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## LEADERSHIP IN THE ARAB WORLD: FROM REVOLUTION TO REDEFINION

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**Abstract.** Leadership as a phenomenon of timeless significance has always been a subject of research interest. It is a special form of social process inherent in all social groups. In this sense, it is characterized primarily by mutual influence of the members of these groups, with one or several of them exerting a disproportionately larger influence on the choices and actions of the other parts of group. At the same time, personal qualities including leadership style and political motivation remain the central concept of political leadership theory. The emergence of new challenges and new requirements for leaders makes it necessary to consider the tools of influence they possess and employ as well as their ability to adapt to the changing internal and external environment. This article focuses on the leaders of the Arab states who came to power in different periods and represented different types of leadership. In the times of national liberation movements, these were revolutionaries, who overthrew outmoded regimes, promised their people a bright future and built it in their own way. At present, the “redefining” leaders (mostly represented by Gulf monarchs) attract the most attention. They have proved to be highly sensitive to the demands of the time, offering their own ways of responding to them. Both monarchs and republican leaders sometimes share similar cultural and historical identities that influence their methods of governance. For example, the Bedouin theme, which emphasizes the ruler’s closeness to his people and his task to take care of his tribesmen, has been accentuated by the Gulf monarchs and by some revolutionary leaders. The author believes that leaders capable of “redefining” are not necessarily a product of democratic systems. In authoritarian regimes, a new generation of rulers has also contributed to the revision of a number of well-established dogmas concerning the goals of social and national development. However, methods, as well as certain management practices used in the Arab monarchies, have been shaped by a mix of elements associated both with modernity and traditionalism.

**Keywords:** leadership, national liberation movement, revolutions, “redefining” leaders, national development, instruments of influence.

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## ЛИДЕРСТВО В АРАБСКОМ МИРЕ: ОТ РЕВОЛЮЦИЙ К ПЕРЕОСМЫСЛЕНИЮ

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**Аннотация.** Лидерство всегда было предметом политического и исследовательского интереса, и в этом смысле данная тематика имеет вневременное значение. Вместе с тем появление новых вызовов и новых требований к лидерам предполагает, помимо прочего, оценку их способности адаптироваться к меняющимся внутренней и внешней среде и тем инструментам влияния, которыми они располагают. Основное внимание сосредоточено на компаративном исследовании политики арабских лидеров периода национально-освободительных движений и укрепления независимости, с одной стороны, а с другой – современных монархов арабских государств Персидского залива. Они представляют собой различные типы правителей и различные режимы. В первом случае – это революционеры, во втором – так называемые переосмысливающие (*redefining*) лидеры. Соответственно, можно условно выделить две модели ответа на вызовы времени. При-

чем, вопреки бытующему мнению, лидеры, способные к переосмыслению существующих привычных подходов, не обязательно являются атрибутом только демократических систем. В авторитарных режимах появление нового поколения руководителей также способствовало пересмотру ряда устоявшихся представлений о путях развития общества и государства. При этом методы осуществления перемен, а также используемые в арабских государствах практики управления органично сочетают современные и традиционные подходы.

**Ключевые слова:** лидерство, национально-освободительное движение, революции, переосмысление, национальное развитие, инструменты влияния.

Leadership issues have been the subject of extensive research. Researchers both domestic and in the West offer their own typologies of leaders, analyse the peculiarities of leadership qualities, and consider the relationship between power and society. The main leadership theories emphasise the leader's ability to exert influence, their relations with others, and specific personal traits. According to American researchers Michael Hackman and Craig Johnson, there are three common themes that leadership theory tends to focus on: (1) how influence is exercised; (2) the group context; and (3) the collaborative or reciprocal nature in relationships between leaders and followers. When considered together, they appear to suggest that leadership always occupies a particular form of social processes intrinsic to all social sets and is characterized by, above all else, the reciprocal interplay of influence among members of those sets in which one or more of those members exercises disproportionate influence on the choices and acts of the group (set) and its members [1, pp. 12-13]. The aforementioned does not exclude the special role personal qualities play – leadership style, political motivation, and stress tolerance [2, p. 414].

