Andrzej Kapiszewski

The Changing
MIDDLE EAST

Selected Issues in Politics
and Society in the Gulf

Kraków 2006

Acknowledgments

Foreword

The Arab world has not been a happy or successful place for quite a while. As one of Arab diplomats once said: "There is a sense of failure, which has opened a gap between the rulers and the ruled. It has led to a lack of confidence in Arab culture, and hostility to foreign influences."[1]

The Arab Human Development Reports 2002 and 2003, prepared by a group of leading Arab intellectuals under the auspices of the UNDP and the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development confirmed such a very pessimistic view of the Arab world.[2] The combined gross domestic product of the 22 Arab countries was lesser than Spain's. Labor productivity in these countries dropped between 1960 and 1990, while it soared elsewhere in the world. Even Africa outperformed the Arab world in rates of economic growth. An exploding population cannot be supported by scarce resources and every other citizen is ready to emigrate.

According to the authors of Arab Human Development Report, the main reason for the dramatic situation in the Arab world is poor governance. "The wave of democracy that transformed governance in most of the world has barely reached the Arab world (...) The freedom deficit undermines human development and it is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development."

Many Western experts stress that there is a dramatic gap between the levels of freedom and democracy in Arab countries and the rest of the world.[3] First of all, there are no true Western-type democracies in the Arab world or really free Arab countries. Secondly, in the last more or less three decades, this world, as a whole, has not seen any significant improvement in political openness, respect for human rights, and transparency, contrary to the trends in all other parts of the world. Democracy is now present in states following every major religious or philosophical tradition: Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Muslim and Jewish. It is present in rich as well as very poor states, in big and small countries. But, as Larry Diamont pointed out, "by any category that is meaningful in the world today, there is only one set of countries that is completely undemocratic: the Arab world."[4]

The Economist evaluated the state of democracy in all Arab countries and results presented on the special scale (April 3, 2004). The most democratic Arab state, Morocco, barely crossed the middle point, while several countries, with Saudi Arabia at the top, did not even reach a quarter of the possible level of democracy.

This situation increasingly worries enlightened intellectuals in the Arab world and Western governments. It is believed to be typical for sudden and violent conflicts, which can de-stabilize the whole region of high strategic importance, and for further spread of terrorism.

Not beginning here a comprehensive analysis of the very complex issue: democracy in the Islamic world, let me just note that there exist very different opinions on the matter. Some people believe that the very idea of democracy "is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam".[5] As Lisa Anderson explained: "Islam's failure to distinguish the realms of Caesar and God, its insistence that sovereignty rests with God and that the essence of the law is divinely revealed and therefore beyond human emendation, its discriminatory treatment

of women and non-Muslim minorities, all appear quite inconsistent with democratic politics."[6] Also in reality, many Arabs, derived from teaching of the Koran and historical tradition, believe that firm rule, based on consensus rather than elections, is good form of government.

In turn, for a group of experts from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace major reasons for democracy deficit in the Middle East are not connected with Islam but are caused by: (1) lack of previous experience with democracy, which, for example, facilitated transitions in Central and Eastern Europe; (2) lack of the prolonged periods of economic growth and the resulting changes in educational and living standards as well as life styles, which led several Asian countries to democratic changes (in fact there is a socioeconomic deterioration in the Middle East); (3) lack of a positive "neighborhood effect", the regional, locally exerted pressure to conform, which helped to democratize Latin America.[7] Moreover, what makes the democratization of the region more difficult to achieve is: a fear of illiberal Islamic movements, which have broad support in most of the Arab countries and which can win democratic elections, if introduced, and while in power abrogate democracy itself; the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the fact that is regularly exploited by rulers of the Arab countries to deflect attention of their citizens from domestic problems; the negative perception of the United States, whose promotion of democracy in view of Washington's support of Israel and occupation of Iraq is perceived as a new American attempt to dominate the Arab world.[8]

Many people believe however that democracy can be implemented in Muslim societies and states. They argue that, first of all, there are reasonably democratic Muslim states already, like Turkey. Then, there are millions of Muslims living in democratic states of Europe, United States or Asia who have successfully

combined their religion with demands of the democratic system. There are also Arab countries, not only the non-Arab Muslim states, that have experimented successfully with democracy. For example post-Saddam Iraq, Lebanon, Marocco and even the Palestinian Authority practiced pretty free elections and have functioning parliaments, proving that certain democratic procedures can be implemented in the predominantly Islamic states. Finally, more and more experts begun to believe that also the Islamic doctrine itself "contains elements that may be both congenial and uncongenial to democracy" and that the only question is to find out how and under what circumstances elements in Islam favorable to democracy "can supersede the undemocratic aspects".⁹

At the same time profound social changes accompany political transformations. Let me mentioned a few. There are changing group identities in the Arab world. Although common religion, language, customs and memory of the glorious past maintain their importance, nation-state identity plays increasingly important role. Arab societies became younger due to high fertility rate which brings tremendous pressure on the labor market. In effect, growing unemployment increases on one side immigration and, on the other, pressure governments for economic reforms. Arab populations are becoming better educated and aware of the real causes of problems facing their countries. Emancipation of women is under way, despite the fact that they still face considerable discrimination. Urbanization continues, with all changes the movement from traditional rural or Bedouin type of life to city's permanent settlement can bring. Etc.

Recently, these issues have obtained special importance in relation to the Gulf states due to developments in the region. American politics, deposition of the Saddam Hussein regime, process of occupation and transformation of Iraq, daily bloody attacks in the country, international crisis over nuclear program of Iran and highly controversial politics of new Iranian president Ahmedinejad,

problems with democratization of conservative monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula and with the dominant role of the foreign labor in these states preoccupy minds of local and world politicians, academics and average people.

In the last year or so, I have published several articles and presented few papers on various conferences on these topics. Most of them are not easily available. Interest in certain academic centers and think-tank groups encouraged me to put them together in one volume. It's content starts with the analysis of President George W. Bush "democratization drive" in the Middle East, with special emphasis on its impact on the Gulf states. Then, results and consequences of recent elections in Iraq and Iran are analyzed. Two papers discuss political changes in the monarchies of the Gulf: one analysis elections and parliamentary activity in these states, second specifically deals with problems of opening up Saudi Arabia. The second part of the volume deals with population and labor issues, very "hot" topics in the Gulf Cooperation Council states, when growing unemployment of local population and broadening political awareness of dominant foreign labor, mostly Asian, increasingly cause tensions. In more detail these problems are analyzed for Oman. Finally, problems of "stateless" Arab residents in the Peninsula are discussed.

Despite the fact that most of these topics have strong political connotation, as a sociologist by background, I look at them as important processes of social change as well, which will bring, and some of them are bringing already, dramatic, painful but overall positive transformation of Gulf societies. In its background crucial nation forming processes are underway, establishing new, or changing old, identities of the people and also creating new, or transforming old, political systems in the region. In the Middle East, extended from north Africa to Afghanistan, countries of Iraq, Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Countries states, lead now the way of change. And despite current problems, I am optimistic about

its outcome. Countries of the region, rich in oil and gas resources, should be able to become a valued members of international community in the years to come.

Krakow, May 2006   Andrzej Kapiszewski

Notes

[1] Michael Field, *Inside the Arab World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 3.

[2] *Arab Human Development Report 2002* and *2003*, New York, www. undp.org.

[3] *Freedom in the World 2001-2002: The Democracy Gap* (New York: Freedom House, 2002), p. 5.

[4] Larry Diamond, „Universal democracy?", Policy Review (June 2003).

[5] Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (Washington, DC, Institute for Near East Policy, 1992), p. 1.

[6] Lisa Anderson, "Democracy in the Arab world: A critique of the political culture approach", in: Rex Brynen, Baghat Korany and Paul Noble (eds): *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, vol. 1, *Theoretical Perspectives* (Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publ., 1995), p. 87.

[7] Marina Ottaway, Thomas Carothers, Amy Hawthorne, Daniel Brumberg, "Democratic Mirage in the Middle East", Policy Brief, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (October 2002).

[8] Some reformists would not even use the term 'democracy' to describe their plans "because in the Arab world that term has become a codeword for hip-hugger blue jeans, sex on television, dysfunctional family life and all other aspects of western culture the Arabs find objectionable", Kenneth Pollack and Daniel Byman, "Democracy as realism", Prospect (April 2003), p. 27.

[9] Samuel P. Huntington, „Democracy's Third Wave", *Journal of Democracy*, no. 2 (1991), p. 28.

George W. Bush's "promotion of democracy" agenda in the Middle East

For a long period of time, basically throughout the Cold War era, promotion of democracy was not a goal of United States foreign policy. The democracy deficit in many parts of the world was not considered a pressing issue as long as pro-American stability in vital regions for U.S. security was not jeopardized. The American government did not pay much attention to the consequences of the lack of democracy, nor did it push for democratic change In fact, it often cherished friendly relations with non-democratic regimes. Saudi Arabia or Pakistan were the best examples of such a policy.

The situation began to change, by the end of the 1990–91 Gulf War. A growing number of people in Washington began to argue that it was time to promote democracy in the Middle East. In particular, they held the view that the United States should remove Saddam Hussein and install a democratic regime in Iraq, what should bring similar results to those achieved in Germany and Japan after World War II.[1] These ideas, however, were not accepted by the U.S. government. President George Bush strongly preferred the regional status quo. Consequently, the U.S. concentrated its efforts on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and left friendly Arab governments to deal with their internal problems as they wished.

The situation somewhat changed when President Bill Clinton came to office. One of the stated goals of the new Democratic administration was the promotion of democracy around the world. Robert H. Pelletreau, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs pointed out clearly that: "The development of democracy and human rights – for the two go together – has been and remains central to U.S. foreign policy... It rests on a hard-headed assessment of our long-term interests. Briefly put, we know that democracies are less likely to go to war, less likely to traffic in terrorism, more likely to stand against the forces of hatred and intolerance and organized destruction. We also know that removing the heavy hand of bureaucracy and opening up national economies within and across borders fosters the sort of economic growth that underpins regional peace and security... For all of these reasons, the Clinton Administration is committed to help countries make the arduous transition from authoritarianism to freedom, and to work to create institutions that will make leaders accountable and responsive to their peoples' aspirations.[2]

Despite proclaiming these ideas, Clinton's government soon concluded that the Middle East region should be exempted from U.S. democracy promotion efforts and that peacemaking should, instead, be the goal there. The argument was that the United States should not risk the destabilization that pressure for reform would generate in deeply traditional and repressed societies. "Pushing hard for political change might not only disrupt the effort to promote peace but could also work against vital U.S. interests: stability in the oil-rich Persian Gulf and in strategically critical Egypt.[3] This argument prevailed, and on that basis the Clinton administration "fashioned a bargain" with America's Arab allies that held, more or less, until September 11, 2001."

Thus, the United States in the 1990s focused only on "improving the climate for political liberalization in the region".[4] Clinton

administration officials did not speak about democracy promotion much but only about "better governance", "enhanced political participation", "pluralism" or "greater openness" in the Middle East.[5] In only a few cases did the State Department call for concrete actions, for instance, pressing for a political solution to the Shi'ite-Sunni conflict in Bahrain or to the war between the government and the Islamist opposition in Algeria, as well as supporting efforts by the rulers of Morocco, Jordan and Yemen, to co-opt the political opposition into government and parliament. While a number of factors motivated these actions, chief among them was the post Cold War era context; the U.S. realized that the promotion of democracy in communist countries had made an important contribution to the fall of totalitarian regimes, and would like to achieve the same in the Arab world. Altogether, the Clinton government spent in the 1990s some \$250 million for democracy-assistance programs in nine Middle East countries, especially in Yemen, Jordan, Morocco and the Palestinian Authority.[6] Projects included strengthening parliaments, improving human rights monitoring and training judges.

In general, these actions did not bring meaningful results, mainly because many of them were poorly designed and executed and were not supported by high-level U.S. government policies.[7] For example, although occasionally the U.S. did raise the human rights issue with Arab governments, such concerns were always secondary in dealings with countries considered strategically important. "Washington did not want to antagonize regimes whose cooperation it needed to keep the peace process going and the oil flowing...[it] hesitated to press for bolder reforms out of concern for stability and fear of Islamist opposition gains".[8]

When George W. Bush (son of former president George Bush) came to the White House in early 2001, it appeared he would continue that approach. But the situation changed dramatically

with the September 11 attacks on the United States. All the terrorist perpetrators were Muslims and 15 of the 19 plane hijackers were Arabs from Saudi Arabia. Many observers understood that the attacks were motivated, in large part, by the conditions in the countries of the Middle East and the Muslim world; large unemployment among the youth, backward education and repressive regimes created fertile ground for the widespread appeal of political Islam, which reinforced existing anti-American sentiments and broadened the social base for Al Qaeda and similar militant groups. With the general conviction that Western-style democracy offers better guarantees for peace and stability, a new policy toward the Arab and Islamic world was than proposed: the goal of democratizing this world was elevated by the American government from a stated objective to a national security imperative, a crucial element in the proclaimed war on terror.[9] Explaining President Bush's standpoint on the matter, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky stated that the "advancement of human rights and democracy... [is] the bedrock of our war on terrorism. The violation of human rights by repressive regimes provides fertile ground for popular discontent...cynically exploited by terrorist organizations... [A] stable government that responds to the legitimate desires of its people and respects their rights, shares power... is a powerful antidote to extremism."[10]

The democratic deficit in the Arab world. Democracy and Islam

There is a dramatic gap between the levels of freedom and democracy in Arab countries and the rest of the world.[11] First of all, there are no true Western-type democracies in the Arab world and not truly free Arab states. None of the 16 Arab majority countries

has democratically elected governments. Approximately, in the last three decades, this world, as a whole, has witnessed no significant improvement in political openness, respect for human rights, or transparency, contrary to trends in all other parts of the world.[12]

Beyond the serious democratic deficit in the Arab countries, they also suffer significant economic and social problems. In early 2000's, the combined gross domestic product of 22 Arab countries was less than that of Spain.[13] Labor productivity in these countries dropped between 1960 and 1990, while it soared elsewhere in the world. Even Africa outperformed the Arab world in rates of economic growth. Simultaneously, the population of the region skyrocketed, worsening the life conditions of majority of people. Most experts agree that there are three major reasons for the democratic deficit in the Middle East: (1) lack of previous experience with democracy, which, for example, facilitated transitions in Central and Eastern Europe; (2) lack of prolonged periods of economic growth and resulting changes in educational and living standards as well as life styles, which led several Asian countries to democratic changes; (3) lack of a positive "neighborhood effect", pressures to conform, emanating from one's regional neighbors, which helped democratize Latin America.[14] Some additional factors complicate demo-cratization in the Arab world. First, many fear the possibility of the accession to power, in a democratic context, of broadly supported illiberal Islamic movements, that could abrogate democracy itself. Second, Arab leaders regularly exploit the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to deflect attention of their citizens from domestic problems. Finally, U.S. democracy-promotion efforts, in view of Washington's support of Israel and occupation of Iraq, are perceived as a new American attempt to dominate the Arab world.[15]

There are, naturally, a number of more fundamental questions related to the possibility of democratization of Islamic states. Is

democratization in the Western sense possible in such states at all, especially in countries, whose rulers use Islam to legitimate themselves and where the religious establishment plays significant role in politics?[16] Opinions on the matter are diverse.[17] Many political scientists express the view that "Islam's failure to distinguish the realms of Caesar and God, its insistence that sovereignty rests with God and that the essence of the law is divinely revealed and therefore beyond human emendation, its discriminatory treatment of women and non-Muslim minorities, all appear quite inconsistent with democratic politics."[18]

According to a well-known scholar Adam Garnfinkle, Muslim societies, to various degrees, lack three pre-requisites for democracy:[19] (1) the belief that the source of political authority is intrinsic to society ("of the people, by the people, for the people"). Muslims believe that God or an accepted extra-societal source is the basis of political authority, therefore the idea of political pluralism as well as the legitimacy of a "loyal opposition" cannot be accepted, while tolerance for any set of social, political or religious principles other that the Islamic one amounts to heresy (2) a concept of majority rule; without this the idea of elections as a mean to form a government does not make sense, yet Muslims are used to governance through consensus-building; the idea that someone who has won 51 percent of the vote in an election should get 100 percent of power, while the person who wins 49 per cent should get none is perceived by them as both illogical and dangerous, an invitation to civil strife. Moreover, in Western democracy the majority view prevails, but in Islam matters should be decided according to the Koran and the tradition of the prophet Mohammed and not according to the views of the people.[20]; (3) equality of all citizens before the law – this idea is in conflict with nearly all Islamic traditional authority, where men are "more equal" than women, the educated considered superior to the illiterate, the pious to non-religious, the elderly

to the youth, and members of the ruling family to the common people.

Nevertheless, even with such obstacles, many Western and Islamic scholars believe that democracy can indeed be implemented in Muslim societies and states. First of all, they point out that theoretically, any revealed religion can have problems with its compatibility with democracy; "all have authoritarian base, are patriarchal, dogmatic what constitutes the truth, and do not believe that reason can bring one to God".[21] But many, Catholics and Protestants in particular, managed to compromise between the ideology and practice. Similarly, while Muslim fundamentalists argue that human beings cannot pass the legislation that infringes on the moral principles of Islam and its tradition, modernists point out that Islam does not specify in any way what form of the state should take and that God gave people the power of reason with which to formulate public policy. Graham E. Fuller goes even further stating that "democracy and political Islam are potentially quite compatible in principle, and the record indicates as much."[22] There are Muslim states which successfully implemented some elements of democracy (Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran) and there are millions of Muslims leaving in democratic states of Europe, America or Asia, who have successfully combined their religion with the demands of a democratic system. Although there are no fully "democratic" Arab states (maybe except Lebanon) – if democracy is defined by the ability to change the ruling authority through elections – but some Arab countries are moving in that direction (Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen). All have functioning parliaments and at least some democratic, or quasi-democratic procedures. Moreover, in recent years even some of the most autocratic regimes, the conservative monarchies of the Persian Gulf, like Bahrain or Qatar, implemented political reforms, broadened political participation of citizens, liberalized the media

and gave more rights to women.[23] These examples gave a boost to supporters of the U.S. idea to democratize the Arab Middle East. President George W. Bush himself stated that "it should be clear to all that Islam – the faith of one-fifth of humanity – is consistent with democratic rule" and that "more than half of the world's Muslims are today contributing citizens in democratic societies."[24]

President Bush's "promotion of democracy" agenda

As Bush administration became convinced that autocracies were making Muslims, and particularly Arabs, especially vulnerable to the appeal of radical Islamist ideologies, fomenting political change in the Arab world became a policy priority.[25] First, the U.S. government decided that the promotion of democracy should be a key component of its new National Security Strategy, initially released in September 2002. This document, which outlines the government's overall plan for defending the United States and advancing its interest and values, declared that "America must stand firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity and the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property." It noted further that "We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world."[26]

In the second step the U.S. Secretary of State Collin Powell unveiled in December 2002 the "US-Middle East Partnership Initiative".[27] The initiative rested on three pillars. It proposed that the U.S. government (1) engage with public and private sector groups to bridge the jobs gap with economic reform, business investment, and private sector development; (2) partner with

community leaders to close the freedom gap with projects to strengthen civil society, expand political participation, and lift the voices of women; (3) work with parents and educators to bridge the knowledge gap with better schools and more opportunities for higher education. Twenty-nine million dollars were allocated for the first phase of the plan implementation; funding than went up by $100 million in 2003, obtained $45 million for the fiscal year 2004 and another $90 million for 2005.[28] The essence of the initiative was supposed to be a partnership with different Arab domestic reformers. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Bill Burns explained that it "means that we in the U.S. governments must listen to ideas and advice and criticism and proposals from the region."[29] Nevertheless, while noble in theory, the execution of the program was highly criticized. Most of the money was awarded to non-democratic and often corrupted Arab governments or state organizations, directly for their subsequent dispersion, or was spent on training for government officials, not for programs aimed at developing nongovernmental pro-reform organizations. Funded programs were focused less on political reforms than on improving the performance of Arab governments, economies, and schools. Altogether, most independent observers believed the program stood little chance of serving "as a catalyst for a tangible political change."[30]

The administration then decided to reorient U.S. diplomacy and American foreign aid policy to lend support to pro-democracy movements in the region as well as to develop a public diplomacy campaign to win Arab "hearts and minds". Special Arab-language radio and television stations were established – the Sawa (Together) radio-station and Al-Hurrah (The Free) television station – to promote American values, especially of religion tolerance, open debate and women rights. Further, study tours, stipends, and English-language studies were offered to expose Arabs to American

democratic institutions and help them to learn and understand America better. In turn, the U.S. government began to send signals that it would not favor Arab governments reluctant to democratic reform. For example, in August 2002, the White House rejected an Egyptian request for $130 million in aid to protest the sentencing of Egyptian-American democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his colleagues to prison for alleged fraud and defamation.

All these actions were, naturally, a consequence of President Bush's approach to the issue. In fact, Bush himself became a great supporter of democratization of the Middle East, and Iraq in particular. That idea became a crucial part of what is becoming known now as "the Bush doctrine".[31] But it came as a surprise to many.

Historically, during the administration of George H. W. Bush (1988–1992), the U.S. was only beginning to develop ideas about what role the country might play in the post-Cold War world. Consequently, in the Middle East, U.S. policy aimed to preserve the existing status quo. Bush senior believed that the maintenance of stability should be the main rationale of American foreign policy. Therefore, when Saddam Hussein disturbed the balance of power in the Middle East by invading Kuwait in 1990, Bush went to war not to create a new order in the region but rather to restore the status quo ante. And for the same reason, after driving the Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, he allowed Saddam Hussein to remain in power in Baghdad. When his son took the presidency in 2000, most people expected him to follow this "realist" approach. But the events of September 11, 2001, compelled Bush jr. to take dramatically different approach. Addressing the nation on September 20, nine days after attacks, he presented himself as a passionate democratic idealist, ready to follow the Wilsonian idea of spreading democracy to as many other countries as possible.[32] Bush underlined that despite the great loss the American nation had suffered, "in our grief

and anger", the U.S. mission was found: "the advance of human freedom". He continued: "we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail" fulfilling this task.[33] In the State of the Union address of January 29, 2002 Bush further elaborated his ideas. First, Bush said that: "The 20th century ended with a single surviving model of human progress, based on non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women and private property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance".[34] Then, he stated: "When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women, there is no clash of civilizations. The requirements of freedom apply fully to Africa and Latin America and the entire Islamic world. The peoples of the Islamic nations want and deserve the same freedoms and opportunities as people in every nation. And their governments should listen to their hopes."[35]

In turn, addressing the United Nations on September 12, 2002, he pointed out that "free societies do not intimidate through cruelty and conquest, and open societies do not threaten the world with mass murder". Therefore, referring to the Iraqi crisis, he said that "liberty for the Iraqi people is a great moral cause and a great strategic goal. The people of Iraq deserve it; the security of all nations requires it." On another occasion he elaborated that "for decades, free nations tolerated oppression in the Middle East for the sake of stability. In practice, this approach brought little stability and much oppression, so I have changed this policy... Some who call themselves realists question whether the spread of democracy in the Middle East should be of any concern of ours. But the realists in this case have lost contact with a fundamental reality: America has always been less secure when freedom is in retreat; America is always more secure when freedom is on the march."[36]

The ideology adopted by President Bush was subsequently promoted by various government officials and accompanied by

endless editorials and articles in major American newspapers presenting optimistic view of the expected results of the new democratizing mission for America.[37]

In March 2003, President George W. Bush decided to take an enormously large and costly action to change the regime in Iraq. He believed that toppling Saddam Hussein would facilitate the rapid democratization of Iraq, which, in turn, would produce a democratic boom in the Middle East, comparable to the successful one that had occurred earlier in Eastern Europe, ending the Cold War.[38] To stress the importance of that argument, the operation was termed "Iraqi Freedom." Nonetheless, there were two more important motivations behind Bush's decision to invade Iraq. First, in the U.S. Saddam Hussein was perceived as an accomplice, if not a sponsor, of Osama bin Laden; further, Iraq was believed to have weapons of mass destruction, threatening for the region. Given that neither of these justifications turned out to be accurate, the argument regarding the importance of democratizing Arab countries in order to win the war on terror has become the important one.

Arabs were not convinced by the argumentation that a desire to promote democracy had motivated Bush's actions. Instead, they believed that controlling oil, protecting Israel and weakening and dominating the Arab world were the real motives behind the invasion and occupation of Iraq.[39] In fact, a large majority of Arabs expected that the war in Iraq would result in less democracy in the region (and more terrorism against the United States). Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden remained for them highly admired world leaders.[40]

On November 6, 2003, President Bush delivered the now-famous address on the need to strengthen democracy around the world and, in particular, to support its development in the Middle East. He called for an end to "sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East", admitting

for the first time that perhaps the U.S. had taken the wrong approach to the matter.[41] Then, he proposed to adopt a new Middle East policy – "a forward strategy of freedom". Bush optimistically stated that the success of democracy in Iraq would "send forth the news, from Damascus to Teheran, that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution."[42] He stressed, however, that democracy takes time to develop and that, consequently, the American commitment to democracy in the Middle East must be the focus of American foreign policy for decades to come. Bush also pointed out that "democratization must always reflect the cultures and tradition of the region. Moreover, democracy can be realized in different political systems". He spoke positively of the rulers of Morocco, Oman, Kuwait, Yemen, Bahrain and Qatar, supported Saudi Arabia's "first steps toward reform" and urged Egypt to "show the way towards democracy in the Middle East." The president rejected exceptionalism of the Middle East as a region inhospitable to democracy, an idea that had often dominated thoughts of Western politicians before.

The American reaction to the speech was mixed.[43] Many commentators praised it, some even compared it to President Ronald Reagan's famous June 1982 speech to members of the British Parliament, in which he predicted the imminent demise of communism because it failed to respect freedom and human rights and reward individual creativity. Others, from the right, criticized Bush on the grounds that he launched "a moral crusade in politically volatile regions without regard to potentially negative consequences", warning that his efforts could unintentionally bring Islamic regimes to power in the Middle East or plunge the region into major turmoil.[44] In turn, conservative realists criticized Bush saying that what he was really proposing was either "a major shift in U.S. attitudes toward the undemocratic ruling classes in Saudi

Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and others which we long called our friends", which could jeopardize U.S. interests in the region, or "a permanent condition of blatant diplomatic hypocrisy", unacceptable as well.[45] Finally some skeptics claimed that Bush's professed U.S. commitment to democracy was just rhetoric and would eventually surrender to the pressures of economic and political interests.

In the Middle East reaction to Bush's speech was generally negative. The media in the region criticized Washington's arrogance, hypocrisy, and interference in Arab internal affairs.[46]

The G-8 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative

President Bush in his November 2003 speech did not announce any new initiative, nor did he define a specific set of policy guidelines. That was left for the White House administration, which began working on the details of the plan that was later named "The Greater Middle East Initiative". The project proposed technical assistance to countries that held elections by 2006, setting up centers to train women managers, journalists and NGO activists as well as women primary school teachers. It called for economic transformation "similar in magnitude to that undertaken by the formerly communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe", mainly through the strengthening of the private sector via microfinancing (individual loans of $400 each to be made to 1.2 million entrepreneurs, 750,000 of them women, in five years time). It also proposed establishment of a Greater Middle East Development Bank, creation of free trade zones, and pressure for Arab countries to join the World Trade Organization. Bush wanted to obtain broad international support for his initiative and planned to launch it at the G-8 summit. The plan was also designed to convince G-8 members that poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in the region,

being the roots of extremism, terrorism, international crime and illegal migration, represented a major threat to their security. At the same time, the plan presented the already existing European Middle East initiative (the "Euro-Mediterranean Partnership", the so-called Barcelona process) and the U.S. State Department sponsored "US-Middle East Partnership Initiative", as complimentary efforts. It also invoked the multilateral reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq as if they were part of the same policy.[47] In short the project involved what was termed the "Greater Middle East," – the area from North-West Africa to Afghanistan, including not only Arab states but also Israel, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.

When the working version of the project under the title "The G-8 Greater Middle East Partnership" was leaked to liberal Arabic daily *Al Hayat* in February 2003, Arab governments, intellectuals and media voiced strong criticism for the plan. They saw in it an unacceptable intrusion in their internal affairs.[48] Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, described any attempt to impose reform from outside as "delusional," and warned that it would lead to anarchy. Bahrain's Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, asserted that "the imposition of any foreign view is not in the interest of the countries of the region". Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal said that the U.S. proposal "include[d] clear accusations against the Arab people and their governments that they are ignorant of their own affairs... Those behind this plan ignore the fact ... that we are able to handle our own affairs". The Syrian Vice President, Abdel Halim Khaddam went as far as to claim that the initiative "is reminiscent of the situation after World War One, when major powers sought to carve up the region". The Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa considered the project "an unacceptable attempt at dictating the development paths the people should take without consulting them."[49] The Tunisian human rights activists Moncef Marzouki stressed "the

total lack of credibility of the U.S. policy to promote democracy in the Arab world" and went on to say "that U.S. policy as a whole greatly facilitates the growth of extremist Islamist forces, as we are seeing in Iraq and will see elsewhere."[50] Questions were also raised about the new U.S.-proposed concept of the Greater Middle East, whose only common denominator seemed to be that it included countries "where hostility to the U.S. is strongest, in which Islamic fundamentalism in its anti-Western form is most rife".[51]

The Arab leaders' criticism of the Bush plan were strengthen by U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's comments that as democracy was a precondition for peace and prosperity in Western Europe, democratic reform was also essential to a resolution of Arab-Israeli conflict".[52] To many, this suggested a justification for postponing efforts to solve this conflict. Moreover, as Zbigniew Brzezinski noted, the plan for the Middle East "ignored the historical reality that democracy can flourish only in an atmosphere of political dignity. As long as Palestinians live under Israeli control and are humiliated daily, they won't be attracted by the virtues of democracy. The same is largely true of the Iraqis under the American occupation... The program for Arab democracy will be more successful, and find wider acceptance, if it is matched by efforts to grant sovereignty to the Iraqis and Palestinians. Otherwise, democracy will be seen to many in the Arab world to be window dressing for continued external domination."[53]

Europe was also critical of the U.S. proposal. Gilbert Achcar wrote in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in April 2004 that America "in the name of democratization" plan now "to strengthen its grip on Middle Eastern oil wealth and markets and extend its network of military bases and facilities." European governments perceived the American initiative as a duplication of their long-term efforts to engage with Arab countries on issues of economic and political reform through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. They feared

that American neo-conservatives would appropriate European ideas to support "democratic imperialism" and that the U.S. initiative would jeopardize their own "soft" approach.[54] Thus, European governments and the E.U. itself reinvigorated their democracy promotion efforts in the Middle East, "facilitating but not imposing change" and "building partnership" with countries of the region. In particular, they have increased aid for Arab governments that agreed to improve human rights in their countries.

In the face of such widespread criticism, the U.S. government scaled-down the original proposal and at the G-8 summit at Sea Island, Georgia, on June 8-10, 2004, presented a new version of the plan under the name "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative".[55] That plan was eventually accepted by the G-8 leaders. The resolution adopted at that meeting called for a "partnership for progress and a common future with the region". That goal is to be achieved through the establishment of the "Forum for the Future", a framework for regular meetings of Western and Arab ministers as well as parallel meetings of civil society and business leaders to discuss political and economic reforms.[56] The initiative includes a microfinance program to help small entrepreneurs, support for training programs for businesses, and a project to enhance literacy. A call to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an idea whose conspicuous absence in the earlier version of the plan had caused wide criticism, was included in the document. The plan acknowledged also that reforms cannot be imposed from outside and that different societies will change at different rates.

Despite a new form, the G-8 reform plan was received coldly in the Arab world. Only five Arab countries accepted President Bush's invitation for launching it at the summit. Two regional powers, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as close U.S. allies Kuwait and Morocco, turned down the invitation, making it clear that they wanted nothing to do with the project. Only Jordan openly

welcomed the plan as "reflective of the priorities of the region;" nonetheless, Jordan warned that reform imposed from outside could backfire. "Opponents of political and social reform will conveniently label reform efforts as a mere implementation of a western agenda against the interests of the Arab world and will probably get away with it.[57] The reaction of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, was a hesitant approval: he noted that "the calls for reform coming from abroad need reflection by the people of our region".[58] Although some Arab intellectuals declared that the U.S. plan could give impetus to homegrown reform movements, many people viewed it only as a bargaining tactic by the U.S. to pressure longtime Arab allies into unpopular and difficult decisions, like pushing the Palestinians to accept an agreement with the Israelis that didn't favor Palestinian interests, or supporting American policy in Iraq.[59]

Of course, many Arab politicians, journalists, intellectuals and others do not reject the Bush ideas per se. Opinion polls reveal that the majority of Arabs support democratic principles; they want to live in the states where leaders are freely elected, where there is freedom of speech and association, where all citizens are equal, and where the rule of law is respected.[60] But the same people usually reject American democratization plans for the region, and U.S. policy towards their countries. (In fact, U.S. Middle East policy in general, U.S. support of Israel, and the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq are the reasons cited most often for Arabs' lack of trust in American initiatives[61]). "The problem is the messenger not the message" – said the Arab League representative, Nassif Hitti.[62] The U.S. image in the Arab world is very negative and in the last few years has worsened: between 2002 and 2004 the number of Arabs who rated the U.S. favorably declined in Morocco from 38 to 11 per cent; in Jordan from 34 to 15 per cent; in Egypt from 15 to 2 per cent; in Saudi Arabia from 12 to 4 per cent.[63] "After what

has happened in Iraq, there is unprecedented hatred [of Americans] never equaled in the region", said President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, the key ally of the U.S. in a region where almost 100 percent of the population held an unfavorable opinion of the country.[64]

Bush's new term in office. Continuity or change of the "democratization drive"?

President Bush made the issue of promoting democracy in the Middle East an important part of his main speech at the Republican National Convention in New York City on September 2, 2004.[65] This was even more significant due to the fact that foreign policy issues are rarely given such prominence during the election campaign. Bush, repeating his earlier declarations, stated first that: "We are working to advance liberty in the broader Middle East, because freedom will bring a future of hope, and the peace we all want. And we will prevail."

Then, the President pointed out that the U.S. strategy is succeeding.

"Four years ago, Afghanistan was the home base of al Qaeda, Pakistan was a transit point for terrorist groups, Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fund-raising, Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons, Iraq was a gathering threat, and al Qaeda was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks". Today, according to the President, "the government of a free Afghanistan is fighting terror, Pakistan is capturing terrorist leaders, Saudi Arabia is making raids and arrests, Libya is dismantling its weapons programs, the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom, and more than three-quarters of al Qaeda's key members and associates have been detained or killed... The murderous regimes of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban are history, more than 50 million people have been liberated, and democracy is coming to the broader Middle East."

(One, of course, can have serious doubts about the accuracy of Bush's analysis.)

Bush underlined that what Americans are doing is "a vital and historic cause that will make our country safer". Moreover, in effect, "free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies, which no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. Free governments in the Middle East will fight terrorists instead of harboring them, and that helps us keep the peace."

For the President, the American mission in Afghanistan and Iraq is obvious: "help new leaders to train their armies, and move toward elections, and get on the path of stability and democracy as quickly as possible." Bush noted that terrorists are aware of how crucial this work is. "They know that a vibrant, successful democracy at the heart of the Middle East will discredit their radical ideology of hate. They know that men and women with hope, and purpose, and dignity do not strap bombs on their bodies and kill the innocent. The terrorists are fighting freedom with all their cunning and cruelty because freedom is their greatest fear – and they should be afraid, because freedom is on the march."

For Bush, "the wisest use of American strength is to advance freedom". "America is called to lead the cause of freedom in a new century". "As freedom advances – heart by heart, and nation by nation – America will be more secure and the world more peaceful."

While the "domino effect theory" was once used to explain how nations in the developing world would fall to communism, today Bush uses it to explain how democracy will spread in the Muslim world. According to him: "As the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq seize the moment, their example will send a message of hope throughout a vital region. Palestinians will hear the message that democracy and reform are within their reach, and so is peace with our good friend Israel. Young women across the Middle

East will hear the message that their day of equality and justice is coming. Young men will hear the message that national progress and dignity are found in liberty, not tyranny and terror. Reformers, and political prisoners, and exiles will hear the message that their dream of freedom cannot be denied forever." Bush is convinced that the millions of people in the Middle East who "plead in silence for their liberty", when given the chance, "will embrace the most honorable form of government ever devised by man."

Bush spoke of America's commitment to advancing the cause of democracy throughout the world also during his inauguration speech while being sworn again as the U.S. President on January 20, 2005. In his short address he mentioned the word "freedom" 27 times and he devoted most of his speech to the questions of human freedom (though this time he never referred to the situation in the Middle East directly). The president said that: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. (...) So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." Simultaneously, "America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling. Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way. We will encourage reform in other governments by making clear that success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people. (...) In the long run, there is no justice without freedom, and there can be no human rights without human liberty."

At the same time, as the President said, America would not abandon those under repression and support democratic reformers. When making an appeal to the allies of the United States for unity in these issues, he finally pointed out that „the concerted effort of free

nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat."
Therefore, it looks like that during his second term in office he may
continue his "democracy drive" in the Arab world. Senator Chuck
Hagel, while outlining Republican foreign policy principles for the
coming years, pointed out recently that "the United States must
continue to support democratic and economic reform in the Greater
Middle East" as "we cannot lose the war of ideas".[66] He provided a
broad justification for such policy. Challenges to U.S. leadership and
security hail not from rival global powers, but from weak "failing"
states where terrorism finds sanctuary and support. These states often
seek legitimacy and power through the possession of weapons of mass
destruction, rather than from the will of their people. Thus "terrorism
and proliferation go hand in glove with the challenges of failed and
failing states." This is why it is so crucial to reform such states.

Many Republicans, as well as most others, are aware that
projects for political reform should be based on realistic assessments
of the needs and specifics of each country, not only on "ideological
orthodoxy". As Henry Kissinger has noted, "a foreign policy to
promote democracy needs to be adapted to local or regional
realities, or it will fail. In the pursuit of democracy, policy – as in
other realms – is the art of possible."[67] Therefore, as Hagel stressed,
"We should support democratic change through partnership
with friendly governments and democrats abroad, developed
through consultations, diplomacy, economic incentives, human
rights standards, and performance-driven measures for success...
Sustainable democracy will depend on institutions that support
education, women's rights, and private-sector development."[68] The
resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an important part of
that policy as the continuation of conflict "increases the capacity
for radical politics and extremists acts of violence".

In the annual address to both chambers of the Congress, the
„State of the Union Address", delivered on 31 January, 2006, Bush

appeared to continuously believe in his mission. Similarly as in the address inaugurating his second term of office, he linked the security of the United States with the enlargement of the group of free states in the world. „The only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and peaceful change. So the United States of America supports democratic reform across the broader Middle East (...) Democracies in the Middle East will not look like our own, because they will reflect the traditions of their own citizens. Yet liberty is the future of every nation in the Middle East, because liberty is the right and hope of all humanity."

The question of propagating democracy in the Middle East was addressed by President Bush a number of times when commenting on the following elections in Iraq, perceived by him as a success of American policy, all the other failures in that country notwithstanding. He was supported in his actions by the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The continuation of the process of democratizing Iraq required from the United States some active measures with a view to convince various Iraqi groupings not to boycott the election or to make difficult compromises. In general, Washington accepted the results of the election, which gave a decisive voice in the state government to the Shiite majority, the latter being to a large extent under the influence of the Islamic groupings, often closely connected with Iran. On the other hand, it worked hard to include also other groups, especially Kurds and Sunnis, in the political process, and to keep anti-American radicals away from the key positions in the country. This was frequently criticized as an interference in the internal affairs of a more sovereign Iraq.

An important role in the shaping of American policy in the field of promoting democracy in the Middle East was taken up by the Congress, particularly by means of providing finance for certain

programs.[69] In this respect, of particular significance is the Advance Democracy Act enacted in 2005, attached to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for years 2006 and 2007, which was submitted by a group of Republican and Democratic Congressmen and Senators. The act imposed on the Department of State an obligation to coordinate actions for the sake of advancing world democracy. The decisions concerning the creation of regional „democracy centers" in diplomatic missions were made, the name of the post of the undersecretary of state „for global affairs" was changed into the „undersecretary for democracy and global affairs"; in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor a post for promoting political reforms in non-democratic countries was established; the Bureau of Intelligence and Research was ordered to collect data on the properties possessed by the leaders of non-democratic states or the countries undergoing political transformation; a decision was made that the question of one's engagement in the process of advancing democracy would be taken into consideration when promoting diplomats to higher ranks; the secretary of state was obligated to give the Congress an annual report on the state of democracy in the world; also the heads of diplomatic missions were requested to get personally involved in the promotion of American values at universities in the countries in which they held their office. For the sake of implementing these programs the sum of $50 million was assigned for 2006 and $60 million for 2007.

On the other hand there are signals that Bush may modify his "democratizing the world" policy.

There are many reasons for that. Iraq cannot be seen as a model for democratic transformation, and the anti-American attitudes in the Middle East has further limited Washington's persuasive powers. At the same time the White House administration has noticed that despite all their flaws, Arab governments have mostly

proved co-operative in combating terrorism, and that several of them began introducing, although slowly, some political reforms (media became freer, women obtained more rights, etc.). Therefore, as Arab countries were called to start reforms as a way to fight terrorism, since they are doing their duty, it seems that the US is ready to neglect their slackness in the democratization drive.

This change in approach became visible at the first international conference under the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative scheme, held in Morocco in December 2004, The agenda prepared for this "Forum for the Future" covered mostly economic and financial issues (aid to small businesses, networking among regional financial institutions, exchange of views how to bring more capital in the region), not the political reforms.[70]Although American officials claimed that economic proposals can contribute in a long run to democratic change ("When you help small entrepreneurs, that creates a middle-class part of the social underpinning of a democracy"), it became obvious that the US has not seen the need and possibility to put the "democratization drive" high on the Middle East agenda now.

Conference in Rabat was attended by representatives from nearly 30 countries, including foreign and finance ministers from the G-8 (Group of Eight Industrialized Countries) and key Arab and Islamic (Afghanistan and Pakistan) states. The ministerial meeting was dominated by the US insistence that promotion of democracy, economic growth, higher literacy rates and gender equality in Arab and non-Arab Muslim states should not be held hostage to the ups and downs of the Middle East peace process. On the other hand, Muslim delegates stressed the link between reform and progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front. Eventually, that link was made clear in the final conference statement.

What was new in Rabat was the presence of the Arab business and civil society groups, which in their statement openly criticized

government of their countries for their lack of willingness to undertake real reforms.[71] They clearly pointed out that Palestinian and Iraqi issues should not be used as excuses for not launching reforms, while Western governments should stop using double standards in assessing violations of human rights and democracy principles in each country. They called their respective governments to allow free ownership of media institutions, freedom of expression, especially freedom of assembly and meetings, ensure women's rights and remove all forms of inequality and discrimination against women in the Arab world and immediately release reformers, human rights activists and political prisoners.

While Arab media generally negatively reviewed the conference in Morocco, the US administration believed that the event provided a promising platform for human right and other nongovernmental groups in the Arab world and "created a mechanism for countries to participate fully with their neighbors in the room to talk about the issue of reform."[72]

The second meeting of the *Forum for the Future*, which took place in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, in November 2005 did not, however, prove to be particularly successful.[73] As a result of the influence of Arabic states government representatives the conference organizing committee did not allow for a number of issues connected with violating human rights in those countries to be tackled. The participants of the meeting did not make any final declaration since Egypt disagreed with the conditions of establishing a foundation whose aim would be to directly (i.e. with no control of the authorities) finance programs of non-governmental organizations in their countries, activities supporting political reforms and the development of civil society. The only success was launching a foundation supporting the promotion of economic reforms in the Middle East. Creating such foundations is important; many non-governmental organizations find it easier

to cooperate with institutions of this type than with official governmental departments.

