayri bloc of the family may appear to be the new nexus of power on account of King Salman's immediate appointments, but the jostling for power between this and other branches of the Al Sa'ud were neither as clear nor completed so soon after this latest accession. There would, most likely, be serious behind the scenes promotions and permutations even if that process was time-consuming. Nevertheless, tangential and largely meaningless conclusions were quickly reached that presumed to gauge, accurately no less, of what transpired or would occur since leading Sudayris presumably wished to rule in Toto. It was worth noting that Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin 'Abdul 'Aziz, a favorite son of a favorite brother, was removed from office although health reasons may have motivated that decision. Likewise, the former Minister of the Interior and a full brother of the monarch, Ahmad bin 'Abdul 'Aziz, was not entrusted with any position after he was unceremoniously dismissed by King 'Abdallah a few years ago. Both were leading Sudayri offspring that, clearly, nullified the premature "the-Sudayris-are-back" contention that lived a mere news cycle.⁵²

In the event, on 23 January 2015, Prince Muqrin bin 'Abdul 'Aziz became the heir apparent. A former intelligence chief, and the youngest son of the Kingdom's founder who was appointed deputy heir apparent on 27 March

49. Caryle Murphy, "In With the Old in the New Saudi Arabia," *Foreign Policy*, 26 February 2015, at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/25/in-with-the-old-in-the-new-saudi-arabia-king-salman>.

50. Ibid.

51. Princess Hassah bint Ahmad Al Sudayri, who married the founder twice, gave him seven sons: Fahd, Sultan, 'Abdul Rahman, Nayif, Turki, Salman and Ahmad. For details, see Kéchichian, *Succession in Saudi Arabia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8.

52. Joshua Teitelbaum, "Saudi Succession: The Sudayris Return," *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 282, Israel, 26 January 2015, at <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/saudi-succession-sudayris-return/>; Kenneth M. Pollack, "Welcome to Sudayri Arabia," *Brookings: Middle East Politics and Policy* [MARKAZ blog], 30 April 30, 2015, at <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/04/30-saudia-arabia-salman-yemen-pollack>; and Bilal Y. Saab, "A New Saudi Foreign Policy for a New Era," *The Atlantic Council*, 13 May 2015, at <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/a-new-saudi-foreign-policy-for-a-new-era>.

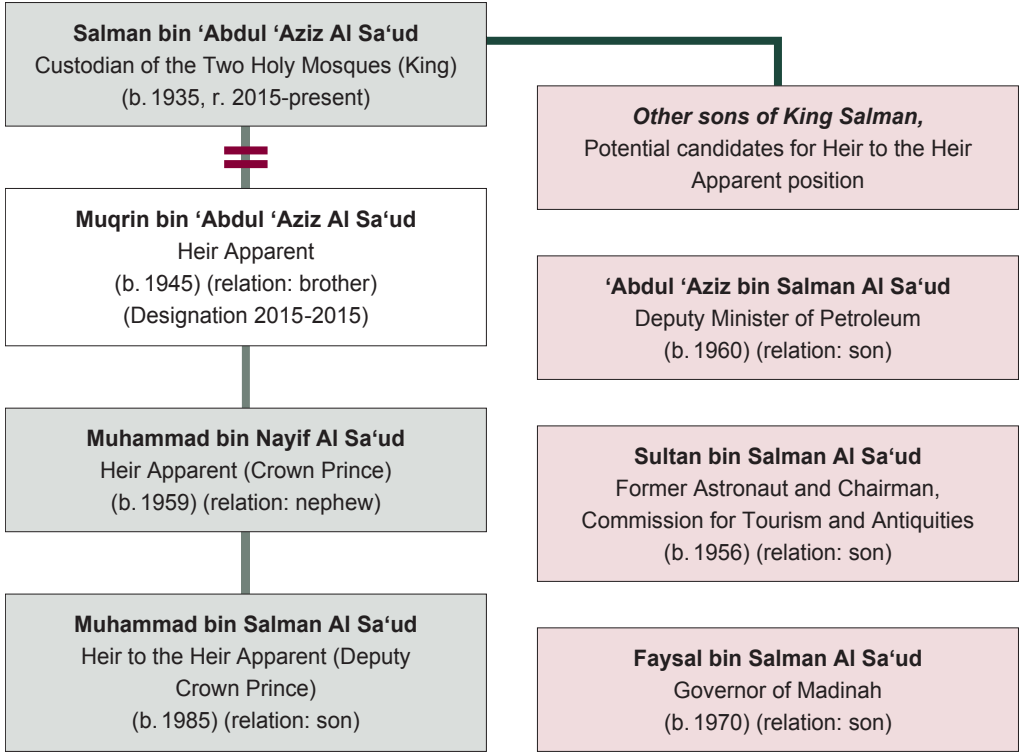
2014, Prince Muqrin was slated to succeed after his half-brothers King ‘Abdallah and then Heir Apparent Salman. Since Muqrin already held the position of second deputy prime minister, a role to which he was appointed in 2013 and that traditionally but informally was being the equivalent to heir-in-waiting, his elevation to the heirship was expected. There were no surprises and as the constant companion of both the late King and his successor, only misinformed loose tongues spread rumors that deemed his unsuitability because of his “Yemeni” mother.⁵³ What was not clear, even to Sa‘udis themselves, was how the jump to the next generation would be managed, even if King ‘Abdallah had decreed procedures to decide succession with the 2006 promulgation of the Allegiance Commission Law. In fact, the announcement that placed Prince Muqrin in the heirship reassured observers about the Kingdom’s long-term succession process, which was secure at a moment when senior members of the family sought internal stability amid conflict and political turmoil across the Middle East.

Yet, King Salman surprised everyone when he quickly appointed the Minister of the Interior Muhammad bin Nayif as heir to the heir apparent, which literally shook the establishment since the designee belonged to the new generation of Al Sa‘uds. This was certainly unexpected even if the minister was a well-known candidate on account of his anti-terrorism work that placed him in the public limelight. Born in 1959 and long thought of as a contender for the throne, the heir to the heir enjoyed a strong bloodline, as both of his parents—the late Heir Apparent Nayif bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz and Jawharah bint ‘Abdul ‘Aziz, from the ruling family’s Jiluwi branch—were full-fledged members of the Al Sa‘ud. Muhammad was initially known for his business dealings, first appearing in Western media in 1991 when it was reported he had been awarded a huge contract to import gas masks into

53. As‘ad Abu Khalil, “Saudi Political Dilemmas,” *Al-Akhbar*, 27 January 2015, at <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/23417>.