Modern requirements for publishing articles sometimes force authors to focus excessively on various political approaches, which, while valuable, do not necessarily align with the subject area of a particular study. During Soviet times, it was obligatory to mention the classics of Marxism and the decisions of the CPSU's latest congresses. Nowadays, it is often required to start with a review of publications that are distant from the analysed topic. This article exclusively uses literature that aids in understanding the causes and peculiarities in the formation of certain types of leaders in the Arab world and their responses to contemporary challenges.

In the 1950s – late 1960s, these were revolutionaries who overthrew outdated regimes, promised a

bright future to the people, and built it in their own way. Western prescriptions for democratic change were not effective action guides in the East, even though republican regimes varied in their levels of authoritarianism. For instance, Egypt, since the 1952 revolution of the 'Free Officers', and Libya since 1969, had the formal status of republics. Egypt had functioning political institutions (political parties, public organisations), unlike Libya, which lacked modern institutions, resulting in not the proclaimed *Jamahiriyah* (people's governance), but a one-man dictatorship.

The political system in Libya formally included revolutionary committees, old administrative institutions, and clan and tribal structures, which Gaddafi could directly communicate with as needed. In fact, the leader who personified power remained at its apex. Accordingly, the hierarchical structure that collapsed after Gaddafi's death could not be revived – none of the contenders could become his replacement, so the existing structures and ties primarily contributed to the formation of opposing camps.

Egypt's political system proved to be much more stable, mainly due to the army's coup in 2013, which allowed a return to the familiar model of governance, albeit stricter than under Hosni Mubarak. Public and political life in the country continued to develop, with around 100 political parties registered by 2015. And although in reality "the majority, if not all, of the new parties had similar agendas with no real programs on the ground to communicate with citizens," the very fact of their appearance indicated that Egypt's political system remained institutional [3].

In the contemporary Middle Eastern context, the leading politicians of the Arab monarchies of the Gulf have attracted significant attention. They have also proved to be very sensitive to the demands of the time, yet they have offered their own unique responses.

Both Arab monarchs and republican leaders sometimes share similar cultural and historical identities that influence their governance methods. For instance, the Bedouin theme, which addresses the distinctive lifestyle of desert nomads, remains characteristic of Gulf monarchies. It emphasises the ruler's closeness to the people and his duty to care for his fellow countrymen. This theme was actively exploited by Gaddafi, a revolutionary leader who positioned himself as a Bedouin, cherishing traditions above all – both in state-building and in crafting his own image. He ostentatiously carried a tent with him everywhere and even took one when travelling abroad; once he insisted on pitching it in the gardens of a Parisian hotel during a state visit in 2007 [4, p. 5].

While many Arab republican leaders could be classified as revolutionaries, the monarchs of the Arab Gulf countries can be described as 'redefining.' However, Archie Brown, a well-known British political scientist who introduced this concept into scientific discourse, originally applied '*redefining*' exclusively to leaders of democratic states. These leaders redefine the boundaries of possible measures in the politics of their countries, engaging in radical changes and questioning established perceptions. It can be argued that democratic leaders are not the only ones who "question established ideas, give new meanings to the concept of politically possible, and make radical changes" [5, p. 115].

In the Middle East, the modern rulers of the Gulf monarchies follow a similar pattern. Unlike revolutionaries who sought to completely rebuild their societies (through nationalisation, significant social upheavals, and the introduction of new ideologies), these monarchs use more conservative methods. These methods have proven effective in redefining perceptions of national development goals and have been incomparably more successful in terms of the development of their societies and states.

#### FROM LEGEND TO POLITICAL ROUTINE

The influence and popularity of leaders of individual states used to depend both on the individual characteristics of the leader's personality (talent, charisma, and business qualities) and

the peculiarities of the epoch. The national liberation movement period, with its high demand for heroes, brought a number of representatives of army circles to the forefront. Historically, many leaders of Middle Eastern states originated from a military background [6, p. 11]. The army was the best-modernised state institution, therefore young and risk-taking people emerged from its ranks. However, the armed forces were by no means the only "supplier" of political talent.