However, President Bush is determined to establish a foundation *Forum for the Future*.[74] He believes that this foundation may become a basis for implementing his program of democratization of the Middle East. That is the reason why, despite the failure of the meeting in Manama, he has assigned $35 million dollars for its activity. Qatar, where the head office of the foundation is to be, has become its other sponsor. The time will show whether the other Arabic states will join the realization of this initiative.

Obviously, the promotion of democracy in the Middle East constitutes a serious challenge for the policy of the United States as it demands reconciliation between putting pressure on the Arabic state governments in terms of introducing reforms, on the one hand, and the necessity to ensure their collaboration in the fight against terrorism, the process of stabilizing the situation in Iraq or support for the peace process, on the other. The relations between the USA and Egypt are an example of the problems appearing in this respect in 2005 and 2006. On the one hand, the USA were pleased with the decision of President Hosni Mubarak who for the first time allowed for many candidates to run in the presidential election, on the other, they criticized the course of the election: the manipulation with the electoral law, arrests of the members of the opposition, blocking access to some polling stations, etc. Finally, when the Egyptian authorities had arrested Ayman Nour, a politician of the opposition, the USA suspended the talks on concluding a commercial contract. However, Arabic democrats criticized the steps taken by Washington as insufficient in the current circumstances.

The most serious challenge that President Bush had to face was the election in Palestinian Autonomy on 25 January, 2006. The United States had been striving for them for years hoping that

this would lead to removing Yasser Arafat from power. After his death, and in the face of the fact that in the election for municipal authorities in 2005 radical Islamic groups, and particularly Hamas (in the West commonly recognized as a terrorist organization), were tremendously successful, Washington may have no longer been so much interested in holding the election, however, as a state officially advancing democracy in the region, it was not in a position to prevent it. Unexpectedly, it was Hamas that won the election and it formed a new government of Palestinian Autonomy. As at the same time, despite the pressure from the West, Hamas did not back out from the policy of negating Israel's rights to exist and conducting military action against it, moreover, it decided to continue rejecting earlier agreements between the Autonomy and Israel, the United States resolved not to maintain any contacts with the new government (despite the fact that as late as January 31, already after the election, but no doubt still in the hope that Hamas would not govern the Autonomy independently, on the occasion of expressing his recognition of the democratization process in Palestinian Autonomy in the State of the Union Address President Bush declared that he would appeal to the Congress for a grant of \$350 million to support further political and economic reforms in the Autonomy).

The results of the election in Iraq and Palestine Autonomy as well as in Egypt and Lebanon (where a fundamentalist grouping Muslim Brotherhood were highly successful) proved that wherever in today's Arab world a free election was held, anti-Western Islamic groupings would come to power in most of the states. The efforts of the West, and especially those of the United States, which promote the development of civil society, and non-governmental organizations in these countries would not able to prevent this. The attempts to find a „third way", an alternative for the present authoritarian and Islamic governments have proved to be a failure.

Thus, Washington is facing a very difficult dilemma of whether to continue a line of confrontation with such groups (cf Hamas), an approach that threatens both parties with serious consequences, or to establish cooperation with them in the hope that, having reached the position of power, they would become less radical (cf. Turkey). Washington may also return to the former option of supporting authoritarian governments, thereby following the principle of lesser evil, and thus postpone the projects of the democratization of the region. As of today (April 2006), President Bush appears to have decided to continue his former policy. Verbally, he still recognizes the democratization of the region to be one of the priorities of his actions, at the same time, however, he does not condemn Muslim autocrats, the allies of the United Staes of long standing, who ensure stability in their countries and make it possible for the United States to conduct business dealings in the Middle East.

Positive responses in the Arab world to the Bush democratization plans?

At the beginning of 2000's, some Arab states decided to introduce certain political reforms.[75] Morocco expanded the rights of women. Qatar adopted a new constitution providing for a partially elected parliament and held municipal elections already; the Emir Sheikh Hamad, several times called for political reforms in the Arab world. Bahrain became a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament and vocal opposition. Saudi Arabia's rulers called for political and economic reform in the whole Arab world (the so-called Prince Abdullah plan), organized several debates with a broad range of people, including Islamists and other opposition figures, and announced its first municipal elections. In Kuwait, the Justice and Development Movement was established "to defend democratic gains and promote democracy" and the Islamic

Constitutional Movement called for the establishment of a multi-party political system in the emirate. Moreover, in the first half of 2004, the League of Arab States, as well as different parties in several Arab countries, produced declarations on the need for broad political, social, and economic reforms. There is no doubt that many of these actions were inspired or at least invigorated by American democratization initiatives.[76] For some Arabs, including some Arab governments, it became crucial to show the world, Americans, and their own countrymen that they are able to take the political initiative and not just follow the U.S. lead. For others, especially reformers and opposition figures, American initiatives offered support and the possibility of assistance in case they would be prosecuted for their involvement in democratization efforts.

First, in January 2004, a large international conference was organized in Sanaa, Yemen, where a declaration calling for periodically elected legislatures in Arab countries, free media, the separation of institutional powers, and women's empowerment was adopted. The conference established the Arab Democratic Dialogue Forum aimed at promoting dialogue; enhancing democracy, human rights and civil liberties (especially freedom of opinion and expression); and strengthening the partnership between public authorities and civil society.[77]

Then, on March 3, 2004, the otherwise banned Muslim Brotherhood unveiled its own reform initiative in Cairo. The initiative demanded that the Egyptian government rescind the emergency law and other restrictions on political activity, and limit the power of the presidency. The plan further called for reducing the military's role in politics, privatizing Egypt's economy, and fostering an independent judiciary (but also purging non-Islamic materials from the media).

A few days later, on March 12-14, intellectuals and civil society activists, together with former Arab ministers and other government

officials, gathered in Alexandria, Egypt to debate the issue of reform. The adopted declaration demanded an end to the emergency laws existing in many Arab countries, and the establishment of executive term limits, regular elections, and a clear-cut separation between the legislative and executive powers.[78] The declaration further stressed the universal character of democratic values and the urgent need to promote them in the Arab world. "It is a call on the Arabs to adopt democracy – not because the West wants them to, but because it's best for them."[79] Characteristically, the statement did not mention the occupation of Iraq and Palestine as an obstacle to reform in the region.

The Arab League, for the first time in its history, managed to take a position on the political reform issue at its summit in Tunis in May 2004. (The process was not without problems however: the first meeting in Tunis in March was cancelled at the last minute due to disagreements over the summit outcome.[80]) In their declaration, Arab leaders pledged to "reaffirm attachment" to human rights, and to "reinforce" freedom of expression, thought, and worship, and the independence of the judiciary, as well as to "consolidate democratic practice, broaden participation in political and public life, reinforce the role of all components of civil society... and widen women's participation in the political, economic, social, cultural and educational fields."[81] The declaration stated, however, that reforms should be implemented according to the guidelines established in a framework document prepared in Cairo before the summit, "A Course for Development and Modernization in the Arab World.". This document pointed out that reforms should take place according to each country's "cultural, religious, and civilizational understandings and values, circumstance and capabilities", thus seriously weakening its significance by giving possibility to wide interpretation.

On June 3-4, 2004, Qatar University hosted a conference of Arab democracy advocates that drew civil society activists, professors,

journalists and members of political movements from across the region. The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, in his widely reported speech opening the event, stated that: (1) Arab states should consider U.S. proposals for democratic reform rather than rejecting them outright; (2) there are many problems in the Arab world with local roots "that have nothing to do with the outside world", and in particular many that "[do] not spring only from the Palestinian cause"; (3) "the adoption of reforms has always been the right way to stability" (though many Arabs have claimed that if popular participation is broadened the result would be the election of forces that would endanger peace and security).[82] Few Arab leaders have so openly stated such opinions, given that they contrast with many popular viewpoints. The adopted "Doha Declaration for Democracy and Reform" called all Arab states to adopt modern, democratic institutions; hold free, fair and regular elections; place limits on executive powers; guarantee freedom of association and expression; permit the full participation of women in political life; and end extra-judicial procedures, emergency laws, and torture. It also called for the creation of a body to monitor Arab governments' progress on reform and to track the fate of other reform initiatives launched recently in the region. Finally, the declaration stated that "hiding behind the necessity of resolving the Palestinian question before implementing reform is obstructive and unacceptable".

Finally, Dubai hosted in December 2004, "The Arab Strategy Forum" attended by 1500 Arab and non-Arab leaders. During the forum, the then Crown Prince of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al Maktoum (now ruler of that emirate) in a strongly worded keynote speech said to his fellow Arabs in charge: "If you do not change, you will be changed. If you do not initiate radical changes, responsibly discharge your duties and uphold the principles of truth, justice and responsibility, your people will resent you. More than

this, the verdict of history on you will be severe."[83] This comments were especially important as coming from one of the Arab leaders, and the one representing the country, the United Arab Emirates, which despite its tremendous economic achievements is not at all advanced in offering its citizens any public participation in the government.

All the above mentioned declarations constitute a new phenomenon in the Arab world. Reformists, civil society activists, intellectuals, and journalists, although not the un-invited Islamists, with the approval of their governments, and usually with the participation of heads of state and other officials, have begun to openly debate vital issues related to democratization. This debate represents a significant accomplishment. Nonetheless, as well-known British political analyst Rosemarie Hollis remarked, the process "should not stop at the issuing of a statement that everybody is committed to reform. Unless it is accompanied by some real changes, it is insufficient to address the issue."[84]

* * *

In conclusion. The United States has never enjoyed greater power than it does today, nor been more able to impose by force what it wants; however, the country is simultaneously often unable to persuade and convince the targets of its policies to accept its proposals.[85] The U.S. Middle East policies, the proclaimed ideology of the war on terror as well as occupation of Iraq has hurt America's status as a model of democracy and weakened its credibility as a pro-democratic actor. Therefore, crucial American interests in the Middle East – an uninterrupted flow of reasonably priced oil, pro-American political transformation in Iraq, and an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement and successes in the war on terror – can still probably be easier to protect through Washington's

cooperation with traditional, reasonably friendly allies representing stable (though not necessarily democratic) regimes, than through dealings with states experiencing the disorder that inevitably accompanies democratic transformation. Thus the prospects for achieving considerable success in democratization of the region in the foreseeable future remains questionable.

It will be possible to evaluate George W. Bush's foreign policy only from a longer time perspective. However, as of today, it appears that, despite numerous mistakes he has committed in his policy, when advancing democracy in the Middle East President Bush did act rationally. As has been mentioned above, however, the critics both in the United States and in Europe blame his policy of propagating the idea of freedom and democracy for, paradoxically, making it possible for anti-Western, non-democratic, radical Islamic forces to seize the power in various countries of the region and for bringing dangerous results for the West – elections tend to be won not by lay liberals but religious fanatics, and this might easily lead to the national and religious divide in Iraq, an open war between Israel and the Palestinians, and the seizing of power by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Such a reasoning appears to be erroneous, though. It is not democracy as such that is responsible for such situations, but dictators who, at times, by way of taking advantage of social ignorance lead to national tragedies. On the other hand, the Arab world commonly believes that the attempts to advance democracy in the Middle East are a camouflage which once more aims to facilitate the process of taking control of the region by the West. If it is so, however, why is then that Bush did not place pro-American authoritarian leaders at the head of the governments in Afghanistan and Iraq (as America frequently used to do in the times of „cold war"), but he got involved in the costly and problematic process of a democratic election of sovereign authorities in those

countries and he accepts its consequences? The examples of Turkey, India or Indonesia show that it is possible to combine democracy with Islam. The post-colonial, military, or dynastic and authoritarian political systems of the Arab world are in any case on a slow decline. Bush's policy speeds up the process. And as *The Economist*, probably rightly, observes, „Whatever people think of Mr Bush, on this one thing – the universal potential and appeal of the democratic idea – he is on the side of the history".[86]

Notes

[1] Martin Indyk, [a former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs], „Back to the bazaar", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2002, pp. 75-88.

[2] Robert H. Pelletreau, "Political reform in the Middle East: America's stake". Address before the Foundation for Democratization and Political Liberalization in the Middle East October 20, 1995; www.dosfan.lib.uic.edu.

[3] *Ibidem.*

[4] *Ibidem.*

[5] Hawthorne: „Do we want democracy in the Middle East?"; www.afsa.org.

[6] Hawthorne: "Can the United States promote democracy in the Middle East?". While in comparative terms $250 million was not much – the U.S. government spent several times more on democratic transformation in Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union – it was nevertheless a significant increase over previously negligible levels.

[7] *Ibidem.*

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 22.

[9] Victor Davis Hanson, "Democracy in the Middle East it's the hardest solution", *The Weekly Standard*, October 21, 2002.

[10] Paula J. Dobriansky, "The Diplomatic Front of the War on Terrorism: Can the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights Tip the Scales?", Heritage Lecture #724, December 21, 2001; www.heritage.org.

[11] *Freedom in the World 2002. The Democracy Gap*, (Freedom House, New York, 2002), p. 5.

[12] Larry Diamond, „Universal democracy?", *Policy Review*, June 2003.

[13] As reported in the *Arab Human Development Reports 2002 and 2003*, prepared by a group of leading Arab intellectuals under the auspices of the United Nation Development Plan and the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, www.undp.org.

[14] Marina Ottaway, Thomas Carothers, Amy Hawthorne, Daniel Brumberg, „Democratic mirage in the Middle East", *Policy Brief*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (October 2002), www.ceip.org.

[15] Some reformists are even not use the term „democracy" to describe their plans "because in the Arab world that term has become a codeword for hip-hugger blue jeans, sex on television, dysfunctional family life and all other aspects of western culture the Arabs find objectionable", Kenneth Pollack and Daniel Byman, "Democracy as realism", *Prospect*, April 2003, p. 27.

[16] F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies. Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf, States* (Council of Foreign Relations, New York, 1994).

[17] See, for example, Raghid Kazem El-Solh, 'Representative democracy in the Arab region: An overview', in: Yousef al-Hassan, *The Dialogue between Civilizations* (The Emirates Center for Developmental and Strategic Studies, Sharjah, UAE, 1995), pp. 199-211.

[18] Lisa Anderson, "Democracy in the Arab world: A critique of the political culture approach", in: Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, Paul Noble, *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World* (Lynnie Rennier Publishers, Boulder and London, 1995), vol. 1, p. 87. Similarly, Samuel P. Huntington in his early works presented the view that "Islam... has not been hospitable to democracy" "Will more countries become democratic?", *Political Science Quarterly*, no. 2, 1984, p. 208. In turn, Elie Kedourie believed that "the idea of democracy is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam", *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (Washington, DC, Institute for Near East Policy, 1992), p. 1.

[19] A. Garnfinkle, "The new missionaries", *Prospect*, April 2003, pp. 22-24.

[20] Heba Saleh, "Iraq's future worries Saudis", BBC News, May 11, 2003.

[21] Graham E. Fuller, „Islamists in the Arab world: the dance around democracy", Carnegie Papers, Middle East Series, no. 49, September 2004, www. ceip.org.

[22] *Ibidem.*

[23] Andrzej Kapiszewski, "Democratizing the Arab states. The case of monarchies of the Gulf, 1991-2004", *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe*, (3) 2004, pp. 69-129.

[24] „Global message" by President G. Bush in London, November 19, 2003, www.whitehouse.gov.

[25] Tamara [Cofman] Wittes, "Arab democracy, American ambivalence. Will Bush's rhetoric about transforming the Middle East be matched by American deeds?", *The Weekly Standard*, February 23, 2004.

[26] Paula J. Dobriansky, "Promoting democracy in the 21st century: an essential tool against terrorism", Remarks to the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs, February 9, 2004, www.state.gov.

[27] www.state.gov.

[28] Tamara Cofman Wittes, "The Middle East Partnership Initiative: Progress, Problems, and Prospects", Sabah Center Middle east memo #5, November 29, 2004.

[29] Speech delivered at the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, May 16, 2003, www.islam-democracy.org.

[30] Wittes: "Arab democracy, American ambivalence".

[31] Norman Podhoretz, "Enter the Bush doctrine. The four pillars of the President's strategy for winning World War IV", *Wall Street Journal*, September 2, 2004.

[32] *Ibidem.*

[33] www.whitehouse.org. At that website all other speeches by President Bush cited in this paper can be found.

[34] Podhoretz: "Enter the Bush doctrine".

[35] Speaking at Galatasaray University in Istanbul in June 2004, Bush directly warned the Middle East leaders that "suppressing dissidents only increase radicalism"; Susan Sachs, "Bush urges all autocrats to yield now to democracy", *New York Times*, June 30, 2004.

[36] A commencement address at the Air Force Academy on June 2, 2004; www. whitehouse.gov.

[37] Ottaway et all.: "Democratic mirage in the Middle East".

[38] Hanson justified Bush action: "Establishing lawful rule in lawless places entails real costs and dangers. Thus, war or the threat of force may be necessary catalyst. Germany and Japan did not abandon fascism voluntarily. Noriega and Milosevic had to be forced out.", Hanson: "Democracy in the Middle East".

[39] "Arab Attitudes towards Political and Social Issues, Foreign Policy and the Media". A Public Opinion Poll by the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland/Zogby International in May 2004 and in April 2002 by Zogby International in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. www.bsos.umd. edu and www.zogby.com. From 64 percent of respondents in Lebanon to 90 percent in Saudi Arabia said they believed the war would result in more terrorism against the U.S. while from 57 percent in Lebanon to 82 percent in Morocco said that war had brought less democracy to the region.

[40] *Ibidem.* Trying to change such opinions, the State Department established the U.S. Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World and appointed Edward Djerejian, former ambassador to Syria, to lead this team of experts to improve America's communication with the region.

[41] Bush elaborated the issue further during his visit to Istanbul for a NATO summit in June 2004. He acknowledged there that Western nations helped feed extremism by supporting repressive regimes for the sake of region's stability. Such policy "did not serve the people of the Middle East... and it has not made Western nations more secure"; Sachs: "Bush urges all autocrats to yield now to democracy"..

[42] Victor David Hanson from the Hoover Institution at Stanford University justified this policy in the following way: "Just as the breakdown of a few Communist Eastern European states led to a general collapse of Marxism in the east, or the military humiliation in colonial Africa and the Falklands led to democratic renaissance in Iberia and Argentina, or American military efforts in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Panama

City brought consensual government to Central America, a reformed Afghanistan and Iraq may prompt what decades of billions of dollars in wasted aid to Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinians, the 1991 Gulf War, and 60 years of appeasement of Gulf petrol-sheiks could not: the end of the old sick calculus of Middle East tyrannies blackmailing the United States through past intrigue with the Soviet Union, then threats of oil embargos and rigged prices, and, most recently, both overt and stealthy support for fundamentalist killers." "US radical engine of democratization", *National Review*, November 19, 2004. In turn, comments by Eric J. Hobsbawm from the University of London, can be quoted as a typical statements of the opposite camp. He criticized as "the world's most dangerous ideas" the belief that wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are but one part of a supposedly universal effort to create world order by "spreading democracy" and that globalization supposedly suggests that human affairs are evolving toward a universal pattern. "If gas stations, iPods, and computer geeks are the same worldwide, why not political institutions?" "Spreading democracy", *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2004.

[43] Carl Gershman [president of the National Endowment for Democracy], "A democracy strategy for the Middle East", January 22, 2004. http://international.ucla.edu.

[44] Samuel Huntington termed it the "democracy paradox": sometimes democracy can foster forces hostile to its paragon, the West.

[45] Adam Garfinkle, "The impossible imperative? Conjuring Arab democracy", *The National Interest*, Autumn 2002; Thomas Carothers, "Promoting democracy and fighting terror", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2003.

[46] Miral Fahmy, "Indignant Arabs say Bush democracy speech a sham", News Center, November 7, 2003, www.commondreams.org. Characteristically, but what didn't go unnoticed in the Arab world, President Bush delivered the November 6 speech at the convention of the National Endowment for Democracy, an institution of right wing, neo-conservative character and unconditional supporter of Israel, being often criticized for trying to influence domestic politics of foreign countries; www.whitehouse.gov.

[47] Gilbert Achcar, Greater Middle East: the U.S. plan", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2004.

[48] As reported by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 17, 2004; www.ceip.org.

[49] *Ibidem.*

[50] Moncef Marzouki, „The US project for democracy in the Greater Middle East. Yes, but with whom?", *Al-Hayat*, February 23, 2004.

[51] Achcar: „Greater Middle East". Achcar subtitled that article: "Fantasy of a region that doesn't exist".

[52] Speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, January 24, 2004; www.weforum.org.

[53] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The wrong way to sell democracy to the Arab world", *New York Times*, March 8, 2004.

[54] Richard Youngs, "Europe and the Greater Middle East Initiative", the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 15, 2004; www.ceip.org.

[55] The term „greater" in the draft version was changed for „broader", as some countries objected to the first one as having some negative political connotations.

[56] Marina Ottaway, „The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: A hollow victory for the United States", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 12, 2004, www.ceip.org.

[57] Heba Saleh, "U.S. plan for Middle East worries Arab rulers", *Financial Times*, June 11, 2004.

[58] Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, "Out of the fog through Arab reform", *Daily Star*, June 21, 2004.

[59] "US reform plan can boost Arab movements", Associated Press, July 8, 2004.

[60] *Views of the Changing World 2003;* The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, p. 36; www.pewtrusts.com

[61] *Ibidem*, pp. 37-38.

[62] Nassif Hitti, „Find a fitting cure for the 'sick man of the world'", *Daily Star*, July 22, 2004.".

[63] See note no. 42.

[64] Interview with *Le Monde*, April 20, 2004. Many Americans don't believe that. "The Arab masses probably hate us less than they abhor their own governments for lack of freedom and economic progress" said Hanson. He also repeated the argument that "both extremist and moderate governments in the Middle East... seek to survive largely through bribery, oppression, and censorship, and by scapegoating Israel and America... In the absence of elections, free speech, or any public audit of government finances, our 'friends' must divert the attention of their restless populations to the bogeyman of the West...We must expect and not fear anti-Americanism." Hanson: "Democracy in the Middle East".

[65] www.2004.nycgop.org.

[66] Chuck Hagel, „Republican foreign policy", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2004.

[67] *Ibidem.*

[68] *Ibidem.*

[69] Mustapha Khalfi: *United States: The Congress and Democracy Promotion.* Arab Reform Bulletin, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace , listopad 2005.

[70] Joel Brinkley, „U.S. Slow Bid to Advance Democracy in Arab Word", *New York Times*, December 5, 2004.

[71] "Straight Talk", *Washington Post*, December 15, 2004.

[72] Glenn Kessler, "U.S. Officials Point to Promise of Mideast Democracy Meeting", *Washington Post*, December 18, 2004.

[73] Bahey Eldin Hassan: Broader Middle East Initiative: Arab Governments Strike Back. ibidem, marzec 2006.

[74] Guy Dinmore, „Bush backs new democracy body". *Financial Times"*, February 7, 2006.

[75] Kapiszewski: "Democratizing the Arab world".

[76] It should be stressed here that in the opinion of some experts political reforms introduced recently by certain Arab states are not the real ones, there are only elements of a strategy to avoid democracy rather than to achieve it. "Arab ruling elites do not share the new Western view that democratic change is necessary to combat Islamist extremism. In fact

they hold the opposite view: that democracy would likely unleash radical forces that could be harmful to both the region and the West." Thomas Carothers, Democracy's Sobering State", *Current History*, December 2004, p. 416.

[77] Rhonda Roumani, „Will Arab leaders risk losing power to implement reforms?", *Daily Star*, June 12, 2004.

[78] *Ibidem*; www.arabreformforum.com.

[79] „A loud silence in Tunis", *New York Times*, April 1, 2004.

[80] Neil MacFarquhar, „Summit's collapse leaves Arab leaders in disarray", *New York Times*, March 29, 2004.

[81] "Arab leaders embrace reform plan", *Arab News*, May 24, 2004.

[82] Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani: "Out of the fog through Arab reform".

[83] "Mohammad: Time for radical reform", *Gulf News*, December 14, 2004.

[84] As quoted in Roumani: „Will Arab leaders risk loosing power".

[85] Samuel R. Berger, "Foreign policy for a democratic president", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004.

[86] *The one thing Bush got right.* "The Economist" z 2 lutego 2006.

Elections and parliamentary activity in the GCC states – Broadening political participation in the Gulf monarchies

Introduction

There is overwhelming agreement that a deficit of freedom undermines human development. As is also well known, there is a dramatic gap between the levels of democracy in Arab countries and the rest of the world.[1] None of the 16 Arab majority countries has a democratically elected government. At the same time, the combined GDP of all Arab countries is less than that of Spain, and labour productivity in these countries dropped between 1960 and 1990, while it soared elsewhere in the world. Even Africa outperformed the Arab region in rates of economic growth, etc.

Nevertheless, for the countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) the situation is quite different from the portrait painted above. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman are among the richest countries in the world. Further, despite having similar, highly conservative political systems, these countries have carried out significant political reforms in recent years, given citizens more say in state

---

[1] *Arab Human Development Report 2002* and *2003*, New York, www.undp.org.

politics, and broadened freedoms. There is a movement from less transparent and accountable governments to more transparent and accountable governments; from less competitive (or non-existent) elections to freer, fairer, and more competitive elections; from very restricted liberties to better protected civil and political rights; from totally censured media to relatively independent ones; and from underdeveloped civil society institutions to more developed ones.[2]

Still, much progress needs to be made before the GCC countries could be characterized as "democracies" – that is – countries in which nearly every adult can vote, elections are freely contested, the chief executive is chosen by popular vote or by an elected parliament, and civil rights as well as civil liberties are substantially guaranteed.[3] The existing systems often resemble what is sometimes called a "trick democracy", rather then a true democracy.[4] The highly publicized (although controversial) Freedom House democracy scale offers evidence for this assertion: in 2004, besides Kuwait and Bahrain (which were rated a "partly free" country), all GCC states were considered "not free," and in 2002 Saudi Arabia was even labelled one of the world's ten most repressive regimes.[5] In turn, the Economist Intelligence Unit's political freedom indicator (1 to 10, 10=most free) gave the GCC states in 2005 the following scores: Saudi Arabia – 1.75; UAE – 3.25; Oman – 4.45; Bahrain and Qatar – 4.90; Kuwait – 5.95. Saudi score make the country

---

[2] David Potter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh, and Paul Lewis (eds.), *Democratisation* (Cambridge, Mass., Polity Press, 1997), p. 6; Marina Ottaway, Thomas Carothers, Amy Hawthorne, Daniel Brumberg, "Democratic Mirage in the Middle East", *Policy Brief,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (October 2002).

[3] Bruce Russett, "A Structure for Peace: A Democratic, Interdependent, and Institutionalized Order", in: Tokashi Inoguchi, Edward Newman, and john Keane (eds.), *The Changing Nature of Democracy* (Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 1988), p. 32.

[4] Fahmi Hweidi, "A trick democracy", *As Safir* (Lebanon}, August 23, 2005.

[5] *Freedom in the World 2002–2003* (New York, Freedom House, 2003).

the least free in the Arab world, while the score for Kuwait put the country on the second best place (after Lebanon).[6]

Scholars have different opinions on the issue, which they often display in the titles of their works. For some, one can certainly talk about democracy in the GCC states already (Ghanim Alnajjar: "The challenges facing Kuwaiti democracy"; Louay Bahry: "Elections in Qatar: a window of democracy opens in the Gulf"); some question the extend of the democratic process (Susan B. Glaser: "Democracy in Kuwait is promise unfulfilled"; Abdelhadi Khalaf: "Bahrain: Democratisation by decree"), while some others firmly believe that democracy is not present in the Gulf yet (Michael Herb: "Parliaments in the Gulf monarchies are a long way from democracy"; Marc Pellas: "Far from democracy in the Gulf. Bahrain: the royals rule").[7]

This chapter describes and analyses the development of the electoral process in all the GCC states since 1990s up to mid-2005, and examines the rulers' decisions as well as activities of the consultative councils and parliaments. The author believes that full democracy will not necessarily be the outcome of the above-mentioned political liberalization.[8] In the case of the GCC states,

---

[6] "The dynamics of democracy in the Middle East", The Economist Intelligence Unit Special Report, (London, March 2005), p. 3.

[7] Ghanim Alnajjar, "The Challenges Facing Kuwaiti Democracy", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 54, No. 2 (2000), pp. 242–258; Louay Bahry, "Elections in Qatar: A window of democracy opens in the Gulf", *Middle East Policy*, vol. VI, No. 4 (1999), pp. 118–127; Susan B. Glaser, "Democracy in Kuwait is promise unfulfilled", Washington Post Foreign Service, February 27, 2003; Abdulhadi Khalaf, "Bahrain: Democratisation by decree", paper presented at the British Society for Middle East Studies, Edinburgh, July 2001; Michael Herb, "Parliaments in the Gulf monarchies are a long way from democracy", *Daily Star*, December 4, 2004; Marc Pellas, "Far from democracy in the Gulf. Bahrain: the royals rule", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2005

[8] Thomas Carothers, "The end of the transition paradigm", *Journal of Democracy*, No. 1(2002), pp. 5–21.

it seems that a third type of relatively stable political system, somewhere "between" the old authoritarian regimes and Western-style democracy, may emerge. In these regimes, certain elements of democracy will be present why others will not.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, by far the largest and most important GCC country, has been since its establishment almost a century ago one of the most conservative ("absolutist") monarchies in the world, ruled by the Al Saud family with a tacit alliance with the fundamentalist Wahhabi movement. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1990s, the country has witnessed political activity that, while not directly questioning the religious base of the country's identity and legitimacy of rulers, has called for changes in the manner of state governance.[9] In particular, various groups submitted petitions to the King demanding political reforms. On March 1, 1992, King Fahd decided to take certain actions to calm down the situation. He decreed the long-promised Basic Laws – a constitution-like document, the statute for a new consultative council, and a system of regional government for the kingdom's 14 provinces.

The most important decision taken concerned the Consultative Council, established as a debating assembly consisting of 60 members appointed by the King.[10] The Council was to study all government regulations, treaties and international accords before they are promulgated through royal decree, as well as to deliberate upon and evaluate economic and social development programs. It was also to discuss annual reports submitted by ministers and

---

[9] Andrzej Kapiszewski, "Democratizing the Arab States. The Case of Monarchies of the Gulf, 1991–2004", *Krakowskie Studia Miedzynarodowe*, 2004, 3, pp. 78–80.

[10] Selim Jahel, "A Parliament According to *Sharia*", *Arabies Trends*, April 1998, pp. 26–31; www.shura.gov.sa

present recommendations, and was empowered to question the cabinet members. The Council was not, however, empowered to initiate debates on issues: it either had to obtain permission from the King to do so or await submission from the government. The King retained the power to dissolve or reorganize the Council at will.

The Consultative Council finally set to work in mid-1990s. Members of the Council have been chosen from among the country's regions and important constituent groups: religious establishment, government bureaucracy and the business community, followers of both conservative and liberal ideologies. They have usually been highly educated and experienced people, considered experts in their respective fields (academics, retired senior officers, ex-civil servants and private businessmen).[11] Sheikh Mohammed bin Ibrahim bin Jubair, a respected Hanbali jurist and former Minister of Justice became the President of the first State Council and of successive ones (to be replaced after his death in 2002 by Saleh bin Abdullah bin Homaid). The Council quickly established itself within Saudi political system. This is why, in 1997, the Council was enlarged from 60 to 90 members, in May 2001, to 120 and in April 2005, to 150 members. Its influence, not necessarily grounded in law, has been a function of its members' prominence and diversity. It also reflects the tradition of governance, which "prizes consensus, strives to maintain harmony through consultation and is deeply averse to conflict".[12] Only occasionally the Council's members have been deeply divided over certain issues; for example, in 2005, they disagreed over women's rights to drive cars. While the verdicts of the Council are neither binding on the King, nor on the government, usually either the ministers accept the recommendations of the Council or the two parties reach a compromise.

---

[11] In 2005, out of 150 members, 108 held doctorate degrees.

[12] "Can Saudi Arabia reform itself?", International Crisis Group Middle East Report No. 28, Cairo/Brussels, July 14, 2004, p.6.

The establishment of the Consultative Council did not satisfy opposition, which since 1999 began to submit consequent petitions to the King requesting further reforms. An informal lobby of liberals, progressive Islamists, nationalists, and Shiites became even more vocal after September 11, 2001 attacks, in which Saudi militants were heavily involved, the subsequent international and local criticism of the Saudi regime, as well as after Al-Qaeda attacks inside the Kingdom. Vigorous debate then started about the causes of extremism, with usual conclusion that the closed nature of the Saudi political system, imposed to large extent by a religious establishment, was the main reason for that. Of particular importance in that movement was petition submitted to King Fahd in January 2003.[13] The petition called "A Vision for the Present and the Future of the Nation", was signed by 104 academics, businessmen, religious scholars and professionals from various regions and representing different religious and political orientations.[14] Among various issues raised in the petition, its signatories called for providing the Consultative Council with legislative and control powers and made it an elected body, as well as for an independent judiciary, freedom of expression and the establishment of civil society institutions. The petition, despite its non-confrontational tone and respectful language towards the monarchy, essentially suggested the establishment of institutions to curb the power of the ruling family and guarantee popular participation in decision-making, replacing a system with ruler's

---

[13] Municipal elections were held in Makkah, Madina, Taif, Jeddah, Yanbu and Qunfunha in the past, between 1926 and 1967. Anita Pratap, "Saudi women make gains", *Saudi Gazette*, October 16, 2004.

[14] Richard Dekmejain, "The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Journal*, No. 3 (Summer 2003); James A. Russel, "Political and economic transition on the Arabian Peninsula: Perils and Prospects", *Strategic Insights*, (May 2003).

absolute power with the constitutional monarchy in which power is shared with elected representatives.[15]

Another petition signed by more than 300 Saudis, including at this time 50 women, Sunnis and Shiites from all parts of the Kingdom appeared in September 2003. The petition entitled "In Defence of the Nation" basically repeated the demands from the previous petition but in the view of the emergence of terrorist activity in the Kingdom, openly blamed the existing political restrictions for its development. "Being late in adopting radical reforms and ignoring popular participation in decision-making have been the main reasons that helped the fact that our country reached this dangerous turn."[16]

In yet another petition prepared in December, this time again jointly by a diversified group of Islamists, liberals and Shiites, titled "An Appeal to the Leadership and the People: Constitutional Reform First", the signatories called for the implementation of the reforms outlined in the January petition and went even further, demanding adoption of the constitution, which would construct "a modern Arab Islamic state".[17]

A response of the government to these petitions was the organization of broad debates, the so-called National Dialogue sessions. The issue of elections was raised during the second debate, which took place in Mecca in December 2003 and gathered 60 intellectuals, clerics and businesspeople, including 10 women (seated in a different room). Various political, social and educational problems were openly discussed at the meeting, which ended in the formulation of 18 recommendations that were later formally presented to the acting ruler, Crown Prince Abdullah. Among others, they included holding elections for the state Consultative Council

---

[15] "Can Saudi Arabia reform itself?", p. 14.

[16] www. arabrenewal.com. Translation by Gwenn Okhrulik and Yara Youssef.

[17] Ibid.

and local consultative councils, encouraging establishment of trade unions, voluntary associations and other civil society institutions, separating the legislative, executive and judiciary powers, as well as broadening freedom of expression.[18]

The National Dialogue recommendations generally reflected opinions on the discussed matters of the Saudi society at large. In particular, Saudis seem to be in favour of political reforms. In probably the first, relatively independent opinion poll on the matter conducted in the latter half of 2003, 85 per cent of respondents thought that political reform would be beneficial for the country and 90 per cent wanted to grant more rights to women.[19] Somewhat contradictory, only 12 per cent of respondents had a positive view of liberal reformers, probably because they associated them only with the writing of inefficient petitions, while political reforms were perceived the most pressing concern for less than 10 per cent of respondents.

Responding to internal demands from liberals and the US pro-democracy pressures, the government began to think about organizing the first elections in the country, to municipal councils, following a well-tested pattern in neighbouring Bahrain and Qatar. Prince Abdullah stated in his address to the Consultative Council that "municipal elections will be the beginning of the Saudi citizens' participation in the political system", while the Foreign Minister, prince Saud Al-Faisal, similarly remarked that Saudi Arabia "has reached a stage in our development that requires expanding political participations". In turn, Prince Turki al-Faisal said that "reforming the Kingdom is not a choice, it is a necessity".[20] Such vocabulary

---

[18] *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, January 4, 2004.

[19] The survey was conducted by the independent Saudi National Security Assessment Projects. See Nawaf Obaid, "What the Saudi public really thinks?", *Daily Star*, June 23, 2004.

[20] Toby Jones: "Social contract for Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Report*, No. 228, Fall 2003.

used to be taboo among the ruling family.[21] In this liberalized mode, the issue of elections became widely discussed throughout the Kingdom. As Islamist reformer, Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim stated: "It is hard to overestimate the importance of this step in a society where non-interference in politics is considered the condition of good citizenship. [The local] elections in themselves may not have much substance, but the decision to hold them breaks a barrier and establishes the principle that society can participate in making policy"[22]

Many Saudi officials, however, have continued to be afraid of such a move. They believe that elections would pose too great a risk to stability of the country and strengthen the hand of radical Islamists. Some of them claim that "because conformity to strict religious dogma remains the principal criterion for judging matters public and private... political debates could potentially turn into religious clashes", while "the culture of democracy accepts the pluralism of opinions and relativity in all things. How can you reconcile relativity with a society that is governed by religion?" and "democracy now will produce something very similar to the Taliban".[23]

With such thoughts in mind, the government decided to go ahead only with elections to municipal councils. Nevertheless, only half of the seats were to be appointed through ballot (the remaining was to be made of nominated incumbents, in theory the ones with the experience to assists the new members), second, that elections in 178 municipalities would be held in three phases: on February 10, 2005 in Riyadh and the surrounding areas, on March 3, in the eastern and south-western regions and on April 21 in the remaining parts of the country (including Mecca and Medina, until then busy

---

[21] Khalid Al-Dakhil, "2003: Saudi Arabia's Year of Reform", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 16, 2004.

[22] "Can Saudi Arabia reform itself?", p. 19.

[23] As reported in: "Can Saudi Arabia reform itself?", p. 19 and 20.

with the Hajj pilgrimage). That approach was designed for the authorities to have an opportunity to take a step back and evaluate the impact of elections before proceeding to the next phase.

Saudi women were not allowed to vote or stand in the elections. This decision made conservatives relieved and liberals dismayed. Nevertheless, women may be allowed to vote during the next elections in 2009. In fact, election rules are written ambiguously and for quite a time it was unclear whether they could participate even in the first elections or not.[24] The officially cited reasons for not allowing women to participate in the elections were of administrative and legislative character and also the result of the Kingdom's limited experience in conducting elections. They did not stress religious norms or Saudi customs, just creating a window of hope for many liberals.[25]

Surprisingly, in late November 2004, the government allowed women for the first time to participate in the elections: to choose board members of the Saudi chambers of commerce and industry (in the past, men voted on behalf of women members). Nevertheless, only a small number of women used that opportunity.[26] Later, in 2005, women were also granted rights to be elected to Jeddah

---

[24] For example, Saudi Arabia Justice Ministry advisor was quoted in *Okaz*: "There is no reason to stop them from participating in the elections... Trends coming from the West which are beneficial and do not contradict our laws and religion should not be banned"; www.aljazeera.com, December 4, 2004. The decision not to allow women to vote was announced by the Interior Minister Prince Nayef on October 11, 2004.

[25] "Women shut up of upcoming Saudi vote", The Associated Press, October 12, 2004. The reasons cited by the government were: lack of women to run women's only registration centers and polling stations as well as the fact that only a fraction of Saudi women have the photo identity cards needed to vote. Moreover, a Saudi law prohibits men and women to work together – a major problems if a women became a council member.

[26] Apparently only 46 women out of 2,750 women members in the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry participated in the elections; *Arab News*, December 1, 2004.

Chamber of Commerce and Industry and in effect two women became members of its board.

Establishing the municipality councils through elections is an innovation for this deeply conservative country used to tribal and extended family system of politics. It can be expected that, once the election is seen to work, the next ones will be for the whole municipal councils, then for regional councils, and eventually for the Consultative Council. Prince Sultan bin Abdel Aziz, the minister of defence and a key figure in the ruling family told the Consultative Council, that the country leadership agrees with demands that this body should be developed and given further powers, to "monitor" and "supervise" the government in particular.[27] Following this reasoning, the royal decree of November 29, 2003, enhanced the Consultative Council rights to act as a partly legislative as opposed to purely advisory body. In particular, individual members were granted authority to propose new legislation and to have more power in disputes with the cabinet. At the same time, it was decided to begin, for the first time, televised coverage of the weekly sessions of the Consultative Council. That became an important decision, as Saudis have a traditional aversion to public debate, preferring to settle matters behind closed doors instead. The *Shura* members and Saudi intellectual elite welcomed these steps, although, especially following the Kuwaiti parliamentarian model, they clearly want further enhancement of the Council's role, in particular to make it the elective assembly, with power to pass the budget, to give or withdraw confidence from ministers and to separate the office of prime minister from that of the King.[28] In response to such proposals, the Council was further reformed in the spring of 2005; members were allowed to have access to state revenue data, discuss the state budget and question ministers. Prince Sultan,

---

[27] Reuters, March 22, 2004.

[28] As reported in "Can Saudi Arabia reform itself?", p. 21.

however, dismissed calls for an elected Council, saying that voters may choose illiterate and unqualified candidates to it and that the move would not serve national interests. "In some countries there are political parties and elections but the result is nothing, because of their quarrels and conflicts between them".[29] Instead, on January 26, 2005, Prince Sultan announced that the *Shura* Council would be further expanded and that in the next term all tribes, cities and villages will be represented in it. As mentioned already, in April 2005, the Council was expended to 150 members. In May, 210 members of local consultative councils in the Kingdom's 13 administrative regions were appointed by the authorities.

Allowing municipal elections to take place seems to be a tacit recognition by the ruling family that some reforms are needed, including greater transparency and accountability of decision making. Nevertheless, the rise of internal security challenges – the extremist Islamist violence – makes it difficult for the government to advance further the reform agenda. The leading members of the Saudi ruling family are not in agreement over the causes of existing tensions in the country and possible actions to be taken to confront them. In particular, many of them are afraid that political openings can be perceived in some quarters as a victory for "liberal" forces, a fact that may reinvigorate Islamist attacks. For that reason, the Saudi government is anxious to depict the whole process leading to municipal elections as being wholly compatible with Islam. This is an important matter as many Islamists consider the elections un-Islamic. In particular, Osama bin Laden in the message released on December 16, 2004 criticized the elections, noting "it is *haram* (forbidden) to participate in legislative bodies ... because Allah is the only lawgiver."[30]

---

[29] Reuters, January 26, 2004.

[30] Simon Henderson, "Saudi Municipal Elections: Royal Caution and Citizen Apathy", Policy Watch # 937, January 3, 2005.