Saudi Arabia. He worked in the private sector until around 1990 and in May 1999 was appointed assistant minister of the interior for security affairs. It was in 2003 that he rose to prominence, when radical extremist planner ‘Ali ‘Abdul Rahman al-Ghamdi handed himself over to him. In June 2004, the rapidly rising star was given the rank of minister, as he oversaw much of Saudi Arabia’s terrorist rehabilitation program ever since its inception. He narrowly escaped death in 2009 when a suicide bomber blew himself up within metres of him. Muhammad bin Nayif became interior minister in November 2012, the most senior position to be taken by a member of his generation, before King Salman appointed his heir to the heir apparent on 23 January 2015. The Prince is married to Rimah Bint Sultan, the daughter of another former heir to the throne, Sultan bin ‘Abdel ‘Aziz, and they have

Table 5. Saudi Arabia and the Al Sa‘ud: Key Figures



several daughters.⁵⁴

Beyond these permutations, King Salman's putative views regarding his presumed affinity to ultraconservative religious authorities was also speculative, given a near unanimous perception within the Al Sa'ud that the 1744 alliance between the ruling family and the Al al-Shaykh must never tip in favor of the clerical establishment. King 'Abdallah curbed what he, then Heir Apparent Salman, and the overwhelming majority of the Al Sa'ud deemed to be the excesses of the religious police, as Riyadh demoted or dismissed clerics who openly obstructed the country's sorely needed reform initiatives. It was natural that the clergy, a group that enjoyed some monopoly over such subjects as education, the court system, or women's opportunities, would not be enamored by the late monarch though it would be a total misreading to assume that King Salman would, even remotely, put clerical interests ahead of family security. Consequently, few should worry that the changes introduced after 2005 would or could be rolled back, and while King Fahd's model may appear to some to be a better balance between religion and modernization, the natural evolutionary pattern can only be reestablished at great socio-economic costs. This did not mean that some Sa'udis did not look askance at globalization and, perhaps, feared that they might forego local traditions. Without a doubt, many doubted the value that modernization ushered in, and that they did not care for rapid changes. Still, those who held such views were certainly not in the majority.

In fact, mainstream Sa'udis often lamented King Fahd's era as one when few social and intellectual modernization initiatives were introduced, and though an economic boom was recorded, the price to pay was very high.

54. Ismaeel Naar, "Who Are Saudi Arabia's New Crown Princes?: Reconfirmation of Muqrin bin Abdulaziz as Heir and Naming of First Grandson as Deputy Attests Shift in the Royal Court," *Al Jazeera*, 24 January 2015, at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/01/saudis-crown-princes-150124083039820.html>.

In the aftermath of the 1979 takeover of the Holy Mosque in Makkah by Juhayman al-'Utaybi and his followers, Riyadh turned the clock back, allowed clerics to impose strict new rules, and otherwise distanced the country from important social reforms recorded after 1964 when King Faysal bin 'Abdul 'Aziz assumed authority.⁵⁵ By the turn of the twenty-first century, an overwhelming majority of Sa'udis expected genuine reforms and were far more satisfied with King 'Abdallah's rule than critics acknowledged, especially as the octogenarian launched significant educational reforms, unleashed indigenous media outlets to report with relative freedom (including authorizing uncovered women to present various television programs while wearing colorful 'abayas), and otherwise encouraged women's advancement in education and the workplace.

Of course, and just because the 2005-2015 period was particularly encouraging for women, it did not follow that King Salman would harbor anti-women intentions or undo his brother's reforms. Simply stated, there was no evidence to suggest that Salman would not care for gender matters as much as 'Abdallah did, even if he moved fast to make several key political changes that amalgamated the late King 'Abdallah bin 'Abdul 'Aziz's 11 committees and councils to run the affairs of the Kingdom into two powerful groups because, it was assumed, he wished to rekindle efficiency and accountability.

In addition to the National Security Council, which was headed by Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the other ten councils and committees axed by the new monarch included the Civil Service Council, Higher Committee for Education Policy, Higher Committee for Administrative Organization, Higher Commission of the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology,

55. For additional details, see Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Faysal: A King for All Seasons*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008 and Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Iffat Al Thunayan: An Arabian Queen*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2015, especially, pp. 198-229.

Supreme Council for Education, Supreme Council for Disabled Affairs, Supreme Council of King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy, Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Supreme Council for Petroleum and Minerals, and the Supreme Economic Council. Two mega institutions, the Council of Political and Security Affairs (CPSA), headed by Heir to the Heir Apparent and Minister of the Interior Muhammad bin Nayif, and the Council of Economic and Development Affairs (CEDA), headed by the Minister of Defense Muhammad bin Salman, replaced the 11 bodies.

Table 6. Institutional Reforms under King Salman of Saudi Arabia

11 existing councils were abolished on 29 January 2015	National Security Council
	Civil Service Council
	Higher Committee for Education Policy
	Higher Committee for Administrative Organization
	Higher Commission of the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology
	Supreme Council for Education
	Supreme Council for Disabled Affairs
	Supreme Council of King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy
	Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs
	Supreme Council for Petroleum and Minerals
	Supreme Economic Council
Replaced by 2 new councils	Council of Political and Security Affairs (CPSA) Chaired by: Heir Apparent Muhammad bin Nayif Al Sa'ud
	Council of Economic and Development Affairs (CEDA) Chaired by: Heir to the Heir Apparent Muhammad bin Salman Al Sa'ud

Both princes received open mandates to reorganize the Kingdom’s affairs, introduce efficient methods, and display transparency. Inasmuch as these reforms were sweeping, it was critical to assess their intrinsic capabilities after a year-long gestation, if for no other reason than to determine what patterns might emerge.⁵⁶

Less than four months into his reign, King Salman introduced another epochal change when he relieved Prince Muqrin bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz of heirship duties in favor of Prince Muhammad bin Nayif, and designated his son, Prince Muhammad bin Salman as heir to the heir apparent.⁵⁷ A favorite son of the monarch, Muhammad bin Salman carried a variety of additional portfolios, including that of Minister of Defense and Chairman of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs that, for all practical purposes, made policy on all non-security matters. Inasmuch as the young man was also a member of the Council of Political and Security Affairs, a smaller entity led by the heir apparent, Muhammad bin Salman became the only royal sitting on both the CEDA and CPSA. Consequently, it was fair to ask the aim of this concentration of power in the hands of a single individual, no matter how qualified. To be sure, and in addition to the above mentioned positions, the monarch’s son added a fresh portfolio to his growing constellation, as head of a new 10-member supreme council for the state-run oil company, Saudi Aramco, even if he surrendered his duties as head of the Royal Court to his deputy, Hamad bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Suwaylim, a long time aide to King Salman.⁵⁸

56. It was, of course, too early to evaluate the records of the two mega committees though this will be tackled in time.

57. “Palace Intrigues,” *The Economist* 415:8936, 2 May 2015, p. 47. See also “The Challenged Kingdom,” *The Economist* 415:8939, 23 May 2015, pp. 17-19; and “Saudi Arabia’s Monarchy: Nothing Succeeds like Succession,” *The Economist* 29 April 2015, at <http://www.economist.com/node/21650011/>.

By entrusting so many responsibilities to his son, King Salman may well have decided to create opportunities for the young man to learn on the job, earn the confidence of the ruling family and, perhaps, even contemplate the eventual introduction of primogeniture as a worthy option to permanently settle the Kingdom's succession mechanism.⁵⁹ From an analytical perspective, nevertheless, these latest nominations confirmed King Salman's penchants for true shock and awe. Still, it was important to emphasize that at 34, Prince Muhammad bin Salman was now expected to find the energy to handle so many missions, and while the King Sa'ud University graduate remained close to his father after he earned his law degree in 2008, what was asked of him went beyond the ceremonial. Although a capable individual, it was still too early to determine whether the young prince had the stamina to do so many things, and do them well. Moreover, it was not clear what type of relations he enjoyed with several of his half-brothers, including the Deputy Minister of Petroleum, 'Abdul 'Aziz, the Chairman of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities and former astronaut, Sultan, and the Governor of Madinah, Faysal, all three of whom were born to a different mother, Princess Sultanah al-Sudayri, who passed away in 2011. In the event, Prince Muhammad bin Salman needed all the help he could muster, given the sheer quantity of work thrown on his laps. As stated above, and in the aftermath of Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen, additional burdens were placed on the defense minister that will surely mark his nascent career.