Revolutionaries are shaped first and foremost by personal qualities. It was not the routine reshuffling of political figures or the succession practice but persistence and charisma that paved the way to the top for the strongest and most ambitious characters. This type of leadership was described by Max Weber who described it as "the credibility of some extraordinary personal *gift* (*Gnadengabe*) (charisma), utmost personal loyalty and personal trust... A person of this type is considered to be internally "called" to lead people; the latter obey him not by virtue of customs or established practices but because they believe him" [7, pp. 646-647].

The rise of individual leaders (Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ahmed Ben Bella, Hafez al-Assad, Abd al-Karim Qasim, etc.) during the period of struggle against colonialism and strengthening of independence was also connected with the special situation in societies – the growth of nationalism, desire for change, and high mobilisation potential. Inflated social expectations proved to be the flip side of these processes – these expectations could not be met in the context of weak economies and the powerful influence of traditionalism.

Gamal Abdel Nasser seems to be the most colourful figure. He became the embodiment of national hopes and an object of pan-Arab pride. Russian scholar Grigory Kosach mentions a special attitude towards Nasser throughout the Middle East: "Not only the street gave heed to the words of this man throughout the Arab world, from Rabat to Al Kuwait; he found supporters in the monarchical families of Saudi Arabia and the (then) Kingdom of Libya. Nasser was the idol of educated youth, illiterate fellahs and urban labourers. One could not but perceive Nasser as a leader who revived the 'Arab dignity' after decades of 'colonial oppression': he 'won' the con-

frontation with the participants of the ‘tripartite aggression’ against Egypt – Britain, France, and Israel, by returning the Suez Canal – the country’s ‘national treasure’ – in 1956 and putting an end to the ‘dominance of foreign capital’ in the Egyptian economy. One could not but admire the man who made a step towards the realisation of the idea of ‘Arab unity’ which was embodied in the appearance of the UAR on the map of the Middle East” [8, pp. 259-260].

Nasser, influenced by the circumstances and his own choice, became a faithful servant, and an embodiment, of the socialist idea (in its national interpretation) as well as the idea of independence and autonomy (the “Non-Aligned Movement”). The regime appealed to Egyptian nationalism, pan-Arab and, partially, Islamic identities. Nasser was not an ideologue, yet he managed to use a mixture of socio-economic postulates and patriotic appeals to legitimize his regime as being based on “Arab socialism” [9, p. 90]. Global ideologies made him invulnerable to private criticism.

The level of popularity of the “Arab leader” was so high that it offset any mistakes and failures. Neither the inglorious dispatch of the expeditionary corps to Yemen (1962–1967) nor the failed attempts to set up inter-Arab alliances, nor even the defeat in the war with Israel in 1967 undermined his unquestionable authority.

Anwar Sadat, who also originated from the “Free Officers” ranks, no longer fit into the paradigm of Arab socialism, which started losing its initial appeal already in the late 1960s. Deprived of the political charisma of his predecessor, Sadat could not count on the unconditional support of his endeavours. He gradually became a subject of popular jokes from sharp-tongued Egyptians. Probably in any society, but specifically in Arab societies, mockery of leaders signals disrespect, which results in a drastic limitation of their ability to influence elites and society.

Such was the case with Sadat. His political achievements were ill-timed and not only failed to make him popular but also increased the rejection of his personality by his contemporaries. His words of readiness for peace with Israel, which he voiced during his visit to Jerusalem in 1978, were no less revolutionary at that time than Nasser’s

announcement of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The Arab-Israeli conflict was still raging; the three “no’s” in the 1967 Khartoum Declaration proved not to be revoked; and the very act of speaking in the Knesset was a challenge to all ideas familiar to Arab societies. A famous American politician Harold Saunders wrote that Sadat had begun to destroy psychological, human, and political barriers [10, p. xiii].