Nevertheless, in an interesting development, the first round of elections, which took place in the Riyadh region on February 10, 2005, was won by Islamists, who took all of the seven available seats. Only around 140,000 men had registered to vote out of 400,000 eligible voters in the area; 65 per cent of them eventually went to the pools in the capital, while in other districts the turnout often exceeded even 80 per cent. Six hundred and forty-six candidates were on the list. Immediately after the results were announced, many loosing candidates accused the winning seven of illegal formation of an Islamist alliance, using the backing of Saudi religious establishment to get votes, and breaking election laws for campaigning on the election day. The winners denied all the allegations. Interestingly enough, the winners used neither ads in the Saudi dailies, nor posters, nor did they set up "discussion tents" where they could meet potential voters, as all loosing candidates did. Instead, they skilfully used Internet and mobile phones (short text messages), the tactic often used by Islamist groupings in the region.

The situation was repeated during the final round of voting on April 21: there was not much interest in elections and Islamist candidates got most of the votes. In the Kingdom's commercial capital of Jeddah, only 55,000 men, or 22 percent of the city's eligible voters, registered. Similar low turnout was observed in Mecca and Medina. In Jeddah, the most liberal Saudi city, the seven winning candidates all were those whose names had appeared on what was dubbed the "golden list" – the picks of prominent conservative religious scholars from among 530 candidates. Five of the six winners in Buraydah, capital of ultraconservative Qaseem province, similarly had been given a clerical support. Islamists won all the seats in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina as well.

Only in the voting which took place on March 3 in eastern regions, in some Shiite-majority areas, several non-Islamist were elected and the turnout was significant. For example, Shiites swept

the board in the town of Qatif and won five out of six seats in Al Hasa. But in the urban centres of Dammam, Dhahran and Al Khobar where a significant Shiite minority also lives, they were Sunni candidates, which won with apparent backing from fundamentalist clerics.

The low turnout was due to several factors, including restrictions on campaigning, an inexperienced and poorly informed electorate, and the low stakes: voters were choosing only half the seats on city councils, bodies with limited responsibilities. The strong showing of the Islamist candidates was credited to the fact that as non-government political activity is forbidden in the Kingdom, religious gatherings are the only ones allowed and clerics can speak there publicly. Nevertheless, most of the elected Islamists represent the moderate religious stand and many of them are graduates from Western universities.

Thus, the elections "should not be viewed as just an experiment in democracy, but also as a window into the possible ramifications that come with democracy in the kingdom. If the truth be told, the group that wanted victory the most – the Islamists – won."[31]

The Saudi rulers, or at least some members of the royal family seems to be ready to allow further broadening of political participation, probably realizing the necessity to do so due to wide criticism of the existing system by Saudi citizens and pressure from the West. In June 2005, the Crown Prince Abdullah, now the country's King, apparently promised Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to introduce reforms that could give the Kingdom an elected government within 10 to 15 years.[32] Also Prince Talal bin Abdel-Aziz, brother of King Abdullah, and one of the closest people to him, has called to adopt a constitutional kingdom system similar to

---

[31] Mohammed Alkhereiji, "Riyadh's polls, a window into Saudi social dynamics", *Daily Star*, February 19, 2005.

[32] Nicholas Kralev, "Abdullah sees elected leaders within 15 years", *The Washington Times*, August 19, 2005.

those of Jordan, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and, in particular, give the Shura Council privileges to question and supervise the executive power and issuing electoral laws.[33] Apparently, King Abdullah considers nominating Prince Talal to the position of second deputy prime minister, i.e. the third in line to the throne. Prince Talal insists, however, to get this post only through ballots.,

At the same time, there are forces in Saudi Arabia's ruling elites which strongly oppose liberalization of the regime. For example, Prince Nayef, the interior minister, ordered in March 2004 the arrests, trial and imprisonment of 13 reformers, which a year earlier were warmly welcomed by Prince Abdullah after submitting to him a reform petition.[34] Ten of them later submitted to his demand to stop asking for reforms and were released; the remaining three, which refused to do so, were sentenced to several years of prison. Only when Abdullah became a King, they were pardoned.

Kuwait

The Kuwait's emirate is ruled since the 18th century by the Al Sabah family. After obtaining independence in 1961, the constitution formally gave the Emir broad executive powers. In particular, it is he who appoints the prime minister and the cabinet. At the same time, the constitution established a partially elected parliament with some legislative powers; for several decades it had been the only national assembly of that kind in the GCC states.[35] The parliament

---

[33] "Constitutional reform in Saudi Arabia", *Al Quds Al Arabi*, August 29, 2005.

[34] Mai Yamani, "How to make violence inevitable in Saudi Arabia", *Daily Star*, June 2, 2005.

[35] Jill Crystal and Abdallah al-Shayeji, 'The pro-democratic agenda in Kuwait: Structures and context', in: Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, Paul Noble, *Political Liberalization and Democratisation in the Arab World* (Lynnie Rennier Publishers, Boulder and London, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 101–125.

has never been a rubber-stamp and always discussed openly the vital Kuwaiti issues. Its criticism of the government, or from the other perspective, its activities perceived as threatening the political stability of the country, caused the Emir to dissolve it in 1976 (until the reestablishment in 1981) and again in 1986. When Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait, the parliament was still disbanded. After the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi forces, the Emir, Sheikh Jabir al Ahmad al-Sabah was not eager to keep his earlier promises of prompt restoration of the assembly. Only after the mobilization of all Kuwaiti political factions, culminating in the presentation of a petition in the spring of 1991, did the emir agree to hold parliamentary elections in October 1992.

After years of limited political activity, the election campaign was very lively.[36] Despite the non-existence of formal political parties, individual candidates in their *diwaniyyas* as well as various voluntary and professional associations were effective in articulating critical views, helping to increase political awareness and activities of different groups of society. In effect, the election brought to the parliament a majority of opposition and independent deputies.

Right after the election the opposition called for the separation of the previously combined offices of prime minister and crown prince, as traditionally in Kuwait, the crown prince (as well as the whole al-Sabah family) was not subject to any criticism or control. Only when in a conciliatory move, the Emir appointed several members of parliament (who retained some credibility due to the fact that they had been popularly elected) as ministers for the first time, the opposition eventually gave up and accepted the status quo. Nevertheless, parliamentary committees initiated a series of investigations including inquires into the events leading to the

---

[36] Shafeeq Ghabra, "Kuwait: Elections and issues of democratisation in a Middle Eastern state", *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies*, No. 1 (1993).

Iraqi invasion, government responsibility for the Kuwaiti defeat, alleged corruption and mismanagement in the Kuwait Investment Office (which manages the country's overseas capital), and the cost-effectiveness of arms-deals with Western powers. These were very sensitive issues whose investigation led to confrontation with top government officials, including members of the ruling family. This was the first time in the history of the GCC countries that such people were publicly questioned, strongly criticized and forced to take responsibility for their actions. The whole term of parliament was alive with heated debates over the issue of power and wealth sharing, corruption and waste in defence expenditure, the way the privatisation was conducted, and other important issues. The parliament also decided to broaden the base of its electorate, extending the right to vote to the large number of sons of naturalized Kuwaiti citizens (naturalized men are eligible to vote only if they have held Kuwaiti citizenship for at least 20 years).

After tough experiences with dealings with the opposition, the government made serious efforts to influence the results of next elections, and the parliament chosen in October 1996 was not as confrontational as the previous one had been. Nevertheless, tensions between Islamist groups in the assembly and the government did not subside. In effect, in 1998, the parliament blocked the government deal with the US to buy the so-called Paladin artillery due to irregularities in the procurement process. Then, in 1999, the Islamists attempted to bring down Sheikh Saud Nasser al Sabah, the Minister of Information. His ministry had permitted books critical of Islamic orthodoxy to be displayed at the international book fair in Kuwait. The minister had to resign. The government perceived the action of the opposition as a breach of the unwritten agreement that Islamists would never attack members of the ruling family. The Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Sheikh Saad al Abdallah al-Sabah warned that criticizing the ruling family jeopardizes the

security of the country, and that this security would be always put "over and above democracy".[37] The Islamists, however, continued to criticize the government. In turn, they attacked the Minister of Religious Affairs for publishing a version of the Koran with typographical errors. Tensions increased. When the whole cabinet threatened to resign, the Emir dissolved the parliament and called for new elections.

The election campaign was again characterized by intense activity on the part of various political groupings, which in meantime had grown in popularity.[38] During traditional political meetings in *diwaniyyas*, candidates openly charged the government with conspiracy, interference in the elections, incompetence, corruption, etc. Women's political rights became a central issue in the campaign as the Emir, in a surprising move, announced his intention to award women the right to participate in future elections. Islamist groups opposed the decision and the Emir's decree was eventually defeated in the all-male parliament. Another highly debated issue was the suspended right to hold tribal primaries, whose results had significantly affected previous general elections.

Altogether, 288 candidates competed for the 50 parliamentary seats during the elections of July 3, 1999. Nevertheless, only 113,000 men out of the total Kuwaiti population of 793,000 cast their ballots, showing a relative lack of interest in political proceedings. Six groupings played a crucial role in the election campaign and won seats in the parliament: the Islamic Constitutional Movement (closely connected to the Muslim Brotherhood), the Kuwaiti Democratic Forum (the alliance of liberals, Arab nationalists, leftists, and independents), the Islamic Popular Bloc (an orthodox Salafi group demanding strict implementation of the Islamic

---

[37] Youssef Alaonueh, "Islamists Movements", *Arabies Trends*, June 1998, pp. 15–16.

[38] Alnajjar: "The Challenges Facing Kuwaiti Democracy".

law), the Salafi Movement (a splinter of the Popular Bloc), the National Islamic Alliance (a Shiite Islamist group) and the National Democratic Bloc (a liberal group connected with the academic and business communities). In the elections the Islamists won 18 seats altogether: six went to Shiite candidates and remaining 12 to Sunnis. The main losers were the pro-government candidates, with 11 major incumbents losing what earlier had been considered secure seats.

The winning Islamists, in a short period of time, undertook a number of actions in the new parliament. In effect, an entirely new Sharia-inspired version of the penal code was adopted together with a ban on festivals and concerts "that are against tradition and morality". Later the Islamists also managed to force the government to re-introduce gender segregation at Kuwait University. In general, Islamists have wanted to widen the role of the Islamic law. They would like to amend the constitution, changing the clause that Sharia is "a main source of legislation" for "the source of the legislation". They also requested the right that no law may be promulgated by the Emir unless it has been passed by the National Assembly first.[39] Finally, they would like to get Kuwait's political parties licensed and formally written into the country's legal system. These motions were re-introduced in the following years, but not approved yet.

In 2002 a new crisis between parliament and the government occurred when the Finance Minister, Youssef al-Ibrahim was accused of abuse of power and misappropriation of public funds. In particular, Islamist and independent deputies wanted him to acknowledge officially that senior ruling family members authorized the expenditure of billions of dollars without the supervision of the Audit Bureau, the legislature watchdog for monitoring state finances. The interpellation proceeded to a vote of confidence. But

---

[39] Wendy Kristianasen, "'We don't want to box Islam in'. Kuwait's Islamists, officially unofficial", *Le Monde diplomatique,* June 2002.

when Sheikh Sabah, the Acting Prime Minister, threatened that the whole cabinet would resign if the minister lost the vote, the majority of deputies decided not to support the no-confidence motion. Another crisis was avoided.

The following parliamentary elections were held on July 5, 2003. They were affected by the political situations in the region.[40] The removal of Saddam Hussein influenced the campaign, as government could not use the Iraqi threat any more to secure support for its own candidates. In times of change in the Gulf, liberals pushing for modernization of the country expected to obtain more seats in the assembly. On the other hand, Shiites also hoped to do better thanks to internal mobilization of the group, caused by developments in Iraq, where the Shiite majority began gaining power after years of discrimination. Tensions between the US and Iran, in the period when Kuwait was improving its relations with the Islamic Republic, were also expected to influence the election results. The issue of extending vote to women became again important in the campaign, especially among liberals. Some women voted in a mock election as a demonstration of their desire to obtain more political rights in the country.[41]

The election expectations proved wrong. First of all, liberals suffered a stunning setback. "Shock and horror. Parliament topples liberals" was the headline in the daily *Al Anbaa*. Both members of the Democratic Platform present in the previous assembly, including prominent opposition leader, Abdallah al-Nibari, lost their seats.

[40] Ammar Ali Hassan, "First parliamentary elections in post-Saddam Kuwait", *Al-Hayat*, June 30, 2003.

[41] Some Kuwaiti women have for a long time been involved in political activity. For example, Rasha Al Sabah, a cousin of the emir, has held her own *diwanyyas* for years. Several have been active in business and in professional associations. One Kuwaiti ambassador is a woman, there are also a few women undersecretaries in the government. In the 1990s, the Kuwaiti University had a woman president.

Independent liberals went down from six seats to four. In turn, the Islamist traditionalists, both Sunni and Shiite, became the election winners, taking 21 of the 50 seats. At the same time, the members of parliament affiliated with existing political groupings went down from 32 to 25, probably due to government's efforts to weaken all the unofficial political parties. The so-called "service" candidates, who emphasized their constituent services rather than political or ideological platforms, did also well in a number of districts. Interestingly, two of three Islamist political groupings also lost seats. The Islamic Constitutional Movement (in the past connected with Muslim Brotherhood) went from five to two seats, while the National Islamic Alliance (Shiite) went from three seats to one. In turn, the *salafi* groupings gained seats, with the Salafi Movement rising from a single seat to three. Independent Sunni Islamists went up from five seats during the previous term to six and independent Shiite Islamists – from two to three. In general, the Assembly became rather equally divided between pro-government lawmakers and Islamist-dominated opposition, with a very small presence of liberals. The defeat of liberals was probably much influenced by the American politics in the Middle East. President Bush's initiative to bring democracy to the region while occupying Iraq "sends many native liberals and democrats under their beds", worrying of being labelled as American puppets.[42]

Elections were not completely clean: there were accusations of increased vote buying, switching districts and registering in different areas.[43]

Right after the elections, Kuwait's Emir, Sheikh Jaber, appointed Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al Sabah to the post of prime minister.

---

[42] Rami G. Khuri, "Kuwait's election and the freezing of Arab politics", *Daily Star*, July 10, 2003.

[43] Saad Al Ajmi, "Gerrymandering and reform in Kuwait", *Gulf News*, June 25, 2004.

For the first time in the history of Kuwait, the post of the prime minister was separated from the post of Crown Prince, officially as a response to the public demand, in reality maybe only due to the poor health of the Crown Prince. The decision had a significant meaning as in this way the prime minister can now be placed before legal inquires in the parliament, which had been impossible in the past as the Kuwaiti constitution grants full immunity to the ruler and the Crown Prince.

The first major clash between the new parliament and the government occurred in March 2004. Many deputies tried to force the resignation of the Minister of Finance, Mahmoud Al Nouri over allegations of mismanagement and squandering public money. Eventually, the minister won the non-confidence vote; nevertheless the opposition accused the government of applying pressure on numerous deputies to achieve that goal.

In May 2004, the government introduced a bill allowing women to vote and to stand for election. The parliament, however, remained divided on the issue of women's suffrage and did not take action on the bill at the time. In a survey conducted by the Islamic Constitutional Movement, the Kuwaiti chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood, showed that 80 per cent of those polled believed that women should only be allowed to vote, but not to become candidates; apparently only five per cent supported the notion that women must participate fully.[44]

At the same time, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, responding to pressure from Islamist parliamentarians, announced a *fatwa* "forbidding women singing to men, reveal part of their body and using vulgar words and dancing".[45] To attend or watch such concerts and provide any assistance or investment in them was also forbidden. Several Islamist deputies have also been trying to

---

[44] "Majority favours only right to vote", *Gulf News*, November 10, 2004.

[45] BBC News, May 24, 2004.

ban musical education from schools as anti-Islamic activity. In December, Islamist deputies accused the Information Minister, Mohammed Abu Al Hasan over allowing "immoral" Western-style concerts in the country, seen by them as violating Sharia law. To avoid questioning in the parliament over the issue the Minister resigned. The situation created additional tensions, as Mohammed Abu Al Hasan was the only Shiite member of the cabinet and was "grilled" by the Sunni lawmakers. Many Shiites, who constitute about 30 per cent of the Kuwaiti population, perceived this move as discriminatory.

Tensions between the government and the opposition occurred also in mid-2004, when voting on a long debated bills on reducing the number of electoral districts from the current 25 to 10 in order to make them more broadly representative (and less based on sectarian or tribal factors) and to discourage vote buying and changing residency, allowing servicemen to vote and lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 were postponed.[46] Liberal deputies then accused the government and many of their colleagues in the assembly of trying to maintain the undemocratic status quo.[47]

These reforms have been connected to the issue of women's suffrage. The government anticipates that on the whole, women constitute a moderate, pro-government force, which can mitigate the destabilizing effects that the above mentioned electoral laws would have on Kuwait's complex political scene.[48]

---

[46] There has been also a pending motion calling to raise the number of deputies from the current 50 to 60, to reflect the population growth and to allow the cabinet to expand from its current 15 to 20 members as according to Kuwaiti law, the number of cabinet ministers, who are *ex officio* members of the parliament cannot exceed one-third of the parliament; now many of them have multiple portfolios, which hampers effective governance. The last call requires however, to amend the constitution, much more difficult proposal to conduct.

[47] Al Ajmi: "Gerrymandering".

[48] Haya Abdulrahman Al Mughni, "The politics of women's suffrage in

On May 16, 2005, somehow surprisingly, the Kuwaiti parliament accepted the long pending ruler's initiative and voted to give women full political rights, giving women the right to vote and stand in parliamentary and local elections. The last-minute amendment was introduced to require women voters and candidates to abide by Islamic Law, as an attempt on the part of the ruling family to reassure Islamists, which in the past had opposed women suffrage, arguing that Islamic law prohibited them from taking positions of leadership. The bill was nevertheless passed with a comfortable majority of 35 votes, with 23 against and one abstention.

Using the momentum, government begun to appoint women to the administrative posts.

On June 2, 2005 the long-delayed ninth municipal elections took place, originally scheduled for summer 2003. Around 50 percent of 130,000 thousands eligible male voters choose 10 councillors responsible for planning and public services from among 55 candidates. Tribal candidates won six of the 10 seats; two seats were claimed by Islamists while the rest were won by liberal-leaning businessmen. Few days later, the government named two women as members of the municipal council. They were among six appointed members of the 16-member municipal body.

On June 12, 2005, Prime Minister Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah appointed Maasouma Al Mubarak as the Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs. This first woman minister in Kuwait is a liberal Shiite academic with a degree from the University of Denver and veteran women's rights activist. Tribal and Islamist parliamentarians protested the government's decision, calling it unconstitutional. But the appointment of Mubarak, served the Kuwaiti government well: it

Kuwait", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 19, 2004; Mary Ann Tetreault, "Women's rights and the meaning of citizenship in Kuwait", Middle East Report Online, February 10, 2005.

addressed aspirations of Kuwaiti women, and also satisfied Shiites, who criticized the lack of their representatives in the Cabinet.

Allowing women to vote will significantly change the Kuwaiti electoral system and parliamentary politics. First of all, the number of eligible voters will increase from current 145,000 to over 300,000 in the next parliamentary elections scheduled for 2007, i.e. more than a third of Kuwait's native population (from about 15 percent now). Secondly, Kuwaiti women will become a majority in future elections.[49] Many believe that this will reduce corruption and vote-buying in elections. Moreover, liberal members of parliament who supported giving women political rights may lose their seats to women eager to run for office. In turn, tribal and Islamist members who opposed political rights for women may gain more votes as women normally vote for conservatives because they focus more on family issues. [50]

At the beginning of 2005, a large confusion in the Kuwaiti political scene was caused by establishing the Hizb Al Ummah political party by the hard-line branch of the Sunni Islamist salafi movement. Neither constitutional provisions nor regulatory laws deal with the issue in a satisfactory manner, and so far the government always opposed the idea. Hizb Al Ummah sent letters to the Prime Minister, the speaker of Parliament and lawmakers urging them to amend Kuwaiti law to explicitly permit functioning of political parties, saying it intends to promote pluralism and the peaceful rotation of power. Members of the organizing committee of the party were interrogated and later put on trial with charges of plotting to overthrow the government. The move created a heated debate as, on one hand, all political groupings would have liked

---

[49] Ali Taqi, "Kuwaiti women voters have the upper hand", *Gulf News*, May 22, 2005

[50] Abdullah Alshayeji, "Women's suffrage means deep change in Kuwaiti politics", *Daily Star*, July 27, 2005.

to obtain a chance to transform themselves into formal political parties, institutions necessary in each mature democracy, but, on the other hand, liberals and moderate Shiites have been afraid that the move in that direction done by radicals Islamists can backfire and be dangerous for political stability of the country. Kuwaiti Parliament Speaker Jassem al-Khorafi called for legalizing political parties in the emirate as part of democratic reforms: "Democracy in Kuwait cannot continue without political organization based on parties."[51] Pressure to legalize political parties will likely increase in Kuwait in future with the large influx of women voters, possible lowering of voting age to 18 years and allowing military personnel to vote, what all can triple the electoral base. In such a situation political parties will be necessary to organize and channel increased participation.

Despite all these developments, the mood at the beginning of the 21st century in Kuwait, in contrast to its Bahraini and Qatari neighbours, is not very optimistic. Many Kuwaitis feel that their country is stagnating, that authorities and parliamentarians are caught up in endless squabbles over minor issues, instead of transforming the country, in the same way as many young, innovative rulers of the neighbouring GCC states already did.[52] There are voices questioning any possibility of further democratisation of the state. Ghanim Alnajjar believes, that "structural and political weaknesses in the Kuwaiti political system continue to hinder the spread of democracy, and may yet cause its failure, which might result in a major future political crisis".[53] According to many, the reasons for limited progress toward more participatory government is the ruling family's tacit alliance with Islamic fundamentalists (for

---

[51] "Kuwaiti political parties must be legalized", Agence France Presse, July 4, 2005.

[52] Neil MacFarquhar, "Infirmity of its senior sheiks leaves Kuwait stagnating", *The New York Times*, June 13, 2002.

[53] Alnajjar: "The challenges facing Kuwaiti democracy", p. 258.

example, to please them the government in recent years established a committee on Islamization of the law, refused to register civil society institutions except Islamic charities and expanded religious instruction in school curricula).[54] "We have lost the 12 years since the liberation because of the resistance of the political Islamic movement" said Saud Nasir Sabah, oil minister and former ambassador to the United States.[55] In general, many believe that Kuwaiti democracy is in trouble. "There is not a democratic system in Kuwait, there is not democracy here", said Mohammed Qadiri, a former diplomat, who quit the foreign service over the dissolution of parliament in 1986.[56] Similarly, Nasr Yousef al-Abdali, one of the leaders of the newly launched Justice and Development Movement, noted that "Democracy in Kuwait is a lie. The whole process has been hijacked by the fight between the Islamists and liberals who are not really looking to the future of the country."[57]

The situation in Kuwait has been, of course, a complex one. By many measures Kuwait has had a more developed civil society than found elsewhere among the GCC states. It has critical press enjoying relative freedom, a tradition of public debate in the *diwaniyyas*, established political groupings and active parliament, which exercises significant influence and control over governance by the ruling family. On the other hand – a fact emphasized every year by the US State Department report on human rights – there is a restricted freedom of assembly, as well as discrimination of women, Shiites and foreign residents, censorship of "morally offensive" materials, and lack of the independence of the judiciary,

---

[54] Glaser: "Democracy in Kuwait is promise unfulfilled". Since the late 1970s, the Kuwaiti ruling family have courted the Islamists, perceiving them as safer for the regime than the secular Arab nationalist or other liberals.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] *Gulf News*, December 19, 2004.

to mention a few problems only. Altogether, so far, the country remains a tightly controlled hereditary emirate, where the al Sabah family still wield undeniable power.

Bahrain

Bahrain has been a state vulnerable to political conflicts. First of all, the country is relatively poor when compared to its oil-rich neighbors; therefore rulers cannot offer their subjects as much as in the neighboring countries and the unemployment in the country has often been high. Secondly, it is ruled by a Sunni minority, and the Shiite majority in the island have often considered themselves discriminated against. The al-Khalifa family ruling the country had a monopoly on power until the adoption of the constitution in 1973, which provided for a partially elected National Assembly. The Assembly was short lived though. In 1975 the emir called its activities "obstructionist" and dissolved it. With the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the accompanying spread of its Islamic ideas, resentment among Bahrain's Shiite population against the regime intensified. Since then the Shiites clashed with the government numerous times. In particular, they demanded the restoration of the National Assembly through direct and free elections as mandated by the constitution, hoping that in such a way they may have more to say in the country's affairs.

Tensions grew also after the Second Gulf War. In July 1992 over 200 Bahrainis, both Sunnis and Shiites, signed and submitted to the Emir a petition demanding liberalization of the regime. Rather than complying with their demands, Emir Sheikh Isa bin Sulman al-Khalifa established the appointed Consultative Council. Like its Saudi or UAE counterparts, the Bahraini Council could only review legislation sent to it by the government. Nevertheless, in an attempt to improve relations with the opposition, 30 members of the Council were divided between Sunnis and Shiites, and a Shiite,

former minister of transportation Ibrahim Hamidan, became its President. Despite that, protests continued. When the Committee of the Popular Petition, created in 1994, sent another petition to the Emir calling for greater popular participation in government, the leaders of the Committee were arrested, leading to a two-year long wave of demonstrations and riots.

The situation began to change only in 1998 when, after the death of Sheikh Isa, his son, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, decided to liberalize the system. In the beginning of the year 2000, he appointed new members to the Consultative Council, including non-Muslims for the first time: a Jewish, a Christian and an Indian Bahraini, as well as four women. Then, the Emir abolished the emergency laws that were in the force in the country for 25 years and pardoned more than 900 prisoners and exiles; in effect many prominent figures of the former opposition, mostly Shiites, returned to the country. At the same time Sheikh Hamad promised to grant nationality to several thousand of *bidoon*, mostly Shiite stateless inhabitants, which became another source of tension. The Emir decided also to compensate government employees, mostly Shiites, for salaries lost while they were detained without a trial in connection with the political unrest of the 1990s. As all these measures were welcomed by the Shiite majority, the Emir became ready to reform his country significantly.

In December 2000, the special committee operating under Emir's instructions proposed far-reaching changes to the political system of Bahrain. "The National Action Charter" proposed by the Committee, stated that "there is agreement on the need to modernize the constitution of the country to benefit from the democracy experiences of other peoples in expanding the circle of popular participation in the tasks of ruling and administration".[58] The Charter, a constitutional declaration, made Bahrain a con-

---

[58] Quoted after Khalaf, "Bahrain: democratisation by decree" p. 4.

stitutional monarchy; Sheikh Hamad – the King, and the al-Khalifa family hereditary rulers of the island. A parliament was to be established with two chambers with equal legislative powers: Council of Deputies consisting of 40 members elected by popular vote, and a consultative council, the Shura Council, also composed of 40 people but appointed by the King. The executive power, the legislature, and the judiciary were to be separated. All citizens were made equal in the eyes of law regardless of their religion, sect or social class. Constitutional Court and Audit Bureau were to be established and enjoy full independence.

The changes proposed in the National Action Charter were submitted to a referendum and on February 14, 2001 overwhelmingly approved by the Bahrainis (98.4 per cent), including the Shiite opposition.

On the first anniversary of the referendum, on February 14, 2002, Sheikh Hamad issued royal decrees reinstating the suspended 1973 constitution and amending it to implement the above-mentioned changes, which practically meant the promulgation of the new constitution.

The opposition was not happy with this development. It complained about the way the reforms were introduced; the King unilaterally made constitutional changes, contrary to the unambiguous provisions of the 1973 constitution itself, and in the absence of an elected legislature. The opposition would have preferred the restoration of the old constitution without changes and reinstatement of the elected parliament. It objected to the situation when most powers remained in the ruler's hands, including full control of the government, the right to dismiss the prime minister, and to dissolve parliament for any "sufficient reasons", as well as in case of "emergencies".[59] Moreover, the opposition criticized the fact,

---

[59] Hamza S. Olyan, "Royal Bahrain's journey to democracy", *Daily Star*, February 24, 2002.

that the appointed chamber would have a direct legislative role equal to that of the elected chamber and even taking certain precedence over the elected one, as its chairman was to be the speaker of the whole new bi-cameral National Assembly (the government argues that the appointed Shura Council is needed to guarantee that experienced and highly educated public figures would be able to take part in the process of policy making). In general, the king's unilateral decree revived deep-seated distrust among the politically active citizenry of the state's intentions and suggested that in spite of assurances, power and resources would remain firmly in Al-Khalifa's hands.[60]

Despite the shortcomings of the introduced reforms, in the new situation in the country numerous political groups – the so-called "societies" – ranging from Islamic fundamentalist to liberals and Marxists, came into being. The Bahraini law does not allow establishing a political party in the country, but these societies quickly begun to play the role of full-fledged parties. The government tolerates the existence of the opposition holding open forums and issuing weekly magazines. Moreover, non-governmental organizations of all types: cultural, religious, and civic as well as trade unions have mushroomed.[61]

After amending the constitution, the King called for the first elections: at the municipal level. Women as well as foreigners who owned property and were legal residents on the island were allowed to participate. Political groupings actively engaged themselves in the election process. The authorities were criticized for redrawing the map of electoral constituencies to moderate, if not totally eliminate, the effects of the Shiite majority in most regions of Bahrain. Shiites voiced their grievances that "the government is playing the

---

[60] „Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge", *Middle East Report no. 40*, May 6, 2005; www.merip.org

[61] Interview with the Minster of Labour and Social Affairs, *Gulf News*, June 29, 2003.

sectarian card and trying to derail the democratic process through gerrymandering".[62] To calm down the existing tensions, King Hamad decided that all members of the Bahraini Defense Force, the National Guard, the police and security services would not be eligible to vote. Therefore, a solid bloc of approximately 15,000 Sunni voters was removed from the scene, giving more chances to Shiite candidates. The King, addressing the public before the Election Day, called on his subjects "to exercise their constitutional right in complete freedom and responsibility. To exercise this right is a duty because without it democracy will not be able to survive."[63]

The elections took place on May 9 and 16, 2002, in two rounds of voting. Over 300 candidates, including 31 women, were registered for five 10-seat councils. Voters' turnover was substantial: 40–80 per cent, depending on the district. Religiously affiliated candidates became the major winners, obtaining 38 out of 50 seats (remaining candidates were considered independent runners). The Shiite Islamic National Wafaq Society, generally in opposition to the King, succeeded in placing most of its candidates in the councils. The failure of liberal and leftist candidates to win a single seat meant that they were unable to present themselves to the public as a viable alternative to candidates supported by the clerical establishment. The poor turnout of women was not really surprising in the traditional, male-dominated society, especially as in most cases they ran against male candidates from the same political organizations. Nevertheless, after the elections, all of women candidates urged the King to order an investigation into the "transgressions" witnessed during the elections and to take the necessary steps against those behind them.[64] They complained that some male candidates used mosques and religious community centres to launch attacks

---

[62] Abdulhadi Khalaf in *Daily Star*, May 20, 2002.

[63] *Daily Star*, May 8, 2002.

[64] *Gulf News*, May 20, 2002.

on female candidates. The leading leftist group, the National Democratic Action Society also criticized undemocratic practices exercised by many candidates on the polling day, including illegal campaigning and vote buying.

The municipal elections were not that important in themselves, as the municipal councils are responsible only for public works and roads, but everybody perceived them as the "dress rehearsal" for the forthcoming crucial polls to elect members to the new parliament.

When the parliamentary elections were approaching, in August 2002, 78 Bahraini intellectuals presented the King with a petition, protesting against the ban on the participation of political associations in the elections campaign. Then, four major opposition groups (the Islamic National Wafaq, the National Democratic Action, the Islamic Action and the Democratic Nationalist Tajammu) sent a letter to the King demanding again the restoration of the un-changed 1973 constitution. In response to these protests, the King allowed political associations to participate in the election campaign. Nevertheless, as other demands were not met, major opposition groups decided to boycott the elections.

In such circumstances, only 190 candidates registered, much fewer than for the far less important municipal elections. Eight women decided to run in the elections, receiving highly publicized support from the King's wife.

The first round of parliamentary elections took place on October 24. Despite calls from the opposition to boycott the elections, 53.2 per cent voters went to the polls, well above most expectations. Nineteen candidates who obtained more than 50 per cent of the vote were elected to the 40-seat Parliament in the first round, including three who ran unopposed. The remaining 21 seats were decided in the run-off elections on October 31.

Elections went smoothly. The Bahraini Human Rights Society was allowed to monitor the polls. Nevertheless, opposition groups

said that the government used authoritarian tactics to thwart the boycott. Moreover, voters had their passports stamped, leading to fears among citizens that they might suffer consequences if they did not have the stamp.

Sunni Islamists became the winners of the election, obtaining, together with their sympathizers, a majority in the lower house. Two Shiite Islamists were elected as well, despite the fact that their numerous co-religionists stayed home obeying the boycott call from their party leaders. Both woman candidates who made it to the second round run-off were defeated. Therefore, to balance the composition of the state bodies and to lower future potential problems in the legislature, the King himself appointed a large number of pro-government "secularists", "liberals" and women to the upper house. In particular, he nominated several defence officials and public servants, whose number included six women and a Jewish trader.

Political life in the country intensified further after the parliamentary elections.

The Council of Deputies demanded more legislative and monitoring powers for itself.[65] Several members of the Council submitted a proposal to legalize political parties. The deputies formed a commission to investigate the collapse of two government-managed pension funds. The Commission, despite government objections, submitted in January 2004 a report providing information of extensive mismanagement and corruption by the funds' senior staff. In result, the deputies questioned the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Labor, and Minister of State on the matter. It was a significant move as it established a parliamentary tradition.[66] The government, however, managed to gain the upper hand in the

[65] "Bahrain's House seeks more powers", *Gulf News*, January 22, 2003.

[66] Abdulhadi Khalaf, "Bahrain's parliament: The Quest for a Role", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 16, 2004.

proceedings which could lead to no-confidence vote using legal technicalities and ministers remained in their posts intact.

In turn, the nominated Shura Council, trying also to stress its role in the country's political system, urged the media to play a greater role in the democratisation process, and asked the government to draw up a comprehensive national strategic plan of social and economic developments for the next 20 years, to establish the Financial Monitoring Bureau to help combat corruption, and the Administrative Monitoring Bureau to verify the soundness and legality of administrative systems and their compatibility with international quality standards in this regard.[67]

In another important development, six of Bahrain's major political groups, religious and secular, signed in March 2003 a "charter of unity", aimed at coordinating their opposition to the kingdom's amended constitution, which they claimed had eliminated the principle of separation of power. There were three Islamists groups: The Islamic National Wefaq Society, the Islamic Arab Wasat Society, and the Islamic Action Society as well as three secular groups with left-wing inclinations: the National Democratic Action Society, the Progressive Democratic Minbar Society, and the Nationalist Block. All these groups boycotted the parliamentary elections as they insisted that the elected council should have exclusive legislative powers. In April, they started a campaign of collecting signatures on a petition to the King to change the constitution. In their opinion, the government controls the parliament, and the elected house is unable to respond to the public needs.[68] The Bahraini royal court warned organizers that what they were doing was illegal, and that only the National Assembly and the King himself had the right to propose or endorse constitutional changes. Eventually, several

---

[67] "Bahrain Shura Council urges press to play greater role", *Khaleej Times*, January 31, 2003.

[68] "Bahrain warns opposition groups", *Gulf News*, April 28, 2004.

activists collecting signatures were arrested. In February 2004, four of these societies (the Wefaq, the Islamic Action, the National Democratic Action and the Nationalist Bloc) organized a controversial "Constitution Conference" to discuss the issue of establishing a genuine constitutional monarchy in Bahrain and restricting the powers of the Shura Council to solely consultative. Later in the year, the government began talks with these societies aimed at ending the stalemate over the constitutional issue and convince them to take part in the next parliamentary elections. The talks were, however, suspended by the government. In response, these groups decided to resort to "pressure tactics" to achieve their demands. In February 2005, they sent to the King a petition signed by approximately 75,000 people calling again for restoration of the 1975 constitution.[69] They planned to organize peaceful rallies and sending delegations to other countries, especially in the West, to meet their legislatures and rights organization in order to explain the whole picture of the Bahraini situation. The government strongly criticizes these actions as meant to involve foreign actors into Bahrain's domestic politics.

The fall of 2004 brought numerous tensions between different actors on the Bahraini political scene. The arrest of human rights activist Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja after his public criticism of the Prime Minister, the King's uncle, and closure of his Bahrain Centre for Human Rights brought opposition protests and street demonstrations. Then, a parliamentary committee has rejected a draft law proposed by the government to regulate street protests and public meetings, saying it was "unconstitutional" as it would severely restrict freedoms. On the other hand, a new draft press law, proposed by the Shura Council, was warmly greeted by the opposition as a progressive one, improving protection of journalists and granting them better access to information.

---

[69] Mohammad Almezel, "Groups 'will resort to pressure tactics to achieve their demands'", *Gulf News*, February 19, 2005.

A possible future source of tensions can be the growing power of religious fundamentalists, both Sunni and Shiite. Some Bahrainis worry that the radicals may eventually move to restrict personal freedoms and attempt to amend the constitution to make Sharia the sole source of the legislation. Religious fundamentalists already demand greater public observance of Islamic practices. The first indication of this was their proposal to ban alcohol sales to Muslims, closing down hotels catering for weekend tourists from the GCC states, restricting the mixing of sexes at Bahrain's University and stop public concerts of Westernized Arab singers.

To summarize, while many praise King Hamad's actions as really introducing some democracy in the Kingdom, the opposition claims that they have just been a window-dressing, calculated to deflect domestic and international criticism.[70] The Bahrain Human Rights Society acknowledged that Bahrain has taken "a giant step" in liberalizing its political system and extending personal freedoms but stressed that much more needs to be done: "Political rights have been restricted to candidacy and voting in the municipal and parliamentary elections when the issue is much broader."[71] In particular, the parliament is so weak that it was unable to pass even a single law in the first years of its existence. In even a more sober note, *The Middle East Report no. 40* from May 2005, wrote that four years after Sheikh Hamad announced a sweeping reform plan, "Bahrain's fragile liberal experiment is poised to stall, or, worse, unravel. The overlap of political and social conflict with sectarian tensions makes a combustible mix. If steps are not urgently taken to address the grievances of the large and marginalized Shiite community... Bahrain, which is often touted as a model of Arab reform, could be in for dangerous times." But one has to remember

---

[70] Abdulhadi Khalaf, *Daily Star*, December 3, 2002.

[71] "Bahrain needs to do more to provide equality", *Gulf News*, February 21, 2003.

that Bahrain is one of the most difficult countries in the region to introduce democracy. If the ruling family allows a powerful Shiite-dominated parliament to emerge, it would put at risk its own position in the country.[72]

Qatar

Qatar, the smallest GCC country, is ruled under the 1970 constitution by male representatives of the Al-Thani family. The Emir holds absolute power, though he consults with leading Qataris on policy issues, and works to achieve consensus with the appointed 30-member Consultative Council (whose members have not changed since 1975).

In January 1992, 54 leading citizens presented the Qatari Emir with a petition criticizing the lack of freedom of expression in the media and unclear laws regarding citizenship and naturalization, as well as demanding the establishment of a new consultative assembly with "wide legislative and investigative authority through which actual political participation is provided".[73] The authors of the petition called for this body to prepare immediately a new constitution "that guarantees the establishment of democracy". The petition did not bring any results. The old Emir, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani had rejected any liberalization of the regime, and the broadening of political participation did not begin until his son, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, assumed power in 1995 (staging a successful coup against his farther).

The new Emir abolished the Ministry of Information, a move calculated to demonstrate his willingness to limit government censorship of the media. Then, in the new atmosphere, the now

---

[72] „The dynamics of democracy in the Middle East", p. 12.

[73] F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies. Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York, Council of Foreign Relations, 1994).

famous al-Jazeera satellite TV channel was opened. The channel introduced controversial and provocative new programs and news bulletins that criticize Arab rulers, governments and policies as well as the lack of rights and freedoms in Arab countries, and advocate the need for significant change in Islamic law. Opposition figures and women often participate in al-Jazeera programs, which quickly became the most popular TV program in the whole Arab world.

The next move by Sheikh Hamad was to call for general elections for the Central Municipal Council, a 29-member advisory body that oversees the work of nine municipalities. The Emir allowed women to vote for and run as candidates for seats in the Council.[74]

This latest move faced certain opposition. Eighteen noted Islamist figures presented a petition to the Emir that criticized the idea, given that this election would afford women "public authority" and the potential for "leadership over men".[75] The petition, however, did not have any effect on Emir's policies.

The first election in Qatar, even before the one to the Municipal Council, was for the board of the Chamber of Commerce, whose members had previously been nominated by the Emir. Close to 3,700 Qatari businessmen cast secret ballots in April 1998, electing 17 members of the board. In turn, the Ministry of Education called for the establishment of elected student unions in all schools. In another exercise of democracy, in November 1998, the Ministry of Finance and Economy cancelled the elections for the board of al-Muntazah Consumer Association after it had been discovered that the number of ballots cast was higher than the number of eligible voters; new elections were simultaneously called for.

---

[74] Bahry: "Elections in Qatar". In fact, this was not the first experiment in Qatar with elections to the Municipal Council. The first elections of this kind took place in 1963 and lasted for a few years.

[75] Bahry: "Elections in Qatar", p.126.

The elections to the Central Municipal Council took place on March 8, 1999.[76] On the ballot were 227 candidates, including six women. About 95 per cent of eligible voters participated in election in Doha, with only a slightly lower percentage participating in the rest of the country (though the number of registered voters was only 22,225 people, which accounted for a small percentage of the total local population of approximately 160,000). The winners of the elections were mostly young technocrats and professionals, elected on the basis of personal preference or family and tribal ties. Significantly, two noted political figures, often critical of the government: Najib Muhammad al-Rubai, a former Minister of Justice, and Muhammad Salih al-Kawari were lost in the election. No women were elected, suggesting that Qatar remains a traditional society.

The successful municipal elections made Sheikh Hamad easier about conducting the next step: introduction of a permanent constitution (a temporary one has been in effect since 1972) providing for the establishment of an elected parliament to be chosen by all Qataris, regardless of gender. On July 2, 2002, the committee preparing the new constitution presented a draft of the document. On April 29, 2003, in a popular referendum, more than 96 per cent Qataris voted in favor of the constitution (but only 24,000 people registered for voting).

The constitution describes Qatar as a democratic state, grants universal suffrage, and confirms the role of the state in providing for the social, economic, and educational well being of its citizens. It also confirms Qatar as a hereditary state and specifies the Sharia as the main source of legislation. The constitution creates a 45-member council (*Majlis al Shura*) to legislate, vote on the state budget, and monitor government activities with the right to question ministers

---

[76] Ibid.

and to vote them out of office through a vote of no confidence. The 30 members of the council are to be elected and the remaining 15 are to be appointed by the Emir. All Qataris of over 18 years of age are eligible to vote and run for office. The constitution provides also for freedom of association, expression and religious practice, as well as an independent judiciary.

Shaikh Hamad promulgated the constitution on June 8, 2004, and it finally came into effect a year later.

There are at least two reasons why Shaikh Hamad decided to broaden political participation in Qatar. First, having some problems with the support from members of the older generation, he wanted to obtain it from younger Qataris, many of whom had obtained Western education and become more cosmopolitan. For many of them, democratisation means making Qatar prominent among its neighbours, and obtaining a dynamic and leading role in the region.[77] Secondly, Hamad wanted to win friends in the West, to oppose threats from his ousted father and to balance off pressures from his more powerful GCC neighbours, especially Saudi Arabia.