Of course, and besides his monarchical prerogatives to determine the fate of the Kingdom, it was also possible to speculate that King Salman probably

58. "Saudi Arabia Shakes Up State Oil Firm Aramco," *BBC Online*, 1 May 2015, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-32552594>.

59. Parts of this section was first published in Joseph A. Kéchichian, "Saudi Arabia's Succession Shakeup and the Rise of Mohammed bin Salman," Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 20 May 2015, at <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/saudi-arabia's-succession-shakeup-and-rise-mohammed-bin-salman>.

decided to accelerate the pace of what he decided was an inevitable change as a new generation rose up to the challenge. Yet, critics were confounded by the ruler's sweeping transformations of the body politic, going so far as to label him as an old and "sick" man who "cannot carry on a conversation for a very long time."⁶⁰ Those who salivated at putative catastrophes failed to understand how the Al Sa'ud leadership functioned, which was to say that it operated without any bombastic behavior, even if King Salman's innovations may well have accelerated the pace of change.⁶¹ Indeed, and even if the Al Sa'ud introduced significant changes in the past, the new monarch sought advice from a variety of sources, before he reached his final decision. It was consensus decision-making par excellence and though one would not doubt that Sa'udis and others were shocked at the pace of transfers that occurred after King 'Abdallah passed away, with some lamenting that King Salman did not wait for the corpse of his late brother be lowered into the ground at Riyadh's al-'Ud cemetery before replacing top court staff members and investing one of his youngest sons with enormous powers, it did not follow that he did so out of spite. On the contrary, Salman wished to telegraph a clear message, namely that the Kingdom was in secure and stable hands no matter what kind of gloom and doom critics anticipated. As stated above, his decision to name an heir apparent from the ranks of the younger generation, the Minister of the Interior and Counterterrorism Czar Muhammad bin Nayif as heir to the heir apparent, was certainly a surprise.⁶²

Unlike his predecessor, Salman bin 'Abdul 'Aziz acceded the throne amid a sea of regional and global crises, which promised to usher in permanent changes in both the Arab and Muslim worlds. His writ was to safeguard Saudi

60. Ian Black and Dan Roberts, "King Salman of Saudi Arabia Pulls Out of US Talks on Iran," *The Guardian*, 11 May 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/11/king-salman-saudi-arabia-pulls-out-us-talks-iran>.

61. Simon Henderson, "Saudi Arabia's Big Gamble," *Foreign Policy*, 26 March 2015, at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/26/saudi-arabias-big-gamble%E2%80%8B-yemen-airstrikes/>.

interests, protect the nation from numerous foes, and allow the Kingdom to prosper—objectives that were steady and etched in stone. Towards that end, the monarch entrusted the day-to-day affairs of the Kingdom to his Council of Political and Security Affairs as well as the Council of Economic and Development Affairs, precisely to develop sound policies, which further institutionalized the process. Of course, while the King's goals rested on a clear ideology and emulated those of the founder and each monarch that ruled Saudi Arabia between 1953 and 2015, epochal changes required adaption. Could Riyadh adjust long-held policies and what kind of likely alterations were probable?

It would be safe to state that King Salman inherited a full plate on 23 January 2015, and while he was part and parcel of the collegial decision-making process

62. On 13 July 2015, King Salman appointed the Minister of State Khalid bin 'Abdul Rahman al-'Issa as head of the royal court, to take over from Hamad bin 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Suwaylim, in what was his fourth makeover of the government after his accession to the throne. Suwaylim, who took over from the monarch's powerful son Prince Muhammad bin Salman in April 2015, and who was considered a protégé of the latter, failed to deliver. Although no reason for the change was given, observers believed that Suwaylim was overwhelmed and, perhaps an indication of internal transformations, selective in his gatekeeper duties. Two separate decrees were issued as well. The first named Majid bin 'Abdallah bin Hamad al-Hugayl, a real estate professional, as housing minister, whose task was to oversee the construction boom in the sector as Riyadh financing hundreds of thousands of projects to provide adequate facilities to its needy population. Another decree named Prince Misha'al bin 'Abdallah, the son of the former monarch who was unceremoniously dismissed from his last post (Governor of Makkah) in late January, as Governor of the Northern Borders Region, a super-sensitive area that abuts Iraq. Critics of the monarchy perceived the changes as a further sign of internal disputes although such changes were natural. See, for example, Bruce Reidel, "Another Royal Reshuffle in Saudi Arabia: King Salman Reorders his court Again," Brookings: Middle East Politics and Policy [MARKAZ blog], Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 14 July 2015, at <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/07/14-saudi-royal-court-reshuffle-riedel>.

for years—every monarch reached final decisions after full consultations across the political gamut—he was, nevertheless, elevated to the unenviable position of final arbiter. The major concerns were well known, headed by an Iranian expansionist policy that sought to literally squeeze the Arabian Peninsula from Iraq to Yemen. Closer to Riyadh, interferences in Bahrain and the prodding of local Shi'ah irredentism were all too real too. In addition to these existential challenges, Riyadh faced the Syrian conundrum, a pro-Iran Hizballah militia that propped Damascus while it threatened Beirut, and a shaky Baghdad where government became synonymous with corruption and non-governance. In both Iraq and Syria, the conservative monarchy tackled Da'ish, the so-called Islamic State, even if Saudi Arabia acclaimed the Holy Qur'an as its Constitution and was the ultimate Muslim State. Comically, Sunni extremist groups like Da'ish and the Muslim Brotherhood sought to replace the Custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques by fathoming rival governments in Egypt, Libya as well as several other Muslim countries, though none was as bold as the Yemeni variety, which brazenly desired to revive a long forgotten Imamate. Even Turkey, a secularized state, made a bid to contest Saudi leadership to lead the Muslim world ostensibly because its thoroughly Islamized leaders appeared to be Westernized that, Ankara believed, ought to be a model worthy of emulation.

Amid these overwhelming developments, shifting positions in leading Western countries, which belied long-standing accords that were etched in stone, antagonized Riyadh as well. Starting with the George W. Bush Administration, Washington embarked on a reassessment of its ties with Riyadh, which reached a crescendo under President Barack H. Obama, whose preferences for an opening to Iran were rather clear. Naturally, the late King 'Abdullah bin 'Abdul 'Aziz, then Foreign Minister Prince Sa'ud al-Faysal, and practically all Saudi leaders were sensitive to these advances as they worked in earnest to protect and promote their country's interests, while they preserved existing ties despite many disappointments.