Formally, Sadat was closer to the category of “redefining” leaders than to the revolutionaries from whose ranks he emerged. His careful judgement told him that the country would not be able to resolve its complex development problems if the military confrontation with Israel, in which Egypt bore the brunt, continued.

However, Sadat’s statements were not met with enthusiasm in Egypt or other Arab states. His move could not inspire people en masse. Life in Egypt was severe; the hopes for social justice were trampled by the savage Egyptian capitalism that enriched only a bunch of “fat cats”, as Egyptian oligarchs were called. Under such conditions, peace with the hated Israel did not look at all attractive even to the middle class interested in stability; meanwhile, Sadat’s opponents in the country and abroad were insulted by such “betrayal”.

Gradually, the leaders born in the anti-imperialist struggle, those who had laid the foundations of nation-states, were quitting the scene. Their fates are different. Abd al-Karim Qasim, the Iraqi President, who himself had come to power in the wake of a bloody coup in 1958, was overthrown and executed in 1963. Much later, as a result of US military intervention, Saddam Hussein was executed (2006); Anwar Sadat was shot dead at a parade (1981); Gamal Abdel Nasser, Houari Boumédiène and Hafez al-Assad died, and furious insurgents massacred Muammar Gaddafi (2011).

Their forced or natural demise preceded the emergence of a new generation of leaders on the political scene, of those who were required by the new time to work diligently to develop and implement national strategies.

The task turned out to be far from simple. The absence or weakness of due institutions, the low



level of human capital development along with corruption and resistance of elites accustomed to other rules of the game, and, at the same time, the leaders' urge to maximise their own power, often deprived their policies of consistency.

### CHANGES IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT AND NEW REGIONAL FORCES

Today, the countries of the Middle East are not only influential regional players but also increasingly prominent participants in global international relations. They have organically integrated first into the globalising and further – into the gradually “nationalising” world. Whereas populists have increasingly taken the lead in the West, the nationalist agenda in the East became associated with authoritarian leaders who, in modern circumstances, were ready to implement reforms, overcoming the resistance of the discontented and making no bones of the opposition.

The modern system of international relations has provided an opportunity for state entities having sufficient resources (irrespective of their population base and territory size) to take a place in the new arrangement of political and economic forces. The absence of two poles pulling together the military, economic and ideological/political world was the main challenge for the regional states that traditionally relied on external allies and even made use of their disagreements and rivalries in the former's own interests. The order defined by the conventional global equilibrium collapsed, and the leading role of the USA in the Middle East disappointed many American allies in the context of a unipolar world. The problem was not the “strategic crosscurrents” that complicated the interaction between the international and regional subsystems in the Middle East. The above was a subject of research by Kristian Ulrichsen, co-director of the Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States. He wrote that “strategic crosscurrents, such as US political and strategic interests in Israel and the US's simultaneous reliance on oil from the Gulf, complicated the reciprocal relationship between the international system and the regional sub-system in the Middle East”

[11, p. 8]. In fact these crosscurrents have existed for a long time, and in fact, both regional and global players adapted to them.

The main factor was that the USA, bound by a variety of commitments, showed a diminishing interest in intervening in the endless conflicts and clashes in the region. As a result, despite their heavy dependence on the USA, the regional rulers realised the need to act independently.

They even began to gradually lose habitual respect for the Joe Biden administration. The disrespect for the American president, who demanded too much from his regional allies and at the same time openly insulted them, being not ready to take their interests into account, was demonstrated quite openly. In July 2022, the American president visited Saudi Arabia to ask for an increase in oil production in order to reduce Russia's oil revenues in the face of the Ukraine crisis. Shortly before that, he characterised the kingdom as a “rogue country” and referred to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as the “murderer” of a Saudi journalist. In addition, he refused to supply high-precision missiles because of Riyadh's military campaign in Yemen [source 1].

Not surprisingly, Mohammed bin Salman did not meet the president at the airport, and made no efforts to normalise the relations with Israel at Biden's request (later he made very serious demands on both the USA and Israel); as to the increase in oil production, it was insignificant and did not last long. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, who visited Saudi Arabia in October 2023, had to wait several hours for a meeting with Mohammed bin Salman. The meeting was originally scheduled for the evening, but the prince did not show up until the morning [source 2].