Although Qatar is sometimes described as being at the vanguard of democratisation in the Arab world, one has to be aware of the shortcomings of its constitution.[78] It qualifies the right of people to assembly and does not allow operation of political parties. The Emir appoints the government and controls its agenda, has the power to block any legislation, can implement laws by decrees, and can dissolve the parliament at will. The legislation becomes law only with the vote of two-thirds majority and the emir's endorsement. But this has to be understood in the country's context. Qatari society is free of sectarian, ethnic, or even significant political divisions.

---

[77] Andrew Rathmell and Kirsten Schulze: "Political reform in the Gulf: The case of Qatar", *Middle Eastern Studies*, No. 4 (2000), p. 15.

[78] Amy Hawthorne, "Qatar's New Constitution: Limited Reform from the Top", Carnegie Endowment – Arab Reform Bulletin, June 11, 2003.

There is no questioning of the legitimacy of the ruling Al Thani family. Therefore, reforms have been promulgated from the top and not as a response to popular discontent.

Reforms in Qatar did not end with the introduction of a new constitution and organization of a municipal election. In particular, women were allowed to enter the political process. In 2003, Shaikh Hamad nominated a woman to become the Minister of Education – the first female cabinet minister in the GCC states. At the same time he appointed Sheikha Abdullah al-Misnad from the ruling family as president of Qatar University and another woman as public prosecutor – the first woman to hold such a post in the GCC states. The Emir's wife, Sheikha Mouza Bint Nasser al-Misnad, has been strongly involved in the promotion of education and women's rights.

Oman

Oman has been ruled since the 18th century by the al bu Said dynasty. After a series of internal and external conflicts in the 1950s and 1960s, and most significantly the Dhofar rebellion, Qaboos bin Said al-Said carried out a coup in 1970 against his unsuccessful father. Supported by the British, Qaboos won and became the Sultan. He quickly proved to be an effective and modern leader. Under his rule, the country advanced economically despite limited oil reserves, relations with the neighbours were normalized, etc.

In the 1990s Oman made several strides towards broadening of the political participation; this happened on the sole initiative of the ruler, without any demands from the public. First, in 1991, Sultan Qaboos established the new Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*), replacing the old State Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Istishari lil-Dawla*) existing since 1981. The 59-seat Council was

granted the right to debate on economic, social and development issues, review laws, evaluate government plans and question ministers, and hold joint meetings with the government twice a year. At the same time, it has no right to be heard in Oman's foreign, defence, and security policies. The Sultan's decree provided that elders, prominent businessmen and intellectuals from each of Oman's 59 provinces choose two potential assembly members and the Sultan appoints one of those two nominees to represent that province. The president of the Council is appointed by a Royal Decree, while his two deputies are elected by the members of the Council in a secret ballot.

After the end of the first three-year term, in 1994, the Council was expanded to 80 seats, giving the Sultan a chance to nominate more people, especially former government officials, to it. In a groundbreaking decision, the Sultan appointed the first two women members of the Council. It was the first case in which women were allowed to participate in a political process of any kind in all GCC states.[79]

Membership of the Council was expanded to 82 persons in 1997, and to 83 in the year 2000 because of the increase in the country's population. Moreover, the Sultan allowed women to stand for election and to vote for candidates to the Council. Over 20 women were among the several hundred nominees in the 1997 elections, and the Council had eventually two women members.

In 1997, Sultan Qaboos established a new 41-seat consultative body, the all nominated State Council (*Majlis al-Dawla*). This Council, akin to an upper house, reviews the proposals of the *Majlis al-Shura* and forwards those it deems important to the government or to Sultan Qaboos; it can also deal with more important political

---

[79] Abdullah Juma Alhaj, "The politics of participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: The Omani Consulatative Council", *Middle East Journal*, no. 4 (1996), pp. 560–571.

matters. *Majlis al-Shura* and *Majlis al-Dawla* together constitute the *Majlis Oman*, or Council of Oman.[80]

One of the reasons to establish the new council was to give the Sultan a chance to accommodate those who were unsuccessful in the elections to the *Majlis al-Shura* and to eliminate potential tensions between rival clans, tribes and businessmen created by the election results. This was clearly visible in the formation of the first *Majlis al-Dawla*, whose nominated members became former ministers, under-secretaries, ambassadors, judges or retired officers. Five women were selected to it as well.

Sultan Qaboos, further supporting the idea of introducing women to the country political life, appointed in 1998–99 the first woman ambassador and named three women deputy ministers in the cabinet. He also included the first woman to the board of directors of the Omani Chamber of Commerce. In March 2003 he appointed a women to become President of the Public Authority for Craft Industries at the rank of a minister. Finally in 2004, he appointed three other women to the Cabinet, to manage the Higher Education, Tourism and Social Development Ministries.

The electoral body has been progressively expanded; in September 2000 elections to *Majlis al-Shura* the electorate was raised to 175,000 people, a quarter of Omani adults (as compared to only 51,000 in 1997 elections, about three per cent of the population, and 5,000 in 1991), with women accounting for some 30 per cent of the participants. Voters were chosen by tribal councils selected by the *walis* or governors and their representatives in the country's 59 *wilayats*. Out of them 114,567 – or 65 per cent – registered for voting, with 87.8 per cent actually casting their ballots. The total of 541 candidates, including 21 women, were in the fray (but only two women were successful, both from the

---

[80] Abdullah Juma Alhaj, "The political elite and the introduction of political participation in Oman", *Middle East Policy*, No. 3 (June 2000), pp. 97–110.

Muscat governorate). In a move towards the goal of having the whole *Majlis al-Shura* elected directly, in 2000, candidates with the highest numbers of votes were for the first time automatically given seats on the Council, rather than being picked from among the top scores by the Sultan.

In the 2003 elections, for the first time, all Omani citizens who have attained the age of 21 (approximately 822,000), both men and women, were eligible to vote. Nevertheless, only 262,000 (i.e. 32 per cent) registered, and only 74 per cent of the registered, that is around 194,000 actually cast their votes on October 2. The elections did not bring much change in the composition of the *Majlis al-Shura*. Only 15 women stood for election, out of 506 candidates, and, as before, only two (actually the same as during the previous term) were elected, despite even the fact that a third of registered voters (95,000) were women.

Consultative councils play certain role in the country's political life. They meet regularly, debate important social and economic matters, review new laws, question government's officials. Certain hearings at the *Majlis al-Shura* have been broadcasted live on television.

Another action of crucial importance for the development of democracy in Oman was the introduction of the Basic Law – the first *de facto* constitution – in 1996. It promulgated the principles governing the Sultanate, highlighted the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and, above all, defined the powers and duties of the executive. It provided for an independent judiciary, due process of law, freedom of the press and of assembly, and prohibition of discrimination of any kind. Several laws and regulations required to implement these provisions were enacted in the following years. In particular, the Supreme Court in Muscat as well as courts of appeals in various *wilayas* were established, and the new press and publication law was introduced.

Oman has a relatively liberal environment, although the sultanate is an absolute monarchy with no political parties.[81] All matters are subject to the Sultan's interpretation and decrees. He has complete authority over all decision-making. The Sultan is both the head of the state and the prime minister, as well as the commander-in-chief of the armed force; moreover, he controls the portfolios of defence and foreign affairs. But at the same time, Sultan Qaboos is usually perceived as a fair-minded ruler who tries to maximize the support base for his policies by taking advice from a broad spectrum of people, but especially from tribal leaders, in accordance with Omani tradition. There is practically no opposition in the country, although in 1994 and 2005, the authorities arrested large number of people for allegedly plotting to destabilize the regime.

The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of tribally based sheikhdoms, established as a unified state structure in 1971. Thanks to huge oil revenues, the UAE managed to transform itself in a short period of time into a very modern and wealthy country. Under the constitution, rulers of the seven emirates make up the Federal Supreme Council, the highest legislative and executive body. The Council elects a state president and the president appoints the prime minister and cabinet. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the ruler of Abu Dhabi emirate, was the President of the country from 1971 till 2004. When he passed away, the presidency was taken over by one of his sons, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed.

The UAE have the least developed system of political representation among the GCC states. The male-only, ruler-

---

[81] "Oman – Ruling Structure", *APS Review Gas Market Trends*, February 23, 2004; J. E. Peterson, "Oman: Three and a half decades of change and developments", *Middle East Policy*, 2 (Summer 2004), pp. 125–37.

nominated, 40-person-strong Federal National Council plays only an advisory role, cannot introduce bills or debate any matter of public concern if the government objects (that is, "if it is detrimental to the higher interest of the union").[82] Nevertheless, in the late 1990s, the number of issues discussed by the Council, and the number of cabinet ministers appearing before it (including some members of the ruling family) increased. In some emirates, Sharjah in particular, local consultative bodies to advise rulers have also been developed.

For approximately a quarter of a century, the UAE did not have a permanent constitution, as numerous attempts to approve one failed due to lack of agreement among the emirates on the prerogatives of the federal authorities; small emirates have traditionally worried that large and rich emirates, like Abu Dhabi, would dominate them. The temporary 1971 constitution became eventually permanent in 1997, though practically no changes were introduced to it at that time, despite the criticism that it contains outdated laws.

Like in all other GCC states, the judicial system comprises both Sharia and the secular courts. The judiciary is not independent; its decisions are subject to review by the political leadership, but the basic due process of law does exist. Media are controlled by the government but non-censored foreign television broadcasts via satellite and Internet are widely available. The government limits freedom of assembly and association. Nevertheless, in general, the country, especially the highly cosmopolitan emirate of Dubai, has been much more liberal and open to the world than other GCC states.

Women are well represented in the workforce and are well educated. Until recently they did not hold any high-level positions in the government. Only the progressive ruler of Sharjah, sheikh

---

[82] Hassan Hamdan Al-Alkim: "The prospect of democracy in the GCC countries", *Critique. Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, Fall 1996, p. 34.

Sultan bin Mohammed al Qasimi, appointed in the early 2000s several women to his local consultative council. In the interesting occurrence, the Crown Prince of the emirate of Ras Al Khajmah was dethroned by his father in June 2003, apparently largely due to the activity of his wife, criticized by conservative members of the ruling elite for being a women's rights activist.[83] Finally, in November 2004, a woman was appointed the UAE Minister of Planning and Economy.

Among limited recent political moves, the UAE, under pressure from the International Labour Organization, have initiated measures to allow formation of workers' organizations in the country. Moreover, the election of officers was allowed in certain public institutions, including the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, suggesting that authorities are testing the possibility of introducing such democratic procedures in other public bodies.

The issue of the establishment of an elected parliament in the UAE has been put forward only very recently. Earlier, there was no pressure from the public at large to change the situation as the enormous wealth of the country had continued to make most people satisfied; there has been no opposition or any political groups operating in this rentier state. It was only after the Saudi municipal elections and the Iraqi expatriates' voting organized in the UAE (the out-of-country voting managed by the International Organization of Migration for the Iraqi elections of January 30, 2005) that some members of the Emirates' Federal National Council and the country's academics raised the issue. They stressed that when millions of Arabs in Palestine, Iraq, and even Saudi Arabia had gone to the polls, the UAE could no longer continue to lag behind.[84] Thus, they begun calling for elections to the consultative council and municipalities as well as for transparency

---

[83] *Gulf Studies Newsletter*, June 2003.

[84] *Khaleej Times*, February 24 and 27, 2005.

in the government, freedom of expression and independence of the judiciary. These calls were encouraged by the decision of the ruler of Sharjah who, in February 2005, announced the establishment of nine local municipal councils, with members who at the moment are still appointed but are promised to be elected in future. Finally, in December 2005, President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan announced that half of the members of the Federal National Council would be elected.

Gulf parliament

At the GCC level, the Consultative Council (often called the Consultative Commission) has functioned since 1997. It consists of 30 appointed members (five from each of the GCC states) and is charged with studying matters referred to it by the GCC Supreme Council. Nevertheless, so far it has been a meaningless body. During the December 2004 GCC summit, Bahrain submitted a proposal from its country's Council of Representatives to establish a GCC parliament to replace the current Consultative Council. No decision on the matter has been taken yet.

Summary

Summing up, the Gulf monarchies – notwithstanding the actions and achievements mentioned above – do not have yet a fully developed and truly democratic electoral process, or properly empowered bodies representing the people. In particular,

- Rulers can amend constitutions at will and pass laws by decree.
- In the UAE there are no elections at all; In Saudi Arabia, only municipal elections are on the agenda.
- In Saudi Arabia, women still cannot participate in the elections.

• In Bahrain, electoral districts are drawn with the intention of under-representing the country's majority Shiite population; In Kuwait, small electoral districts make vote-buying easier and favor certain candidates.

• In Oman and the UAE, the consultative councils can neither introduce legislation nor dismiss ministers, nor can the Saudi *Shura* Council dismiss Cabinet members.

• In Bahrain and Qatar, the elected lower chamber can dismiss ministers only with a two-third majority, which is very difficult to attain.

• Bahrani and Qatari parliaments need a large majority to block legislation, and the Omani and the UAE Consultative Councils cannot block legislation at all.

In most cases, changing these realities would require constitutional revisions, which are very difficult to carry out. Michael Herb, recently summed up the state of affairs in a commentary simply titled, "Parliaments in the Gulf monarchies are a long way from democracy".[85]

At the same time, however, Herb underlined that "Gulf elections are much fairer than those organized by most authoritarian regimes." In particular, "Kuwait's elections compare well to those of many emerging democracies". Furthermore, the Kuwaiti parliament is able to successfully block legislation, and has the power to mount a very serious challenge to the primacy of the ruling family, as it can remove any minister through a no-confidence vote. Therefore, a Gulf monarchy can implement a system, which has a number of typically democratic futures; the Kuwaiti way can be, and probably will be, gradually adopted by other GCC states.

---

[85] Herb: "Parliaments in the Gulf monarchies are a long way from democracy".

Prospects for further broadening of political participation in the Gulf monarchies. The GCC and the Western (American) democratisation agenda

Will the broadening of political participation in the GCC states continue? Can the occurrences presented above actually lead towards the Western type of democracy?

On the one hand, there are many obstacles to the democratisation process.

First of all, as time has shown, Gulf monarchies are quite stable regimes, contrary to stereotypical views in the West, where they are frequently seen as anachronistic systems and destined to disappear with modernization. Thus, rulers do not always see the necessity to transform their regimes quickly and extensively to stay in power. Moreover, they do not think they need the support of their people to govern; constitutions and traditions legitimize their positions. They also feel secure given that the United States and other Western countries, despite their occasional rhetoric of criticizing non-democratic regimes, do not like to de-stabilize the region further after the Iraqi experience and with few exceptions continue to be committed to the maintenance of the GCC countries' status quo due to the strategic importance of oil they posses. In such circumstances, rulers often perceive the broadening of political participation in their countries as another gracious gift they may offer their subjects, rather than an action required to satisfy the vital needs of their populations. The circumstances have seemed different only in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait, where pressure from the West and the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in the first place, the demands of the Shiite-led opposition in the second, and the activities of political groupings in the third, are factors strongly influencing the change.

In turn, the "subjects" at large, maybe except for the Shiite population, so far do not look for major political reforms

themselves, being worried that change could negatively affect their socio-economic situation. They have generally been satisfied with what they get from their governments, and even the existing extensive control the regimes exercise over them do not dispose them negatively to their rulers. This is why, for example, even the demands of opposition groups have only called for reforms, not for revolution: the opposition has wished to improve the operation of the existing regimes, not to overthrow them.[86] The middle class in the GCC states – usually the main reformist, pro-democracy grouping in other parts of the world – has little reason to support the downfall of the monarchy, which allows the monarchies to prosper. Similarly, the military and majority of tribal sheiks, large beneficiaries of the existing regimes, usually strongly support the rulers. So far, there has been no "revolutionary proletariat" in the GCC states; in future, only a growing number of young, unemployed school graduates may lead to the establishment of such a group. Last but definitely not least, most people lack political awareness; civil society, the ultimate source of political change, is in the very preliminary stage of development.

On the other hand, there are many factors which can further enhance the broadening of political representation and the "democratisation drive".

First of all, as has already been mentioned, in several GCC states: Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, there are significant groupings pushing for democratisation. Moreover, the presence of active parliaments and free media, wherever they are present, boosts democratisation process.[87]

---

[86] Gawdat Baghat: "The Gulf monarchies: Economic and political challenges at the end of the century", *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, No. 2 (1998).

[87] Michael Herb, "Emirs and parliaments in the Gulf", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, No. 4 (2002), p. 47.

Then, the economic situation can have a significant impact on the process. At the beginning of the 21st century, the GCC countries were earning far less than they used to during the oil bonanza three decades earlier. While these states are still relatively rich, several are running budget deficits, borrowing nationally and internationally, and are turning to expense cutting. Moreover, while until recently many services were free in the GCC countries, some regimes have begun to charge their citizens for them, and have even considered introducing income taxes. Should citizens be obliged to pay for the running of the state, the state will be forced to open up to their scrutiny. "No taxation, no representation" rule began to change already to "some taxation, some representation". The situation has changed, however, with very high oil prices dominating the market since 2004. The increased revenues considerably improved the economic situation in the oil-producing GCC states, thus giving governments possibility to postpone certain reforms.

Another factor that can influence the change is the population of the GCC countries: not only is it growing at a rate that makes the maintenance of so generous welfare states problematic, but it is also becoming more literate, educated, and urban: features that are characteristic for other societies that, in similar conditions, have usually experienced a political upheaval leading to further democratisation.

Young new leaders, who may replace old rulers of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, but also of the UAE and Oman in the not so distant future, may also speed up reforms, as occurrence in Qatar and Bahrain showed already.

Events in the neighbouring states: Egypt, Iran, Yemen, and the new Iraq, which all have more political representation of citizens in the process of governance, indirectly influence also the peoples' thinking across the borders; mostly through media reports but also through their citizens living in the GCC states in large numbers.

Finally, there have been numerous attempts coming from the West, and the United States in particular, to democratise the Arab world. They relates to the situation in the GCC states as much as in other Arab countries. After 9/11, there have been a number of voices in the United States linking lack of democracy with the roots of terrorism and calling Washington to "save the Arabs from corrupt autocrats and radical Islam as it once was engaged in saving the world from communism" and to "pressure Arab states to democratise rather then shielding them".[88] For example, Rohan Gunaratna in his book *Inside al Qaeda* expressed a common belief that there have been so many terrorists produced by Saudi Arabia because it's not democratic; government is not representative of the people.[89] In turn, commenting on elections in Bahrain, S. Rob Sobhani wrote in the *Washington Times* on November 25, 2002, that "the United States has a vested interest in the success of King Hamad's reform movement because tiny Bahrain can be a model for the rest of the Arab world, especially in neighbouring Saudi Arabia. Shi'ite comprise a majority in the oil-rich eastern province of Saudi Arabia, where 25 per cent of the world's remaining oil reserves is located. Therefore Bahrain should be rewarded and singled out for its bravery, friendship and pursuit of democracy" (and it has become one of the closest non-NATO ally of the United States, a seat of the US Army Central Command, and a free-trade agreement partner).

Since 9/11 the goal of democratising the Arab Middle East has become elevated by the American government from a rhetorical ideal to national security imperative.[90] Therefore, the administration

[88] Susan Sachs, "Remembering how to rig a democracy" *The New York Times*, June 30, 2002.

[89] Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002).

[90] Andrzej Kapiszewski, "Democracy Promotion in the Arab Word: The Bush Agenda", *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, No. 3 (2004), pp. 65–92.

decided to reorient US diplomacy and American foreign aid policy to lend more support to pro-democracy movements in the region. In January 2003, the United States introduced the "US-Middle East Partnership Initiative", which was aimed to spread democracy and political reforms in the Middle East. Then, in March, President George W. Bush decided to go to Iraq, believing, among other things, that overthrowing Saddam Hussein would allow rapid democratisation of the country, which, as a result, would produce a democratic boom in the Middle East, comparable to the successful one which occurred earlier in Eastern Europe and put the end to the Cold War.

Many Arab leaders were unhappy with the US pro-democracy initiatives. In response to them, in January 2003, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdallah proposed his own "Charter to Reform the Arab Stand," which was meant to encourage regional economic development and peoples' participation in politics. It was briefly discussed at the Arab leaders summit in Cairo in March 2003, devoted generally to the Iraqi problem on the eve of the US military intervention, and later at the Tunis summit, in May 2004 (although Saudi Arabia did not attend).

On November 6, 2003, President Bush delivered the now-famous address on the need to strengthen democracy around the world and, in particular, to support its development in the Middle East. He called to end "sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East" and to adopt "a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East". In the follow-up, US authorities began working on the details of what later became known as "The Greater Middle East Initiative". The project called for economic transformation "similar in magnitude to that undertaken by the formerly communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe".

The leakage of the draft version of the project to the London-based *Al Hayat* in February 2004, was met with strong criticism

from Arab governments, intellectuals and media, who all saw in it an unacceptable interference with their internal affairs, another sign of Western imperialism.[91] In particular, Bahrain's Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, asserted that "the imposition of any foreign view is not in the interest of the countries of the region". The Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal said that the US proposal did "include clear accusations against the Arab people and their governments that they are ignorant of their own affairs... those behind this plan ignore the fact... that we are able to handle our own affairs".[92]

In such a situation, facing all this criticism, the US government scaled down the original proposal and presented it under the new name "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative"

Nevertheless, the plan did provoke debates concerning the need for change. Most Arab rulers adopted a "middle-of-the-road position," supporting reforms and democratisation gradually emerging from within the system, but rejecting their imposition by outside powers.[93] They attacked the paternalistic way in which the US plan was introduced, while not entirely rejecting some of its content. Several Arab governments and civil society activists produced declarations on the need for broad political, social, and economic reforms, which were directly inspired by the G-8 plan.[94] Some GCC states became a venue for such an activity as well.

---

[91] As reported in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 17, 2004.

[92] As quoted by K. Gajendra Singh, "America's democracy initiative in Middle East", South Asia Analysis Group, paper No. 1052, www.saag.org.

[93] Elie Podeh, „Between stagnation and renovation: The Arab system in the aftermath of the Iraqi war", *MERIA, The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol.9, no. 3 (September 2005); www. http://meria.idc.ac.il

[94] Main conferences were held in Saana, Yemen and in Alexandria, Egypt. Moreover, the Arab League for the first time took a position on the political reform issue at its summit in Tunis in May 2004. See Kapiszewski: "Democratizing the Arab states", pp. 127–129.

In particular, on June 3–4, 2004, the Qatar University hosted a conference of Arab democracy advocates: civil society activists, professors, journalists and members of political movements from across the region. The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, in his widely reported speech opening the event stated that: (1) Arab states should consider US proposals for democratic reform rather than reject them outright; (2) there are many problems "of our own creation that have nothing to do with the outside world", and that in particular "do not spring only from the Palestinian cause"; (3) many Arabs have claimed that "if popular participation is broadened it would only result in bringing in those who would endanger peace and put an end to security. Yet, the adoption of reforms has always been the right way to stability".[95] There are not many Arab leaders who would so openly say such things, opposing the popular Islamist standpoint. The conference adopted "The Doha Declaration for Democracy and Reform", calling all Arab states to get modern, democratic institutions; hold free, fair and regular elections; place limits on executive powers; guarantee freedom of association and expression; permit the full participation of women in political life; and end extra-judicial procedures, emergency laws, and torture. It also called for the creation of a body to monitor Arab governments' progress on reform and to track the fate of other reform initiatives launched recently in the region. Finally, the declaration stated that "hiding behind the necessity of resolving the Palestinian question before implementing reform is obstructive and unacceptable".

The issue was also raised during the Arab summit in Tunis in May 2004. In the final declaration Arab states pledged (although vaguely) to carry out domestic reforms such as expanding political participation, increasing the role of civil society, widening the role of women in social and political spheres and promoting educational reforms, and enhancing research.

---

[95] Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani: "Out of the fog through Arab reform".

The Bush plan was discussed at the G-8 summit at Sea Island, Georgia, on June 8–10, 2004.[96] The resolution adopted there called for "partnership for progress and a common future with the region". In particular, that goal is to be achieved through the establishment of the 'Forum for the Future', a framework for regular ministerial meetings as well as parallel meetings of civil society and business leaders to discuss political and economic reforms.[97] A call to settle down the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the idea conspicuously absent from the earlier version of the plan, causing wide criticism, was that time included in the document. The plan acknowledged that reforms cannot be imposed from outside and that different societies will change at different rates. The summit also welcomed the Tunis declaration, in which Arab leaders expressed their readiness to implement democratic reforms.

Despite a new form, the G-8 reform plan initially received a cold reception in the Arab world. Only five Arab countries accepted President Bush's invitation to its launch at the summit (from among the GCC states, only Bahrain). The most important Arab countries: Saudi Arabia and Egypt (as well as close US allies: Kuwait and Morocco) turned the invitation down, making it clear that they would have nothing to do with the project. Only the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (who, by the way, was not invited to the summit due to controversies related to his Al Jazeera TV station's anti-American reporting) stated cautiously that "the calls for reform coming from abroad need reflection by the people of our region".[98]

---

[96] The term "greater" in the draft version was changed for "broader", as some countries objected to the first one as having some negative political connotations.

[97] Marina Ottaway, "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: A hollow victory for the United States", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 12, 2004.

[98] Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, "Out of the fog through Arab reform", *Daily Star*, June 21, 2004.

Following the G-8 plan, the issue of reforms was discussed next on the Forums for the Future, which took place in Morocco in December 2004 and Bahrain in 2005. Foreign and finance ministers from about twenty countries in the Middle East and North Africa, representatives of the G-8 countries, as well as members of various Middle East NGO's attended it. Forums did not bring meaningful results and the one in Manama even ended without any result as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Tunis expressed reservations to wording of the final declaration in which states pledge to expand democratic practices, to enlarge participation in political and public life, to foster the roles of civil society, including NGOs and to widen women's participation" in all fields and reinforce their rights in society.

Thus, an expansion of a reformist discourse and the introduction of certain liberal measures that may eventually bring about some political changes have been observed in the Arab world. Only time can show whether those actions will have any effect on the democratisation of the GCC states. It remains to be seen whether the rulers of these countries will be ready to introduce further reforms. Democratisation is always a long lasting process. One can foresee future developments in the GCC states, which can lead towards that goal, but there are also many obstacles, which can slow it down, or even reverse. One can agree with the opinion of Hassan Hamdan al-Alkim that "although democracy may not be realized within the coming decade, it is acquiring a significant importance in the GCC states political life. Thus, its realization becomes a matter of time".[99] A thought that, however, should always be taken into account, is that democratisation may not immediately produce more peaceful and stable GCC regimes. The political reforms can weaken the existing regimes, or even de-stabilize the countries. The opposition forces in the GCC states, where they exist, are to a large extent rooted

[99] Al-Alkim: "The prospect of democracy", p. 41.

in Islamic fundamentalism, which, if coming to power through otherwise praised democratic elections, can reform the political system into a much less democratic – of the religious theocracy type – than the present one. An indication of such approach can be found in the latest parliamentary elections in Kuwait and Bahrain where the Islamists won the majority and continue to press for Islamisation of the countries.[100] So far, however, the development of the electoral process in the GCC states, as well as the enhancement of their parliaments' activity, as compared to political reforms, or rather lack of them, in many other Arab countries, allows to look at the future of the democratisation process in the monarchies of the Gulf with cautious optimism.

---

[100] Marina Ottaway, Thomas Carothers, Amy Hawthorne, Daniel Brumberg, *Democratic mirage in the Middle East* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief, October 2002); Vahan Zanoyan, "Time for making historic decisions in the Middle East", Kuwait, Center for Strategic and Future Studies, November 2002.

Saudi Arabia: Steps toward democratization or reconfiguration of authoritarianism?

Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the most conservative monarchies in the world, and, according to Western standards, a very authoritarian regime. The King rules by decrees. Political parties, trade unions, collective bargaining, and strikes are prohibited. Freedom of expression is severely restricted, in particular by prohibitions of criticism of the government, Islam, and the ruling family. Public demonstrations are forbidden. Women are denied many basic rights and segregated. Judicial independence is undermined by the influence of the royal family and its associates. In general, the Saudi political system constitutes the most complete expression of the so-called 'Islamic exception', the general rejection of the Western system of law and support for the view that all legitimacy should come from the Koran and the Sunna. The country does not have a constitution to regulate affairs of the country, believing that Sharia determines all aspects of not only private but also public life. On the highly publicized (although controversial) Freedom House democracy scale Saudi Arabia is not only usually considered as a "not free" country, but in 2002 was even labeled one of the world's ten most repressive regimes (*Freedom in*

the World, 2003). Similarly, the Economist Intelligence Unit's political freedom indicator named Saudi Arabia in 2005 the least free country in the Arab world (*EIU Special Report*, 2005: 3).

The country was established and has been ruled by the al-Saud family with the support of the religious authorities. The relationship between the two dates back to the 1744 alliance between Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud, a sort of merger of religious legitimacy and military might (Al-Raheed, 2002). The descendants of al-Wahhab have authority over theological, social and cultural affairs, still dominate the religious institutions of the state and issue *fatwas* that justify the policies of the Al Saud. Today, however, the alliance between the regime and clergy is much contested by dissidents because the parties no longer serve as "checks" on each other. Moreover, as the Kingdom provides the West with the uninterrupted deliveries of oil, Western governments, first the British and later the United States, guarantee the security of Saudi Arabia and also the position of the ruling family. That "evil" relation makes Saudi rulers a subject of strong criticism from part of the religious establishment and the people.

Petitions to the King in the 1990s. Introduction of the Basic Laws

Despite the autocratic character of the regime, since the beginning of the 1990s, in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War, which showed vulnerability of the country and doubtful ability of the Al Saud to lead the state, Saudi Arabia has witnessed political activity that, while not directly questioning the Islamic base of the country's identity and people's integration, has called for changes in the manner in which the state is governed. Political criticism became public, especially during Friday's sermons in mosques, while opposition became organized and demanded specific reforms.

First, in December 1990, a group of 43 'liberals' and 'secularists' (academics, writers, businessmen, and government officials) circulated a petition in which they called upon King Fahd to introduce basic laws regulating the functioning of government, and for the strengthening of the principle of equality of all citizens, as well as for the elimination of discrimination based on religion, tribal affiliation, family background and social status. The petitioners urged the King to establish the long-proposed Consultative Council and provide it with broad powers, including the right to oversee the work of executive agencies (Gause, 1994: 94-7; Kramer, 2000: 263-4). They advocated also the establishment of consultative councils in the Saudi provinces, more independence of the media and the legal system, as well as the introduction of a framework for issuing *fatwas*, which, as they suggested should be subject to evaluation, discussion, and response without restriction.

In turn, in May 1991, over 400 Islamists, including leading *ulama*, presented to the King a memorandum also demanding extensive reform of the political and judicial system but calling for strict application of Islamic norms and values in public life as well as in economic and foreign policy issues. It criticized the corruption of government officials and called for greater consideration to be given to qualifications and merit than to kinship in the government appointment process. It also stressed that the planned consultative council should be completely independent and should have broad powers. Moreover, the memorandum called for a buildup of the strong army and for a 'national' foreign policy, not based on foreign alliances not sanctioned by the Sharia.

This memorandum was followed by another one, the 'Memorandum of Advice', dated July 1992. It was signed by a large group of more than a hundred lower-level *ulama*, including many academics at Islamic colleges and universities and sent to Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz, the head of the Council of Senior Scholars and Secretary

General (with the ministerial rank) of the Administration of Religious Studies, Legal Opinion, Mission and Guidance.(Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 2000: 142-3; Kramer, 2000: 264) The memorandum repeated many themes from the earlier petitions, such as the criticism of corruption, nepotism and favoritism, lack of respect of individual rights, the denial of freedom of expression (for Islamic preachers, teachers and activists) and close cooperation and dependence on Western powers. It requested independent judiciary and establishment of a consultative council. At the same time the memorandum called for strict application of the Sharia, the abolition of all un-Islamic laws and revision of treaties with non-Muslim and un-Islamic states and institutions. The signatories complained that the *ulama* were not being consulted by the state authorities in crucial economic, political and military issues and demanded that more power be given to them. All together, the memorandum requested the creation of much more purely Islamic state.

Leaders of the large Shi'ite population also wrote a petition to the King in which they strongly supported the establishment of a consultative council. At the same time, they demanded the discontinuation of discrimination against Shi'ites in the country, especially in the labor market, universities and the army, as well as the cessation of the harassment they faced while performing their religious rites.

All these developments were a sign of serious tensions in the country. Therefore, on March 1, 1992, King Fahd decided to take some actions to calm down the situation. He decreed the long-promised Basic Laws – a constitution-like document, the statute for a new consultative council, and a system of regional government for the kingdom's 14 provinces. The Consultative Council was established as a debating assembly consisting of 60 members appointed by the King. The Council was to study all

government regulations, treaties and international accords before they are promulgated through royal decree, and deliberate on and evaluate economic and social development programs. It was also to discuss annual reports submitted by ministers and state-owned organizations and present recommendations, and was empowered to question the cabinet members. The Council cannot, by its own constitution, initiate debate on issues; it has to await the submission from the government, or obtain permission from the King to do so. While the verdicts of the Council are neither binding on the King nor on the government, usually either the ministers accept the recommendations of the Council or the two parties reach a compromise (Jahel, 1998: 26-31). The King retained the power to dissolve or reorganize the Council at will.

King Fahd decided also to accommodate the Shi'ites. He invited their leaders to Jeddah and listened to their grievances. In exchange for ending anti-Saud Shi'ite propaganda from abroad, the government released Shi'ite political prisoners and allowed exiles to return; Shi'ite leadership was also assured that their social and religious demands would be addressed as well.

The Consultative Council finally set to work in mid-1990s. Members of the Council have been chosen from among the country's regions and important constituent groups: religious establishment, government bureaucracy and the business community, followers of both conservative and liberal ideologies. They have usually been highly-educated and experienced people, considered experts in their respective fields (academics, retired senior officers, ex-civil servants and private businessmen).[1] Sheikh Mohammed bin Ibrahim bin Jubair, a respected Hanbali jurist and former Minister of Justice became the President of the first State Council and of successive ones (to be replaced after his death in 2002 by Saleh bin Abdullah bin Homaid).

The Council quickly established itself within the Saudi political system. This is why the Council was enlarged from 60 to 90

members in 1997, to 120 in May 2001 and to 150 members in April 2005. Its influence, not necessarily grounded in law, has been a function of its members prominence and diversity. It also reflects the tradition of governance, which "prizes consensus, strives to maintain harmony through consultation and is deeply averse to conflict" (International Crisis Group, 2004: 6). Only occasionally the Council's members have been seriously divided over certain issues: for example, in 2005, they disagreed over women's rights to drive cars. While the verdicts of the Council are neither binding on the King nor on the government, usually either the ministers accept the recommendations of the Council or the two parties reach a compromise.

Despite establishment of the Consultative Council and agreement with Shi'ites, political tensions in the Kingdom did not come to the end.

In May 1993, several prominent Islamist scholars and academics established the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights, the first ever opposition organization in the Kingdom openly challenging the monarchy, accusing the government and senior *ulama* for not doing enough 'to protect the legitimate Islamic rights of the Muslims'. Skillfully using the new media (faxes and Internet) the Committee members for the next few years, from the Kingdom and later from the exile in London, questioned the very foundation of the regime: the contract between rulers and the religious establishment, and criticized the behavior and decisions taken by Saudi authorities, and King Fahd in particular[2] (Kostiner 1997; Teitelbaum, 2000).

The government strongly responded to this action. In particular, in September 1994, two leaders of the Committee, Salman al-Awda and Safar al- Hawali were arrested together with a large number of their followers, in the city of Burayda, Qasim region. Moreover, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz, issued a fatwa, that unless al-Awda and

al-Hawali, repented their former conduct, they would be banned from lecturing, meetings and cassette-recording.

In the late 1990s Crown Prince Abdullah became *de facto* ruler of the Kingdom, due to the deteriorating health of King Fahd. Abdullah has been perceived as a more pragmatic leader than many other, top-positioned members of the ruling family, the man who well understands challenges facing the Kingdom in modern times. He began to enact reforms to offset economic problems, budgetary deficit and unemployment. He also started to work carefully to defuse the biggest potential threat to al-Saud's legitimacy: educated middle-class Islamists, who for years, with the increased intensity, have loudly been denouncing corruption and demanding a change in the country. For that purpose, he released several radical Sunni fundamentalist prisoners, hoping to calm down existing tensions.

In the aftermath of 9/11:
Further demands for reforms

The attacks on the New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon with hijacked planes on September 11, 2001, had a profound impact on Saudi political scene. Out of 19 hijackers, 15 were Saudis. Then, it occurred that majority of the al-Qaeda soldiers, arrested in Afghanistan and brought to Quantanamo were Saudis. Osama bin Laden used to be a Saudi citizen and his organization was supported by contributions from Saudis. Thus, many people in the West started to believe that Saudis "waged war" against them (Pollack, 2003), that they were "financing the spread of the idea that free societies must be overthrown and totalitarian Wahhabi Islam must be imposed by force"(Barone, 2002). "The country's rulers, its religious beliefs, social customs and educational curricula became targets of many hostile commentary. The Kingdom came to be portrayed as "a breeding ground for terrorism, an anachronistic,

backward country (...) teaching its children to hate the West" (International Crisis Group, 2004: 8). Rohan Gunaratna in his book "Inside al Qaeda" expressed a rather common belief that there have been so many terrorists produced by Saudi Arabia because it is not democratic, and therefore does not represent the people (Gunaratna, 2002).[3] Dore Gold, former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, wrote a book "Hatred's Kingdom. How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism" (Gold, 2003). In such an atmosphere, in November 2003, members of the U.S. Congress went as far as to introduce a draft of the Saudi Arabia Accountability Act, which would impose sanctions on the Kingdom unless the U.S. President certified that Riyadh continued to make maximum effort to fight terrorism. (The legislation eventually went on voting as an amendment to the foreign aid bill requesting to add Saudi Arabia to the list of countries which "have funded terrorists and fostered hatred of the West", and was rejected, 231–191 as the State Department declared that Saudi Arabia had taken actions to disrupt domestic al-Qaeda cells and improved anti-terrorist cooperation with the U.S.) At the same time President Bush announced the new American policy towards the region, admitting that 60 years of supporting dictatorships in the region had not made Americans safe (Kapiszewski, 2004). In the carefully chosen words he also encouraged political reforms in the Kingdom, saying that "by giving the Saudi people a greater role in their own society, the Saudi government can demonstrate true leadership in the region". In another speech he added, with an obvious reference to Saudi Arabia, that a different approach, "suppressing dissent", can only increase radicalism (*Washington Post*, 30 June 2004).

In the wake of a possible Western intervention in Iraq, the action aimed to replace Saddam Hussein's regime with a democratic government, Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Abdullah decided to make a move by himself and called for reforms in Arab states. In January

2003, he proposed his own "Charter to Reform the Arab Stand," which was meant to encourage regional economic development and popular participation in politics. He noted that "internal reform and enhanced political participation are essential steps for the building of Arab capabilities and for providing the conditions for a comprehensive awakening and development of Arab human resources" (*Arab News*, January 16, 2003). Abdullah's plan was briefly discussed at the Arab leaders summit in Cairo in March 2003, devoted generally to the Iraqi problem on the eve of the U.S. military intervention, and later on the Tunis summit, in May 2004 (although Saudi Arabia did not attend it). In general, however, Abdullah's plan did not bring any concrete results.

Accusations of supporting terrorism as well as the U.S. pressure to reform their system enraged many Saudis. They accused the West, the U.S. in particular, of staging a propaganda war against them. They were right at least to some extend. Al Qaida terrorism was as much a threat to them as to the West. Most of them did not hate America, had positive feelings toward the country and only totally rejected Washington's policies in the Middle East. Nevertheless, as their anger could easily turned against Saudi authorities closely cooperating with the U.S. government on various issues, Prince Abdullah met with the *ulama* and warned them against preparing any campaign on the matter.

At the same time some reformists decided to use the tense situation in the region and in the Kingdom itself to intensify pressure for political, social and educational changes. In 2003, they submitted several petitions to the King calling for reforms.

The first one, called "A Vision for the Present and the Future of the Nation", was prepared in January, among others by Abdullah al-Hamed, an Islamist from Riyadh, Mohamed Said Tayyeb, a liberal lawyer from Jeddah and Jaafar al-Shayeb, a Shi'ite activist. It was signed by 104 academics, businessmen, religious scholars and

professionals from various regions and representing different religious and political orientations (Dekmejain, 2003; Russel, 2003a). Staying within the framework of *Sharia*, the signatories called for the convening of an "open national conference" to discuss existing problems, providing the Consultative Council with legislative and control powers and made it an elected body, and for an independent judiciary, freedom of expression and the establishment of civil society institutions. They also requested fair distribution of wealth among different regions and introducing measures to fight corruption, bribery and the abuse of official powers. The petition, despite its non-confrontational tone and respectful language towards the monarchy, essentially suggested the establishment of institutions to curb the power of the ruling family and guarantee popular participation in decision-making, replacing a system with the ruler's absolute power with a constitutional monarchy where power is shared with elected representatives (International Crisis Group, 2004: 14).

The end of April witnessed the second petition, prepared in turn by the Shi'ite community and signed by 450 men and women. It was entitled "Partners in One Nation" to reaffirm the Shi'ite loyalty to the state (often questioned by radical Sunni Islamists). It followed the spirit of the January petition but urged government particularly to end the discrimination of Shi'ites in employment and let them practice their religious rites (Jones, 2003). The petition appealed to put an end to "fanatical sectarian tendencies stimulating hatred", unlawful arrests, the deprivation of the right to travel, etc., as well as a public announcement by country's leaders to respect Shi'ite rights and equality with other citizens. (Shi'ites are often perceived by Wahhabi religious establishment as infidels, and their veneration of saints and shrines, celebration of the prophet Mohammed's birthday and other rituals as sinful).

The Shi'ite petition should be understood in the context of sectarian tensions existing in Saudi Arabia. What has happened

across the border after the beginning of the Iraqi war has an impact on the situation in Saudi Arabia (as well as in other countries with major Shi'ite populations, i.e. Kuwait and Bahrain). Clashes between Shi'ites and U.S. troops in Iraq inspired feelings of solidarity there, while the vision of a future Shi'ite-led government in Baghdad made some people anxious, as such a development could strengthen demands for far-reaching political reforms in Bahrain or in Shi'ite-dominated Eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia. Just before the Iraqi war, on February 3, 2003, an article in the Wall Street Journal, subsequently translated into Arabic and reprinted in the region, suggested that the Shi'ite in Al-Hasa region would be willing to secede from the Kingdom, seeking to re-establish their state in that part of the Peninsula. That was accompanied by rumors that "liberating" the Eastern Province in such a way had in fact became an official U.S. policy (Jones, 2003). To calm down tensions, Prince Abdullah met with the Shi'ite reform group and listened to their complaints, while the nation's most senior religious leader, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah al-Sheikh, declared that accusation of other Muslims, who may obey a different doctrine, of being disbelievers is not permitted under Islam and such an approach "results in murdering innocent people, destroying facilities, disorder, and instability" (Murphy, 2003).

The lack of visible results of the January petition prompted new appeals. In September 2003, more than 300 Saudis (including this time 50 women), Sunnis and Shi'ites from all parts of the Kingdom, signed a petition entitled "In Defense of the Nation". In it they basically repeated the demands from the previous petition but in the view of the emergence of terrorist activity in the Kingdom, openly blamed the existing political restrictions for its development. "Being late in adopting radical reforms and ignoring popular participation in decision-making have been the main reasons that helped the fact that our country reached this dangerous turn, and this is why we

believe that denying the natural rights of the political, cultural and intellectual society to express its opinions has led to the dominance of a certain way of thinking that is unable to dialogue with others... which is what helped create the terrorist and judgmental mind that our country is still plagued with."(www.arabrenewal. com) Moreover, the signatories of the petition criticized "unilateral and judgmental thinking, pretending to hold and monopolize the truth" and called for "nurturing a pluralistic atmosphere that paves the way (...) towards the acceptance of the different."