Many wondered whether US foreign policy gurus would eventually transform and forego an 80-years old partnership, though it was interesting to notice that President Obama led a large delegation to pay his condolences to the Al Sa‘ud and the people of Saudi Arabia as well as to congratulate King Salman on his accession because, perhaps, senior officials realized what was at stake. In fact, neither the short trip nor the heavyweight delegation that accompanied him were coincidental, for even Obama must have concluded that a bird in the hand was preferable to two in the bush. Washington and Iran may yet consummate a full reconciliation and, conceivably, reach an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program whose ultimate goal was to acquire an atomic weapon notwithstanding punctuated denials. Yet, American leaders knew that Riyadh could not tolerate that such an accord be at the expense of Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Cooperation Council allies, and would react accordingly. Even if few could ascertain whether King Salman would tell President Obama what King ‘Abdallah [when he was heir] reportedly told former US President Bill Clinton on 8 February 1999—that “friendship has limits, Mr. President” after Clinton wanted to introduce him to Israeli officials attending King Hussein’s bin Talal’s funeral in Amman—few should.

There were no doubts that the relationship Riyadh maintained with Washington was the most important one for the Kingdom, and though repeated American adventures hampered them, Saudi officials were determined to preserve it. Nevertheless, few should be surprised if the approach evolved, with King Salman anxious to affirm his will to power in a part of the world that was ripped apart along sectarian lines. Even fewer should persuade themselves that the monarch would forego that leadership role. On the contrary, and barely a few weeks after his accession, King Salman seemed as resolute as ever to rally the troops and forge ahead. That is why he focused on intra-Gulf relations, both to remove lingering disagreements among GCC ranks as well as to telegraph that Riyadh intended to lead the Arab Gulf monarchies.

The United Arab Emirates and the Al Nahyan-Al Maktoum Duopoly

In early January 2014, the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Shaykh Khalifah bin Zayid Al Nahyan, suffered a stroke that required surgery. His health stabilized though he remained largely incapacitated, which meant that his half-brother and Heir Apparent, Shaykh Muhammad

Table 7. The United Arab Emirate and the Al Nahyan-Al Maktoum Duopoly:
Key Figures in Abu Dhabi and Dubai

Abu Dhabi	Dubai
Khalifah bin Zayid Al Nahyan UAE President, Amir (b. 1948, r. 2004-present)	Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum UAE Vice President and Prime Minister, Amir (b. 1948, r. 2006-present)
Muhammad bin Zayid Al Nahyan Heir Apparent (b. 1960) (relation: brother)	Hamdan bin Muhammad Al Maktoum Heir Apparent (relation: second eldest son)
Potential candidates for Heir Apparent	Potential candidates for Heir Apparent
Hazza’ bin Zayid Al Nahyan UAE National Security Advisor (b. 1965) (relation: brother)	Maktoum bin Muhammad Al Maktoum Deputy Ruler of Dubai (relation: son)
Sultan bin Khalifah Al Nahyan Board Member, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (relation: son)	Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum Deputy Ruler of Dubai (relation: brother)

bin Zayid Al Nahyan, was burdened with the responsibilities to run the country. Even before the incident, nevertheless, the Abu Dhabi heir apparent was in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the country's wealthiest Emirate. Equally important was the Dubai ruler, Shaykh Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who headed the federal cabinet. While Muhammad bin Rashid served as vice-president of the federation, it was Muhammad bin Zayid who exercised effective authority in his capacity as deputy supreme commander of the military, filling for his ailing brother. Observers of the Emirates did not expect major changes in practical terms when Shaykh Khalifah passed away, as Muhammad bin Zayid was literally guaranteed succession to both the Abu Dhabi rulership, as well as the presidency of the federal government.⁶³ Everyone anticipated a continuation of the Abu Dhabi-Dubai duopoly both for practical as well as ideological purposes.

The Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi

Figure 6. President of UAE (Abu Dhabi): Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan



Source: Ahmed Jadallah © REUTERS

Shaykh Khalifa's ill-health has been a topic of discussion as early as 2010, when he spent time in Switzerland for treatment for an undisclosed condition, although the 2014 stroke required intensive medical attention. Little is actually known of what ails the ruler, even if some sources suggest he has terminal throat cancer, while others are less sure, though all agree that the nearly 68-year-old (born in 1948) president's health is fragile and that the transition of power has already begun.⁶⁴ His succession, whenever it comes, is expected to be smooth with Abu Dhabi Heir Apparent Muhammad bin Zayid (MBZ) slated to become president while his brother Hazza' is seen as the most likely candidate for Abu Dhabi heir because he enjoys widespread backing among many tribal leaders spread throughout the country.⁶⁵

MBZ's path was laid in 2003 when his father, then President Zayid bin

63. Because of the existence of seven separate ruling families in the UAE Federation, succession patterns differ in each one, which is why the following discussion focuses on all seven even if data is scarce for most of them. For background details, see Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-348.

64. "Sheikh Khalifa's Condition Stable as He Recovers from Stroke," *The National*, 25 January 2014, at <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/sheikh-khalifas-condition-stable-as-he-recovers-from-stroke>. See also F. Gregory Gause, III, "Understanding the Gulf States: Why the Monarchies of the Persian Gulf Fall Out and Get Back Together—and Why it Matters for the Region and the World," *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Issue #36, Spring 2015, at <http://www.democracyjournal.org/36/understanding-the-gulf-states.php?page=all>.

65. While Prince Muhammad bin Zayid Al Nahyan is widely assumed to be the next UAE president—the third individual to fill that post in the federation's brief history since 1971—there is slightly more conjecture about who will be next Abu Dhabi heir apparent. Most observers expect Hazza' bin Zayid Al Nahyan, the third of the Bani Fatimah born in 1965, to be MBZ's successor. Hazza', who is said to be especially close to MBZ, is currently vice chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council and national security adviser. Other names mentioned are Tahnun bin Zayid, another full brother who is deputy national security adviser since March 2014, and Hamdan bin Zayid, also a Bani Fatimah, and currently the ruler's representative in the Western Region.

Sultan Al Nahyan, named him deputy heir apparent. He was elevated to the heirship to the ruler of Abu Dhabi on his father's death on 2 November 2004. His appointment was not a given—at various times, his half-brother Shaykh Sultan bin Zayid and full brother Shaykh Hamdan bin Zayid looked likely to rise—though he earned his wings when both contenders engaged in tangential activities that prevented them from building up their power bases. As Zayid's sons, both were privileged even if they were unlikely to rule given significant changes in recent years. Equally important, and before Shaykh Zayid passed away, MBZ had matured and consolidated his influence not just as chief of staff of the armed forces starting in 1993, but also as his father's official adviser on security affairs that enhanced his credentials. In other words, it was safe to state that Muhammad bin Zayid shed his youthful indiscretions, boned up on serious national security matters, and earned family accolades, including from Sultan bin Zayid and Shaykh Hamdan bin Zayid. In many ways, the succession has already taken place through MBZ's assiduous cultivation of the defense portfolio, as well as his transformation of the armed forces since the early 1990s. These steps further strengthened his desire to step-up to the proverbial plate and assume the burdens of power, something which sealed his future position, and helped the UAE secure a unique military role in the Gulf.