The military clashes between HAMAS and Israel, which began on 7 October 2023 with a militant raid on Israeli territory and the massacre of civilians, ended in a massive Israeli response and made the idea of normalising the relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel not only untimely but also unrealistic. It is important to note, however, that Riyadh, in the process of discussing it in the autumn of 2023, made demands on the USA that no Arab country had previously dared to make on its global ally.

Riyadh's conditions included the extension of security guarantees up to the participation of the American military force in repelling threats against Saudi Arabia; delivery of modern weapons and military equipment from the USA; America's agreement to the development of the Saudi peaceful nuclear programme, and ensuring the Kingdom's access to full nuclear cycle technology. The settlement of the Palestinian problem was a separate item [12].

The Middle East middle powers "do not necessarily meet the typical criteria for middle power status, which presupposes large populations, considerable national wealth, and substantial armed forces – possibly with a small nuclear component. Nevertheless, they have interests in many parts of the world and are therefore widely represented by their diplomatic services. The MENA 'middle powers' meet some of these criteria..." [13, p. 35].

Some Arab medium-sized and even small states compensated for the lack of particular characteristics by emphatic policies of their leaders who use both modern and quite traditional practices to promote their influence, gradually adapting them to the changing world and the needs of the society.

It is known that the ability of a state to demonstrate its status is traditionally linked in the Middle East with a military force that ensures the projection of the country's influence as well as the imposition of one's will on others. However, the real advantages of the Gulf monarchies lay in the sphere of resources and technological achievements and were determined by the ability to "pay" for successful policies.

#### GULF ARAB MONARCHIES: AGENTS OF CHANGE?

The question of why the leaders of the Gulf Arab states can be categorised as those who are critically reconsidering their usual approaches probably has no unambiguous answer. The accession to power of a more educated generation of rulers, the need to diversify sources of income, greater control over the society (with consideration of the opposition, including the elites), and the availability of resources – all of the above play their role.

The analysis of the activities of the new generation of Gulf Arab monarchs, the "redefining" leaders, raises many questions. Why do they easily overcome the barriers described by Harold Saunders, as he was writing about Sadat? The UAE and Bahrain normalised relations with Israel and developed multilateral ties with it without any negative cost. No less important was the normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, despite their continuing rivalry.

It is a different time, but the threats posed by unresolved conflicts have not disappeared. The events of autumn 2023 demonstrated the powerful explosive potential of the Palestinian problem. Most Arab societies and elites had always perceived the absence of an equitable settlement of the Palestinian problem as a kind of national humiliation, but it gradually receded to the background of the political agenda. The bloody drama put the Arab rulers at risk of being drawn into confrontation. Possibly, that is what HAMAS leaders aspired to.

In terms of activist policies (both foreign and domestic), Arab monarchies do not conform to obsolete perceptions prevailing in the West. In particular, according to Polish sociologist and political scientist Jerzy Wiatr, traditional monarchies and theocratic regimes "are remnants of the past, continuing their existence only in countries which have either escaped the processes of modernization or had their modernization cut short (and at least partially reversed) due to strong resistance from traditional, particularly religious forces. Traditional monarchies have survived only in some Arab states (for instance in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates and other emirates of the Gulf)..." [9, pp. 74-75].

However, in fact, monarchical governance is not perceived in the Arab world as a relic, especially since the tribal tradition projected onto relations within the state means that the sheikh (ruler) must, as it is understood today, efficiently meet the needs of state-building and the public good (migrants do not count). Nor does the presence of monarchies in the Middle East mean that the countries have escaped modernisation, although this process may have been slowed down for various reasons not necessarily related to the

resistance of conservative religious forces. In fact, the preservation of monarchical rule can provide significant regulatory advantages: “Their status as resource-rich polities with a highly-concentrated decision-making core freed rulers from many of the constraints on states with more participatory political systems” [11, p. 2].