The Saudi government, to improve its image, organized in October 2003, the international human rights conference, first of its kind in the Kingdom. During the conference, on a call from the dissident, London-based Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, a hundred or so Saudis, men and women, went into the streets of Riyadh in the first in decades large-scale protest in the country. They demanded political, economic and administrative reforms. Saudi police fired warning shots, used tear gas and arrested many demonstrators. Next week, only a heavy police presence thwarted further demonstrations in several cities. As the follow-up of the conference, the quasi-independent National Human Rights Commission was established in March 2004. It was composed of 41 male and female members, headed by Abdullah ibn Saleh Al-Obaid, former secretary-general of the Muslim World League and member of the Consultative Council. It is supposed to monitor the human rights situation in the Kingdom, including violation of women's rights (Ghafour, 2004).

As many reformers who signed the January 2003 petition decided not to sign the September one as too liberal and anti-Islamic, another petition was prepared in December, this time again jointly by a diversified group of Islamists, liberals and Shi'ites. It was titled "An Appeal to the Leadership and the People: Constitutional Reform First". Calling for the implementation of

the reforms outlined in the January petition, the signatories this time went further, demanding adoption of the constitution, which would construct "a modern Arab Islamic state".

"National Dialogue"

A response of the government to petitions of the early 2000s was the organization of broad debates, the so-called "National Dialogue" sessions. The first one, held in Riyadh in June 2003, gathered religious leaders from various Islamic currents and sects: *ulama* from the official religious establishment, popular *salafi* preachers[3], Shi'ites and Sufis. The presence of the last two was of a particular note, as they are not considered brothers in faith by the dominant Wahhabis. The meeting was probably aimed at bringing some Sunni-Shi'ite understanding, the issue of special significance in times of change in neighboring Iraq, where Shi'ites were growing in power (International Crisis Group, 2004: 16).

The second session took place in Mecca in December 2003. Entitled "Extremism and Moderation, a Comprehensive View", it gathered 60 intellectuals, clerics and businesspeople, including 10 women (seated in a different room). Problems with the rise of Islamic militancy as well as various political, social and educational issues were openly discussed at the meeting. The meeting ended in the formulation of 18 recommendations which were later formally presented to Prince Abdullah. They included holding elections for the Consultative Council and local consultative councils, encouraging establishment of trade unions, voluntary associations and other civil society institutions, separating the legislative, executive and judiciary powers, developing new school curricula promoting spirit of tolerance, dialogue and moderation as well as broadening freedom of expression (Al Sharq Al Awsat, January 4, 2004).

The third "National Dialogue" session was held in Medina in June 2004 and was devoted to "Rights and Duties of Women". Although every other of the 70 participants was a woman, the meeting was dominated by conservative men. In effect, controversial topics, like lifting the ban on women drivers, or allowing them to travel without a male guardian, were avoided. This was also why a delegation of women went separately to see Prince Abdullah and submitted to him an alternative set of specific recommendations, which he promised to consider (Al Hayat, 15 and 18 June, 2004). It is worth noting that a few days before the session, a group of nearly 130 religious scholars issued a joint statement asserting that total equality between men and women would contravene Islam. The statement also criticized several Saudi newspapers for being "proponents of Westernization" in relation to women (*Al Quds Al Arabi*, June 9, 2004).

Although in Saudi Arabia's political and cultural environment organization of such sessions was a definitive opening of the authorities to a dialogue with the opposition, the impact of the said sessions should not be overestimated. They were government-sponsored and controlled events, and recommendations adopted by the participants are unlikely to be implemented soon, if at all. Some even believe that the sessions "were essentially gimmicks meant to co-opt critics and project a more acceptable face of the regime to both domestic and international audiences" (International Crisis Group, 2004: 18). In February 2004, 880 participants in the "National Dialogue" meetings along with the petition-writers, frustrated with lack of any signs of reforms, sent Prince Abdullah a letter urging him to announce a timetable for the implementation of the recommendations adopted at the second session (www.arabrenewal.com).

Organizing the "National Dialogue" sessions, meeting with signatories of "memorandums" to discuss their demands and in-

cluding some of them in the "National Dialogue" debates were not the only reactions from the authorities to petitions.

First of all, in general, the government, allowed Saudi dissidents to speak more openly in public 'to let off the steam', and let newspapers publish articles criticizing government (though no criticism of the royal family or publication of the texts of petitions was still allowed). One of the prominent Islamist dissidents, Ahmad al-Tuweijeri, received an appointment to the Consultative Council. Many others have been rewarded with audiences with members of the royal family to air their gripes.

Secondly, the high-ranking officials for the first time began to talk about broadening political participation. That topic used to be taboo among the ruling family (Al-Dakhil, 2004). For example, the Foreign Minister, prince Saud Al-Faisal, remarked that Saudi Arabia "has reached a stage in [its] development that requires expanding political participations," while Prince Turki al-Faisal said that "reforming the Kingdom is not a choice, it is a necessity" (Jones, 2003). Moreover, Prince Sultan bin Abdel Aziz, the minister of defense and a key figure in a ruling family told the Consultative Council, that the country leadership agrees with demands that this body should be developed and given further powers, to 'monitor' and 'supervise' the government in particular.

Finally, in this liberalized mode in the country, also the issue of elections became discussed widely. The Islamist reformer, Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim noted: "It is hard to overestimate the importance of this step in a society where non-interference in politics is considered the condition of good citizenship" (International Crisis Group, 2004: 19). While reformers were demanding elections, many Saudi officials, were afraid of such a move. They believed that this would pose too great a risk to stability of the country and strengthen the hand of radical Islamists. According to some of them "because conformity to strict religious dogma remains

the principal criterion for judging matters public and private (...) political debates could potentially turn into religious clashes", while "the culture of democracy accepts the pluralism of opinions and relativity in all things. How can you reconcile relativity with a society that is governed by religion?" and "democracy right now will produce something very similar to the Taliban" (International Crisis Group, 2004: 19-20).

Municipal elections

In response to internal and external pressures, but in a surprise to many, the government decided to go ahead with some elections, although, facing opposition, only with relatively un-important one to municipal councils (following a well tested pattern in neighboring Bahrain and Qatar). In October 2003 it announced that municipal elections will be held within the next twelve months. In August 2004, the government made crucial decisions about them; first, that only half of the seats would be filled through elections (the remaining were expected to be made of nominated incumbents with the experience to assists the new members), second, that elections in 178 municipalities would be held in three phases: in mid-November, after Ramadan, in Riyadh, and before and after *hajj* in other parts of the country, ending in January 2005. That was to let the authorities take a single step and evaluate the impact of elections before proceeding to the next phase. At the same time the Saudi government depicted the whole process leading to municipal elections as being wholly compatible with Islam. This was an important matter as many Islamists considered the elections un-Islamic. In particular, Osama bin Laden in the message released on December 16, 2004 criticized the elections, noting "it is *haram* (forbidden) to participate in legislative bodies ... because Allah is the only lawgiver"(Henderson, 2005).

Despite such criticism even Islamists participated in elections in large number. In the first round, which took place in the Riyadh region on February 10, 2005, Islamists won and took all of the seven available seats. Only around 140,000 men had registered to vote out of 400,000 eligible voters in the area; 65 per cent of them eventually went to the pools in the capital, while in other districts the turnout often exceeded even 80 per cent (Agence France Press, February 11, 2005). Six hundred and forty-six candidates were on the list. Immediately after the results were announced, many loosing candidates accused the winning seven of illegal formulation of an Islamist alliance, using the backing of Saudi religious establishment to get votes, and breaking election laws for campaigning on the election day. (MacFarquhar, 2005) The winners denied all the allegations. Interestingly enough, the winners used neither ads in the Saudi dailies, nor posters, nor did they set up "discussion tents" where they could meet potential voters, as all loosing candidates did. Instead, they skillfully used Internet and mobile phones (short text messages), the tactic often used by Islamist groupings in the region to promote their ideas.

The situation repeated during the final round of voting on April 21: there was not much interest in elections (*Associated Press*, April 23, 2005). In the Kingdom's commercial capital of Jeddah, only 55,000 men, or 22 percent of the city's eligible voters, registered. Similarly low turnout was observed in Mecca and Medina. Islamist candidates obtained most votes. In Jeddah, the most liberal Saudi city, all the seven winning candidates were those whose names had appeared on what was dubbed the 'golden list' – the picks of prominent conservative religious scholars from among 530 candidates. Five of the six winners in Buraydah, capital of very conservative Qaseem province, had been given a similar clerical support. Islamists won all the seats in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina as well.

Only in the voting which took place on March 3 in eastern regions, in some Shi'ite-majority areas, several non-Islamist were

elected and the turnout was significant (Reuters, March 6, 2005). For example, Shiites swept the board in the town of Qatif and won five out of six seats in Al Hasa. But in the urban centres of Dammam, Dhahran and Al Khobar inhabited by significant Shi'ite population, these were Sunni candidates who won with apparent backing from fundamentalist clerics.

The low turnout was caused by several factors, including restrictions on campaigning, an inexperienced and poorly informed electorate, and the low stakes: voters were choosing only half the seats on city councils: bodies with limited responsibilities anyway. The strong showing of the Islamist candidates was credited to the fact that as non-government political activity is forbidden in the Kingdom, religious gatherings are the only ones allowed and clerics can speak there publicly. Nevertheless, most of the elected Islamists represent the moderate religious stand and many of them are graduates from Western universities.

Establishing the municipality councils through elections has been an innovation for this deeply conservative country used to tribal and extended-family system of politics. Yet since elections to fill out half of the municipal councils went smoothly, it can be expected that elections for the whole municipal councils can be announced in a year or two, then for regional councils, and eventually for the Consultative Council. Some reformers, however, have been afraid that municipal elections were an isolated incident made by the government just to please the outside world and will not be followed by other democratic reforms.

Broadening the scope of reforms

There were other decisions of political nature taken by the Saudi government in the early 2000s. The royal decree of November 29, 2003, enhanced the Consultative Council rights to act as a

partly legislative as opposed to purely advisory body. In particular, individual members were granted authority to propose new legislation and to have more power in disputes with the cabinet. At the same time, it was decided to begin, for the first time, televised coverage of the weekly sessions of the Consultative Council. That became an important decision, as Saudis have a traditional aversion to public debate, preferring to settle matters behind the closed doors instead. The *Shura* members and Saudi intellectual elite welcomed these steps, although they clearly wanted further enhancement of the Council's role, in particular, following the Kuwaiti parliamentarian model, to make it an elective assembly, with power to pass the budget, and to give or withdrew confidence from ministers; their claims included also separation of the office of prime minister from that of the King (International Crisis Group, 2004: 21). In response to such proposals, the Council was further reformed in the spring of 2005: its members were allowed to have access to information on state revenues, discuss the state budget and question ministers. Prince Sultan dismissed, however, calls for an elected Council, saying that voters may choose illiterate and unqualified candidates to it and that the move would not serve national interests. "In some countries there are political parties and elections but the result is nothing, because of their quarrels and conflicts between them" (Reuters, January 26, 2004). As mentioned already, in April 2005, the Council was expanded to 150 members. In May, 210 members of local consultative councils in the Kingdom's 13 administrative regions were appointed by the authorities.

Some reforms were introduced to the judiciary system. A new bill regulating the rights of defendants and suspects before courts and police came into effect, in particular allowing lawyers to present arguments in criminal courts. In February 2004, an international organization – Human Rights Watch, was granted access to the Saudi judicial system, including its prisons. In October 2005, the

Human Rights Commission was granted more rights, including the right to access prisons and detention centers and submit reports directly to the prime minister. The Commission's new president, Turki ibn Khaled Al-Sudairi obtained the rank of a minister (Jabarti and Mubarak, 2005).

Steps were also taken to change the situation of women. In the year 2000, Saudi Arabia finally ratified the UN convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Thanks to the efforts of Prince Abdullah, women were for the first time allowed to present their grievances to the Consultative Council, in particular complaints about their marital status and dowries. A female member of the royal family was appointed Undersecretary at the Ministry of Education – the highest position ever held by a Saudi woman. The government began issuing identity cards to women thus allowing them to be listed as citizens rather than dependents on husband's or father's cards. Responding to long-time popular pressure for reform of the neglected female education, the control of the General Presidency for Girl's Education, run by the religious establishment before, was transferred to the government's Ministry of Education, which added prestige and financial capacities to the education of girls. In May 2003, the Council of Ministers issued a decree allowing women to obtain commercial licenses in their own names, without the need for a male guardian permission. At the same time, the document appealed to government departments and Chamber of Commerce to create more jobs for women. That was especially important as, according to official figures, only about 5 per cent of Saudi working age women were employed.

On the other hand, conservative forces continued to oppose any changes in the status of women. In particular, Saudi women were not allowed to vote or to stand in municipal elections. The officially cited reasons for not allowing women to participate in the elections were of administrative and legislative character and

also the result of the Kingdom's limited experience in conducting elections. They did not stress religious norms or Saudi customs, just created a window of hope for many liberals.[5] Many believe that women may be allowed to vote during the next elections in four years.

Surprisingly, in late November 2004, the government allowed women to participate in the elections for the first time: they were to choose board members of the Saudi chambers of commerce and industry (in the past, men voted on behalf of women members). Nevertheless, only a small number of women used that opportunity (Arab News, December 1, 2004).[6] In September 2005, government for the first time allowed Saudi women to be elected to Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, reserving two places for them. At the same time, however, Saleh bin Humaid, speaker of the Shura Council, stated that talk about women members of the Consultative Council "was premature" (Salil, 2003).

On January 17, 2004, there was an interesting incident at the Jeddah Economic Forum, attended by such personalities as Bill Clinton. The keynote address was given by Lubna Olayan, a leading Saudi business woman, connected to the ruling family. She was introduced by Prince Mohammed Al Faisal, the grandson of King Faisal. Women attending the Forum were separated from their male colleagues by a partition only (i.e. not segregated into a separate room as it has been usually the case). Pictures of Olayan's unveiled face appeared next day in some Saudi newspapers, making her the first Saudi women appearing in such a way in the media.[7] In reaction to that incident, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom's leading religious official appointed by the government, strongly condemned such a behavior. Yet at the same time, Akbaria,· an all-news Saudi TV channel began featuring three non-*muhajaba* · women anchors, and Okaz, a popular Saudi daily ran a photo of them. Another cultural border was crossed.

All of these, in the Saudi context, were significant moves. The government cannot go much further now with granting women more rights as the "women issue" as such is so emotional and symbolic that is always ready to mobilize wide opposition (Gause, 2004: 4).

The Saudi press, to a great extent privately owned, plays an increasingly important role in the political discourse. In last years, newspapers although did not go that far as to publish or discuss any of the reform petitions, but opened their columns to unprecedented criticism of such matters as education (accused of backwardness as well as of not promoting tolerance), poverty, unemployment, drug use or the mistreatment of foreign workers. Some called into question elements of the Wahhabi discourse, suggesting a link between certain attitudes promoted by the religious establishment and the rise of violent extremism (Gause, 2004: 4). A good example of the openness of newspapers was a commentary written on the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks by Rasheed Abu-Alsamh in the Arab News:

> First, we must stop denying that any of the hijackers were Saudis or even Arab. We must also stop saying that the September 11 attacks were a CIA-Zionist plot to make the Arabs and Islam look bad. That is utter nonsense. We must be mature and responsible enough to admit that these sick minds that hatched and perpetrated these dastardly attacks, were, sadly, a product of a twisted viewpoint of our society and our religion ... We must stop the hatred being taught to our children in schools.

Nobody would dare to publish such comments before.

Following the suicide bombings of Western residential compound in Riyadh on May 12, 2003, in which 35 people died, newspapers ran a series of unusually bold editorials on the problems of Saudi society (Blanford, 2003). An extraordinary article was

published by Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador to Washington, in Al-Watan, on June 1, 2004. The Prince recognized the Saudi effort against terrorism as 'feeble', and went on saying that terrorism "has nothing to do with America or Israel or the Christians or Jews... So let us stop these meaningless justifications for what those criminals are doing and let stop blaming others while the problem comes from within us." Elsewhere in the article he noted that the Kingdom's religious scholars "have to declare *jihad* against those deviants and to fully support it, as those who keep silent about the truth are mute devils." The Saudi-owned, but London-based, Asharq al-Awsat followed the line of that argument. Turki al-Hamad wrote in it: "the official clergy in Saudi Arabia denounce violence, but theoretical base of Wahhabism is a problem. It is not enhancing or encouraging violence directly, but if you analyze the creed itself, you will reach these results" (*Time*, 2003).

The religious establishment and those members of the ruling elite who follow their guidance promoted a different viewpoint. According to them, "the perpetrators of these heinous crimes are influenced by ideologies alien to our country and to the nature of our people, who throughout the ages advocated tolerance and coherence" (*Time*, 2003). Prince Mohammed bin Fahd, governor of the Eastern Province and the son of King Fahd, was quoted as saying after the Khobar attacks: "Those militants are the outcome of Guantanamo, Abu Gharib, Sharon and the American policy of the region; they are angry against anything foreign and want to retaliate against anything foreign" (*Time*, 2003). For Muhsen Awaji, a prominent Islamist lawyer, "it was not Wahhabism which produced them, they were the other circumstances in the region"(*Time* 2003). Such views were prevailing among the Saudis. Most of them greatly resent the implication that their religion has any connection to terrorism.

Under such circumstances, broadening the freedom of the press was, of course, possible only because its criticism of certain matters, especially terrorism, coincided with the official viewpoints. But when the un-written boundaries were violated, journalists continued to pay a heavy price. For example, a well-known editor of Al-Watan was dismissed in May 2003 after the newspaper aroused the religious establishment by publishing a series of articles critical of the clerics.

Altogether, the press scored certain victories in recent years. In March 2002, press criticism of behavior of the head of religious institution in charge of girls' education forced him to resign, the first such case in the history of the Kingdom, after the scandal surrounding the death of 15 schoolgirls in a fire in Mecca. In turn, in 2004, the government, approved the establishment of a long-sought Saudi Journalists' Association, an organization aimed to protect the rights of reporters.

Determinants of reforms

The road towards the broadening of political participation in Saudi Arabia is not straight.

First of all, as time has shown, Saudi monarchy is a fairly stable regime, contrary to stereotypical views in the West, where it is frequently seen as an anachronistic system destined to disappear with modernization. Thus, its rulers do not always see the necessity to transform their regime quickly and extensively to stay in power. In the past, they were successful at managing challenges, both liberal and conservative. Moreover, they do not think they need the support of their people to govern; their positions being legitimized by tradition. They also feel secure, given that the United States and other Western countries, despite their occasional rhetoric of criticizing non-democratic regimes, do not like to de-stabilize the

region further after the Iraqi experience and – with few exceptions – continue to be committed to the maintenance of the status quo due to strategic importance of oil the Kingdom posses. In such circumstances, Saudi rulers often perceive the broadening of political participation as another gracious gift they may offer their subjects, rather than an action required to satisfy the vital needs of their population. Only occasionally do they feel pressure for change coming from the West, the al-Qaeda, Shiites or other politicized groups.

Secondly, the royal family has been divided on the issue. Many of its members have totally opposed reforms, especially such proposals as independence of the judiciary, redistribution of wealth or transparency of public finances, as reforms in these areas would seriously jeopardize their socio-economic position in the country (Russel, 2003b). Prince Nayef, the Minister of Interior, when asked about the January 2003 petition remarked: "no to change, yes to development" (Jones, 2003). "Change means changing something that already exists. Whatever exists in the Kingdom is already well-established; however, there is a scope for development – development that does not clash with the principles of the nation." With such an opinion prevalent in the government, it became obvious that at certain moment the authorities must restrict actions of the reformers. It happened in December 2003, when Prince Nayef summoned a group of opposition figures and threatened them with arrest if they continued their activities (*Financial Times*, January 17, 2004). A few weeks later, Crown Prince Abdullah, usually perceived as more open and pragmatic person than the other members of the ruling family, also warned the reformers that "the state will not allow anybody to destroy national unity or disturb the peace of its people under the pretext of reforms [...] We will not leave the security of the nation and the future of its people to the mercy of opportunists, who start with provocation and end with arbitrary demands" (Arab

News, January 15, 2004).[8] In turn, Prince Nayef, the minister of interior, ordered in March 2004 the arrests, trial and imprisonment of 13 reformers including al-Hamed and Tayyeb, who a year earlier were warmly welcomed by Prince Abdullah after submitting to him a reform petition (Yamani, 2005). Ten of them later submitted to Nayef's demand to stop asking for reforms and were released, the remaining three who refused to do so were sentenced to several years of prison. Only when Abdullah became a King, were they pardoned.

On the other hand, some members of the royal family are ready to allow further broadening of political participation. In June 2005, the Crown Prince Abdullah, now the country's King, apparently promised Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to introduce reforms that could give the Kingdom an elected government within 10 to 15 years (Kralev, 2005). Also Prince Talal bin Abdel-Aziz, brother of King Abdullah, and one of the closest people to him, has called to adopt a constitutional kingdom system similar to those of Jordan, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and, in particular, give the Shura Council privileges to question and supervise the executive power and issue electoral laws (*Al Quds Al Arabi*, 29 August, 2005). It appears that King Abdullah considers nominating Prince Talal to the position of second deputy prime minister, i.e. the third in line to the throne. Talal insists, however, to get this post only through ballots.

Whatever the current or predominant mode in the royal family is, the government does not have much flexibility in terms of reforms. As it is engaged in a fight against extremists who accuse it of deviation from the path of Islam, the regime cannot afford to jeopardize its relations with religious forces that also oppose violence, justify its legitimacy and are supported by the majority of conservative Saudi society. These forces strongly oppose certain reforms, and in particular any dialogue with various groups and elections. The domestic pro-reform movement and external pressures

do not seem to be strong enough to enforce far-reaching changes. The old age of the rulers and problems with succession additionally limit the potential for change. Only some young new leaders, who may replace old rulers of Saudi Arabia in the not so distant future, may speed up reforms, similarly to recent developments in Qatar and Bahrain.

Then, it needs to be emphasized that, at least to some extent, the issue of reforms in Saudi Arabia is not so much between those who want them and those who do not. The problem hinges on the kind of reforms that different groups want. Here, the key issue (and disagreement) are the relations between reforms and secular modernity. A large part of the Saudi religious establishment, in the tradition of the conservative reformist, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, believes that modernization comes only at the cost of secularization and for that reason must be rejected. Some reformers believe however, that it is possible to have modernization without secularization and therefore call for enhancing political participation, greater transparency, rights for women, etc., claiming at the same time that it can be done within the framework of their conservative, Islamic values. Yet, as nobody talks about secularization of public life, Western type of political reforms are very unlikely. Pessimists go even further. "No matter what happens in Saudi Arabia, whether the insurgents actually unseat the ruling family, or the Sauds manage to accommodate the militants, there will be no 'liberal reform' in the Kingdom for a long time", wrote Lee Smith (Smith, 2004). "In all likelihood, that country is going to become even more conservative."

It is difficult for the royal family to move against the Islamists. After the Islamic militants took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979 and held hundreds of pilgrims hostage, to avoid similar occurrences in future, the authorities decided to accommodate the Islamists. "The royal family handed over education, the courts and

cultural affairs to the imams. Many of the rigid features of modern Saudi life: no women on television, no music in any media, an overdose of religion in schools, stores closed during prayer times, increased powers for the religious police were passed in the early 1980s" (Zakaria, 2004). Now the authorities are afraid that if they take on the religious establishment, "the imams will stop preaching about infidels and start talking about royal family decadence".

The radical Islamists are generally against reforms. They are afraid that reforms may de-Islamize the Kingdom. A good example of that attitude was a statement released by 156 Salafi scholars and judges in December 2003 (and released on 1 January, 2004), protesting against the educational reform, meaning mostly a deletion of material offensive to Christians and Jews (Reuters, 3 January, 2004). They accused the government of capitulating to American pressure on the matter and called teachers and parents to oppose the new curriculum.

Nevertheless, there is an agreement between moderate Islamists and secular modernists that what Saudi Arabia needs are some political, economic and social reforms. According to these factions, these could "head off the collision between the two extremes – Bin Laden's Islam and George Bush's America – that could ultimately destroy it" (*The Guardian*, 14 May, 2003) The trouble is that the terrorist attacks in the Kingdom make significant reforms unlikely because the regime is afraid to make any moves which could potentially destabilize the situation even further. On the other hand, terror makes reforms more necessary, because it has been causing exodus of the now dramatically targeted foreign nationals, which results in the drying up of foreign investment, and can – in consequence – bring worsening of the socio-economic situation, which in turn can further help to breed the militants.

What also weakens the chances for substantial reforms is that those who stand for them are mostly intellectuals and academics

– not a strong political force in the Saudi society. The Saudis at large, maybe except of the Shiite population, so far do not look for major political reforms themselves, being worried that change could negatively affect their socio-economic situation. They have generally been satisfied with what they get from the government, and even the existing extensive controls the regimes exercise over them do not dispose them negatively to their rulers. Even the demands of many opposition groups have only called for reforms, not for revolution: the opposition has wished to improve the operation of the existing regime, not to overthrow it (Baghat, 1998; Al-Dakhil, 2003). The middle class – usually the main reformist, pro-democracy grouping in other parts of the world – has little reason to support the downfall of the monarchy. The business community at large is not generally against reforms, which, if implemented, can give it a greater say in the economy of the liberalized country. At the same time, however, businessmen are often unwilling to get actively involved in the reform movement because of their dependence of the government and risk of losing the privileges they already possess. Similarly, the military and majority of tribal sheiks, large beneficiaries of the existing regimes, usually strongly support the rulers. So far, there has been no "revolutionary proletariat"; in future, only a growing number of young, unemployed school graduates may lead to the establishment of such a group. Last but definitely not least, most people lack political awareness; the civil society, the ultimate source of political change, is in the very preliminary stage of development. The majority of the Saudi people are not politically mature to the extent that as long as the government is not bothering them, they are going to go along with it; revolutionary change being therefore not inevitable.

On the other hand, there are many factors which can further enhance the broadening of political representation and the "democratization drive".

First, the phenomenon which can speed up the process is the Saudi changing society. In probably the first, relatively independent opinion pool on the matter conducted in the latter half of 2003, 85 per cent of respondents thought that political reform would be beneficial for the country, 90 per cent wanted to grant more rights to women, and fewer than 59 per cent supported the official clergy (Obaid, 2004).[9] Unemployment was the most pressing concern for respondents (80 per cent), while political reforms, corruption, education, or religious extremism did not exceed 10 per cent. Somewhat contradictory, only 12 per cent of respondents had a positive view of liberal reformers, probably because they associated them only with the writing of inefficient petitions.

Second, the economic situation can have a significant impact on the democratization process. In not so distant past, Saudi Arabia was earning far less than it used to during the oil bonanza three decades earlier. While the state was still relatively rich, it was running budget deficit, borrowed nationally and internationally, and had to turn to expense cutting. Moreover, while until recently many services had been free, the government began to charge their citizens for them, and even considered introducing income taxes. Should citizens be obliged to pay for the running of the state, the state will be forced to open up to their scrutiny. "No taxation, no representation" rule would than change. The situation has altered, however, with very high oil prices dominating the market since 2004. The increased revenues considerably improved the economic situation of the Kingdom, thus giving government a chance not to introduce certain reforms, at least in the near future. There are some analysts, however, who recommend the contrary. They believe that the moment is just right to introduce further reforms taking advantage of widespread public support for the new King and very good economic situation. (High oil prices have increased revenues in the world's biggest oil producer to over $150 billion in 2005 from $106 billion a year

earlier; the Saudi stock market has grown almost six-fold in the past three years, etc.) But for serious political reforms to take place, the royal family should be willing to give up some of their rights and privileges, which will be a difficult task to accomplish.

Another factor that can influence the change is the Saudi population: not only is it growing at a rate that makes the maintenance of so generous welfare states problematic, but it is also becoming more literate, educated and urban: features that are characteristic for other societies that, in similar conditions, have usually experienced a political upheaval leading to democratization.

Finally, events in the neighboring states: Egypt, Iran, Yemen, and the new Iraq, which all have more political representation of citizens in the process of governance and conduct general elections, indirectly influence also people's thinking across the borders; mostly through media reports but also through their citizens living in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

Democratization is always a long lasting process. One can foresee future developments, which can lead towards that goal, but there are also many obstacles which can slow it down, or even reverse. One can agree with the opinion of Hassan Hamdan al-Alkim that "although democracy may not be realized within the coming decade, it is acquiring a significant importance in the GCC states political life. Thus, its realization becomes a matter of time" (Al-Alkim, 1996). A thought that, however, should always be taken into account, is that democratization may not immediately produce more peaceful and stable regime. The political reforms can weaken it, or even de-stabilize countries. The opposition forces are to a large extent rooted in Islamic fundamentalism, which, if coming to power through otherwise praised democratic elections, can turn the political system

into one even more authoritarian. Political reforms introduced so far in Saudi Arabia can be the first steps of the long way towards the creation of a democratic constitutional monarchy. At the moment, however, many of them are but a reconfiguration of the existing authoritarian regime. The current problem is whether Saudi Arabia can afford a lengthy debate on its reforms. Many believe that the rapid pace of globalization risks leaving the Kingdom behind the rest of the world unless it accelerates the pace of change (Blanford, 2003). Saudi Arabian author, Turki al-Hamad, remarked that "ten, twenty years ago, we had the luxury of time. We could choose the kind of reform pace we wanted. Now, we either reform quickly or collapse" (*Associated Press*, 9 February, 2003).

References

Al-Alkim, H. H. (1996) 'The Prospect of Democracy in the GCC Countries', *Critique. Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, 9 (Fall).

Al-Dakhil, K. (2003) 'Saudi Arabia's Reform Movement: A Historical Glimpse', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 16 October.

Al-Dakhil, K. (2004) '2003: Saudi Arabia's Year of Reform', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 16 March.

Al-Raheed, M. (2002) *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge: The University Press.

Al Quds Al Arabi, 'Constitutional Reform in Saudi Arabia' (2005), 29 August.

Associated Press, 'Women Shut Up of Upcoming Saudi Vote' (2004), 12 October.

Baghat. G. (1998) 'The Gulf Monarchies: Economic and Political Challenges at the End of the Century', *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, 2.

Barone, M. (2002) 'Our Enemies the Saudis', *U.S. News and World Report*, 6 March.

Blanford, N. (2003) 'Reformist Impulse in Saudi Arabia Suffers Setback', *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 June.

Dekmejain, R. (2003) 'The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Journal*, 3.

Doran, M. S. (2004) 'The Saudi Paradox', *Foreign Affairs*, 83 (1).

Economist Intelligence Unit S pecial Report, 'The Dynamics of Democracy in the Middle East' (2005), London.

Freedom in the World 2002–2003 (2003), New York: Freedom House.

Gause III, F. G. (1994) Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press.

Gause III, F. G. (2004) 'Saudi Arabia at a Crossroads? Notes from a Recent Visit', *Strategic Insights*, vol. III (February).

Gause III, F. G. (2005) 'Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?', *Foreign Affairs*, 84 (6).

Ghafour, A. (2004) 'First Independent Human Rights Organization Established', *Arab News*, 3 March.

Gold, D. (2003), *Hatred's Kingdom. How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism*, Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

Guardian, 'Kingdom Threatened by Collision of Worlds' (2003), 14 May.

Gunaratna, R. (2002), *Inside al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Henderson, S. (2005) 'Saudi Municipal Elections: Royal Caution and Citizen Apathy', Policy Watch # 937, 3 January.

International Crisis Group Middle East Report (2004) 'Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?' Cairo/Brussels, p. 6.

Jabarti, S. and E. Mubarak (2005) 'New Rights Body Gets More Powers', *Arab News*, 7 October.

Jahel, S. (1998) 'A Parliament According to *Sharia*', *Arabies Trends*, (April).

Jones, T. (2003) 'Social Contract for Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Report*, 228.

Kapiszewski, A. (2004) 'Democracy Promotion in the Arab Word: The Bush Agenda', *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, 3: 65–92.

Kostiner, J. (1997) 'State, Islam and Opposition in Saudi Arabia: The Post Desert Storm phase', *MERIA Journal. Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 2.

Kostiner, J. and J. Teitelbaum (2000), 'State-formation and the Saudi Monarchy', in: J. Kostiner: *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*. Dulles, VA: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Kralev, N. (2005) 'Abdullah Sees Elected Leaders Within 15 Years', *The Washington Times*, 19 August.

Kramer, G. (2000) 'Good Counsel to the King: The Islamist Opposition in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco', in: J. Kostiner: *Middle East Monarchies*.

MacFarquhar, N. (2004) 'The Saudis Fight Terror, But Not Those Who Wage It', *New York Times*, 6 June.

MacFarquhar, N. (2005) 'Some Saudi Candidates Claim Election Violations', *New York Times*, 14 February.

Murphy, K. (2003) 'Saudi Shi'ites Take Hope From Changes Next Door', *Los Angeles Times*, 8 May.

Obaid, N. (2004) 'What the Saudi Public Really Thinks?', *Daily Star*, 23 June.

Pollack, J. (2003), 'Anti-Americanism in Contemporary Saudi Arabia', *MERIA Journal. Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 4.

Russel, J. A. (2003a) 'Political and Economic Transition on the

Arabian Peninsula: Perils and Prospects', *Strategic Insights*, (May).

Russel, J. A. (2003b) 'In Defense of the Nation": Terror and Reform in Saudi Arabia', *Strategic Insights*, (October).

Salih, R. M. (2003) 'No Role for Women in Saudi Council', *Aljazeera*, 27 October.

Singh, K. G. (2004) 'America's Democracy Initiative in Middle East', South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 1052. Available at http://www.saag.org.

Smith, L. (2004) 'The Saudi Civil War. Who Is Fighting? Who Will Win?', *Slate*, 18 June.

Teitelbaum, J. (2000) *Holier Than Thou. Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition*. Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Time, 'The Saudis. Whose Side Are They On In the War on Terror' (2003), 15 September.

Yamani, Y. (2005) 'How to Make Violence Inevitable in Saudi Arabia', *Daily Star*, 2 June.

Zakaria, F. (2004) 'The Saudi Trap', *Newsweek*, 28 June.

Notes

[1] In 2005, out of 150 members, 108 held doctorate degrees.

[2] The Committee publications from England referred to the Saudi rulers as „pharaohs" and non-Islamic, while the regime as „as a mix of a mutilated form of Islam combined with tribalism and feudalism", which "has even degenerated into a form of Mafia-like family rule".

[3] F. Gregory Gause III noted, however, that there is "no solid empirical evidence for a strong link between democracy, or other regime type, and terrorism, in either a positive or negative directions." (Gause, 2005).

[4] *Salafis* is the termed used commonly in Saudi Arabia for the orthodox Islamists, that have been termed "Wahhabis" in the West.

[5] The reasons cited by the government were: lack of women to run

women's only registration centers and polling stations as well as the fact that only a fraction of Saudi women have the photo identity cards needed to vote. Moreover, a Saudi law prohibits men and women to work together – a major problems if a woman became a council member.

[6] Apparently. only 46 women out of 2,750 women members in the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry participated in the elections; Arab News, 1 December, 2004.

[7] Earlier only pictures of non-Saudi women could appear in the media.

[8] There is quite a disagreement among Saudi experts about divisions in the royal family into 'pro-reformers' and 'conservationists'. See Russel, 2003b and Doran, 2004.

[9] The survey was conducted by the independent Saudi National Security Assessment Projects. See Obaid, 2004.

The Iraqi elections and their consequences. Power-sharing, a key to the country's political future

On January 30, 2005 the Iraqi people voted in three elections: for a country's parliament (Transitional National Assembly), for 18 district councils and, for voters in the three semi-autonomous Kurdish provinces in the north, for an Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly. The most important for the future of Iraq were, of course, elections for the National Assembly.

Last January was not the first time Iraq witnessed elections. The Hashemite monarchy, which ruled Iraq from 1921 until 1958, adopted a British-style parliamentary system. Opposition parties existed and participated in elections. Further, during Saddam Hussein's rule elections were also organized, but as Hussein was the only candidate, they were in reality a referendum on his leadership. Thus, Iraq has no experience with democratic elections in the contemporary period, a reality that makes the events of earlier this year even more significant and worthy of analysis.

Electoral rules

The rules for the 2005 elections were decided by the Iraqi Transitional Administrative Law ("The interim constitution"), enacted in March

2004, when the U.S.–led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was running Iraq. The elections were organized by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, established by the CPA. U.N. election specialists provided legal and technical expertise.

With respect to voting rules, an Iraqi citizen of at least 18 years of age could cast ballots. Voters for the Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly had to provide proof of residence in one of the Iraq's three northern provinces. The database from the U.N.'s Oil-for Food Program was used to prepare the voter registration lists. This induced some problems, however, for instance with regard to the more than 200,000 residents of al-Falluja who were displaced during the U.S. offensive. Some complications with preparing voters' lists occurred also in the Kurdish areas.

To run in the elections, a political entity had to provide a petition in support of its participation signed by at least 500 eligible voters. It had to submit the names of at least twelve candidates, one third of whom had to be women (given the goal of having the National Assembly consist of twenty-five percent women). In order to run in the elections, a candidate had to be more than thirty years of age, have at least secondary school education, and not be a member of the armed forces. A candidate was also required to meet certain criteria regarding past affiliations and have a certain type of background. In particular, any Ba'th Party members could not be senior members of that party, and had to renounce their Ba'th Party membership and disavow all past links. Further, a candidate could not be a member of the "former agencies of repression," could not have participated in the persecution of the Iraqis, must not have enriched himself or herself in an "illegitimate manner", and must not have been convicted of a crime involving "moral turpitude." Candidates were required to have a "good reputation" (whatever that might mean).

Participation in the elections on the part of political groupings. Security problems

The lead-up to the elections was fraught with violence and security problems. On January 18, for instance, two candidates from the Iraqi National Accord were killed in Basra, and the following day, a candidate for the Constitutional Monarchy Movement was killed in Baghdad. Some female candidates were also attacked. What is more, Electoral Commission employees were the target of threats, harassment and violence by insurgents. On December 19, 2004 in central Baghdad, for instance, a gunman shot three Commission employees. One important ramification of this violence was that political parties and individual candidates had little ability to prepare for the contest, and few opportunities to campaign. Very few groups had public meetings before the elections and most did not release the names of the candidates on their lists before voting day (except for the prominent individuals on the top of their lists).

Views on the election held by Iraqi political groups, as well as their willingness to participate, varied widely. In general, Shiites and Kurds wanted to take part in the elections, knowing they would emerge with power. In contrast, many Sunnis, knowing that the elections would ultimately result in the loss of the beneficial position they had enjoyed for decades under the British and Saddam Hussein regimes, decided to boycott the elections. Doing so provided them with an excuse to subsequently question the credibility of the election results. In particular, the influential Muslim Scholars Association, an alliance of some 3,000 Sunni clerics, called for an election boycott to protest the U.S. occupation of Iraq in general, and the November 2004 assault of on Falluja in particular. The moderate Iraqi Islamic Party, the main Sunni faction in the postwar government, withdrew from the election, citing security concerns. Iraq's interim President Ghazi al Yawir and Adnan Pachachi, head

of the Independent Democrats, both Sunnis, several times called for the postponement of the elections due to the dramatic instability that Iraq was experiencing.

Further, Kurdish political parties also threatened to boycott the elections to protest the fact that Kurdish residents who had been expelled from Kirkuk during Saddam Hussein's "Arabization" program in the 1980's and 1990's were forbidden to vote in the provincial elections. They decided to participate in the election only when the Electoral Commission finally allowed them to vote locally for the al-Tamim provincial government. Arab and Turkmen leaders in Kirkuk, fearing that this decision might give Kurds the upper hand in the debate about the future of the area, condemned it and considered boycotting the elections as well.

Finally, radical Islamic groups, such as the al-Qaeda linked Ansar al-Sunna, had warned that the elections were "farcical and un-Islamic" and threatened to punish those who participated.

On the other hand, the leading Shi'ite cleric, Grand Aytollah Ali al-Sistani, issued an edict that called voting a "religious duty similar to prayers and fasting", and stated that abstention from voting "constitutes disobedience of God Almighty". Sistani and his faction believed that successful elections would be the best way to bring the U.S. occupation of Iraq to an end.

Election results

In the elections, Iraqis voted for 111 entities: Nine multiparty coalitions, 66 single parties and 36 individuals.

The main Shiite political parties, including the Islamic Da'wa Party and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), supported by Ayatollah al-Sistani, formed a coalition called the United Iraqi Alliance and presented voters with a list of 228 of their candidates for parliamentary seats. The leaders of these

parties, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim from the SCIRI and Ibrahim al-Jafari from the Da'wa Party held the top positions on that list. Ahmad Chalabi's secular Iraqi National Accord, an umbrella organization of diverse opposition groups (including Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis) also joined the alliance.

The main Kurdish parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan ran on a joint ticket, called the Kurdish list. Other multiparty coalitions included the Iraqi Independent Block led by Ghassan al-Attiya, and the Arab Democratic Front. Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and his party, the Iraqi National Front, presented a 240-candidate coalition list. Iraq's Interim President Ghazi al-Yawir and his Iraqi Grouping ran an 80-person slate. Other single party lists included those presented by the Constitutional Monarchy Movement, the Iraqi Communist Party, the Iraqi Turkmen Front, and the Islamic Party. Finally, while most Sunni parties did not participate in the elections, some influential individual Sunni candidates did, most notably Adnan Pachachi.

According to the official results, 8,456,266 Iraqis cast their ballots, a total that represents 58 percent of the registered electorate of more than 14 million people. The International Organization for Migration arranged for ex-patriot Iraqis to cast their ballots in some 14 countries.

The elections were monitored by a number of Iraqi organizations. Foreign observers were not present in large numbers due to security concerns, and many tried to monitor the contest from neighboring Jordan. The elections were generally considered fair. Nevertheless, the release of the final results was delayed for some days because of complaints of some electoral irregularities.

Iraqis voted largely along sectarian and ethnic lines, with all the secular parties having far less success than their religious counterparts. The United Iraqi Alliance received 48.2 percent of

the vote which translated into 140 seats in the parliament; the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan received 25.7 percent of the vote and was consequently awarded 75 seats in the assembly; and the Iraqi List obtained 13.8 percent of the vote and thus won 40 seats. The remaining 20 seats in the parliament were divided among nine other parties, which together received 12.3 percent of the vote.

The Shiite United Iraqi Alliance was unquestionably the winner, finally translating its demographic weight into political power after decades under the Sunni rule. Nonetheless, it failed to achieve the absolute majority that many had predicted.

Kurds swept into second place, thanks to the Sunni boycott, obtaining a higher percentage of votes than one might have expected given the Kurdish share of the Iraqi population (estimated below 20 percent). They secured a major parliamentary presence and top government jobs, after decades of struggle against successive Sunni regimes. One of the main reasons for their success was that Massud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party, and Jalal Talabani, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, were able to put aside years of rivalry in the interest of combining forces on a joint ticket, which facilitated Kurdish success in the contest. In the disputed oil city of Kirkuk, Kurds won an absolute victory in local polls.

With the United Iraqi Alliance mustering less than 50 percent of the vote, and the Allawi-led Iraqi List coming in a distant third place, the Kurds became a powerbroker in national politics as a potential bridge between Shiite religious parties and secular Arabs.