At 54, Muhammad bin Zayid is in charge of much of the day-to-day running of the UAE, particularly the spheres of defense, economics and security. Interestingly, he steered the UAE's policy response in the post-9/11-era, and has long been an important figure in international diplomacy. As deputy supreme commander of the armed forces since January 2005, Muhammad bin Zayid cultivated a vast network of foreign contacts, the majority of which perceived him as a capable leader. Within Abu Dhabi, too, he had de facto control over economic development policy even before Shaykh Khalifah acceded to power, eclipsing the latter along with the then-heir's son, Sultan bin Khalifah Al Nahyan, Shaykh Zayid's first and apparently favorite grand son.⁶⁶

Consequently, assuming the presidency is a step Shaykh Muhammad bin Zayid has long been groomed for, and those who know him say he is more than ready. Given the current extent of his power, an MBZ presidency is not expected to lead to major changes within the UAE. Naturally, there are some concerns that his well-documented opposition to Islamists could see further crackdowns on free speech, and he is thought to be the driving force behind the targeting of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated groups which have led to mass trials and convictions after 2013. It was important to note that his stance on this matter predates the Arab Spring (in a February 2009 US diplomatic cable published by *WikiLeaks*, then US Ambassador Richard Olson quipped that “being labeled a Muslim Brother is about the worst epithet possible in MBZ's vocabulary,”) and has reverberations throughout the region, bringing the UAE into confrontation with Qatar, Egypt and others.⁶⁷ MBZ's propensity to overreaction to the Muslim Brotherhood, and the UAE's response to the perceived Islamist threat, may yet prove to be his Achilles' heel although more recent events in the Gulf region, especially the UAE's participation in the Sa'udi-led coalition against the Houthis in Yemen, affirmed his leadership credentials. In the event, and subject to unforeseen circumstances, the leadership position was his to dispose of as he wished.

66. “Political Forces at a Glance,” *Country Report on the United Arab Emirates*, London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 21 July 2014, at <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1712034355&Country=United%20Arab%20Emirates&topic=Summary&subtopic=Political+forces+at+a+glance>.

Richard Olson, “Strong Words in Private from MBZ at IDEX—Bashes Iran, Qatar, Russia,”

67. Department of State Cable Number 09ABUDHABI193_a, 25 February 2009, at https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ABUDHABI193_a.html.

The Al Maktoum of Dubai

Figure 7. Vice President of UAE (Dubai): Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum



Source: Jumana El Heloueh © REUTERS

On 1 February 2008, Shaykh Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum (MBR), the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE as well as Ruler of Dubai, appointed his second eldest son, Shaykh Hamdan bin Muhammad Al Maktoum (HBM), Heir Apparent of Dubai.⁶⁸ Few were surprised by the appointment of the 25-year-old given the careful grooming that the father

68. Muhammad bin Rashid has an oldest son, Rashid, who now may have forfeited his political rights because, allegedly, he may have caused the death of an assistant in the Ruler's office several years ago, which ended his career.

engaged in to give his son ample visibility through high level government assignments and unofficial publicity campaigns over the past several years. Consolidating the Dubai government's succession, Muhammad bin Rashid appointed another son, Shaykh Maktoum bin Muhammad Al Maktoum (MBM), as Deputy Ruler of Dubai, a position the young man shared with his uncle, Deputy Ruler Shaykh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum who was first named to the post in 1995. Shaykh Hamdan is also the UAE Minister of Finance and Industry.⁶⁹

Hamdan bin Muhammad was born on 14 November 1982 and is MBR's second oldest son by his first wife, Shaykhah Hind bint Maktoum bin Jumma. The heir apparent graduated from Sandhurst Royal Military College in 2001 and the following year was appointed chairman of Dubai Bank that, to put it mildly, was a major promotion.⁷⁰ In September 2006, the young Shaykh was elevated to the high visibility role of Chairman of the Dubai Executive Council, entrusted with overseeing all Dubai government entities, as well the far more ambitious work involved with the completion of the 2015 Dubai Strategic Plan. In addition to these responsibilities, the ruler of the Emirate entrusted his heir with the presidency of the Dubai Sports Council, the Dubai Autism Centre and the Muhammad bin Rashid Establishment for Young Business Leaders. Often seen at various sports events on account of his enthusiasm for athletics and horsemanship, the heir apparent was also a budding poet—his poetic pseudonym being *Fazza'*, a reference to an Arab knight of exceptional ethics. Although his elevation ensured a primogeniture

69. "Shaikh Hamdan Appointed Dubai's Crown Prince," *Gulf News*, 1 February 2008, p. 1, at <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/02/01/10186492.html>.

70. M. Satyanarayan, "Sheikh Hamdan Excels," *Gulf News*, 9 September 2001, p. 1, at <http://m.gulfnews.com/news/uae/general/sheikh-hamdan-excels-1.424502>. See also "Chairman Appointed for New Dubai Bank," *Al-Bawaba*, 8 July 2002, <http://www.albawaba.com/business/chairman-appointed-new-dubai-bank>.

mechanism for succession in Dubai, and Shaykh Hamdan was liked by a majority of his brethren, it was uncertain how he would manage his uncles, other relatives and, especially his younger full brother Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Rashid. For now, the Dubai heirship was secure, with Shaykh Muhammad bin Muhammad busy with the chairmanship of the Dubai Technology and Media Free Zone, as well the expansions of Dubai Media City, Dubai Internet City, and Knowledge Village. To his credit, Muhammad bin Muhammad has maintained a relatively low public profile, and was not particularly active in international affairs. Still, there were no doubts that the two brothers were destined to work together, if for no other reason than to preserve Dubai’s interests and, in the larger federation, protect and promote the Emirate’s share of power.

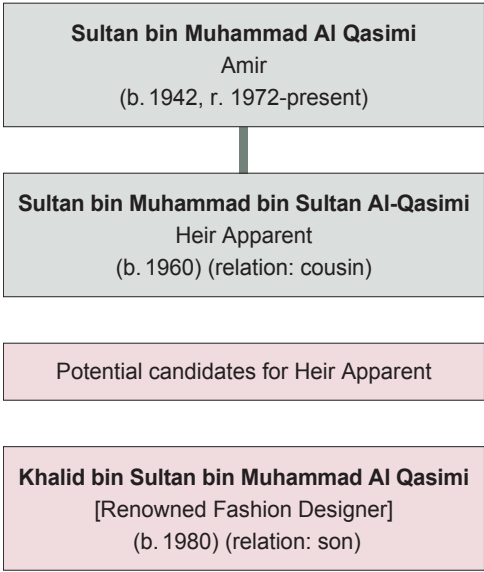
The Al Qasimi of Sharjah

Sharjah was probably the Shaykhdom that most closely resembled a constitutional monarchy under the Al-Qasimi family. While the ruler, Shaykh Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, has ruled since 1972—save for six days in 1987 that saw an attempted coup masterfully handled by UAE Federation President Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan—a good deal of power rested in an executive council that functioned as a central government. A majlis al-Shurah (consultative council) enjoyed some autonomous powers that stood out among all UAE Federation members.