Moreover, a marked and rapid rise of autocratic authoritarianism has taken place in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. “Both countries – for good or ill, depending on one’s perspective – appear further than ever from European-style constitutional monarchy, let alone the sort of democracy or political freedoms espoused by the US Department of State, which claims that ‘promoting freedom and democracy and protecting human rights around the world are central to US foreign policy’ [14, p. 13]. The strengthening of authoritarian rule, which can formally be considered as evidence of a growing political gap when compared to modern regimes, in fact indicates that rulers are attempting to reduce their traditional dependence on the family and the tribal elite as a whole. “Observers of Mideast politics will note that the family of a ruler is deeply integrated into that ruler’s administration. This is one of the more persistent remnants of the Bedouin culture, the almost exclusive priority given to members of the family or tribe in matters of access, resources, and power” [15, p. 106].

In this context, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia showed that he was not ceremonious with his relatives. He accused them of corruption and demanded to return the money to the treasury, threatening with punishment. These measures were intended to “remind people in the future that their wealth and well-being will depend on the Crown Prince, and not on anything else,” said a former Saudi official who spoke on condition of anonymity [16].

The transition to unvarnished absolutism in the Gulf monarchies represents liberation from the yoke of tribal restraints that force the ruler to put up with the arbitrariness of the inner circle and constrain his ability to make necessary decisions.

Presently, the Gulf monarchies are placing a premium on modern development. New educational institutions are being opened, high-tech

industries are being created, and a modern labour market has been formed in which both men and women can find employment. Great attention is paid to information resources, which are on par with the leading Western media. For instance, the Qatari channel Al Jazeera, established back in 1996, successfully competes with both the *BBC* and *CNN*. At the same time, the ongoing reforms in no way politically restrict the monarchical regime with all the inherent costs of one-man rule.

The availability of energy resources has opened up a possibility for accelerated economic development. While remaining essentially rentier states, the Gulf Arab monarchies are nevertheless forming an evolving, adaptive type of state. We are witnessing «the continued rise of a more proactive ‘new rentier’ class who are seeking fresh sources of rent and pressing for necessary economic reforms... rentier states prove willing to adjust their economies to globalizing forces and other external variables while at the same time trying to preserve existing rentier political dynamics» [14, p. 13].

Oil revenues served as a way to stabilise the socio-political situation during the Arab Spring. According to Andrei Korotaev, Professor of the Higher School of Economics, “the modern study of revolutions shows that oil dependence and large oil revenues are a factor of stability. Until recently, an opinion was declared and promoted about some kind of oil curse, voicing that oil-producing countries are more exposed to risks of destabilisation than other states... Look at Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Arab Emirates, and Brunei. Do you see any signs of destabilisation there? On the contrary, the consistent source of oil revenues has a stabilising effect” [17].

In the 2000s, the monarchies of the Gulf experienced a natural change of generations of rulers. However, those were new people not just in terms of age but in terms of their understanding of the modern world. A number of the new rulers had a military education from the best military academies in Britain. However, this was rather a tribute to tradition. For instance, Hamad ibn Khalifa Al Thani (Qatar) and Mohamed Ibn Zayed Al Nahyan (UAE) graduated from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. However, many of them



believed that experience in various types of business structures was more important. For example, Mohammed bin Salman, before starting his career in civil service, gained commercial experience, including as a consultant to the Bureau of Experts under the Council of Ministers, and later served as Secretary General of the Competitiveness Centre of Riyadh and Special Advisor to the Chairman of the Board for the King Abdulaziz Foundation [source 3].

Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan – Emir of Abu Dhabi and President of the United Arab Emirates – is the head of Tawazun Holding’s economic council with activities focused on increasing economic diversification, holds the positions of chairman of *Mubadala Investment Company* and head of the Abu Dhabi Council for Economic Development (*ADCED*), an economic planning institute. *ADCED* is implementing numerous projects to expand entrepreneurship in the UAE under his patronage. He also holds the position of Vice Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (*ADIA*), which invests towards diversifying and globalising the economy<sup>1</sup>.

The Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, was in charge of the construction of a new network of roads around Doha and gave impetus to the development of the capital city’s metro. The ruler significantly optimised the abundant governmental costs, abolished several ministries similar in function, cut a number of redundant programmes and implemented some political reforms. The main transformations in the country were analysed in detail by Russian Arabist Tatiana Tyukaeva [18]. The food security programme, through which subsidies are allocated to companies entrusted to reduce the cost of food [19], was subjected to significant reorganisation.

The implemented economic and social measures of various kinds are aimed at building sufficient human capital and supporting its development, which inevitably weakens the traditional social relations based on kinship, tribal or more extensive ties that used to provide individuals’

<sup>1</sup> *His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan*. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190705043414/https://melf.ae/his-highness-sheikh-mohammed-bin-zayed-al-nahyan/> (accessed 12.02.2023).

protection in exchange for loyalty. As the tendency to individualism grows, families and tribes become less important. “We conclude”, as stated by American researcher Jon Alterman, “that individualism is on the rise in the region, affecting the way people relate to power and to each other. We also conclude that individuals constantly make cost-benefit calculations about adhering to expected norms of behavior. Most still want an extended network to rely on in extreme circumstances, but they are more likely to rely on friends and colleagues from day to day. We find that people are much more likely to rely on tribe and family in circumstances where security, government, and mobility are low. Urban elites in safe areas have a different set of attitudes than the poor and vulnerable. Finally, we find that young people are showing a much wider range of attitudes toward loyalty and obligation than their elders, partly because of technology and partly due to economics” [20, p. 1].

The changing nature of ties between individuals and social groups within the Arabian monarchies is one of the central changes and at the same time a result of the “redefining” leaders’ policy.

At the same time, the heirs of revolutionaries who once laid the foundations of the nation-states found themselves far less able to meet the challenges of the epoch (Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia). Their loss of strategic vision and increased distancing from the “dependent” people gave a boost to the activities of radical Islamism supporters who proposed the restoration of justice by backsliding. At the same time, Arab monarchs realised the need to contain the most conservative and influential religious forces.

#### AID AS AN INSTRUMENT OF INFLUENCE

An important factor in sustainable rule and reliable public support is reputation, which is a key value in Bedouin culture. It is widely believed that reputation, along with political power and wealth, holds much more weight in the Middle East than in other societies. In any case, respect from the subjects and confidence that the ruler is just and cares for people remain the most important motivations for submission to his will.



Generosity has always been one of the ways to create such an image. Peoples of the desert are renowned for their hospitality; gifts and signs of the monarch's kindness form a circle of specifically loyal subjects, while at the same time imposing additional obligations on them. The history of the Arab world abounds in stories about the generosity of rulers who dispensed enormous wealth and privileges to those whose loyalty they deemed necessary to win and maintain. Probably this is not original: the sole rulers' distribution of gifts and preferences used to be part of a governance system based largely on personal loyalty.

As Arab nation-states and societies developed, generosity as a policy tool was taking on new forms and content, especially as it concerns the rulers who possessed greater resources. It was transformed from the tool of winning the loyalty of individual subjects into numerous aid projects aimed both at supporting the own population and creating the ruler's positive image abroad. Elena Melkumian, a Russian Orientalist, devoted a separate study to the humanitarian activities of the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies [21].

Sheikh Zayed established the Abu Dhabi Fund for Economic Development in July 1971 to assist developing countries through preferential loans, development grants and equity participation of their companies. "The UAE has become a role model ... and the nation has conveyed Zayed's message of boundless generosity...", said Dr Mohammad Ateeq Al Falahi, Secretary-General of the Emirates Red Crescent [22].

The new rules of the game introduced by major Western philanthropists (Bill Gates, Warren Buffett) might have served as a kind of role model for Arab rulers. As believed by some researchers, a direct link can be found here. "In June 2015 Prince Alwaleed bin Talal (Saudi Arabia. – I.Z.) announced that he was pledging his entire holdings – by his own estimate some \$32 billion – to his foundation. He credited Bill Gates with offering both a role model and some direct encouragement. The prince said he is motivated by wanting to tackle large global problems like disease eradication while making sure that his foundation continues to be a major player beyond his lifetime" [23].