Sunnis largely boycotted the polls. In the Sunni-dominated Anbar province, only two percent of eligible voters cast their ballots, and in Nineveh province, containing the flash-point city of Mosul, only 17 percent voted.

Views on the elections

The elections were generally a success. Most importantly, they represented a triumph of courage for the Iraqis who went to the polls despite insurgents' threats and violence. Further, they were a victory for the coalition forces, mostly the U.S. troops, and for the Iraqi police and military, who succeeded in controlling the situation in the country. They were also a success for the United Nations experts and the members of the Iraqi Electoral Commission who managed to organize the event despite all of the problems they faced. Finally, the elections signified a win for the Bush administration, which was happy to be able to show the world that at least one of the stated goals of the invasion of Iraqi – bringing the democratic process to the country – was fulfilled. (Indeed, the success of the elections positively affected President Bush's approval rating in the U.S.)

There were, however, many who criticized the elections, in particular, many of Iraq's Sunnis, and anti-American Arabs in the region. Several Islamist commentators in the media accused the US government of using the elections to legitimize the system it imposed on the Iraqi people. Al Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri called the elections as a "sham". Most of the neighboring states have been profoundly ambivalent about, if not hostile to, a successful democratic experiment in Iraq, either because they are concerned about the effect on it on their own citizens, or because they fear the emergence of another Shiite dominated neighbor (a problem for Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain, states with significant Shiite population, often opposing the existing regimes) and/or autonomous or quasi-independent Kurdistan (a major problem for Turkey, but also for Iran and Syria, all with large population of Kurds). Some shared the view that former president of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev expressed publicly – that the elections were futile: "I don't think these elections will be of any use. They may even have

a negative impact on the country. Democracy cannot be imposed or strengthened with guns and tanks."[1]

In turn, a well known U.S. political analyst, Marina Ottaway, wrote that such elections could never be considered "a triumph of democracy".[2] According to her, "never have elections been held under such difficult conditions, with a level of violence so high that the country had to be locked down for several days in order for the vote to be held." She also expressed the view that, as Iraqis had voted along sectarian lines, the results could only strengthen conflicts and tear the country apart. She believed that elections were grossly premature. "They were held before major actors had reached any agreement about – indeed before they had even started discussing – the principles that should underlie the future political system of Iraq. And elections without broad agreement about basic issues, experience shows, are dangerous. They deepen rifts. They create winners and losers, making winners more arrogant and losers more resentful."

Post-election dynamics: the formation of the new government

Although such pessimism may eventually prove founded, the first weeks after the elections led towards inter-party agreements rather than new conflicts. Such agreements were necessary as the interim constitution requires a two-thirds majority in the parliament to elect the presidential council (composed of the president and his two deputies).[3] Given the election results, such a majority could only be produced through the formation of a coalition of the Shiite United Iraqi Alliance and the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of the Kurdistan.

Further, all key politicians in these parties have sought means to integrate Sunnis (with no presence in the parliament) into the

political process, knowing that otherwise there is no chance for stability in the country. Sunnis, Iraq's second-largest community, were alienated by the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime and the concomitant loss of the power they had possessed since the establishment of the country; they are widely believed to support the continuing insurgency. Thus, a gentleman's agreement of the kind functioning for years in Lebanon is being struck through the creation of an extra-official formula to guarantee proper representation of the three main groups, and to minimize conflict among them.[4]

On April 3, after lengthy negotiations, the National Assembly voted to appoint a speaker and two deputy speakers, taking the first step, though a largely symbolic one, toward installing a new government. Hajim M. al-Hassani, a prominent Sunni Arab and the Minister of Industry in the old interim government was elected speaker of the parliament, while Hussain al-Shahristani, a nuclear physicist and leading Shiite Arab, and Arab Taifur, a Kurd, became his two deputies. The speaker of the assembly is a high profile but largely ceremonial post. Nevertheless, to elect a Sunni to such a position was an important gesture and required support of rival groups.

Hassani has a doctorate from the University of Connecticut and lived in Los Angeles for 12 years. He became a member of the interim government as a member of the Iraqi Islamic Party, a religious Sunni group rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood movement. When his party decided to stop supporting the interim government after the American assault on Falluja, Hassani , who supported U.S. goals and strategy in Iraq, left the party (but remained in the government). Thus, he may not be the ideal person to try to persuade disillusioned Sunni Arabs to resist the insurgency and support the new government.

On April 6, the parliament elected Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as the country's new Interim President. Shiite Adel Abdul-Mahdi

(the Finance Minister), and Sunni Arab Ghazi al-Yawer (a former Interim President) were elected to the Vice Presidential posts. The three, were agreed upon in inter-party negotiations and no other candidates were proposed. Although the presidential post is much less important than that of prime minister, Talabani's appointment was a major political victory for Iraq's Kurdish community, which was discriminated against for decades and suffered greatly under Saddam Hussein. Further, it was the first time that a non-Arab became the head of the Arab-majority country.

Talabani, a leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (one of the two major Kurdish parties) is one of the longest-serving figures in Iraqi Kurdish politics. He is a shrewd politician with a history of changing alliances. Ghazi al-Yawer is a leader of the powerful Shammar tribe. A Georgetown University graduate and long time Saudi Arabia–based businessman, al-Yawer had few noticeable achievements while serving as Iraq's Interim President. Adel Abdul Mahdi is an Islamist who fled Iraq in 1960, escaping the death penalty to which he was condemned for his political activities. He has a Ph.D. in economics from France and his four children hold French nationality. He is one of the leaders of the SCIRI. He hoped to become prime minister (the most important position in the country) but failed to obtain enough support.

Talabani's presidential appointment in Baghdad made room for his long-time foe, Kurdistan Democratic Party chief Massoud Barzani, to head an autonomous government in Kurdistan, diminishing possibility for further leadership conflicts between the two.

On April 7, the Presidential Council, shortly after being sworn in, appointed Shiite leader Ibrahim Jaafari as the Prime Minister of the country's new interim government.

Jafari, a 58-year-old physician, has been one of the leading figures in the Islamic Da'awa Party. That party, one of the oldest Shiite Islamist movements in Iraq, fought a bloody campaign

against Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1970s. When the rebellion was crushed, Jaafari went into exile, first in Iran and then in Great Britain. After returning to Iraq after the fall of Saddam, he was appointed to the mainly ceremonial role of vice-president in the US-appointed interim regime. Nevertheless, he quickly became Iraq's most popular politician; an opinion poll in 2004 suggested Jaafari was third behind Ayatollah al-Sistani and radical cleric Moqtada Sadr in the public's esteem.

Nonetheless, it is not completely clear, where Jaafari stands on key Iraqi issues, in particular what role religion should play in the country. When the Iraqi interim government was drafting its basic law, he was one of the champions of Islam as the only source of legislation. Consequently, some of his opponents accuse him of being secretly linked to Iranian hardliners and fear he may now push for a similar theologically-based system of government. So far, however, there are no signs of that. Despite his soft-spoken diplomatic charm, he does not appeal to all, especially to those Iraqis who never accepted the US-appointed interim administrators, and to the so-called outsiders, people who spent the harsh years of Saddam Hussein's rule abroad. In his acceptance speech in the parliament, Jaafari expressed his hopes that sectarian conflicts would not dominate the Iraqi scene in the following months, pledged that he would try to bring Sunni Arabs into the democratic process after their widespread absence from polling stations, and stated that he would aim to satisfy the Kurds' thirst for autonomy without endangering the integrity of the country.

In an interesting developments, the former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi coalition, the Iraqi National Accord, predicted earlier to become a main opposition party in the parliament, decided to join the government. The inclusion of the secular Shiite politicians in the Iraqi government may help assuage Sunni fears about a cabinet dominated by Islamist Shiite Muslims.

The challenges ahead

With the appointment of the prime minister, the complex process of selecting the first democratic authorities in Iraq has drawn to a close. Nonetheless, this transitional government faces extremely difficult tasks: the drafting of a permanent Iraqi constitution by the quickly approaching mid-August deadline; its approval by more than 50 percent of the voters in a referendum in October 2005; and the holding of final elections to parliament in December (that is, elections based on the constitution drafted and approved by the Iraqis, not by any occupation authority). Moreover, according to the still-valid interim constitution, the permanent constitution will fail if rejected by two-thirds of the voters of any three provinces. Kurds and Sunnis have such a majority, which could potentially be directed to reject the new charter, in "their" three provinces.

In spite of the election, the U.S. retains a major behind-the-scenes role, not only through direct links to many key Iraqi political players, but also because all parties realize that, at least in the foreseeable future, only American troops are able to provide even minimum security in the country. Further, most are aware that, without political support from Washington, Iraq will be unable to obtain necessary economic assistance from the international financial community (for example new loans or the reduction of old debts).

In the coming months two issues will be of crucial importance for the newly elected Iraqi parliament: working out the federal system of the country and defining the role of religion in the state.[5]

While many mainstream Iraqi politicians agree that a decentralized government is needed, they disagree about how much autonomy can be awarded to Kurds without jeopardizing the integrity of the country. The two dominant Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan,

call for a confederation between an Iraqi Kurdistan and an Arab Iraq. They would like recognition in the new constitution that Iraq is made up of separate Arab and Kurdish nations, and guarantees that Kurds will have complete autonomy (implying a great deal of authority for the Kurdish regional government). Kurds en masse go even further: they overwhelmingly support complete independence. During the January elections, an informal referendum was held in Kurdistan confirming general support for the idea. Of course the Arab majority in the country and several minority groups in the Kurdish north resist such an arrangement. The newly emerging Shiite majority in particular wants to govern a unified Iraq and will consequently seek to avoid such a division of the country. The Shiites and Sunnis also oppose other Kurdish demands, such as the proposition that 25 percent of Iraq's oil revenues be allocated to Kurds, that Kurds be given veto power in parliament, and that they be allowed to keep their strong militia, the peshmerga. (The last request would make it impossible to disband other militias, like the Mehdi Aramy of Muqtada al-Sadr or the Sadr Brigade of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim).

The Kurds would also like to enlarge the territory they control to include Kirkuk and some surrounding areas, which they claim have a Kurdish majority. Other Iraqis, however, point out that Kirkuk is also home to a large number of Turkomans, Christians, and Arabs. Moreover, whoever ends up representing the Iraqi Arabs in Baghdad (both Shiites and Sunnis) will not give up that province easily because of its economically valuable and strategically important oil fields, refineries and pipelines. (In fact, negotiations to elect new Iraqi authorities were prolonged because of disagreements about who – Shiite or Sunni – will get the oil ministry).

There are also other problems with creating a federalist Iraq. For such a system to work, strong local governments that reflect each province's religious and ethnic composition must be established.[6]

However, strong inter-group conflicts have begun to emerge in many provinces since the elections, weakening local governments. Moreover, deputies to the National Assembly do not represent specific districts or provinces as they were chosen in a nationwide ballot.

A second major debate in the parliament and in the country in the months to come will probably center on the role of Sharia (Islamic law) in the newly organized state. While it may be that few Iraqis want a theocratic country of the Iranian type with clerics governing, as noted above, Ayatollah al-Sistani stated right after the elections that Sharia must be the only source for the constitution and all laws in Iraq, and warned against the danger of changing the Iraqi identity by separating religion and politics.[7] The key Shiite parties in the winning United Iraqi Alliance (the SCIRI and Da'wa) will push in that direction. The secular forces among the Kurds and some Western educated Sunnis and Shiites in the parliament, however, may try to achieve a compromise. They may get support from women deputies, who compose about one-third of the legislature, and may be worried about the islamization of the law and in particular about the effect the introduction of Sharia laws would have on family law.

Only reaching some compromise on these issues will guarantee the support of different groups within the Iraqi political class needed to ratify the constitution. Achieving that consensus would require the revival of a lost sense of Iraqi identity, and a commitment to rebuild their torn country. Many doubt that such trust cooperation among groups – and perhaps within them – is currently a possibility.

The key for the success of democracy, or indeed any political process in Iraq, is the stability of the country. Nonetheless, to date, insurgents, local and foreign, continue their attacks on Iraqi and American forces as well as on Iraqi government officials. Despite expectations to the contrary, violence did not diminish after the

elections. The insurgents know that the emergence of any strong Iraqi government will further limit their potential for action, and as most of them are Sunnis, their interest in destabilizing the new Shiite-dominated government is even greater. Thus, they continue to fight hard against the emerging authorities. At the same time, Iraqi citizens are growing increasingly frustrated because of continuing high levels of unemployment, slow progress at rebuilding destroyed infrastructure and continued power outages and water shortages. The newly elected government must quickly and successfully deal with all these problems, or Iraq may face civil war on a large scale.

Notes

[1] Interfax News Agency, January 31, 2005.

[2] Marina Ottaway, "Iraq: Without consensus, democracy is not the answer", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief, February 2005.

[3] Once formed, the presidential council proposes the prime minister and the cabinet; the vote of confidence to approve these appointments requires only a simple majority to pass

[4] Sami Moubayed, " A gentleman's agreement in Iraq", *Asia Times*, April 5, 2005. The Iraqi situation resembles the National Pact established in Lebanon in 1943, giving the presidency to the Maronites, the premiership to the Sunnis and the job of the speaker of parliament to the Shiites.

[5] Phebe Marr, "After the Iraqi Elections: High Stakes", Carnegie Arab Reform Bulletin, February 2005.

[6] Edmund Sanders, "Power struggles stall Iraqi provincial councils", *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 2005.

[7] Quoted after Ottaway: „Iraq". Earlier, Ayatollah al-Sistani rejected the interim constitution on that ground, because of its secularism.

Iran's new revolution?
President Ahmadinejad
and the power struggle in Tehran

Presidential elections 2005

On June 24, 2005, in the second round of voting, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a hard-line Islamist was elected new president of Iran. His victory was unexpected. A rather little-known person defeated Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, "an icon of the Islamic Republic", a two-term president of the country (1989–1997), earlier speaker of the parliament (1980–1989). Ahmadinejad won by impressive 62 percent of the vote, with Rafsanjani taking only 36 percent. Turnout was very high at 59 percent.

However unknown, Ahmadinejad represented the Islamic Republic's model of an ideal layperson. He has gained all the necessary credentials to be trusted with a leadership job: participation in Islamic associations, serving in the military, fighting in the Iraq war, being a governor of the Ardebil province, advisor to the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and mayor of the capital, achieving the title of science university professor, and a man living a simple Muslim life. He was a member of the ideological Revolutionary Guards, the paramilitary Basiji as well as a leader of the Abadgaran (Developers of Islamic Iran) movement, comprised of younger

hardliners who feel that their elders and clerical establishment have lost revolutionary fervor. Voters perceived him as a young man (he was 49 years of age) running against an old one (Rafsanjani was 71), an outsider worth trying after more than twenty-four years of clerical rule.[1]

Such election result should have been anticipated. First, no expected changes were brought by the pro-democracy reform movement that emerged with the election of President Mohammad Khatami in 1997 and was reinforced successively in the 1999 municipal elections, the 2000 parliamentary election, and the 2001 presidential election (when Khatami was reelected). In effect, large groups of Iranians became disillusioned with Khatami's politics and thought it was worthwhile trying to return to the old revolutionary ideals. This is why in the 2003 municipal elections and the 2004 parliamentary elections conservatives scored an impressive victory and a similar result could be expected in the 2005 presidential race.

Secondly, Ahmadinejad's opponent, Rafsanjani, was a controversial figure. On one hand, he was perceived as moderate reformer who once initiated some economic changes and tended to support centrist factions. On the other hand, he was often associated with much of the corruption and human rights abuse which occurred during his terms in office. In effect, his 1989 and 1993 election victories were not impressive; moreover, when he decided to re-enter politics, taking part in the 2000 parliamentary election, he even suffered a humiliating defeat. Nor could he appeal to poor Iranians, being himself a very rich businessman and having a son, Mehdi Hashemi, linked to bribery scandals. Thus, Rafsanjani was not a candidate whose merits could have easily challenged any conservative candidate.

Ahmenidejad and Rafsanjani were the only two contenders in the second round of voting, and by the way, it was the first time in Iran's history that presidential elections did not end in the first round.

The conduct of elections held certain features existing in free countries. For example, it included lively public campaigning by candidates. The winner could not be predicted in advance: a rather unusual phenomenon in elections taking place in Middle Eastern states. But the elections were, of course, not truly free. The outcome was to a large extend predetermined by the Council of Guardians who allowed only eight candidates (of whom seven eventually ran) to be put on ballot out of over 1,000 who were eager to enter the race. Those approved were the ones deemed sufficiently loyal by the regime. Among those disqualified was Mostafa Moin, former cabinet member, supported by leading reformist parties: Islamic Iran Participation Front and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution; Ibrahim Yazdi, the respected leader of the banned Liberation Movement of Iran, and all female candidates. Moin's disqualification caused a great public outcry leading Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to instruct the Council to reinstate Moin (and a lesser-known reformist candidate, Mohsen Mehralizadeh). The reformist camp was also represented by Hojjatolislam Mehdi Karrubi, former speaker of parliament, supported by Militant Clerics Association. In turn, the conservative camp was represented by Ali Larijani, a former head of Iran's state-controlled radio and television monopoly; Mohsen Qalibaf, a former general and police chief; and Ahmadinejad. There was also the centrist Rafsanjani. Several other well-known public figures planned to participate in election but for various reasons dropped out from the race at an earlier stage. Among them was Ali Akbar Velayati, a former foreign minister, who resigned when Rafsanjani himself decided to run.

The first-round took place on June 17. Turnout was high: 63 percent. There was no clear winner. Rafsanjani won that round but only with 21 percent of the vote. The biggest surprise was that Ahmadinejad came in second with 19 percent of the vote, followed by Karrubi with 17 percent, and Qalibaf and Moin each

taking 14 percent. Larijani and Mehralizadeh took only 6 and 4 percent, respectively. Four percent of the ballots were declared invalid. These figures indicated that the Iranian electorate was highly polarized, as 35 percent favored reformist candidates and 39 percent voted for conservative candidates. It was a significant change from the height of the Khatami era, when over 50 percent of the electorate supported reformists and only some 20 percent supported conservatives. Nevertheless, the election might have had a very different outcome if the reformists had nominated an attractive candidate (e.g. Mir Hossein Musavi, a former prime minister), had their vote not been split among several candidates, or if Rafsanjani had not run.[2] Moreover, the election results could have been influenced by President George W. Bush, who a few days before the first round of voting criticized the election process as not fulfilling requirements of democracy. In doing so, Bush probably wanted to strengthen the reformist candidates but his comments backfired. It simply angered many Iranians, earlier ready to boycott the elections. In result they might have decided to change their plans and gone to polls in defiance of Bush's statement. Many of them voted for more radical candidates, especially Ahmadinejad. West would have preferred Rafsanjani's victory, believing that he will be more inclined to improve relations with Western governments, a very important issue in times of the growing power of conservatives in Iran, tensions related to Teheran's nuclear program and Shiite victory in the Iraqi elections. Among Iranians, however, there was a widespread opposition to Rafsanjani, being accused during the campaign for amassing a large fortune and committing various irregularities.

Ahmadinejad scored a decisive victory in the second round. His populist campaign, stressing the necessity to fight social inequalities and mass corruption, believed to emerge during the years of Rafsanjani or reformist Khatami, was a success. Ahmadinejad was

presenting himself as a simple, deeply religious man who would guarantee the return to principles of the Islamic revolution, improve the situation of the poor, and not look for compromises with the West. That gave him large number of votes from people of different social strata, not only from the poor.

The reformists focused mainly on promoting modernity, democracy and human rights but their poor showing in the election indicated that these issues were not a high priority for most Iranians. In turn, Ahmadinejad's victory meant that many Iranians opposed socio-cultural liberalization which had occurred in the country during Khatami's years, like gender mixing and more relaxation in women dresses.

After the voting, statements were made that the election was a fraud. Karrubi, who was just two percent behind Ahmadinejad, declared that security forces had illegally called to vote for Ahmadinejad, intimidated voters at polling stations, used false identity cards to increase ballots, and even bribed voters. Interior Minister, Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari, confirmed those accusations, suggested that some votes were bought and a "smear campaign" was waged, clearly implying that hard-line conservatives tried to manipulate the vote in favor of Ahmadinejad. On the day before the second round, the ministry of the interior arrested 26 people for election violations. Moin and other reformists warned against the emergence of "fascism". Nevertheless, the conservative Guardian Council, as expected, found no evidence of irregularities. In protest, Karrubi resigned from his positions on the powerful Expediency Council, of an advisor to Khamenei, and a leader of the Militant Clerics Association. While it is possible that the organized vote by the Basiji, the Pasdaran, and other organs controlled by the conservatives, helped Ahmadinejad gain enough votes on 17 June to reach the run-off, in the second round he won by such a large margin that electoral manipulation could not have a decisive impact on the results.

Ahmadinejad's election was a great success of Iran's Abadgaran neo-conservative movement. In the past two decades they slowly gained positions of power on different levels of government and now managed to elect one of its leaders a president of the Republic. (One has to remember, however, that in Iran's political system, presidency is a very visible but not a very powerful position. With the *veleyat-e-faiqih* constitutional provision, for example Khatami during his two terms in office was unable to implement most of reforms because of lack of acceptance from the Supreme Leader and other sources of power.)

Ahmadinejad's victory signaled the fact that the reformists' appeals did not attract people's mind much any more. Their talk of political reform, human rights and civil society had done little to solve such problems as high unemployment or inflation. Reformers realized too late that they worked "behind close doors" and did not get their messages across. Only now, Mostafa Moin, the candidate of the reformist Islamic Participation Party, along with members of the Iran Freedom Movement (of religious nationalists) announced the formation of the new Front for Democracy and Human Rights and a plan to engage in more "grassroots" work. Another failed reformist candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, has also unveiled plans for establishing a new National Trust Party as well as a satellite TV channel to promote its ideas.[3]

Ahmadinejad's politics

As A. Savyon noted, Ahmadinejad's win in Iran's presidential elections signaled the coming of the "Second Islamic Revolution."[4] "Ahmadinejad's public addresses attest to his religious commitment to the messianic ideas of the Shi'a, and to the profound belief in the historic existential struggle between two civilizations, Islam and the West – in which Islam is bound to triumph. He perceives these

principles as guidelines that his government and Iran should strive to realize." According to the president,: "The people, in the last elections, proved their faith in the Revolution, and wish to see a revival of the Islamic Revolution's ideals... This revolution was in fact a continuation of the Prophets' movement and, therefore, all political, economic, and cultural goals of the country need to be directed at materializing the Islamic ideals." He added, "Followers of this divine school of Islamic thought are doing their best to pave the way for the urgent reappearance [of the Hidden Imam]... It is our obligation to direct people back to those glorious ideals and to lead the way in the establishment of an exemplary, powerful and progressive Islamic society. Iran must emerge as the most powerful, most advanced country."[5]

Ahmadinejad first step after becoming president was to forbid the display of his portrait in public. The second step was to construct his Cabinet.

The proposed Cabinet has been young, like himself, and several of its members served, as he had, in the Revolutionary Guard.[6] The basis of selection seems to be not practical competence but ideological commitment and political loyalty. The most controversial appointments were for the posts of Interior Minister and Intelligence Minister. Mostafa Pourmohammadi, who became the Interior Minister, served as deputy intelligence minister during a series of killings of political dissidents that were linked to that ministry in the late 1990s, while the new Intelligence Minister, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejehei, acted as the judiciary's representative to the ministry at that time. Both are clerics with a record of questionable human-rights efforts. Ahmadinejad's foreign affairs team, led by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Manouchehr Mottaki and the re-appointed Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani are both considered hardliners. The new Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance, Mohammad Hossein Saffar-Harandi, served as the

ultraconservative editor of the *Kayhan* daily newspaper. His rule may likely translate to more newspaper closures as well as a rigorous monitoring of cultural activities at large. In turn, in what many find a contrast to his own views, Ahmadinejad entrusted the economy to a free-marketeer, Davoud Danesh-Jafari.

During his term in office Ahmadinejad will most probably focus on domestic issues. Thanks to high oil prices he should be able to fulfill promises from his presidential campaign, which included low-interest loans for the people in need and increased subsidization of basic consumer goods. Indeed, one of the first acts of Ahmadinejad's government was to set up a $1.3 billion fund to help young people trying to get married. Another large package to lower unemployment is on the table, and the president wants to double teacher salaries. In general, leveling inequalities in wealth, and creating more opportunities for the poor top the government's agenda.

What will be helping the new president is the economic situation of the country. It is not bad, to say the least. In the past five years Iran has experienced growth at 5.5 percent per year; the GDP per capita has doubled. U.S. sanctions have created problems, but the regime has used second-tier technologies from the east (from such countries as China, India, and Malaysia) to meet consumer expectations. On the other hand, the President faces difficult tasks: he will have to fight high inflation, budget deficit, large corruption, inefficient bureaucracy, and wastefulness of state subsidies. There is also a question about country's further development as Iran's oil production may drop under Ahmadinejad unfriendly approach towards foreign investors. In such a situation it was not unexpected that the stock market went down considerably since Ahmadinejad's election (by 30% in mid-November).

On the socio-cultural front, Ahmadinejad will likely carry out at least token crackdowns on dress-code violations and gender-

mixing, expand religious education in schools and strengthen media and art control. There will be more policing of decency, seeking to curtail what its agents perceive as "moral laxity". In general, the government will probably be "tough on the elite and soft on the masses". In one of its first announcements, the Minister of Culture criticized the former pro-reform government of failing to protect Islamic values and employing literary censors that lacked the "will" to block offending texts. Thus, he decided to replace many of the ministry's employees.

Iran's relations with the West are likely to deteriorate further. Ahmadinejad's attitude toward U.S. and Israel is clear: he said publicly on October 26, 2005, that he would be happy if Israel were wiped out from the map and the U.S. destroyed[7] (moreover, he apparently stepped on a picture of an American flag on his way to vote[8]). So, he will probably put forward more aggressive policies and tougher negotiating tactics.

One of the first foreign policy decisions by Ahmadinejad was rejection of a European Union proposal on the nuclear issue (August 2005) and recommencement of uranium enrichment. The EU proposal ruled out enriching uranium and reprocessing plutonium, recommended allowing Iran to purchase nuclear fuel and send it elsewhere for disposal, and called for a continuation of Iran's voluntary suspension of uranium-conversion activities.

The international community thought that Ahmadinejad would present a counterproposal while addressing the UN General Assembly on September 17th. However, Ahmadinejad instead aired grievances relating to events that took place more than half a century ago; discussed "a conspiracy theory" about the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, and accused the United States that its policies helped to create Al Qaeda. He spoke of the need for increased Third World representation in international bodies, decried Western countries double standards, and insisted that Iran

has the right to pursue peaceful nuclear energy activities, calling attempts to deprive it of that right a sort of "apartheid". Moreover, Ahmadinejad called for a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East and offered a "serious partnership" with other countries' private and public sectors implementing uranium-enrichment programs. The speech was interpreted by most Western leaders and the press as very confrontational and even at home it was perceived as detrimental to Iran's nuclear negotiating position.

As a consequence of Iran's behavior, the IAEA governing board issued a resolution calling on Tehran to be more cooperative and transparent, and hinting that referral to the UN Security Council (which can easily mean introducing sanctions) could be next.

Iran's policymakers, across the political spectrum, want Iran to be perceived as a regional power.[9] Ahmadinejad himself has stressed that the world must deal with Iran as an equal. Iranian people also feel a sense of victimization. The Iran–Iraq war was a formative experience for Ahmadinejad. International treaties banning the use of chemical weapons did not protect Iran from Saddam Hussein's gas attacks. Moreover, Washington openly supported Iraq, a fact well remembered by Ahmadinejad and his generation. U.S. sanctions have reinforced the sense of victimization. In addition, Iranian elites believe that throughout the modern era Iran has been manipulated by the West; they still remember the overthrow of nationalist Prime Minister Mossadeq in 1953 by the CIA and restoration of the shah.

These beliefs reinforce a sense of constant insecurity. Both the United States and Israel are perceived as existential threats to the Islamic Republic. Possession of nuclear bombs by its eastern neighburs, Pakistan and India, also worries Iran. In this context, one should try to understand Iran's approach to the nuclear issue. For majority of Iranians, especially the elites and the parliament, the

acquisition of a nuclear fuel cycle that provides a deterrent against potential attackers is a way to country's security and respect from the international community. They believe that Iran has a right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to develop civilian nuclear power and question why the West is not allowing Iran to do what other countries (as e.g. Brazil) are permitted. No one in Iran wants to give up its legitimate rights without any sort of guarantees or benefits in return.

Power struggle among Iran's political forces

Ahmadinejad's plans in foreign as well as internal policy, may not fully materialize. Like any Iranian president, he is constrained by a complex and consensual foreign policy decision-making process. What has occurred already, Ahmadinejad and his supporters face strong opposition in the country not only, as expected, from the reformists, but also, to a surprise of many, from several right-wing centers of powers and many ayatollahs.

The first signal of problems for the new president came from the parliament which did not approve all Ahmadinejad's candidates for Cabinet ministers. Four of them, including the one for the important oil ministry were rejected. As much as parliament is now a hardliner, Ahmadinejad's Pasdaran are not a majority in it.

Then, in October came the decision by Khamenei altering the country's power structure by granting the Expediency Council new authority to supervise the executive, legislative, and judiciary powers, and also to originate top-down decision-making. The Council, an appointive body, was previously only empowered to settle disputes between the parliament and the Guardian Council – another, more influential appointive body – and to advise the Supreme Leader. In even a more surprising move, Khamenei made Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani the president of the Council.

Thus, the person who lost the election to Ahmadinejad received at supervision over the administration put in place by the winner, President Ahmadinejad.

The expansion of the Expediency Council's power was widely viewed as an effort to balance the rise of hard-liners in the Iranian politics.[10] Ahmadinejad and the fundamentalist militaristic faction begun to pose an increasing threat to the position of veteran's of the Islamic Revolution and to the economic power that they have accumulated over the years and "veterans" decided to counteract. Others saw in this action Khamenei's gesture intended to restore some prestige to Rafsanjani who played a key role in elevating Khamenei to the position of supreme religious leader after the 1989 death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. According to some sources, however, the Supreme Leader was forced to make such a decision by the Judiciary System chief Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi and Council of Experts head Ali Meshkini.[11] These ayatollahs apparently came to Khamenei with a demand to fire Ahmadinejad, after the latter demanded that they produce financial reports on what was being done in their institutions. Khamenei rejected that demand. However, when the ayatollahs threatened to depose Khamenei himself, he agreed to an alternative move – empowering Rafsanjani over Ahmadinejad.

One of Rafsanjani's first decisions was to appoint the outgoing president, Mohammad Khatami – identified with the reform-seekers – senior advisor to the council. Rafsanjani, also began to criticize Ahmadinejad's foreign policy actions, in particular his speech at the United Nations General assembly on September 17, 2005, and lack of expertise and finesse of president's experts, especially ones dealing with nuclear energy issues.[12] Then, he attacked president for damaging "national unity and solidarity" and for "trying to remove and isolate invaluable individuals and efficient managers"[13] (for

example, in November Ahmadinejad decided to replace of 40 out of 70 ambassadors, including some of Iran's most seasoned diplomats, dozens of deputy ministers and fired seven managing-directors of state banks as well the heads of the state insurance and privatisation organisations). Also Khatami voiced concern that Ahmadinejad was exceeding his powers removing from the government large number of experts.

These developments indicate that there is serious concern among political establishment in Iran that some of Ahmadinejad's actions have been too radical, in a sense that he has put Iran under an unnecessary scrutiny and criticism by foreign institutions and that perhaps his rhetoric is ill-serving some of the regime's more practical, rational needs.[14]

Ahmadinejad's main enemy at the moment can be found inside the country. As Alexander Adler rightly pointed out, calls to wipe out Israel and to break immediately relations with all the Muslim states that have hitherto recognized Israel, suggest that the president wants to become involved in dispute not only with Iran's reformers but also with the theocratic structure initially established to counter Khatami's liberalism (there has been an agreement between people like Rafsanjani and Khameni to have Iran cooperate with such countries as Egypt, Jordan or Turkey, which all have good relations with Israel).[15] Now this structure has begun to clash with Ahmadinejad's fundamentalist and militant Islamism. As William O. Beeman recently wrote "The clerics have discovered that they have a tiger by the tail. Mr. Ahmadinejad may be dedicated to their eradication.... He has rejected both the reformist politics of President Khatami, and the establishment Islamic leadership of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei".[16]

In a response of a kind, some sources close to the president begun to spread the information that a secret committee has been

formed by Ahmadinezhad's opponents with the aim of toppling the government. Apparently it has been supported by some political groups and newspapers. The information about "a secret committee" was probably only a propaganda but it only confirmed that a serious power struggle in the upper echelons of the regime is underway. The traditional tensions on the reformist-conservatives axis have shifted to the right and is concentrated between "the reformist right" and the fundamentalist-militaristic conservative group. In the first one Rafsanjani, Shahroudi and Meshkini, heads of powerful non-elected (or only partially elected) institutions of power play key role, while Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi, and on members of the security establishment, particularly the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij, and the intelligence apparatuses, lead the other (this group controls the office of the president and have large representation in the parliament).

Ayatollah Khameni, trying to balance internal powers, stated first that there were certain "irregularities' in the government actions, which should not be tolerated, but later went to defend Ahmadinejad. He said that he "heard unjust criticism of the government and the president" and that "the government must be supported".[17] Paradoxically, Ahmadinejad's victory in the election did not strengthen Khameni position as the Supreme Leader; in contrary, it intensified the power struggle in the country which has weakened the ayatollah.

At the same time, Iranians are extremely nationalistic and would not accept any foreign-inspired change. Some despise the current regime for its corruption and repression, but Western pressure or military attack will only rally them around the government.

A short-distance future of Iran is difficult to predict. Some believe that the Iranian revolution begins anew.[18] Other are more cautious. Certain change is naturally inevitable in Iran but will Ahmadinejad and

his Pasdaran be able to change the constitution and make the country less theocratic, or will they leave the religious establishment intact and pursue more hard-line foreign and cultural policies, only with the improvement of economic position of the poor? Or maybe more moderate conservatives will manage to impeach him in the parliament? On the other hand, will Ayatollah Khatami survive, or be removed from his office of the Supreme Leader? Only time will allow to answer these questions. One of the main problem now is, however, that internal struggle in Iran complicate even more the very difficult talks between Tehran and the West over the country's nuclear program.

Notes

[1] Ali Akbar Mahdi, "Iran's reformers: a future that works", www.OpenDemocracy.org, July 14, 2005.

[2] Mark Gasiorowski, "The Causes and Consequences of Iran's June 2005 Presidential Election", *Strategic Insights*, 8, (August 2005), www.ccc.nps.navy.mil.

[3] Kupchan: "Iranian Beliefs and Realities".

[4] A. Savyon, "The Second Islamic Revolution in Iran: Power Struggle at the Top", MEMRI, no. 253, November 17, 2005, http://memri.org

[5] Quoted after Savyon, ibid.

[6] "A gloomy new government", *The Economist*, September 1, 2005.

[7] Bernard's Gwertzman interview with Ray Takeyh, an Iranian expert, "Iran's New President Largely Indifferent to What Outside World Thinks", November 10, 2005, http://www.cfr.org/publication/9199/takeyh.html.

[8] Barry Rubin, "Relations with Iran have just heated up", *Daily Star*, July 5, 2005.

[9] Clifford Kupchan, "Iranian Beliefs and Realities", *National Interest*, Fall 2005.

[10] Karl Vick, "Iran Moves to Curb Hard-Liners. Power Given to Relatively Moderate Body Led by Rafsanjani", Washington Post Foreign Service, October 8, 2005.

[11] Savyon: "The Second Islamic Revolution in Iran".

[12] Bill Samii, "Iran: New President's Diplomacy Sparks Controversy", October 11, 2005; http://www.rferl.org/.

[13] Gareth Smyth, "Iran's former president hits out at Ahmadi-Nejad", *Financial Times*, November 16, 2005.

[14] Takeyh: "Iran's New President" .

[15] Alexander Adler, "What does Ahmadinejad want?", *Le Figaro*, November 3, 2005.

[16] William O. Beeman, "The Revolution Begins Anew in Iran", November 8, 2005. http://www.agenceglobal.com/Article.asp?Id=705

[17] Agence France Presse (AFP) "Iran supreme leader defends president", November 15, 2005

[18] Beeman: "The Revolution Begins Anew in Iran".

Arab vs. Asian migrant workers in the GCC countries

A difficult economic situation of many Arab and South East Asian countries in the last few decades has made labor emigration an attractive option for citizens of these states (Al-Najjar, 2001; Abella, 1995).* Such emigration has generally been supported by the governments of these countries to ease the pressure on labor markets, reduce unemployment, and accelerate development. The migration of the workforce has become one of the most dynamic economic factors in the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries; remittances from migrant labor back to these states exceed the value of regional trade in goods as well as official capital flows (Nassar and Ghoneim, 2002; Fergany, 2001). Similarly, the migrations to the Gulf states speed up the development of certain regions of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines or Indonesia (Amjad, 1989; Eelens et al., 1992).

One of the largest markets for Arab and Asian job seekers has been that of the Gulf states: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman: members of the 1981-established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Since the discovery of oil,

---

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference "Transnational Migration: Foreign Labor and Its Impact in the Gulf", June 20–25, 2005, Bellagio Center, Italy.

these countries, lacking a local workforce, have been employing a large expatriate labor force. That process has had a very significant impact on the economy, politics, and the social structure of the GCC states. It has allowed for a rapid development of these countries, but at the same time involved them in various foreign affairs developments and brought a number of negative cultural and socio-economic consequences. Although foreigners in the GCC states have not created problems of the magnitude of those found in other immigrant countries of the world, different economic and political interests of governments and individuals have brought numerous tensions and conflicts, which intensified in the post 9/11 era.

This paper analyzes the population dilemmas of the GCC states as well as the economic and political determinants of the labor policies. In particular, such issues as the heterogeneity of the local populations, the national composition of the foreign workforce, the segmentation of the labor market and the localization of the workforce are discussed.

Divided populations: nationals vs. expatriates

Since the discovery of oil political entities of the Persian Gulf have transformed themselves from desert sheikhdoms into modern states. This process has been accompanied by a rapid population growth. The population in the current GCC states has grown more than eight times during 50 years; to be exact, from 4 million in 1950 to 40 million in 2006, which marks one of the highest rates of the population growth in the world. This increase has not been caused primarily by a natural growth of indigenous population but by the influx of foreign workers. The employment of large numbers of foreigners has been a structural imperative in these countries, as the oil-related development depends upon the importation of foreign technologies and requires knowledge and skills alien to the local

Arab population. In consequence, unlike in Western Europe, where foreign workers have only complemented the national workforce, usually by filling lower-status jobs, in the GCC states they have become the primary, dominant labor force in most sectors of the economy and the government bureaucracy. The percentage of foreigners in the GCC populations has systematically been growing over the last decades, increasing from 31 percent in 1975 to over 38 in the mid-1990s, leveling, and diminishing slightly at the beginning of the 2000s, to only grew again lately.[a] Towards the end of 2004, the year of the latest relatively reliable statistics, the GCC states were inhabited by 12.5 million foreigners, who constituted 37 percent of the total population (Table 1). In Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait, foreigners constituted a majority; in the United Arab Emirates they accounted for over 80 percent of population. Only Oman and Saudi Arabia managed to maintain a relatively low proportion of foreigners: about 20 and 27 percent, respectively.

The dominance of foreigners has even been more pronounced in the workforce than in the total population. Non-nationals constituted a majority of the labor force in all the GCC countries, with the average for the year 2004 being close to 70 percent. The lowest rates were recorded in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, but even there expatriates constituted above 50 and 65 percent of the workforce, accordingly; in Kuwait 82 percent of the workforce were foreign, in Qatar almost 90 percent, and in the UAE: 90 percent (Gulf Cooperation Council, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Fasano and Goyal, 2004; Girgis, 2002).

This development has posed security, economic, social and cultural threats to the local population (see below). As a consequence, to maintain a highly privileged position of the nationals, numerous restrictions have been imposed: the sponsorship system, the rotational system of expatriate labor to limit the duration of foreigners' stay, curbs on the naturalization and the citizenship

rights of those who have been naturalized, etc. However, many of these measures have not brought the expected results, especially, the planned rotation of the workforce has proved impossible to achieve. The free market economy has been more powerful than the policies the authorities have been eager to implement. The majority of expatriates have stayed beyond the term of the original contract as employers usually prefer to keep workers who have already gained some local experience rather than bring in the new ones. Moreover, importing a new worker involves additional costs to employers. As a result, the average period of time that foreign workers spend in the GCC countries continues to extend, and the number of 'almost permanent' foreign workers has increased, albeit not formally.

Table 1. Population of the GCC states, 2004 and latest (2005–2006) estimates

	Nationals	%	Expatriates	%	Total	Current total
Bahrain	438,209	62.0	268,951	38.0	707,160	707,160
Kuwait	943,000	35.6	1,707,000	64.4	2,650,000	*2,992,000*
Oman	2,325,812	80.1	577,293	19.9	2,903,105	*3,102,000*
Qatar	*223,209*	*30.0*	*520,820*	*70.0*	744,029	*855,000*
Saudi Arabia	16,529,302	72.9	6,144,236	27.1	22,673,538	*27,020,000*
UAE	722,000	19.0	3,278,000	81.0	4,000,000	*4,700,000*
GCC	*21,184,323*	*62.9*	*12,486,349*	*37.1*	*33,677,832*	*39,376,160*

Source: Publications of the government agencies of the GCC states for mid- or end 2004. See also: quarterly reports of the *Economist Intelligence Unit* (London). Numbers in italics are rough estimates due to the lack of official data.

Notes: Various government agencies often present different data. The preliminary results of the Saudi Arabia 2004 Census, presented above,

contradicts other reports. For example, in May 2004 the Saudi Labor Minister said, that there are about 8.8 million expatriates in the Kingdom. Other reports suggested that the total Saudi population in 2005 crossed 27 million, with some 20 million expatriates and 7,0 million nationals. In turn, in May 2005 the UAE Ministry of Labor announced that at the end of 2004 the population of the Emirates reached 4.33 million and is expected to reach 5 million by the end of 2005. Some reports suggest that the total Omani population exceeded 3.2 million already in 2004.

What makes the situation more difficult is the fact that that the exceptionally favorable situation which the nationals have enjoyed for decades has started to change.[2] A growing number of them have experienced difficulties in finding the kind of employment they have been looking for. The public sector, in which most nationals used to find employment, has already become saturated, while the private sector has remained too competitive for the great majority of them.[3] As the unemployment among nationals began to grow, which was a phenomenon unheard of in the past, the GCC governments decided to embark on the formulation of labor market strategies to improve this situation, to create sufficient employment opportunities for nationals, and to limit the dependence on the expatriate labor (the so-called localization, nationalization or indigenization of labor, depending on the country referred to as: Saudization, Omanization, Emiratization, etc.).

A number of measures have been proposed to achieve these objectives: some professions have been reserved as 'for nationals only', the employment quotas for nationals and expatriates have been introduced in certain professions, wage subsidies and state retirement plans for nationals in the private sector were established parallel to fees and charges on the foreign labor to make it less competitive (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 201–250). Private companies meeting quota requirements have been rewarded in public tenders.