Shaykh Sultan was born on 6 July 1939, the son of Shaykh Muhammad bin Saqr bin Khalid Al Qasimi and Shaykhah Maryam Bint Ghanim bin Salim Al Shamsi, two educated individuals that distinguished themselves in the harsh environment of the Lower Gulf. The young Sultan received his primary education in Sharjah, before he was sent to Kuwait, where he was introduced to contemporary affairs. From Kuwait, he travelled to Egypt where the inquisitive pupil attended Cairo University, received a Bachelor’s Degree in Agricultural Engineering in 1971, though this field was not his

real calling. Elevated to rulership and aware of his Shaykhdom’s rich history, the sovereign enrolled at Exeter University in the UK and, in 1985, earned a Doctorate with distinction in history; in 1999, he earned a second Doctorate in Political Geography from Durham University also in the UK. Over the years, he was awarded at least 16 honorary doctorates from leading universities, including the Université de Paris-Diderot (France, 2012); Hanyang (South Korea, 2011); Kanazawa (Japan, 2010); the American University in Cairo (Egypt, 2009); Tübingen (Germany, 2006); the Armenian Academy of Science (Armenia, 2005); the University of Malaysia (2001); and the Academy of Russian Studies (Russia, 1995). Remarkably, the established historian published several manuscripts and theatrical works in English as well as Arabic, which corroborated his scholarship.⁷¹

Table 8. The United Arab Emirates and Sharjah: Key Figures



Shaykh Sultan married twice, to Shaykhah Mawzah bint Salim bin Muhammad bin Mani‘ al-Falasi, with whom he had two children, and

Shaykhah Jawahir bint Muhammad bin Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi, with whom he has four children. His eldest son, Muhammad, passed away in 1999 under tragic circumstances and his youngest son, Shaykh Khalid was born in 1980.⁷²

In 1990, Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi appointed as heir apparent Ahmad bin Sultan, a younger brother of the former ruler Saqr bin Sultan, in an effort to heal the rift between the two branches of the family. Many believed that this was a temporary selection as the ruler groomed his own son, Muhammad, for the post though the latter's tragic death ended that prospect. In May 1999, and after the forty-days mourning period, the ruler

71. Shaykh Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi published at least 8 plays in Arabia, including *Torgut* (2011), *al-Hajar al-Aswad* [The Black Stone] (2011), *Shamshun al-Jabbar* [Samson the Courageous] (2009), *Al-Namrud* [Nimrod] (2008), *Iskandar al-Akbar* [Alexander the Great] (2006), *al-Waqi'*—*Sura Tabaq al-Asl* [The Reality—Copy of the Original] (2000), *Al-Qadiyyah* [The Case] (2000), and *'Awdat Hulaku* [The Return of Holako] (1998). His numerous history titles include the following English titles, all of which were available in Arabic as well as several European and Asian languages courtesy of Al-Qasimi Publications in Sharjah [where only a date is provided] although a few were published with foreign editors too: *Taking the Reins: The Critical Years—1971-1977*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012; *Sharjah Air Station Between East and West*, 2012; *Muscat and other Forts on the Shoreline of the Gulf of Oman*, 2009; *Memorandum on Kuwait: The Biography of Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah*, 2004; *A Memorandum for Historians on the Innocence of Ibn Majid*, 2000; *Power Struggles and Trade in the Gulf (1620-1820)*, London: Forest Row, 1999; *The Gulf in Historic Maps (1478-1861)*, Leicester, UK: Streamline Press Limited, 1999; *The Journals of David Seton in the Gulf, 1800-1809*, Exeter, UK: BPC Wheatons Ltd., 1995; *John Malcolm and the British Commercial Base in the Gulf 1800*, 1994; *Omani—French Relations (1715-1905)*, London: Forest Row, 1993; and *The Myth of Arab Piracy in the*

72. *Gulf*, London: Croom Helm, 1986.

British media alleged that the young man overdosed on cocaine. See, for example, "Mystery Death of Sheikh, aged 24," *The Argus*, 8 April 1999, at <http://archive.theargus.co.uk/1999/4/8/198180.html>.

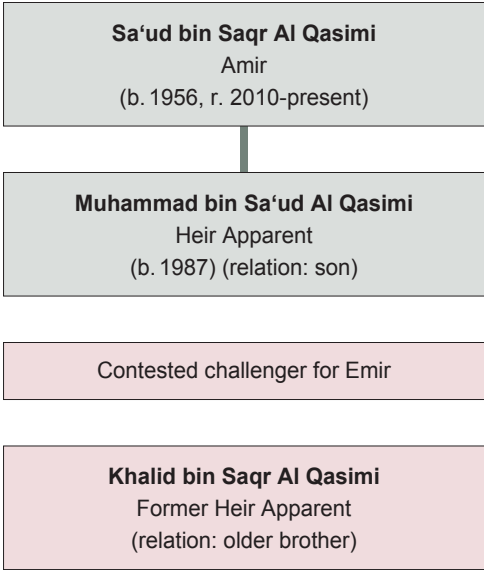
designated his cousin, the competent Sultan bin Muhammad bin Sultan (given the similarity in the names of both ruler and heir, it was important to add the grandfather's name to tell them apart), who was also the brother of his beloved wife Jawahir, to assume the heirship. While it was too early to rule out whether Shaykh Sultan would switch the Sharjah heirship to his younger son Khalid, there were no indications that he was so predisposed. Over the years, Sultan bin Muhammad bin Sultan certainly demonstrated his competence as heir, and looked after the emirate's interests. He was also well-liked in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, as he maneuvered intra-federation politics with skill. Moreover, Sultan bin Muhammad was well placed to keep in check other Al Qasimi rivals, many of whom believed that the sovereign should emerge from within their own branches. Such a highly unpredictable situation was likely to become more pronounced as the ruler grew older.

The Al Qasimi of Ras Al-Khaimah

Ras al-Khaimah was periodically catapulted into the international spotlight after members of the ruling family fell victim to the ruler's divide-and-rule practices. The latest episode in what became a decade-long struggle for supremacy between two rival brothers, and their respective backers in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (as well as neighboring Oman), was played out in 2003 when the patriarch of the Qawasim ('Al-Qasimi') tribe, Shaykh Saqr bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, who claimed the throne in 1948 and ruled until 2010, replaced his heir. In fact, the sovereign's eldest son and heir apparent since 1958, Shaykh Khalid bin Saqr Al Qasimi, was replaced by Shaykh Sa'ud bin Saqr on 14 June 2003, in what was an unfortunate but classic struggle that fit the Shaykhdom's legacy that, to put it mildly, further isolated it.⁷³

73. Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-330.

Table 9. The United Arab Emirates and Ras al-Kaimah: Key Figures



Despite its strategic location close to Iran and the Strategic Straits of Hormuz, Ras al-Khaimah almost always hit above its weight, though much of its bravura was due to its ruler’s prowess. The Emirate held-up its UAE Federation membership in 1971—it only joined the UAE in 1972, some six months later than the other six—because Shaykh Saqr believed he could leverage Abu Dhabi against Dubai and, in the process, strengthen his hand within the nascent country. The effort failed not because Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan was lukewarm towards the Northern Shaykhdom—he was not and, over the years, was far more generous than many assumed—but because Ras al-Khaimah’s hydrocarbon reserves were insufficient to secure a decisive position on the bargaining table. Saqr was, consequently, in a subservient position though he still believed that he was an equal partner with his wealthier neighbors. Still, what he relied on was his population’s devotion and, when the latter witnessed the type of development enjoyed by other Emiratis, he acquiesced to their social emancipation. Tribal leaders remained loyal to their Shaykh but, increasingly and voluntarily, availed

themselves to the bounties that came their way from the UAE Federation. It was not long before Ras al-Khaimah became a solid manager of federal subsidies, as Shaykh Saqr and his younger sons filled various government offices, which benefitted everyone.