Saudi Arabia provides assistance in many forms. They include humanitarian aid at times of crises and natural disasters. One can recall the broad-scale assistance provided by Riyadh to Pakistan during the floods of 2010 [24], or the aid to Syria after the 2023 earthquake [source 4].

Assistance in development involves financing multi-aspect projects (such as the construction of roads and medical and educational facilities), which is the most important component of the Kingdom's "soft power" [25].

Over time, the conditions for aid have become more stringent, with closer cooperation between the national funds and international structures. According to Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al Jadaan, "We are changing the way we provide assistance and development assistance. We used to give direct grants and deposits without strings attached and we are changing that. We are working with multilateral institutions to actually say we need to see reforms" [26].

In principle, the conditions for providing assistance should not only prevent recipients from squandering it but also make them more economically and politically dependent on the donor country.

At the same time, domestic needs involving the realisation of ambitious development projects require investment in their own states and societies. In this context, although the commitments of Arab multilateral organisations (Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Islamic Development Bank, OPEC Fund for International Development and Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa) have extended, they do not compensate for the decline in the internal aid [27].

The question of where the funds have gone suggests the only answer – a substantial increase in government spending on national needs.

## CONCLUSION

Arab regimes are not democratic; however, this does not mean their leadership has stagnated. Authoritarian regimes are also grasping the demands of time and trying to find answers to the challenges of modernity. Leaders who are far from democratic standards may be capable of re-

defining their roles and development paths for the states they govern. In this regard, much depends on the ruler's personality and his preferences.

The question of what Arab leaders are and what is the basis of their influence is not exhausted by a comparative analysis of particular aspects of the leaders' policy – talking of those representing the period of formation of independent states and contemporary rulers of the Arab monarchies of the Gulf. It is important that both demonstrate the high potential for transformation in the Arab world. Naturally, not all of the changes can be deemed successful, and the reasons include the ability of the elites to ensure effective governance, along with the willingness of societies for change.

The attempts by revolutionary leaders (Gamal Abdel Nasser, Hafez al-Assad, Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein) to achieve a special influence in the region through military force as well as to ensure the stability of the regimes they created did not have a lasting effect and eventually contributed to the aggravation of the socio-economic environment (in the last years of their rule or after their demise). It can be assumed that modern development was sacrificed by them in favour of military and political achievements which for the most part proved to be disappointing. The example of Iraq under Saddam Hussein is the most striking in this regard.

Military/political success was no less important for the monarchies – they fought in Yemen, supported their allies in Libya, and engaged in an acute rivalry with Iran. Their actions in this domain were also realised with varying degrees of success. Nevertheless, the Gulf rulers realised

that gaining sustainable and influential positions in the region and beyond could be achieved primarily through advanced development. They had to redefine the habitual governance practices and develop long-term strategies that changed both the states and societies. In some monarchies, these changes were more visible, for instance in the UAE, while in others they were implemented much more slowly and with greater reliance on local conservatives (Saudi Arabia).

Arab monarchies have proved to be truly legitimate and stable regimes, where the right to power is dictated by lineage and does not raise any doubt (although the order of succession may change from brother to brother or from father to son). At the present stage, monarchical rulers have formed their own vision of the main directions of nation-building and started using the instruments of influence in a new way. Unlike the presidents of formally republican Arab regimes and their entourages, the heads of the Gulf monarchies have more organically combined modernisation approaches with the preservation of traditions.

The use of traditional and modern mechanisms of influence, along with hard pressure on the dissatisfied, allows the monarchs to reduce resistance and strengthen their power. At the same time, the existence of patron-client relations provides for certain agreements with representatives of various interest groups. In the long run, the development of individualism will somehow require the monarchs to revise the outdated views on sources of loyalty and, possibly, to introduce new political, social and economic practices of interaction between the government and society.

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