Moreover, large efforts have been made to improve the education and training of nationals. Nevertheless, all these measures have so far brought only limited results. Only the public sector has become successfully nationalized. In the private sector, the localization is still very low. In 2004, in Kuwait out of total workforce of 850,000 in the private sector, Kuwaitis accounted for only 1.8 percent, i.e. ca. 16,000 (Jassen, 2004). In general, in Qatar, Oman and the UAE there were around 10 percent of nationals in the workforce; in Bahrain 27 percent, and only in Saudi Arabia in excess of 30 percent (Fasano and Goyal, 2004). The unsuccessful nationalization attempts have been caused by the fact that employment in the private sector is usually unattractive for nationals. The salaries it offers are usually low, working hours long, and the work environment, with its competitiveness and the need to recognize an expatriate supervisor – difficult to accept. Moreover, working in the private sector, unlike in the public sector, is sometimes perceived as debasing the nationals' social status. Another problem is that nationals are culturally disinclined to enter low-skilled posts while, at the same time, the educational systems are not properly prepared to deal with the problem of reorienting traditional work values. Finally, a forceful approach to localization, like the quota system, has encountered strong opposition from local businessmen, as potentially harmful, and adversely affecting productivity and profitability of firms.

Women in the workforce

In the GCC states there has been another very important determinant of the situation in the labor market, namely the participation of women. In general, that participation has been limited due to religious norms and tradition (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 101–119). In Saudi Arabia, the law even forbids women to work

in the presence of men, and in effect women amount to only some 10 percent of the Saudi labor force.[4] Nevertheless, the improving education of women, the existing economic needs and changing attitudes to their work outside homes in the society at large are among the factors that have recently increased national women's participation in the workforce. Their presence in the labor market created a possibility to replace some foreign workers. Just the act of granting Saudi women the right to drive cars alone should result in removing around one hundred thousand foreign drivers from the labor force.

The issue of female employment poses a dilemma for the authorities: some would like to promote it but are often anxious to do so, as moves in that direction may strengthen radical anti-government Islamic forces that oppose the emancipation of women. These movements are especially strong in Saudi Arabia but their power is also growing in Kuwait and Bahrain. Yet, in recent years, the rulers of many GCC states have made a number of symbolic gestures to support women's position in the society: in Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates they have nominated a number of national women to ministerial positions. In Oman, Bahrain and Qatar they have allowed them to participate in local elections, in Kuwait they will be able to do so in next election, even in Saudi Arabia they have been allowed to participate in the election to the Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

The majority of women in the GCC workforce are foreign (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 107–109). Their ratio has varied: in the UAE, over 80 percent employed women have been expatriate, while in Bahrain only some 55 percent. In turn, national women has constituted between 2–10 percent of the total national workforce, while expatriate women between 10–25 percent of the expatriate workforce. Most of the expatriate women have been Asian domestic workers.

Arabs vs. Asians.
De-Arabization of the labor market

Another problem which has developed in the labor market has been its controversial national make-up.

For historical, political and economic reasons, people of various nationalities have traditionally searched for work in the GCC states. The composition of these foreign populations has been changing with time.

At the beginning of the oil era, the majority of the workforce migrating to the lower Gulf countries came from the poor neighboring Arab states. The largest groups among them were Yemenis and Egyptians looking for better employment opportunities, particularly in Saudi Arabia. There were also traditional local migrant laborers from the peninsula, Omanis in particular, who looked for jobs in more developed neighboring states. In various times, other Arabs used to arrive in the Gulf states, compelled to leave their home countries as a result of the domestic political situation. There were Palestinians, who began emigrating to the Gulf very early, after the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and the occupation of Palestine, some Iraqis, following the 1968 Ba'ath party coup in Baghdad, and Yemenis after the civil wars in their country. For years, many Indian, Pakistani, and Iranian traders and laborers used to go to the Gulf as a result of their long-time ties that their countries had maintained with the region (developed especially during the British presence in the Indian subcontinent). A new phase in the migration started with the post-1973 economic boom. With the upsurge in oil revenues, the Gulf states made development efforts on an unprecedented scale, unmatched in other states of the world. A total investment rose almost ten times between the first and the second half of the 1970s. In Saudi Arabia alone, the growth of the capital formation averaged an incredible 27.8 percent a year

during the whole decade (Abella, 1995, p. 418). A massive labor emigration followed these developments: Yemenis, Egyptians, Sudanese, Jordanians/Palestinians, Syrians, Pakistanis and Indians began to arrive in the Gulf states in large numbers.

Initially, Arab workers were particularly welcomed. Their linguistic, cultural and religious compatibility with the local populations made them more attractive to nationals than other immigrants. The migrant Arabs set up a familiar Arab-type government administration and educational facilities, helped to develop health services, build the necessary infrastructure for these rapidly developing countries, and run the oil industries. Nevertheless, relatively quickly, the preference of the oil-states' governments changed, and they began to be more open to Asian workers. There were several economic, political, social, historical and pragmatic reasons for this change.

First of all, the Gulf authorities became worried about non-local Arabs bringing and spreading radical social and political concepts (in particular, the secularist and frequently pro-Soviet ideologies), and cultivating undesirable loyalties. The leftist, pan-Arab ideas promoted by Arab expatriates called for the abolition of monarchies in the Gulf. Some organizations of the type of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf were established and began anti-government activities in the Gulf states. In the 1970s and 1980s, numerous immigrant Arab workers were prosecuted, jailed, and deported because of their participation in the activities of these organizations (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 133–144). The internal stability of some of the GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, was also shaken by the Arab expatriate-led labor strikes.

Some other ideas promoted by expatriate Arab workers also worried the GCC authorities. Many young Arabs regarded borders

in the Middle East as artificial lines imposed by Western imperialists, and, consequently, expected them to be eliminated. Another popular pan-Arab view, that of a single Arab nation in which labor 'circulates' freely, was also rejected by the Gulf governments for security reasons. Yet another problem was related to the regional distribution of the oil-generated wealth. Whereas the oil-producing countries which preferred to retain that wealth began to link the entitlement of oil revenues to state sovereignty, poorer states increasingly stressed their Arab identity as a good reason to demand their share in the revenues: Iraq even used the oil-related arguments as a justification to invade Kuwait in 1990.

Another dimension of the Arab presence in the GCC states which worried many nationals was the supposed "Egyptianization" of the local dialects and culture that were believed to have resulted from the predominance of Egyptians in the field of education (Graz, 1992, pp. 220–221).

Finally, the presence of Palestinians, which pushed the GCC states into an involvement in politics related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, was also considered a problem.

The stereotypical attitudes of the nationals towards the non-GCC Arabs have not helped to promote them in the labor market, either. Their attitudes have often not been as positive as the cultural and religious bonds between the nationals and the non-GCC Arabs could suggest. Birks and Sinclair, noted: "Many GCC nationals feel a detachment from Palestinians and Jordanians, a lack of respect for Yemenis, and mistrust and dislike of Egyptians" (Birks and Sinclair, 1980, p. 116). Mohammed Al-Fahim, a leading UAE businessman, presents the attitudes of nationals towards non-Gulf Arabs in the following way:

> Because we had a common religion and for the most part, a common language, we felt we were dealing with friends not foes. In the case

of our neighbours, we shared the same Arab perspective on life
and the world. Or so we believed. Unfortunately, we found to our
dismay that it took more than such commonalties to build a solid
foundation for trustworthy relationships (Al-Fahim, 1995, p. 160).

On the other hand, Asians did not represent any threat to the Gulf
nationals and were preferred to Arabs for various other reasons.

First of all, Asians were less expensive to employ, easier to lay-
off, and believed to be more efficient, obedient, and manageable
(Ghobash, 1986, pp. 138–142; Girgis, 2002, p. 29). Secondly,
they were used to leaving their families at home, whereas Arab
immigrants usually brought their families to the Gulf with the hope
of settling there permanently. This possibility was not acceptable
to the GCC authorities. Thirdly, in the post-1973 oil-boom, the
demand for foreign workers in the GCC states outstripped the
Arab countries' ability to supply them (Chuocri, 1983). In contrast,
Asian governments became often involved in the recruitment and
placement of their workers, facilitating their smooth flow to the
Gulf. Efficient recruitment agencies in Asia were able to provide
a constant supply of manpower, fully satisfying the needs of the
Gulf employers. Moreover, at that stage of the GCC countries'
development, the so-called 'turn-key' projects, in which Asian
contractors specialized, were implemented with an increasing
frequency. In many cases, Asians were also logistically easier to bring
to the GCC states as this region had closer historical links with
some parts of Asia than with many, more geographically distant,
parts of the Arab world.

Finally, many Asians were Muslims too, so the religiously-
sensitive Gulf Arabs felt more comfortable having such people
around.[5]

For all these reasons the number of Arab workers in the GCC
countries went considerably down over the years, although there

were never any official policies announced to sanction such an approach. Arabs were replaced not only by workers from the states already well established among the GCC workforce, as e.g. India or Pakistan, but also from such countries as the Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.

The percentage of an expatriate population represented by Arabs in the GCC countries decreased from 72 percent in 1975 to 56 percent a decade later (Table 2). In turn, in 1970, non-Arabs constituted only 12 percent of all workers in the Gulf, yet by 1980 their number had grown to 41 percent, and by 1985 Asian workers had reached the figure of 63 percent of the Gulf workforce (Russel and Teitelbaum, 1992).

There was some concern about the possible social consequences of the de-Arabization of the population as a result of the Asian influence. For example, in 1982, Abd al-Rahman al-Dirham from the Qatari Ministry of Labor, noted that:

> The question of foreign labor is of great concern. Our social customs are threatened by foreigners. The problem is not just in Qatar but also in other Gulf countries. We prefer it if we can get suitable people from Arab countries who can live in the Gulf area without changing it (*MEED*, August 1982, p. 40).

The labour laws enacted in most of the GCC countries stressed that employment should be offered firstly to the national citizens, secondly to the citizens of other GCC states, thirdly to non-Gulf Arabs and only then to other foreigners. That approach was in line with the overall Arab position on the issue. In 1968, the Arab Labor Organization called all the Arab states to give priority to Arab workers; in 1975 a similar resolution was adopted by the Arab League. The Strategy for Joint Arab Economic Action of the 1980s stated that "Arab manpower must be resorted to increasingly reduce dependence on foreign labor." In 1984, the Arab Declaration of Principles on

the Movement of Manpower stressed once more the need to give preference to Arab nationals before the nationals of third countries.

In 1980, the UAE formally introduced a policy that Arabs should constitute at least 30 percent of the foreign workforce, and signed agreements with Tunisia, Morocco, and the Sudan to recruit more Arab workers (Al-Alkim, 1989, pp. 30–32). Similarly, in 1974, Qatar signed an agreement with Egypt to receive 9,000 workers annually from that country, and in 1982 with Tunisia providing for the recruitment of Tunisian military personnel and technicians for the Qatari army as well as blue-collar workers (Winckler, 2000, p. 27).

Despite all these declarations and agreements, the pro-Arab labor policies were never really implemented. Nader Fergany wrote that "attempts to organize the pan-Arab labor market have fizzled out into ineffective declarations of intent that have been impeded in reality by perceived narrow national interests, particularly of countries of employment, acting the mind set of buyers in a buyers-market." Moreover, "labor movement in the Arab region has been captive to the ups and downs of Arab politics, sometimes with devastating consequences to the welfare of embroiled migrants" (Fergany, 2001, p. 12).

It is only recently that the GCC authorities have begun to admit publicly the negative consequences of this situation. During the October 2004 meeting of the GCC labor ministers, Majeed Al-Alawi, the Bahraini Minister of Labor and Social Affairs warned that "non-Arab foreign workers constitute a strategic threat to the region's future" (http://www.middle-east-online.com, 12 October, 2004). Similarly, during another ministerial meeting of that kind in November 2005 Abdul Rahman Al Attiya, the GCC Secretary-General, warned about the possible consequences of the situation. "The GCC countries need to look at the massive presence of expatriates basically as a national security issue, and not merely as an economic matter... International accords are pressing for the

settlement of expatriates and imposing giving them salaries equal to nationals and greater rights in the areas of education and health." At the same time James Zogby, the president of the Arab American Institute stated that the guest workers were a "time bomb waiting to explode and unleash riots like those that [recently] rocked France" (*Gulf News*, 24 November, 2005).

The regional politics occasionally also influences the situation on the labor market to a considerable extent. In particular, some significant changes in the composition of the foreign workforce occurred as a result of the events of the second Gulf War. Both the Iraqis and those whose governments were supportive of Iraq (including Palestinians, Jordanians, Yemenis, and Sudanese) were distrusted and forced to leave the GCC states during and in the aftermath of the crisis. Altogether, over 1.5 million people were expelled: up to one million Yemenis were expelled from Saudi Arabia along with 200,000 Jordanians and 150,000 Palestinians – mainly from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Several hundred thousand foreign workers (including 158,000 Egyptians) left Kuwait voluntarily or were evacuated by their governments (Shaban et al., 2002, p. 41). In addition, many Asian workers were evacuated from Kuwait by their governments, but most of them were able to return to the country after the crisis.

Many Arabs who left the GCC states during the Gulf war and in its aftermath did not return following the conflict. The resultant vacuum in the labor market, despite the GCC governments' intentions, was not filled by the nationals. The free market dynamics led Asians in particular to take the vacant jobs, enlarging their share in the workforce again.

The workforce has witnessed further change in the 1990s, partly because of the end of the Cold War and the processes of globalization. The job-seekers from China and from the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union began to arrive in the Gulf looking for employment opportunities. Cheap to employ

and often quite well educated, these migrants created an additional competition in the labor market.

The policy of nationalization of the workforce combined with political preferences has also had an impact on the foreign workforce. For example, in mid-1990s when trying to reduce the expatriate labor in order to find more jobs for young unemployed Saudis, Saudi Arabia reduced the number of work permits issued to Egyptians. As a result, their number decreased from 900,000 in 1995 to 670,000 two years later.

Following all these developments, the percentage of the expatriate population represented by Arabs in the GCC countries continued to decrease further in the following years: by early 2000s, they accounted only for 32 percent (see Table 2). In Saudi Arabia, the percentage of Arabs went down from 91 percent in 1975 to 33 percent by 2004. In Kuwait, the decline was from 80 percent in 1975 to 30 percent in 2003. In other countries, where the proportion of non-native Arabs in the population was traditionally lower, their share nevertheless declined even further, to as little as 6 percent in Oman and 13–15 in Bahrain and the UAE (all these numbers are estimates only, as the precise data are not available).

Altogether, among the 12.5 million foreigners who lived in the GCC countries in 2004, there were about 3.2 million non-Gulf Arabs, half the number of Asians, who were represented by 3.3 million Indians, 1.7 million Pakistanis, about 0.7 million of people from Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka each (Table 3). Thus, the percentage of Asians in the foreign populations varies from almost 70 percent in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to over 90 percent in Oman.

The exact size of foreign communities in the GCC states is, however, difficult to establish, as authorities usually do not reveal any information about them, thinking probably that it is better not to make foreign communities aware of their actual size.

Table 2. Arab share in foreign populations, 1975–2002/4*
(estimates, in percentages)

	1975	1985	1996	2002/4
Bahrain	22	15	12	15
Kuwait	80	69	33**	30**
Oman	16	16	11	6
Qatar	33	33	21	19
Saudi Arabia	91	79	30	33
UAE	26	19	10	13
GCC	72	56	31	32

Source: The ratios for 1975 and 1985 – Birks (1988), Birks et al. (1988) and Winckler (2000); for Kuwait in 1996 from the Public Authority for Civil Information; for Oman in 1996 from the Ministry of Planning, *Statistical Yearbook 1996* (Muscat); the ratios for the other countries in 1996 and in 2002/4 are the author's estimates based on various sources. See also: the GCC Demographic Report (1998). * data for the years 2002, 2003 or 2004; ** – including the *bidun* (Kapiszewski, 2005).

The non-Gulf Arab community has mainly been composed of Egyptians (almost 1.5 million), Yemenis (0.9 million) and Palestinians/Jordanians (0.5 million) (Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, 2004; Ambrosetti and Tattolo, 2004). There are also over 300,000 Sudanese living in the GCC states nowadays.

There are numerous reports that give much larger numbers for particular Asian communities, especially in Saudi Arabia. Many claim that currently the Kingdom hosts over one million Bangladeshis, about 900,000 Sudanese, a similar number of Filipinos, 850,00 of Sri Lankans and over 500,000 Indonesians.[6] If

such numbers are correct, it means that the number of foreigners in Saudi Arabia is much higher than officially reported in the last census results (that this can be true, see Note to Table 1). In turn, some sources speak of only 40,000 Sri Lankans in Kuwait and just 100.000 Indonesians in Saudi Arabia.[7]

Table 3. Major expatriate communities in the GCC countries (estimates for various years, in thousands)

	Bahrain 2004	Kuwait 2003	Oman 2004	Qatar 2002	Saudi Arabia 2004	UAE 2002
Indians	120	320	330	100	1,300	1,200
Pakistanis	50	100	70	100	900	450
Egyptians	30	260	30	35	900	140
Yemenis					800	60
Bangladeshis		170	110		400	100
Filipinos	25	70		50	500	120
Sudanese					250	30
Sri Lankans		170	30	35	350	160
Jordanians/ Palestinians	20	50		50	260	110
Indonesians		9			250	
Syrians		100			100	
Iranians	30	80		60		40
Turks					80	
Nepalese				70		
Bidun		80				

Source: various sources

The consequences of large Asian and non-Gulf Arab populations in the GCC states

The employment of foreign workers is both profitable and costly for the receiving countries. The benefits of importing foreign labor are fairly clear: foreigners provide a basic workforce as well as specialists to compensate for the limited number of nationals with required skills and attitudes, stimulate the domestic consumption of goods supplied by local merchants, and boost local property markets. The costs, although much more difficult to estimate, consist of salaries, and the increased spending required to expand the educational and health services, housing, and roads, communications and other elements of infrastructure in order to accommodate the needs of the newcomers. Moreover, the foreign labor force is a substantial drain of the GCC states' hard currency earnings, with remittances to migrants' home countries amounting to $27 billion each year; $16 billion coming from the migrant workers in Saudi Arabia alone (Al-Bassam, 2004). These remittances constitute a large portion of the GCC countries' GDP; for example, in Saudi Arabia in 2001 they amounted to about 10 percent of the total GDP of the Kingdom (*Al-Madinah*, 16 July, 2002). Nevertheless, the relative costs and benefits of hosting foreign labor have more or less balanced each other out in economic terms. It has been shown that the percentage of the GDP that foreign labor generates is roughly equal to what the state has to spend on them.[8]

On the other hand, foreigners benefit from their employment in the GCC countries. They are usually able to find better-paid jobs than they would have at home, enjoy a high standard of living, and often have a chance for a quick career advancement. In particular, they are able to save large sums of money and send or take them home, often significantly stimulating the economy in their home countries.[9] The presence of a large number of expatriates constitutes, however,

a major threat to the stability of the GCC countries; it endangers the culture, influences the structure of society and, furthermore, has an impact on the foreign policy. During the GCC summit in Manama in December 2004, the Bahraini King submitted a report on the danger posed by foreign labor to the social and cultural life as well as the economy of the GCC states. Majeed ibn Muhsen Al-Alawi, his Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, said in an interview that "we should save future generations from having their culture lost" and that although "we are not against the foreign labor" at the same time "we do not want these workers to become citizens in the region." The submitted proposal was aimed at limiting the period a foreigner can work in a Gulf state to six years.[10] The summit left it to further discussions which has continued ever since.

Expatriates have often been perceived by the nationals as disloyal to their hosts, and even as potentially dangerous political agents who spread hostile ideas or work as a "fifth column" for the benefit of foreign powers (Whitley, 1993, p. 30). Abdul-Reda Assiri has commented that "certain elements of the expatriate labor force could potentially be quasi militant," function as "intelligence instruments, to instigate disputes and sabotage," or serve as tools "for political pressure, and monetary and economic extortion" (Assiri, 1996, p. 19; El Rayyes, 1988, p. 86; Khalifa, 1979, p. 113; Fergany, 1984, p. 160). In 2005 the GCC Secretary General clearly stated that "expat workers are 'security issue'" (*Gulf News*, 24 November, 2005). Thus, quite often, the security situation has an impact on the labor market. For example, in August 2005, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior banned workers from Iraq, Iran and Syria from entering Kuwait due to the "security reservations" (*Arab Times*, 29 August, 2005). It also became compulsory for persons of certain nationalities to get a security approval before applying for residency in the country.

In the GCC states, as elsewhere, migration can be an important foreign policy issue, and migrants can influence both their host

and sending countries' policies. According to Hassan Hamdan al-Alkim, "the roles played by the expatriates … in the GCC states are of great importance in political articulation on foreign policy-making" (Al-Alkim, 1994, p. 29; Davisha, 1970, p. 60). Although in the monarchies of the Gulf members of expatriate communities do not usually have any formal rights in the political process, they can influence their host countries' foreign policy via the local media. Expatriates also exert influence through the informal access to top-ranking nationals, which some of them enjoy, and through the expatriates' involvement in the overall functioning of the state. According to al-Alkim, "the expatriate community, though without citizenship (…) exerts more real political influence than most local citizens, and in many ways is considered to be crucial to the relatively smooth functioning of the political process" (Al-Alkim, 1994, p. 49). In a similar way, expatriates can often influence their home countries' foreign policy towards the GCC (Crystal, 1997, p. 208).

The presence of large groups of expatriates sometimes causes problems between their home and host countries. For example, in 1996, the Qatari government accused Egypt of its involvement in the attempted coup, and expelled ca. 700 Egyptian workers, particularly those employed in the Ministry of the Interior. Several hundred Egyptian workers were also fired by the Qatari authorities in 1997 and 1998, basically due to the tensions between the countries resulting from Cairo's criticism of Doha's developing relations with Israel. In turn, in December 1999, around 3,000 Yemeni workers were deported from Saudi Arabia, apparently due to renewed tensions between the countries related to the border issues. In October 1999, a mass riot involving hundreds of Egyptian and Kuwaiti workers took place in Kuwait. One hundred and twenty people were wounded in the event, and 16 Egyptian workers were arrested and accused of arson, damage to private property, participation in an illegal gathering and resisting arrest in

the riots. At the root of the incident were the inadequate working and living conditions of Egyptian workers, most of whom were employed illegally and as such were not protected by either Kuwaiti or Egyptian authorities (Kapiszewski, 2004, p. 128). In 2005, the low-paid Asian workers also staged protests, some of them violent, in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar for not receiving salaries on time. In March 2006, hundreds of mostly south Asian constructing workers stopped work and went on a rampage in Dubai, UAE, to protest their harsh working conditions, low or delayed pay, and the general lack of rights.

Such incidents demonstrate the tense relations which have developed between the nationals and the expatriates in some cases. Foreigners, non-Gulf Arabs in particular, have often suspected the nationals of desiring to exploit them on unfair economic terms and have feared the possible consequences of a total dependence on their sponsors, given the lack of laws that could protect them adequately. They have felt the nationals have often acted out of prejudice and discriminated against them both in the labor market and·in their attempts to establish business enterprises or purchase real estate (Alessa, 1981, pp. 44-50). Non-Gulf Arabs have also been frustrated that the nationals' attitudes towards them were not more positive than toward non-Arab or non-Muslim expatriates. They "naturally expect to be better treated and somehow more naturally welcomed in the Gulf than [let us say] Indians or Koreans," and when their expectations are not met, they sometimes "repeat tales of 'arrogance,' 'greed,' 'exploitation,' and 'discrimination' encountered in the Gulf" (Salame, 1988, p. 242). Such claims are often justified. According to James Zogby, "workers are trapped in horrible conditions, denied justice and their basic humanity" (*Gulf News*, 24 November, 2005). Even Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed, the Kuwaiti foreign minister, said once that foreign workers were often treated by unscrupulous contractors as "slaves" (*IPS*, Cairo, 5 December,

1999). Of course, the non-Gulf Arabs' perception of the treatment they receive in the GCC countries depends, as is the case with all the expatriates, on their personal experiences (failures or successes), as well as their expectations and motivations before immigration.

Non-Arab laborers, Asian women especially, have also often complained about their treatment in the Gulf.

The sexual harassment of Filipino housemaids by local employers, especially in Saudi Arabia, has become a serious matter in the recent years (Gamburd, 2005). Among other things, it has resulted in a ban on the under 21 years of age female migration. Also in Indonesia the maltreatment of women in the GCC states has been widely reported; it has been viewed as a national "embarrassment", and led to calls to the government to stop sending housemaids altogether (Silvey, 2004, p. 258).

When several Nepalese contract workers were murdered in mid-2004 by their hostage-takers in wartime Iraq, anger over this situation spilled into the streets of Kathmandu, where the incident was indexed as an act of Arab aggression against guest workers in the Gulf, and the Nepal offices of the Qatar Airways were torched (Chaudoir, 2005). Earlier, in 2001, the female labour migration was banned by the Kathmandu government.

There are also other social and cultural implications of presence of a large number of foreigners in the GCC states. The negative influence of expatriates on the national cultures, identities and values as well as social structures remains a big concern for the nationals (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 157-168). In particular, authorities are worried about the influence of Asian nannies or expatriate teachers, who form the majority of school staff, on local children; their concern is raising the children without a proper attention being given to Islamic and Arabic values. They are also unhappy at the growing influence of the foreign media and a large number of foreign women married to the nationals . Strangely enough, the authorities

seem to be less worried about the overwhelming presence of the Western material civilization and Western consumption patterns in the GCC states, probably the most threatening factors for the local culture and identity of the nationals.

The future of the GCC foreign labor market

The demand for foreign workers in the GCC countries in the years to come will depend on several factors: the number of young nationals entering the labor market, the effect of the nationalization of labor markets (mainly due to government regulations), the capacity of the economy to generate new jobs, the employment qualifications of the national labor in relation to the requirements of the job market, the willingness of the nationals to take low-prestige jobs, as well as political and security considerations (Fasano and Goyal, 2004; Girgis, 2002). Probably the most important factor will be the overall state of economy; the high oil prices at the beginning of the 2000s allowed for a further rapid development of several GCC states and in consequence a large growth in population, the foreign one in particular. The reality has greatly exceeded the earlier predictions.[11]

In terms of the numbers, were the trend of the last decade to continue, the number of the expatriates would grow in the next 10 years by another 10 million or so (between 1995 and 2004 the number of the expatriates went up from 7 million to 12.5 million, that is by 80 percent). There are also indications that the percentage of foreigners in the population may grow as well, at least in some countries.[12] Most of the newcomers will be Asians, as employers in the GCC states will probably continue to prefer them to Arab workers.[13] It is unlikely that in the near future the wage rate in such Arab countries as Egypt or Jordan will fall low enough to make the non-Gulf Arab labor wage-competitive with the Asian labor.

Moreover, the Arab labor will remain less attractive for foreign employers due to the non-Gulf Arabs' inferior level of education and technical training as compared to that of many Asians.[14]

What may, to some extent, slow down the growth of the foreign labor? This may occur because of the following reasons:

– There will be a growing number of nationals looking for jobs each year due to the demographic factors: the birth rate of nationals in the GCC states is very high (3.5 on average), and almost half of the local population is under 15 years of age.

– The nationals will become better educated, which will allow them to compete more effectively against the foreign labor in the private sector. Moreover, when facing the growing unemployment (especially high in Saudi Arabia[15]), the nationals will gradually change their work ethic and grow more willing to accept the low-prestige jobs currently held by foreigners (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 210–211).

– National women will increase their presence in the workforce, in terms of the numbers especially in Saudi Arabia.

– The nationalization policies will create more jobs for nationals each year.[16]

Moreover, the decisive actions can be expected from some GCC governments in that matter. Saudi Arabia seems to be adopting most radical measures here. According to the 2002 guidelines of the Shura Council, by 2007, 70 percent of the workforce will have to be Saudi.

On February 2, 2003 Prince Naif bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Internal Affairs and the Chairman of the Manpower Council, announced that the Saudi government had decided to lower the number of foreigners in the Kingdom to a maximum of 20 percent of its indigenous population within the next 10 years, and to establish a quota system for foreigners in which no nationality may exceed 10 percent of the total population (*Riyadh Daily*, 3

February, 2003). This decision, if implemented fully, will have a dramatic effect on the foreign population in the Kingdom, and on the Arab immigrants in particular. In terms of the 2004 situation (16.5 million nationals , 6.1 million foreigners), the execution of the new policies would imply the expulsion of over half of the foreign workers currently residing in the Kingdom, a decrease in the size of the Indian population from 1.3 million to around 300,000, and a reduction of the number of Egyptian, Yemeni, and Pakistani populations from almost a million (each) to a similar number.

In October 2004 Ghazi al-Ghosaibi, the Labor Minister, announced that the government plans to cut the number of foreign workers by no less than 100,000 every year, and in March 2005 he declared that the number of job visas was reduced from 832,244 to 684,201 during one year (Ghafour, 2005).

Naturally, only time will show whether the Saudi authorities will be able to realize these ambitious plans. In the Five-Year Plan adopted in 1985, a 22.6 percent reduction in the foreign labor was planned by the year 1990 (that is, by some 600,000 people). In reality, the foreign workforce increased during that period by 200,000.

The Kuwaiti government was similarly unsuccessful in trying to implement such policies. In 1997, a decision was issued that ministries must replace 10 percent of their expatriate staff every year with young Kuwaitis. The decision was implemented for two years only as ministries could not find enough qualified Kuwaitis to substitute them (Taqi, 2005).

The most recent proposal is to limit the expatriate stay, at least of the unskilled labour, to six years only. Labour ministers submitted such a recommendation to the GCC leaders in December 2005 but it evokes various reactions (*Arab Times*, 14 December, 2005).

To sum up, in the years to come, in all the GCC states the employment of the nationals and the labor migration will

remain politically a very sensitive issue as it will cause further tensions between the profit-driven concerns of the private sector, the indigenization efforts of the states and the national security considerations. Moreover, a large number of foreigners residing in these countries will bring new social and cultural challenges of consequences difficult to estimate, especially as the naturalization of many foreigners will take place. Asians will continue to dominate the foreign workforce at the expense of the non-Gulf Arab labor.

Reference

Abella, Manolo I. (1992). The troublesome Gulf: Research on migration to the Middle East. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* (Manila), vol. 1, No.1, pp 145–167.

Abella, Manolo I. (1995). Asian migrant and contract workers in the Middle East. In *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, Robin Cohen, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ahmad, Attiya (2005). Pakistanis citizens' call to the Ummah in Kuwait: Contradictions and interconnections. Paper presented at the Transnational migration: Foreign labor and its impact in the Gulf Conference, Bellagio, Italy (20–25 June).

Al-Alkim, Hassan Hamdan (1989). *The Foreign Policy of the United Arab Emirates*. London: Saqi Books.

Al-Alkim, Hassan Hamdan (1994). *The GCC States in an Unstable World: Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Small States*. London: Saqi Books.

Al-Bassam, Majed (2004). $16b remittances. *Arab News* (26 March).

Al-Fahim, Mohammed (1995). *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi*. London: Center for Arab Studies.

Alessa, Shamlan Y. (1981). *The Manpower Problem in Kuwait*. London: Kegan Paul International.

Almazel, Muhammad (2005). Bahrain strained by expat rush. *Gulf News* (8 February).

Al-Moosa, Abdul Rasool and Keith McLachlan (1985). *Immigrant Labour in Kuwait*. London: Croom Helm.

Al-Najjar, Baqer (2001). *Dream to Migrate to Wealth: Migrant Labour in the Gulf*. Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies.

Ambrosetti, Elena and Giovanna Tattolo (2004). Petrole et migrations de travail vers les Pays du Golfe. Paper presented at 13e colloque de l'AIDELF, Budapest (20–24 September).

Amjad, Rashid, ed. (1989). *To the Gulf and Back: Studies on the Economic Impact of Asian Labour*. New Delhi: UNDP and ILO.

Assiri, Abdul-Reda (1996). *The Government and Politics of Kuwait: Principles and Practices*. Kuwait.

Birks, J.S. (1988). The demographic challenge in the Arab Gulf. *Arab Affairs* (London), vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 72–86.

Birks J.S. and C.A. Sinclair (1980). *Arab Manpower: The crisis of Development*. London: Croom Helm.

Birks, J.S., I.J. Seccombe and C.A. Sinclair (1988). Labour migration in the Arab Gulf states: Patterns, trends and prospects. *International Migration* (Geneva), vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 267–286.

Chaudoir, David C. (2005). Mapping work in the Gulf: Guest workers in Qatar's luxury hotels. Paper presented at the Transnational migration: Foreign labor and its impact in the Gulf Conference, Bellagio, Italy, (20–25 June).

Chuocri, N. (1983). *The Hidden Economy. A New View of Remittances in the Arab World*. Cambridge: MIT. Mimeographed.

Crystal, Jill (1997). Social transformation, changing expectations and Gulf security. In *Gulf Security in the Twenty-First Century*, David E. Long and Christian Koch, eds. Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, pp. 208–225.

Dawisha, Adeed (1977). The Middle East. In *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States*. Christopher Clapham, ed. Farnborough: Saxon House.

Eelens, F., T. Schampers, and J.D. Speckmann, eds. (1992). *Labour Migration to the Middle East: From Sri Lanka to the Gulf.* London: Kegan Paul International.

Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (2004). *The Statistical Yearbook 2003*. Cairo.

El Rayyes, Riad N. (1988). Arab nationalism and the Gulf. In *The Arab Gulf and the Arab World*, B. R. Pridham, ed. London: Croom Helm.

Fasano, Ugo and Rishi Goyal (2004). Emerging strains in GCC labour markets. Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, Working Paper.

Fergany, Nader (1984). Manpower problems and projections in the Gulf. In *The Impact of Oil Revenues on Arab Gulf Development*, M. S. El Azhary, ed. London: Croom Helm.

Fergany, Nader (2001). Aspects of labour migration and unemployment in the Arab region. Cairo: Almishkat Center for Research. Mimeographed.

Gamburd, Michele Ruth (2005).'Lentils there, Lentils here!' Sri Lankan domestic labour in the Middle East. Paper presented at the Transnational migration: Foreign labor and its impact in the Gulf Conference, Bellagio, Italy (20–25 June).

Gulf Cooperation Council (2002). *GCC Secretariat Report.* Riyadh: GCC Secretariat (July 27).http://gcc-sg.org.

Ghafour, Abdul (2005). No ban on foreign recruitment. *Arab News* (26 March).

Ghobash, M. (1986). *Immigration and Development in the United Arab Emirates*. Cairo: Al Wafa Press.

Girgis, Maurice (2002). Would nationals and Asians replace Arab workers in the GCC? Paper presented at Fourth

Mediterranean Development Forum. Amman, Jordan. (6–9 October). Mimeographed.

Graz, Liesl (1992). *The Turbulent Gulf: People, Politics and Power.* London: I. B. Tauris.

Human Rights Watch (2004). Migrant communities in Saudi Arabia. In *Bad Dreams: Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia.* http:// www.hrw.org.

Jassen, Nirmala (2004). Plans to increase Kuwaiti manpower quota in private sector. *Gulf News* (December 5).

Jassen, Nirmala (2005). Kuwait sees rise in national workforce. *Gulf News* (February 18).

Kandil, M. and M.F. Metwally (1990). The impact of migrants' remittances on the Egyptian economy. *International Migration Review* (New York), vol. 28, No.2, pp. 159–180.

Kapiszewski, Andrzej (2001). *National and Expatriates. Population and Labour Dilemmas of the GCC States.* Reading: Ithaca Press.

Kapiszewski, Andrzej (2004). Arab labour migration to the GCC States. In *Arab Migration in a Globalized World*, Geneva: International Organization for Migration, pp. 115–133.

Kapiszewski, Andrzej (2005). Non-indigineous citizens and 'stateless' residents in the Gulf monarchies. *Krakowskie Studia Miedzynarodowe* (Krakow), No.2 (VI), pp. 61–78.

Karimkhany, Azita (2005). Viability of 'Emiratization' stirs debate. *The Daily Star* (12 April).

Khalifa, Ali Mohammed (1979). *The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Looney, Robert (2004). Saudization and sound economic reforms: are the two compatible? In *Strategic Insights* (Monterey), vol. III, No. 2.

Nassar, Heba and Ahmed Ghoneim (2002). Trade and migration. Are they complements or substitutes: A review of four MENA

countries. Cairo: Center for Economic and Financial Research and Studies, Cairo University. Mimeographed.

Pakkiasamy, Divya (2004). Saudi Arabia's plan for changing its workforce. Migration Policy Institute. Mimeographed.

Russel, Sharon Stanton and Michael S. Teitelbaum (1992). International migration and international trade. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Discussion Paper no. 160.

Salame, Ghassan (1988). Perceived threats and perceived loyalties. In *The Arab Gulf and the Arab World*, B. R. Pridham, ed. London: Croom Helm.

Shaban, Radwan A., Ragui Assaad, and Sulayman Al-Qudsi (2002). Employment experience in the Middle East and North Africa. In *Labour and Human Capital in the Middle East. Studies of Markets and Household Behavior*, Djavad Salehi-Ishfahani, ed. Reading and Cairo: Ithaca Press with the Economic Research Forum, pp. 21–67.

Silvey, Rachel (2004). Transnational domestication: state power and Indonesian migrant women in Saudi Arabia. *Political Geography*, vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 245–264.

Taqi, Ali (2005). Government rejects plea for job nationalization. *Gulf News* (4 July).

United Nations. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2001). Globalization and labour movements in the ESCWA region. New York.

Whitley, Andrew (1993). Minorities and the stateless in Persian Gulf politics. *Survival* (Oxford), vol. 35, No. 4.

Winckler, Onn (2000). *Population Growth, Migration and Socio-Demographic Policies in Qatar*. Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies.

Notes

[1] There is a general lack of reliable population data for the GCC states. Author's comments on that written in 2000 are still valid (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 26, 27, 45, 46). Therefore, numbers presented in this paper should be treated as estimates only, especially ones for Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

[2] For example, in Saudi Arabia, between 1990 and 2000, the GDP grew in average 1.6 percent annually but the country's population grew at an annual rate of 2.7 percent, thus producing a declining trend in per capita income (Looney, 2004). In turn, over the 1997–2004 period, average nominal salary for Saudi nationals declined by 12 percent, as compared to 17 percent fall for foreigners (Fasano and Goyal, 2004).

[3] Nationals prefer to work in the public sector because of usually high wages, job security, generous social allowances and retirement benefits, short working hours (allowing to be involved in additional private business on the side), lack of work discipline, etc.

[4] See: Obstacles before Saudi women's employment discussed, *Arab News* (6 February, 2006).

[5] Nevertheless, many Gulf Arabs have perceived non-Arab Muslims as potential trouble-makers, often trying to use their shared Muslim identity to buttress their claims to resources and economic wealth, which the GCC nationals believe are necessarily and naturally only theirs (Ahmad, 2005).

[6] For example, according to the spokesman for the Philippine Embassy in Riyadh in 2005 there were between 850,000 and 900,000 Filipinos in the Kingdom (*Saudi Gazette*, 17 December, 2005).

[7] According to the official Indonesian government data for 2003 there were 104.698 Indonesians workers in Saudi Arabia.

http://www.nekatrans.go.id/statistik_naker/pptkln.php

[8] Abdul Rasool Al-Moosa and Keith McLachlan (1985, p. 85) calculated that foreign workers in Kuwait generate 26 percent of the GDP while the state spends 30 percent of GDP to sustain this workforce.

[9] Workers remittances constitute a large share of home countries' GDP: in the 1990's there were 12.4 percent in Egypt, 15.7 percent in

Jordan and 22.4 percent in Yemen. Apparently each dollar of remittance increased Egypt's GNP by 2.2 dollars (Shaban and others, 2002, p. 27; Kandil and Metwally, 1990, pp.159–180; Abella, 1992, p. 157).

[10] One of the reason for such a proposal was problem caused by international regulations imposing naturalization of foreign workers who had lived in the country for more than five years.

[11] For example, Girgis (2002), widely quoted in the literature on the subject, predicted in the year 2000 that by the year 2010 the demand for expatriates in the GCC states will increase to 10,799,000. That number was achieved already in 2002.

[12] In Kuwait in 2004 the foreign labour grew by 12 percent while national by only 6.6 percent (Jassen, 2005).

[13] Girgis (2002, pp. 39–40) estimated that in the years 2003–2007, 485,000 non-Gulf Arabs will lose their jobs in the GCC states. The lost income that will result from the consequent out-migration will reach $3.6 billion from Arab workers. While the calculations leading to these precise numbers are debatable, one should agree with Girgis that in the years to come "[non-Gulf] Arab countries are well advised to anticipate less remittance, more workers returning home and perhaps high unemployment rates at home."

[14] Nader Fergany (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23–29 December, 1999) stressed this problem in relation to Egypt: "We have a problem of human resource quality. This is a part of our problem with the Gulf. Today, to be competitive in the global market you have to have efficient, cheap and highly trained labour. In this new era of rapidly and continuously changing knowledge and high rates of obsolescence, workers require access to on-going education programs. [But] our education, training and re-training systems are very weak."

[15] There are various estimates of the level of unemployment in Saudi Arabia. In January, 2005, Saudi Labour Minister Ghazi al-Ghosaibi said that there were 180,443 unemployed nationals. The Minister also said that there are numerous unofficial estimates that are greatly exaggerated and that the only figures which should be accepted are those from the General Statistics Authority. The problem is, however, that according to

the Authority, the unemployment figure was twice as high as mentioned by the Minister, namely around 300,000 or 9.6 percent (*Arab News*, 13 January, 2005). Undersecretary for Planning and Development for the Ministry of Labour, Abdul Wahid Al-Humayid, revealed on January 4, 2006, that there were only 155,000 Saudi male job seekers, that is five percent. The unemployment of women was unknown. Other sources quoted from 14 to 20 percent, with 32 percent among young workers (United Nations, 2001, p. 44), see also Saudi Monetary Agency statistics (*Arab News*, 5 March, 2003). In Bahrain, in 2004, there were 16,000–20,000 unemployed, that is 13–17 percent of the national workforce (Almazel, 2005). In the UAE the number was put at 32,000 (Karimkhany, 2005).

[16] Nationalization policies did not bring much change in the composition of the workforce so far, but eventually they will (Kapiszewski, 2001, pp. 212–243). Failures of the nationalization policies can be easily observed, for example, in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Manpower Council mandated five percent of Saudization annually, while in reality that number was achieved only between 1998–2003 (Pakkiasamy, 2004).

Population and workforce in Oman

Population statistics

In the latter half of the 20th century, largely thanks to the discovery of oil in the region, all political entities of the Gulf transformed themselves from desert sheikhdoms into modern states. This process was accompanied by the rapid population growth[1]. The Sultanate of Oman has followed the suit. The population of the country grew from around 400 thousand in 1950 to 3 million in 2004: more than sevenfold (Table 1)[2].

Table 1. Oman. Population growth, 1950–2004 (in thousands)

1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2003	2004
413[a]	505[a]	654[a]	1,060[b]	1,625[b]	2,402[b]	2,341[c]	2,903[d]

Source: [a] *Gulf Statistical Profile*, Table 5.2, p. 201; [b] *Oman Statistical Yearbook 2004*, www.moneoman.gov.om; [c] 2003 Population Census, *Oman Statistical Yearbook 2004*; [d] *CIA World Factbook 2004*, www.cia.gov.

---

[1] For the population data see A. Kapiszewski, *National and Expatriates. Population and Labor Dilemmas of the GCC States* (Reading, Ithaca Press, 2001), pp. 33–47.

[2] There is a considerable discrepancy between the 2003 Population Census data and other, including official Omani information concerning the population of the country. The official Omani statistical data provided in successive Statistical Yearbooks showed the Omani population in 2000 – 2,402,000; 2001 – 2,478,000; 2002 – 2,538,000 only to go down by 2003 Census data. According to various sources, the 2003 Census population numbers are underestimated.