In the event, the consequences of the 2003 political clashes, which degenerated into the deployments of tanks in front of various palaces, stood as perfect illustrations of Shaykh Saqr’s legacy. Unable to manage the Emirate’s regional affairs, as the dispute hovered around ties with Iran, and after Shyakh Khalid allegedly took anti-American positions at the height of the War for Iraq, the ruler replaced his heir apparent with his third eldest son, Sa’ud. In reality, palace intrigues that involved Sa’ud’s mother may have played a role in the change, even if genuine developmental issues were pertinent as well, since Ras al-Khaimah suffered from little or no diversification of its economy especially when compared to its powerful and wealthier neighbors. Sa’ud promised to invigorate the real estate and tourism sectors, embarked on a carefully laid out public relations campaign to “sell” the Emirate, and ingratiated himself in Abu Dhabi. When the palace coup occurred, and without the support of the Al Nahyan, Shaykh Khalid was duly exiled, first crossing the border into Oman, before settling in the United States and Britain. Various claims to return came to naught including the 27 October 2010 confrontation after Shaykh Saqr passed away, when Khalid re-entered Ras al-Khaimah, briefly installed him in his pre-2003 palace while he awaited the green light from Abu Dhabi to acknowledge his rulership. In the event, he was not authorized to attend his father’s funeral, and the last nail was hammered on his political coffin when the Abu Dhabi-controlled Federal Ministry for Presidential Affairs congratulated Sa’ud on becoming the new ruler of Ras al-Khaimah.⁷⁴

Efforts to meet with the members of the Supreme Council of Rulers to discuss his and, presumably, Ras al-Khaimah’s future, came to naught as Shaykh Khalid was forced to leave the Emirate even if those who know him have concluded that he remains adamant in his determination to reclaim the

throne. Naturally, such an unresolved challenge will continue to undermine Shaykh Sa‘ud’s rule and may provoke renewed instability in the future, especially if the Emirate’s economy stagnates. For no matter how unpalatable that challenge was, and this must be acknowledged openly, the 2003 succession did not strengthen Sa‘ud’s legitimacy on account of open Abu Dhabi interferences in Ras al-Khaimah affairs. Whether Shaykhs Khalid and Sa‘ud, perhaps with tribal leaders from their own Emirate, could have managed to settle the succession to Shaykh Saqr without Abu Dhabi’s interference was now a moot point. What lingered was the precedent set for the other small Shaykhdoms, something that no one could ignore as the UAE matured further as a supra-federal entity.

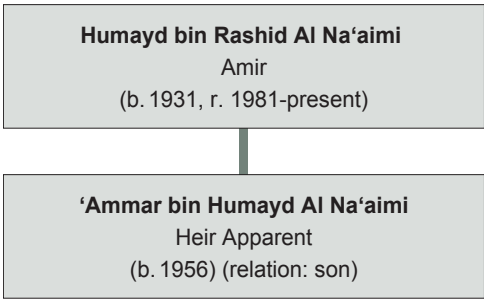
The Al Na‘aimi of ‘Ajman

The Na‘aimi ruling family, probably the smallest in the Lower Gulf in terms of actual numbers, fell victim to the vagaries of Gulf tribal life. Its members were dispersed in Ras al-Khaimah as well as in Buraymi/Al-Ayn (and in Oman) that, undoubtedly, burdened Ahmad bin Rashid bin Humayd Al Na‘aimi. Moreover, and perhaps because of the Shaykhdom’s proximity to

74. For additional details on these developments, see Richard Myddleton, “RAK Heir Change Prompts Meeting,” *Seven Days* (Dubai), 20 June 2003, pp. 1, 5; Shafiq Al-Asadi, “Mubadarat ‘Umaniyyah li-Taswi’at al-Khilaf fi Ras al-Khaimah” [Oman Intervention to Compromise on the Ras al-Khaimah Dispute], *Al-Hayat*, Number 14707, 30 June 2003, p. 2; “RAK Ruler Receives Well-Wishers,” *Gulf News*, 16 June 2003, p. 2; The Economist Intelligence Unit, “Fragility of Succession Rights Highlighted,” *Country Rreport-UAE 3-2003*, August 2003, p. 14; and “UAE: The Ras al-Khaimah Succession Crisis,” *The Estimate*, 4 July 2003, p. 1. See also Susan Bisset, “Emirates Prince Ousted in Women’s Rights Row,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 June 2003, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/06/15/wcoup15.xml>; and Simon Henderson, “Succession Politics in the Conservative Arab Gulf States: The Weekend’s Events in Ras al-Khaimah,” Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policywatch*, Number 769, 17 June 2003.

Dubai, ‘Ajman leaders adopted neighborly policies to ingratiate themselves with the Maktoums. This preference created the impression that the Al Na‘aimi were not always grateful to Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan’s unwavering support though no one was ever as generous as the Abu Dhabian. Whether the Na‘aimi rapprochement with the Al Maktoum was tactical or strategic is impossible to decipher although Shaykh Ahmad displayed legendary Arab pride—not wishing to be financially dependent and kowtow to every Abu Dhabi directive—but it may also be due to tribal survival instincts, as he maneuvered his emirate’s interests between more powerful leaders in Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Table 10. The United Arab Emirates and ‘Ajman: Key Figures



Shaykh Humayd bin Rashid, who was born in 1931 and received his primary education in ‘Ajman and Dubai before he went to Cairo, was the deputy ruler in 1971 when the UAE Federation came into existence. Standing for his ailing father, he became an active participant in various councils, and slowly sidelined his older brother ‘Ali bin Rashid, before he succeeded his father as ruler on 6 September 1981 eager to transform the small fishing village into a vibrant commercial center. While ‘Ajman welcomed foreign investments, its proximity to Dubai predetermined all of its decisions, especially after the emirate was slowly transformed into a relatively affordable bedroom community to thousands toiling next door. His eldest son and heir is Shaykh

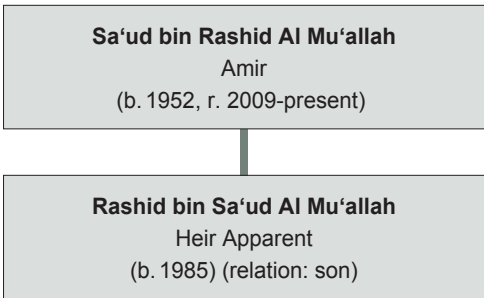
‘Ammar bin Humayd Al Na‘aimi, who is also the president of the Emirate’s Executive Council.⁷⁵

The Al Mu‘allah of Umm Al-Qiwain

With Abu Dhabi as its lone parallel, Umm al-Qiwain enjoys geographical continuity that, more than other characteristics, facilitates Al Mu‘allah rule. Remarkably, the ruling family—that belongs to the Al ‘Ali tribe—has enjoyed a palpable and more or less unchallenged degree of longevity ever since the rule of ‘Ali bin ‘Abdallah in 1844. Whatever internal disputes existed were due to Al Qasimi domination of the Lower Gulf and how successive British political agents positioned ruling families against them. A major dispute arose, however, when Rashid bin Ahmad was imprisoned by Zayid bin Khalifah of Abu Dhabi in 1907 in a classic tribal war that pitted neighbors competing for scarce resources.

Shaykh Rashid’s personality clashes were not limited to his contacts with neighbors. Between 1912 and 1917, he also entangled with his half-brother, Nasir bin Ahmad, over inheritance conditions. His son ‘Abdallah succeeded

Table 11. The United Arab Emirates and Umm al-Qiwain: Key Figures



75. Kéchichian, Power and Succession, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-333.

him in August 1922 but ruled for about a year before he was killed by one of his slaves, ostensibly over a trivial matter but, in reality, as an act of treachery by one of his cousins. Hamad bin Ibrahim literally assumed power in a classic coup and attempted to make peace with his uncle, Sa‘id bin Ahmad, who was then living in Ras al-Khaimah. His own rule came to a violent end on 13 February 1929, when servants of his blind uncle ‘Abdul Rahman, killed him. Ahmad bin Rashid, the brother of the ruler who was murdered by Hamad bin Ibrahim, was named successor.⁷⁶

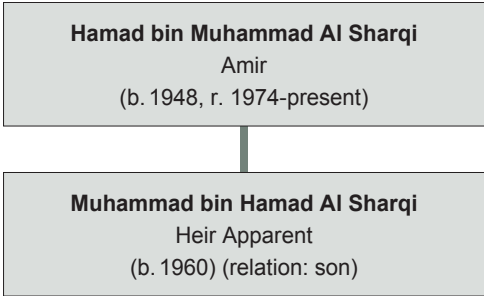
Barely 18 when he assumed the burdens of power, Ahmad accepted British treaties and ruled peacefully until 1981. He was a recluse during the latter part of his life and turned over most federal responsibilities to his son Rashid who, in turn, acceded to rulership on 22 February 1981. When Shaykh Rashid passed away on 2 January 2009, his son Sa‘ud succeeded him. Born on 1 October 1952, Shaykh Sa‘ud received his primary education in Umm al-Qiwain, and attended high school in Lebanon before he enrolled at Cairo University, from where he earned a degree in economics in 1974. He was named Heir Apparent in 1982 and is married to Shaykhah Sumayyah bint Saqr bint Muhammad Al Qasimi, a sister of the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah. The couple have ten children including Shaykh Rashid bin Sa‘ud bin Rashid Al Mu‘allah, the heir who is expected to succeed his father in a straight primogeniture system.

The Al Sharqi of Fujairah

The Al Sharqi gained full sovereignty over the emirate from the Al Qasimi (Sharjah) on 23 March 1952, although the initial break occurred around 1866, after Sultan bin Saqr, the legendary Qasimi leader that marked the chronicle of the Lower Gulf, passed away. Since then, successive leaders

76. Kéchichian, Power and Succession, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-336.

Table 12. The United Arab Emirates and Fujairah: Key Figures



shaped the ruling family’s history just as they delineated its geographic features. Consequently, the emirate came into existence but as a fragmented entity that, not surprisingly, complicated its actual administration. Today, Fujairah has two separate enclaves, as well as three village dependencies, and has a Westerly outlook because of its physical location on the Sea of Oman. These enclaves and dispersed villages are the result of wars between Al Qasimi and Al Sa’id (Oman) rulers who competed for power in the area and enlarged their numerous quarrels by dragging other tribes along. Qasimi rulers as well as influential British political agents were pre-occupied with the various maritime conditions that facilitated—or prevented—free navigation for their ships. In the event, the divide and rule approach persisted, but not because Fujairah was either devoid of leadership or of tangible assets.

Fortunately, and because the British never recognized Oman’s claim to Fujairah, Muhammad bin Hamad’s persistence paid off in 1952, when London sought to further its commercial position in the Lower Gulf. Reacting to Muhammad’s offer to grant oil concessions, and having long accepted Al Qasimi divisions in Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah and Kalbah, London extended recognition to further its maritime posture. Naturally, the ruler accepted the panoply of British conditions, ranging from the General Treaty of 1820 to the crucial Treaty of Peace in Perpetuity of 1853. At the time, both rulers in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah voiced their objections,

but these were simply ignored. Mistrust and competition kept Muhammad bin Hamad at odds with the rulers of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah that, on several occasions, resulted in armed conflict. They also forcefully brought in British political agents who earned credit to defuse tensions.⁷⁷

Fujairah’s ruler, Shaykh Hamad bin Muhammad Al Sharqi was born on 25 September 1948, and is one of the better educated of the seven UAE rulers. He attended the Eastbourne School of English in the United Kingdom and graduated from the Mons Military Academy. Upon his return, he served as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for several years before taking the throne, as he ascended to Fujairah’s rulership when his father passed away in 1974. Married to Shaykhah Fatima bint Thani Al Maktoum, with whom he had six children, including his heir, Shaykh Muhammad bin Hamad bin Muhammad Al Sharqi, who is expected to succeed his father is a straight primogeniture mechanism.

Over the years, the dexterous Shaykh Hamad managed his financial dependence on Abu Dhabi, as he ingratiated himself to Shaykh Zayid who truly liked the Fujairan. Because of his intrinsic abilities, Zayid entrusted him with major tasks, including representing the UAE in international fora like the annual United Nations General Assembly and League of Arab States gatherings. The astute sovereign fulfilled his duties with aplomb and saw increased investments while keeping his majlis doors open for citizens and expatriates alike in the tradition of the smaller emirates. To his credit, Shaykh Hamad may be said to have enhanced Fujairah’s strategic location on the Gulf of Oman, gradually transforming his small emirate into a tangible UAE asset. It fell on his successor to add to the many benefits that the new pipeline from Abu Dhabi, for example, would bring to Fujairah. All indications pointed to precisely such an outcome.

77. Kéchichian, *Power and Succession*, *op. cit.*, pp. 336-339.

Conclusion

Historically, Arab Gulf ruling families have had their share of succession woes although smooth transitions, rather than gloom and doom scenarios, were the patterns during the past several decades. After the death of a sovereign, designated heirs acceded respective thrones, mostly uneventfully. Even in monarchies without designated heirs, succession was a well-oiled mechanism that, with rare exceptions, ensured the survival and prosperity of existing ruling entities. Still, several of the monarchies discussed in this report are entrusted to ageing patriarchs, which is the chief reason why many are concerned about the ways in which control passes to the next generation. While each monarchy displayed its own particularities, new rules to govern processes that can currently get bogged down if senior family members are in disagreement may well be required, even if much of the winnowing occurs behind closed doors. Emphasis on primogeniture, as in Bahrain, Qatar and several UAE ruling families may well have solved one feature of succession patterns in these respective countries, although intra-family challenges lingered and cannot be dismissed as being harmless. In Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia, mixed forms of succession mechanisms existed, though how power is passed to future generations remained critically important. Given their critical roles in international affairs, who rules in the six conservative Arab Gulf monarchies and who might assume the burdens of power, were vital questions and bound to remain so for generations to come.

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