The average annual population growth rate maintained a steady increase from about 2.0 percent in 1950s to 5.5 percent in 1985, when it begun to decrease to about 3.0 percent in the 2000s[3]. But even such growth placed Oman in the years 2000–2005 among the world top ten countries in terms of population growth rates. According to the UN Population Division this trend will continue and the Omani population will triple in the next 50 years, reaching 9 million in the year 2050[4].

This increase of the Omani population has not been caused by the indigenous population alone but by the influx of foreign workers as well. The employment of foreigners was a structural imperative for growth in Oman, as development depended upon the importation of foreign technologies and required knowledge and skills alien to the local Arab population. In consequence, foreign workers have become an important part of the labour force in most sectors of economy and the government bureaucracy.

Table 2. Oman. Populations of nationals and expatriates, 1975–2004 (in thousands)

	Nationals	Expatriates	Total
1975[a]	650	132	782
1985[b]	1,102	314	1,416
1995[b]	1,557	574	2,131
2003[c]	1,782	559	2,341
2004[d]	2,326	577	2,903

Source: [a] Birks: 'The demographic challenge', Table 7.7, p. 147; [b] *Oman Statistical Yearbook 2004*, www.moneoman.gov.om; [c] *2003 Population Census, Oman Statistical Yearbook 2004*; [d] *CIA World Factbook 2004*, www.cia.gov.

---

[3] www.econstats.com.

[4] To be exact, the United Nations Population Division projected the Omani population to reach 8,751,000.

The percentage of expatriates in the total population grew from approximately 17 per cent in 1975 to 27 per cent in 1995 (Table 2 and 4). The situation began to change, however, at the turn of the century. Omanization policies (see below) finally reverse this process and in 2004 the population of Omani nationals went up to 80 per cent, reaching its level from 1970s (Table 3).

Table 3. Oman. Percentage of nationals in population, 1975–2004

1975	1985	1995	2004
83.1	77.8	73.1	80.1

Source: Table 2.

Table 4. Oman. Percentage of expatriates in population, 1975–2004

1975	1985	1995	2004
16.9	22.2	26.9	19.9

Source: Table 2.

The Omani government have tried to change this proportion by adopting pronatalist policies that enlarge the size of national population. First of all, the authorities have devoted substantial funds to improving healthcare services and promoting hygiene, proper nutrition and healthy living as a way to increase the number of nationals. Due to these efforts, infant and maternal mortality rates have fallen sharply, being about four times lower than the world's average at the turn of the century (Table 5). Meanwhile, life expectancy at birth has gone up considerably, rising by approx. 25 years in the last few decades and being almost ten years above the world's average.

In order to encourage national couples to have more children, a number of incentives were introduced, including special housing

loans or even free government housing for some low-income nationals, allowances for families according to the number of children or fully paid maternity holidays.

Table 5. Selected population statistics

Fertility rate (1)	Maternal mortality rate (2)	Infant mortality rate (3)	Life expectancy female (4)	Life expectancy male (5)
5.0	87	10	76.3	71.0

Source: *The World Health Report 2004*, *Annex*, Tables 1 and 7, pp. 116 and 152 and Ministry of Health information.
Notes: (1) – 2002, children born/women; (2) – 2000, per 100,000 live births; (3) – 2000, per 1,000 live births; (4) and (5) – 2002, in years at birth.

Effects of pronatalist policies are, however, difficult to evaluate fully, as statistics of fertility rates published rarely separate data for nationals and expatriates. In general, the fertility rate in Oman has been very high, much higher than the world's average. Nevertheless, in the last decades it has been decreasing.

While in relative terms, the pronatalist policies have brought some positive results, their overall effects on population structure have been negligible. The ratio of nationals to expatriates, has not been much influenced by these policies. Moreover, as expatriate labour often provides for consumption needs, the need for foreign workers can increase with population growth of the local population[5]. The pronatalist policies have also caused some problems for the authorities. The enlarged young section of the population becomes a socio-economic, if not political, burden and a potential factor

---

[5] A. Hossein, V. Nowshirvani and M. Jaber, *Economic Development in the GCC. The Blessing and the Course of Oil* (Greenwich, Connecticut, JAI Press, 1997), p. 73.

of instability, especially as unemployment grows. Therefore, the government have tried to limit the overall number of expatriates by administrative means and to replace them by nationals at work (see below).

Heterogeneity of the population

The Omani population has not only been divided between citizens and temporary foreign workers. Even the nationals constitute a diversified group of people. Among them there are still highly distinguishable members of various tribes, ethnic or religious minority groups. Their group identification and perception by others have been related to the not-so-distant history of the country, when the interior, Muscat and Dhofar regions, as well as African territories were separate administrative entities, in case of the interior and Muscat additionally divided by the religious differences. Thus, in modern Oman there are still "Ibadis" (about 75 percent of the total population), coastal "Shiites", "Dhofaris", "Zanzibaris" (or more general "Swahilis" as they originated not only from the island, but also from Tanganyika and Central Africa). The Muscat-Matrah urban area has long been home to remarkable numbers of Persians (Iranians) and of merchants of Indian ancestry, some of whom also live along the al-Batina. Famous among the latter are the Liwatiyah, who originally came from Sindh (now in Pakistan) but have lived in Oman for centuries. The Omani Indian communities are mainly Shi'ites with a few Hindus. Besides majority Arabs, there is a large separate group of Baluchis. Finally, deep divisions exist between certain tribes (for example Al Bu Sa'id, Al Hindi, Al Gafri). Nevertheless, most of the local passport holders are quite well integrated in the community which began to posses the attributes of the modern nation-state. This has happened thanks to the work of Sultan Qaboos who, after becoming the ruler of the country in 1970 and successfully handling problems caused by the

Dhofar uprising, made national integration one of the major issues of his policies. Only occasionally, in the social context, members of certain local groups, as well as naturalised foreigners are considered 'not real Omani' by other nationals.

In turn, the expatriate population is also highly diversified. Major expatriate groups in Oman consist of Indians (approx. 330,000), Bangladeshis (approx. 110,000), Pakistanis (approx. 70,000), Sri Lankans (approx. 30,000) and Egyptians (approx. 30,000)[6].

Nationals and expatriates in the workforce

Although the number of Omanis in the total population greatly exceeds the number of expatriates almost at the rate of three to one, the latter dominate the labour market. In 2003, there were 58 per cent expatriates in the Omani workforce (Table 6).

Table 6. Nationals and expatriates in the Omani workforce, 1995, 2003

	Nationals	Expatriates	Total
1995	270,000	496,200	766,200
2003	312,446	424,178	736,64

Source: 1995 – Ministry of Development estimates, *Five-Year Development Plan 1996–2000* (Muscat, 1996), p. 114; 2003 – *Population Census, Oman Statistical Yearbook 2004*.

For several decades, the number of foreign workers has grown steadily along with the economic development of Oman. Growing at the same time was the expatriate share in the total workforce; it went up from about 35 per cent in 1975 to about 65 per cent

---

[6] Data from the appropriate government departments as reported in Human Rights Watch reports for 2004.

in 1995. Only more recently, after 1995, did the overall situation begin to change, and a development that has resulted in the decrease of average representation of expatriates in the overall workforce is visible.

On the contrary, the percentage of nationals in the workforce has decreased from 65 per cent in 1975 to about 35 per cent in 1995, only to shift to approximately 42 per cent by 2003. Oman, along with Bahrain, has the highest percentage of working nationals among the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) states.

A large expatriate presence in the Omani workforce is expected to continue in the years to come. The popular conviction that demand for foreign labour is only transient, as "in essence it is a demand for foreign skills that GCC nationals are in the process of developing", is not necessarily true[7]. The overall educational gap between nationals and foreign workers is not particularly large and the number of unskilled, illiterate foreign workers, who have little to offer nationals in terms of "know-how" transfer, is very high, ranging from 30 to 50 per cent[8]. Contrary to the long-term interests of nationals, the attention paid to the low wages of such workers is often greater than the understanding of negative effects. of their large presence.

It also has to be remembered that the expatriate inflow is a self-feeding process. The employment of foreign workers increases the demand for housing, services, consumer and other goods, creating an additional demand for manpower that can be met only by greater immigration.

The ratio of the workforce to the total population is high, mainly because of the size of the expatriate workforce. The Economic Activity

---

[7] S. Al-Qudsi, *Labour Markets and Policy in the GCC: Micro Diagnostics and Macro Profiles* (Emirates Lecture Series, Abu Dhabi, The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1998), p. 24.

[8] Ibidem, pp. 29–31 and 46.

Rate is Oman in 2003 was 31 per cent, that is comparable to rates in other countries at a similar level of economic development and with comparable per capita income, but much lower than in highly developed countries (for example, in the US, the rate was 51 per cent in 2000)[9]. Economic Activity Rates, naturally, differ a greatly between nationals and expatriates. The national workforce in Oman is small, lower than is to be expected from the size of the national population. Only 17.5 per cent of Omanis work, as compared to 76 per cent of expatriates. Thus, each employed national has, on average, five dependants. In sharp contrast, each expatriate worker has on average only 0.3 accompanying family members.

There are several reasons for the low Economic Activity Rate of Omanis. First of all, the national population is very young, with large proportion of people aged below 15. Therefore, only a relatively small proportion falls within the economically active age group. Second, there is still only limited employment of women (see below). Finally, many working-age men of Omani nationality do not actually participate in the labour market because of the reduced economic necessity to do so: a circumstance that is exacerbated by a low retirement age. In contrast, the foreign labour force has a high Economic Activity Rate as a result of the dominance of single male workers and a lack of non-working expatriates, young and old.

The Economic Activity Rates for Omani nationals remained basically the same in the last decade. This shows that various attempts by the government to increase the number of working nationals have not been as successful as they could (in particular, the participation of women in the workforce did not increase much). At the same time, the Economic Activity Rate for expatriates decreased slightly, showing that their overall status in the society increased (they have been able to have more dependants).

---

[9] The Economic Activity Rate.

Alongside the state policies of providing jobs to all nationals is the fact that the majority of them have been employed in the public sector. This is a paradox in countries with very liberal economic policies and free markets, but it is largely caused by the fact that salaries and other benefits in the public sector are quite attractive for nationals as compared to the demand for labour in the competitive, profit-oriented private sector. In Oman, 62.6 per cent of nationals were employed in the public sector in 2003, while 27.4 per cent were employed in the private sector[10].

Women in the population and in the workforce

Women constitute a minority of the population of Oman due to the large number of single male expatriates as well as restrictions placed on the residence of expatriate women. Only certain categories of foreigners are allowed to bring their families with them, one criterion being the minimum required salary. In 2003, there were 1,027,576 women in the total population, that is 43.9 per cent. That proportion slightly increased in the last decade; for example, there was 41.4 per cent women the total population in 1997, showing more liberal attitude to bringing in foreign female workers and possibility to increase a number of female dependants.

While Omani women have constituted about 50 per cent of the national population (49.5 per cent in 2003), the expatriate women were at that time responsible only for 26.2 per cent of the foreign population. Therefore, the ratio of expatriate men to women was almost 3:1.

The female workforce in Oman continues to be small, at 15 per cent of the total; in 2003, there were 113,632 women in the total workforce of 736,624[11].

---

[10] Population Census 2003, *Oman Statistical Yearbook 2004* (Muscat, Ministry of Development), Table 23-2.

[11] *Ibidem*, Table 16-2.

The Omani female workforce is over 17 per cent of the total Omani workforce; in 2003 there were 53,791 Omani women in the total Omani workforce of 312,446[12]. That percentage has been steadily going up in recent years; for example a decade earlier, in 1993, there were fewer than 10 per cent of Omani women in the total Omani workforce[13].

The expatriate female workforce accounts for 14 per cent of the total expatriate workforce; in 2003 there were 59,841 expatriate women in the total expatriate workforce of 414,178[14]. That percentage was much less than a decade earlier (19 per cent), probably because of the growing number of Omani women going to work.

As a small percentage of national women work, their Economic Activity Rate is low – 6.1, much lower, as might be expected, than in the case of men (28.7), but in the upward trend; in 1993 the Economic Activity Rate for Omani women was 3.5. In contrast, the Economic Activity Rate of expatriate women is quite high, over 40 per cent.

The majority of national women work in the public sector which provides higher salaries and accommodates better their needs for flexible working hours. Moreover, the public sector provides them with protection, shielding them from the necessity of dealing with a large number of persons, usually foreign men, as is the case in the private sector. In 2003, 63.3 per cent of female Omani workforce was employed in the public sector, as compared to 26.6 in the private one, interestingly enough in both cases almost the same percentage as for Omani men[15]. Thirty-nine per cent of Omani women worked in education, 15 per cent in public administration, and 14 per cent in health and social work[16].

---

[12] *Ibidem*, Table 17-2.

[13] A. Kapiszewski, *Nationals and Expatriates*, p. 108.

[14] Population Census 2003, Table 18-2.

[15] *Ibidem*, Table 23-2.

[16] *Ibidem*, Table 20-2.

The increase in the employment of national women is expected to continue in the near future, because of the economic necessities, more liberal attitudes towards the employment of women in society at large, the strong interest among many national women in working, the improvement of educational facilities for women and the shortage of national men to fulfil the needs of the market.

Although a part of national public opinion might still be against the idea of working women, the authorities have become strong supporters of enhancing their public role and their employment. In 1994, Sultan Qaboos nominated the first two women to the State Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura). Opening the Council session, he called on Omani women "to roll up their sleeves and contribute to the process of economic and social development [...]. The country needs every pair of hands"[17]. On another occasion he said, that "if the energy, capability and enthusiasm of women were excluded from a country's public life, that country would deprive itself of 50 per cent of its genius"[18]. Further promoting the role of women in public affairs, in 1997, he allowed national women to participate in the elections (the first such case in the GCC countries) and later nominated four of them to the newly established Council of Oman. In 1998–1999, the Sultan appointed the first woman ambassador, named three women under-secretaries in the Omani government and one a member of the board of the chamber of commerce and industry. In 2003, he appointed a woman to become President of the Public Authority for the Craft Industries at the rank of a minister. Finally, in 2004 the Sultan appointed three other women to the cabinet, to manage the Higher Education, Tourism and Social Development Ministries. Moreover, five female lawyers were appointed as attorney generals, the only such case in the GCC states. In turn, among the religious

---

[17] *Khaleej Times*, 4 September 1994.

[18] K. Thomas, 'A velvet revolution', *Arabies Trends* (April) 1999, p. 34.

leaders of the GCC countries, the Mufti of Muscat stands apart as being the only one to give his blessings to the inclusion of women in the political process[19].

Policies towards foreign labour

Policies towards foreign labour have been designed to secure the preservation of the existing regime and the dominant position of the national population. They are based on the following principles: rigorous laws regulating the entry, residence and employment of foreigners; rotation of the migrant workforce; preference for labour from certain regions; and last but not least, rigid restrictions on naturalisation.

Laws regulating the entry and employment of foreigners have generally been restrictive. Except for the citizens of the GCC countries and a few other exceptions nobody can enter a country without a proper visa, which in most cases requires a local sponsor. When the purpose of entry is employment, the application has to be made by the future employer, in which case residency and work permits issued by the Ministries of the Interior and Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, are also necessary. Work permits and entry visas are issued only when taking into consideration age, health, competence and qualifications for the job in question, and sometimes also 'good reputation and behaviour'. Residency visas are granted for a limited period of time, not exceeding five years. Work permits have to be renewed regularly, often annually, and when cancelled the residency permits become invalid. Changing the type of visa (for example from tourist to residency) is restricted, as is the possibility of changing employer (which usually requires the prior consent of the first sponsor and the authorities). In such situations

---

[19] C. J. Riphenburg, *Oman: Political Development in a Changing World* (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger, 1998), p. 152.

the person is often required to leave the country for a certain period of time before being granted a new contract and work permit. The local sponsor is responsible, at least on paper, for the conduct of the employee and is obliged to ensure that he or she is employed in accordance with legislation. In reality, the foreign workers can be hired and fired at the will of their employers. Moreover, authorities can terminate residency and working permits at any time. To secure even better control of foreign labour, employees are generally required to cede their passports to the employer for the duration of their stay in the country.

Despite the existence of all these restrictive regulations, the rotation of the workforce has proved impossible to achieve as planned. The free market economy has been more powerful than the policies the authorities would like to implement. The majority of expatriates have stayed beyond the term of the original contract, as employers usually prefer to hire workers with local experience rather than bring in new ones. Moreover, bringing in a new worker involves additional costs to the company. As a result, the average period of time that foreign workers have spent in Oman has been growing and the number of practically, though not formally, permanent workers has increased.

In turn, the policies regarding preferences for labour from certain countries have essentially accomplished their goals. In particular, the number of non-Gulf Arab workers, Palestinians in particular, was kept low while the number of Asians was high.

Finally, policies regulating naturalisation and citizenship have been most strictly enforced, successfully limiting the possible enlargement of privileged local populations by foreign elements. One has to be resident for 20 years to have the right to apply for the citizenship; this requirement is reduced to 10 years if the applicant has been married to an Omani. Because of such restrictions, very few people have been naturalized; for example between 1986 to

1996 only 1,861 foreigners were able to obtain such status[20]. Most of them were Arab women married to nationals[21].

In due course, however, the authorities realised that the size of the foreign workforce grew much beyond the government's expectations and full control over it became increasingly difficult. Therefore, they began to introduce different measures to deal with the problem.

To discourage foreigners even from considering the option of settling down, they have been forbidden, with a few exceptions, from owning land, buildings and any other immovable property, and barred from entering into a commercial venture without a national partner (foreign participation in a business must not be a majority share).

To limit the number of non-productive foreigners residing in the country, expatriate workers are prohibited from bringing in their family members unless they earn above a certain limit. Male children above the age of 18 are not allowed to stay with their parents unless they work or study in the country under different sponsorship. To limit the number of foreigners further, employment contracts are generally not renewed for expatriates reaching the retirement age of 60.

Then, the government have made employment of foreigners more expensive. For that reason the costs of labour cards, work and resident permits, entry and exit visas and health cards as well as the costs of subsidised services for expatriates have continually increased. In 1994, the government introduced a tax for hiring foreign workers. The tax ranges from 60 rials ($157) annually for each expatriate employee in the private sector to 70 rials ($184) for each domestic helper. Secondly, to reduce the number of foreigners further, amnesties have been regularly granted to non legally

---

[20] As calculated by the number of passports issued by the Naturalization Department, *Statistical Yearbook 1996* (Muscat, Ministry of Development).

[21] J. al-Jasser, "Naturalization in the Gulf: Ladies come out on top", *Mideast Mirror*, 2nd June 1999.

residing foreigners (that is, without a proper visa), allowing them to leave the country voluntarily without punishment. At the same time, tough penalties were introduced for illegal employment, with sentences to be served in prisons and substantial fines for both the illegal labourers and the nationals employing or sheltering them. The administrative deportations of non-legalized residents have been also practised.

Finally, to limit further the increase in the number of foreign workers, especially unskilled, the authorities have been trying to develop high-tech manufacturing and services which are not labour-intensive and do not need large on-site field personnel.

All the policies aimed to limit the numbers of the foreign labourers have neither been strict enough, nor fully implemented . In reality, they have often been losing the battle with the forces of the free market. A *laissez-faire* approach to the import of foreign labour continues to enjoy a strong support from the politically powerful lobbies of trading and merchant families whose fortunes have to a large extent been built thanks to expatriate workers.

Localisation of the labour market

Omanisation (often also called localisation, nationalisation or indigenisation) are terms used to describe policies leading to the replacement of expatriate labour by nationals. The Omani authorities try to implement such policies to provide jobs for all citizens, and also because they understand well the security-related, economic, social and cultural risks coming from the existence of large communities of foreigners on their territory.

The localisation of jobs in Oman went on the government's agenda very early. The Education and Training Council chaired by the Sultan was already established in 1977. The Third Five-Year Development Plan (1980–1985) paid much attention to this issue.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour through its Directorate General of Vocational Training established several Vocational Training Institutes in different regions of the Sultanate in the mid-1980s. In hardly any time at all, they began to offer numerous commercial and technical courses for nationals. Oman Technical and Industrial College, the Institute of Health Services, the Institute of Public Administration and the Institute for Bankers were set up as well[22]. State-owned oil companies, such as Oman Petroleum Development and Oman Refinery Company established in-service training and educational programs for their Omani employees. At the same time, the authorities began to involve the private sector in such programs. In the early 1980s, the Training-Levy Rebate Scheme was introduced to reimburse the costs of training courses for Omani nationals to private employers.

The first sector the government decided to nationalise was the banking sector, attractive for nationals thanks to high salaries and the prestige associated with the job. Omanis quickly dominated this sector and in the 1990s already constituted 85 per cent of all bank employees. Programs to Omanise fully some other sectors, nursing for example, were established as well. At the primary school level, 95 per cent of teachers are Omanis already; in the whole public school system 57 per cent of teachers were nationals in 1999[23]. Altogether, 81.8 per cent of all government employees (excluding military) were Omanis by 2005, with several government departments becoming almost 100 per cent localised[24].

---

[22] J. S. Birks and C. A. Sinclair, 'Successful education and human resource development – the key to sustained economic growth', in B. R. Pridham (ed.), *Oman: Economic, Social and Strategic Developments* (London, Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 145–65.

[23] *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (March) 1999, p. 74.

[24] Interview with Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, Minister of Economy, *Khaleej Times*, 4th January 2006.

In 1994, Oman became the first country in the GCC to introduce legal requirements for the localisation of the private sector. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour imposed an Omanisation percentage according to a sectored quota system: banking – 90 per cent; transport, storage and communication – 60 per cent; finance, insurance and real estate – 45 per cent; hotels and restaurants – 30 per cent; wholesale and retail – 20 per cent; and contracting – 15 per cent. Several categories of jobs, such as fishing, animal husbandry, driving light vehicles or practising traditional handicrafts, were reserved for nationals only. The plan aimed to increase the percentage of Omanis in the private sector to 27 per cent by the year 2000 (from 17 per cent in 1995), which would bring the overall localisation of the workforce to 40 per cent.

Companies were asked to reach the targeted percentages on time or face heavy fines, the denial of visas for importing labour and the loss of public contracts for failing to comply. Nevertheless, the implementation of this ambitious program had to be postponed. Most of the private companies were not ready to fulfil the legal obligations, claiming lack of sufficient numbers of properly skilled Omanis to take jobs over from expatriates. The truth, however, was that all too often, private companies did not take the issue seriously and did very little or nothing about it. The attitude of the private sector was, and still is, somewhat opportunistic and there has been evidence of "crash management hire-an-Omani-somehow" techniques to win favour with the government[25]. Another major problem has been the different salary expectations between expatriate and local labour. Many expatriates from Asia are ready to work for 60 rials ($160) a month while the minimum wage required for an Omani secondary school graduate is 200 rials ($550). Private

---

[25] F. Al-Farsi, 'Omanisation and faculty development in Sultan Qaboos University', in K. E. Shaw (ed.), *Higher Educationin the Gulf: Problems and Prospects* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1997), p. 183.

companies prefer, of course, to employ the former. Nevertheless, thanks to the government involvement, the rate of localisation in the private sector reached 25 percent in 2005 (increasing from 16.4 in 2000)[26].

In the mean time, the Omanisation policy and the quota system in particular were outlined in the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1996–2000) as well as in the Sixth (2001–2005). It was stated there that, along with Sultan Qaboos' vision for Oman's economy, there was a need to attach a greater importance to human resource development. This means "upgrading and developing ... basic education to the level of distinguished international standards", and "expanding the area of technical education and vocational training, and directing most of the basic education graduates towards these areas"[27]. At the same time, it was also expected that the unemployment should substantially go down and the Omanisation of the labour force should increase.

To fulfil these goals, to oversee all issues related to vocational education and in particular to ensure that vocational training meets the needs of the private sector employers, the Supreme Committee for Vocational Training and Labour was established (replacing former bodies of this kind). Ministers of national economy, commerce, industry and development became it members. The Committee's executive arm, the Vocational Training Authority, has been entrusted with the task of initiating programs to increase the number of trained professionals and technicians. Thanks to the Authority's initiatives, several technical colleges and vocational training centres have been established. Many private institutes offering training in business, computer skills and accounting have opened as well. Moreover, significant budget allocations have been

---

[26] Interview with Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, Minister of Economy, *Khaleej Times*, 4th January 2006 .

[27] Royal Decree No. 1/96, *Official Gazette*, January 1996 .

made for training schemes for nationals, including ones for women. The government has also decided to use for that purpose funds generated from the tax imposed on companies for hiring expatriate workers. The authorities have also expanded earlier schemes and have begun to reimburse private companies for employing Omanis, covering the entire cost of their in-job training and 50–80 per cent of their salaries for the first few months.

The Vocational Training Authority has adopted the British National Vocational Qualification System to help boost human resource development. It puts equal emphasis on real-life experience and classroom theory, and – to a large extent – satisfactorily tackles the problem of secondary school leavers. Only those educational institutions which satisfy the system's requirements are entitled to apply for government subsidies. To expand educational possibilities further, as Sultan Qaboos University and a few other existing public colleges can enrol only about 15 per cent of high school graduates, the establishment of private colleges has been allowed. The government believes that with all these measures adopted, it will be possible to increase the enrolment of nationals in technical and vocational education significantly. At the same time, the Chairman of the State Council, Sheikh Hamud al-Harifhi, warned men in Oman "against the consequences of their laziness, because women are taking their due role in all ministries, establishments and areas of production and are scoring superior positions"[28]. As national women won the majority of university seats, the state intervened and had the enrolment percentage equalled between males and females.

Other actions have been initiated as well. First of all, the Omani government decided, in 1997, to require the early retirement of more than a fourth of its civil service, to secure in such a way a number of jobs for young nationals. Secondly, 1998 (and later, 1999 as well)

---

[28] Reuters, 25 June, 1999.

were proclaimed the Year of the Private Sector, with the aim of promoting further development of this sector and the localisation of private establishments. In particular, companies employing a large number of Omanis and organising training programs for them became eligible for special "green cards" from the (renamed) Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, giving them priority in expediting their labour-related transactions at the Ministry. To help to eradicate unemployment among graduates, the Fund for the Development of Youth Projects was launched in 1998, the first of its kind in the Gulf. Sultan Qaboos and other members of the royal family were the first donors to the fund. Finally, a decision was reached to begin implementing strictly the 1994 law and fine establishments that do not meet the quota requirements. Petrol stations were the first companies where this measure was adopted. The authorities suspended labour cards of expatriate employees in gas stations which are not 50 per cent Omanised. In the next step, all school bus and tractor driver positions were set aside for nationals[29]. Hairdressers, tailors and gas distributors were added to the list of occupations reserved for Omanis only. Moreover, the government asked all private companies employing 50 or more local workers to have an Omani director of personnel by the end of 1999 and announced that it would no longer grant expansion loans to companies that had not reach Omanisation targets. The authorities stress that they do not intend to Omanise positions if there were a negative repercussion on productivity or the quality of services provided. Nevertheless, the restrictions result in a certain amount of complaints both from nationals and expatriates.

---

[29] This decision has not been easy to implement. For example, as *Oman Observer* noted, many Omanis "are not able to operate the sophisticated mowers, bailers, rakers, etc.". Moreover, small farmers have financial worries related to the ban. Omani tractor drivers charge 120 rials ($307) a month compared to 70 rials ($180) for Asian workers.

As the Economist Intelligence Unit experts remarked: "the forced complete Omanisation of basic services as such as the supply of cooking gas cylinders, on which a substantial portion of the country depends, will leave the government open to particular criticism if Omanis who take these jobs are not responsive to after-hours or weekend calls. There will no doubt be some early difficulties, but the government is unlikely to rescind the order as it comes under increasing pressure from unemployment" [30].

Localisation has become easier to achieve as the attitude of young Omanis towards jobs has changed. Young people used to want to work in the ministries or to begin their careers in high managerial posts: now they realise that this is often not possible and faced with the threat of unemployment, they go to technical or clerical jobs outside the public sector as well. The Minister for Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, Amur bin Shuwain al-Husni, stressed the importance of this approach and said that Omanis should seize the jobs available rather than wait for the choicest ones. "We cannot wait for foreigners to cook for us, drive our cars and tailor our clothes ... no work is inferior"[31]. Sultan Qaboos went even further and denounced what he called 'the laziness' of the present generation who are no longer willing to perform manual labour[32].

Despite all these efforts, Omanisation continues to face serious problems. In the study by Asya Mohamed Suleiman Al-Lamky, 65 per cent of Omani graduates indicated that they were not able to replace expatriates at work[33]. According to Fawzia Al-Farsi, the

[30] EIU, *Oman. Country Report* (2nd quarter 1999), p. 15.

[31] *Gulf News*, 5 May 1998.

[32] EIU, *Oman. Country Report* (4th quarter 1998), p. 13.

[33] A. M. S. Al-Lamky, *Higher Education in Oman: Perceptions of University Graduates in the Context of Dependent Development, 1970–1990* (Ph.D. thesis, The George Washington University, 1992), p. 216.

major obstacles to Omanisation are: lack of awareness amongst expatriates of their responsibility to train nationals and inadequate cooperation from expatriates in this respect as a result of their fear of losing employment, lack of clear policy and Omanisation targets; continued preferential treatment of expatriates over Omani nationals in the private sector; insufficient opportunities for Omanis to be given responsibility at work, inappropriate Omani work attitudes and limited commitment[34]. Moreover, the localisation of the workforce in Oman, as in other GCC countries, has not been welcomed by everybody. Some businessmen have expressed their criticism of enforced localisation. They believe that "Omanisation cannot be based on converting the private sector into charitable institutions, forcing it to absorb nationals"[35]. Others point out that localisation should not be speeded up as otherwise serious problems will likely to occur, as for example was the case when expatriate water-tanker drivers were replaced by nationals, resulting in a poor supply of water[36]. On the other hand, there has also been criticism that localisation policies have not been enforced firmly enough. The President of the Shura Council, 'Abdullah bin 'Ali al-Qatabi, has called in 1998 for the review of the Omanisation policies since an increasing number of expatriates continue to arrive in the Sultanate to take up employment[37]. Moreover, the unemployment of nationals stays high: according to official estimations in 2003, more than 60,000 Omanis under the age of 24 were without jobs[38]. Nevertheless, in comparison with other GCC states, the localisation of the Omani workforce has been quite successful so far.

---

[34] Al-Farsi, 'Omanisation', p. 190.

[35] *Emirates News*, 10 October 1997.

[36] EIU *Oman. Country Report* (1st quarter 1998).

[37] *Khaleej Times*, 23 March 1998.

[38] *Middle East Economic Digest*, 2 May 2003.

Non-indigenous citizens and "stateless" residents in the Gulf monarchies. The Kuwaiti *bidun*

Since the discovery of oil, the political entities of the Persian Gulf have transformed themselves from desert sheikhdoms into modern states. The process was accompanied by rapid population growth. During the last 50 years, the population of the current Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman[1], grew from 4 million in 1950 to 33.4 million in 2004, thus recording one of the highest rates of population growth in the world[2]. The primary cause of this increase has not been the growth of the indigenous population, large in itself, but the influx of foreign workers. The employment of large numbers of foreigners was a structural imperative for growth in the GCC countries, as oil-related development depended upon the importation of foreign technologies, and required knowledge and skills unfamiliar to the local Arab population. Towards the end of 2004, there were 12.5 million foreigners, 37 percent of the total

---

[1] The GCC is a regional organization of these states established in 1981.

[2] For the population data see Andrzej Kapiszewski, *Nationals and Expatriates. Population and Labor Dilemmas of the GCC States* (Reading, Ithaca Press, 2001), pp. 33–47.

population, in the GCC states. In Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait, foreigners constituted a majority. In the United Arab Emirates foreigners accounted for over 80 percent of population. Only Oman and Saudi Arabia managed to maintain a relatively low proportion of foreign population: about 20 and 27 percent, respectively.

This development has created security, economic, social and cultural threats to the local population. Therefore, to maintain the highly privileged position of the indigenous population and make integration of foreigners with local communities difficult, numerous restrictions were imposed: the sponsorship system, limits on the duration of every foreigner's stay, curbs on naturalization and on the citizenship rights of those who are naturalized, etc. However, these measures did not bring the expected results. Rotation of the workforce has failed to meet expectations. The free market economy has been more powerful than the policies the authorities tried to implement. The majority of foreign workers have stayed beyond the term of their original contracts because employers usually prefer to keep workers with local experience rather than bring in new ones. As a result, the average stay of foreign workers in the GCC countries has continued to grow, and the number of almost permanent foreign workers has increased, albeit not formally.

The domination of foreign labour over the indigenous one has not been the only peculiarity of the GCC states population structure The populations in these countries have been divided into citizens and temporary foreign workers and there have also been deep divisions within the citizens' groups themselves. Among the local passport holders, there have been naturalised foreigners and other "non-indigenous" citizens, including members of certain tribes, or certain ethnic or religious minority groups considered "impure" nationals by "real" nationals. In some countries the authorities established different degrees of citizenship resulting in not all citizens being equal.

The question of citizenship arose at the beginning of the oil era and acquired greater significance when the sheikhdoms of the Gulf obtained their independence. Citizenship was introduced as a concept that the local Arabs found a novelty, largely of Western origin and connected with the idea of the nation-state. It was "a blanket designation that overlooked tribal and geographic origins [...] a classificatory principle alien to their way of conceptualising social relations"[3]. Traditionally, the primary affiliation for most of the indigenous population was of a tribal nature. An "alien" was, by definition, anyone who did not belong to the tribe[4]. Thus, the core of the new nations in the Gulf consisted of tribes connected with the ruling families, as well as some powerful local merchant families. As loyalty to blood was considered far more important than residence in the particular territory and as the final word on citizenship remained in the hands of the ruler, inhabitants of a country could easily obtain the citizenship of another country, if they were linked to the proper tribe residing across the border. This eventually led to their possession of dual citizenship. Nevertheless, the later established laws formally regulating the issue usually incorporated both blood and territory in the definition of nationality and hence in the requirements to be satisfied for citizenship[5]. This

---

[3] A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand. Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1997), p. 46.

[4] The "alien" classification is often visible in names assigned by the natives to non-local residents. Al Yamani, Al Najdi, Al Hijazi or Al Hasawi are examples of well known Gulf families which originated in particular regions of the peninsula. See Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 46.

[5] The first nationality law in this part of the world was established during the Ottoman period. In 1869, the Sultan separated the notions of religion and nationality and instead adopted the concept that the citizenship of the individual was determined by the citizenship of his or her parents or by the place of birth. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 established the citizenship of the people, who were earlier under the Ottomans' jurisdiction,

approach did not change much over the years, and citizenship and tribalism cohabit uneasily under a regime that has been described as the "simultaneity of the unsimultaneous"[6]. Until today, the issue of roots for many GCC families is a sensitive one.

The question of citizenship was made more complicated by the context of the dual nature of the Arab statehood identity. Many Arabs subscribe to the principle that they constitute a single people, a single Arab nation (*ummah arabiyyah*), united by a common language and religion. This concept has even found expression in the constitutions of Kuwait and the UAE. At the same time,

---

based on the territorial principle. Despite the provisions of this treaty, many Arab states, Kuwait and the UAE in particular, decided to use both the principles – loyalty to blood and loyalty to the land – as a basis for citizenship. Bahrain was the only Gulf country where the place of birth was supposed to decide about the right to citizenship. Already in the 1930s, when the country was still very much under British influence, people born in Bahrain who wanted the country's citizenship had to register within a year of their 18th birthday with the authorities. P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality in the United Arab Emirates*, in: P. Dresch and J. Piscatori (eds), *Monarchies and nations. Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 141. For discussion on the issue of citizenship in the Arab world see: S. Stanton Russell, *Migration and political integration in the Arab world*, in: G. Luciani (ed.), *The Arab State*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), pp. 377–8; G. Dib, *Migration and naturalisation laws in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates*, ESCWA, *Population Bulletin*, Part I (15) 1978, pp. 33–62, Part II (16) 1979, pp. 3–18; N. A. Butenschon, U. Davis, M. Hassassia (eds.), *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East* (New York, Syracuse University Press, 2000). The Saudi Nationality Law of 1926, recognized as Saudi citizens "original" residents of the Kingdom holding Ottoman nationality in 1914, Ottoman nationals or non-Ottoman nationals domiciled in the Kingdom in 1914 and continued to do so until 1926 without obtaining a foreign nationality; www. uscis.gov.

[6] B. Tibi, *The simultaneity of the unsimultaneous: old tribes and nation-states in the modern Middle East*, in: P. S. Khoury, J. Kosiner (eds), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), pp. 127–152.

Arabs identify themselves with particular sovereign states, a fact acknowledged in turn by the Arab League. Thus, in the Gulf a basic principle of a single Arab nation conflicted with the unequal treatment of the large migrant non-Gulf Arab workforce. Labour migration within the Arab world did not help to make the region a single territory without boundaries – the concept often proclaimed by pan-Arabists. On the contrary, and especially in the case of the GCC countries, labour migration has induced states to develop policies to control their borders. This approach has been clearly articulated in the Kuwaiti law which underlines that: "The most prominent aspect of the State's sovereignty over its lands is the protection of its territories from any offender who daringly violates the said sovereignty by infiltration and residing in it without having secured a proper residence permit"[7].

Despite sharing a negative attitude towards the integration of foreigners, several GCC states naturalised many foreigners, mostly Arabs, in the first years of their independence. They did so to enlarge the size of the country's legal body of citizens or for political reasons. Moreover, some badu (bedouins) and foreign Muslims (of Arab, Persian or African origin; the last including former slaves), long-time residents of these countries, were also initially granted citizenship.

For example, the UAE gave citizenship to several thousand members of certain non-local tribes as well as to some foreign residents. Many Arabs of Omani, Bahraini and Qatari origin benefited from this opportunity, and so did some Arabs residing earlier in Iran and Baluchis from Pakistan. In particular, the Abu Dhabi emirate acted thus in order to enhance its political weight *vis-a-vis* the other emirates. It also granted citizenship to many Yemenis because of the special relationship between Sheikh Zayed, the President of the country,

---

[7] Explanatory Memorandum accompanying Kuwait's Law No. 55 of 1982; Russell, *Migration*, p. 384.

and Yemen. Most of them were from the Hadhramaut region. Some were many well educated people from the Aden area driven out by the communist government[8]. In turn, Dubai, gave passports to some Iranians who had lived and traded there for generations (including the Bastakis).

In turn, Saudi Arabia in 1950s and 1960s, awarded citizenship to a number of Yemeni, Egyptian, and Palestinian workers as well as to dissident refugees from Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Palestine. Oman in a similar way naturalized many Indian traders, Pakistanis who worked in the army, and Yemenis with family links to the province of Dhofar as well as people from their former territories in Zanzibar and East-Central Africa[9]. A large number of people were also naturalized in Kuwait (see below).

After consolidating their independence, the Gulf monarchies restricted the possibility of obtaining citizenship. They declined to extend that right to a broader populace as it became a unique privilege, connected with social and material benefits[10]. Moreover,

---

[8] Like the bin Breks, who later became prominent "locals" in Dubai. See also: P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality*, p. 142.

[9] In 1964 Omanis in Zanzibar were told to go home. Many returned and eventually received   the country's citizenship as of Omani ancestry. The ones with mixed Omani-African descent were naturalised. Since 1970s, the Omani nationality law considered children of Omani male nationals born abroad to be full Omani citizens. Nevertheless, Zanzibari returnees and their children have created a separate community, especially in Muscat; many of them speak Swahili rather than Arabic until now. For an excellent study of Zanzibari Omanis in Muscat see: M. Al-Rasheed, *Transnational connections and national identity*, in: P. Dresch and J. Piscatori, *Monarchies and nations*, pp. 96–113.

[10] A. Nga Longva, *Citizenship in the Gulf States: Conceptualization and Practice*, paper presented at the Conference on Citizenship and the State in the Middle East, University of Oslo, November 1996; R. Maktabi, *The politics of citizenship in Kuwait – membership and participation in a rentier state*; paper presented at 13th Annual National Political Science Conference, Hurdalsjoen, Oslo, January 2005.

rulers now worried that extending citizenship rights to foreigners could lead to domination of the naturalized population over the local one. Therefore, Kuwait decided that citizenship could be granted only to people who have resided in the country since 1920; Bahrain declared the year 1921 for that purpose, the UAE – the year 1925 and Qatar – the year 1930.

This policy did not change in the following years. The residency requirements stipulated by the respective laws have been very extensive (although shorter for certain Arab nationalities), and naturalised citizens have remained subject to some restrictions of their rights, especially of a political nature[11]. In the UAE, according to first Nationality Law of 1972, Omani, Qataris, and Bahraini residents for three years were eligible for citizenship in one of the emirates making up the Federation. Other Arabs had to prove ten years' residence, at least five of which had to fall after the date when the law was issued; other foreigners' request for naturalization required continuous residence since 1940, or for 30 years out of which 20 had to fall after the law came into effect[12]. Later, some expatriate Arabs, who had worked for the UAE government for more than 20 years, were allowed to retire and stay in the country, although not all of them have formally been naturalised. Until recently, Omanis and Yemenis serving 15 years in the UAE military force could also apply for citizenship.

Kuwait and Qatar require that Arab applicants for citizenship should have been resident for 15 years at least; 20 for non-Arabs. Oman, on the other hand, does not distinguish between Arabs and

---

[11] J. al-Jasser, *Naturalization in the Gulf: Ladies come out on top*, „Mideast Mirror", June 2, 1999. The information in the following section are based on the Jasser's article.

[12] P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality*, p. 141. The Federal law of 1975 substituted reference to Omanis, Qataris and Bahrainis by more general: "members of the Arab tribes who migrated from countries neighbouring the State", *ibidem*, p. 144.

non-Arabs: all have to have been resident for 20 years, but this requirement is reduced to 10 years if the applicant has been married to an Omani since before 1986. Bahrain requires Arabs to be resident for 15 years, non-Arabs for 25, before granting its citizenship. Until recently, Saudi Arabia required a residency period of five years and proficiency in Arabic. Nevertheless, even fulfilling all the necessary requirements has not granted a foreigner an automatic right to citizenship. Interior ministries decide in such cases and often turn down applications without having to announce cause. On the other side, the GCC rulers have the absolute authority to grant citizenship to anyone even if they do not meet the basic requirements. This prerogative is usually invoked when the persons concerned have done the country a great service, if their skills are greatly desired, or for any other reason that the ruler deems appropriate. In such a way, the UAE and Qatar accepted (and naturalised) a number of Iranians after the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Naturalized citizens face varying restrictions: in Saudi Arabia, for example, they are excluded from the armed forces, the internal security forces, the diplomatic corps and other sensitive posts. In several Gulf countries they are not eligible to vote, run for parliament, or be appointed to a ministerial post before the passage of a certain period: 20 years in the case of Kuwait, and 10 in Qatar and Bahrain. In the UAE, naturalized citizens never obtain certain rights unless they were Omani, Qatari, and Bahraini natives; in that case they get them seven years after naturalization. Only Oman grants naturalized citizens all the rights of native Omanis. Moreover, the "non-indigenous" passport holders, not only the naturalised ones but also members of certain groups are often not treated by "real" nationals as equal to them, which often leads to their discrimination in various fields. This, for example, has been the fate of many Badu in Kuwait, Shi'ites of Iranian background in several GCC countries, and Yemenis in the province of Asir in Saudi Arabia.

All GCC countries formally require that people who would like to be naturalised renounce their previous citizenship. Conversely, GCC nationals – as well as their dependants if they do not specifically express their desire to retain the citizenship – usually lose their citizenship if they are granted the nationality of another country. Such approach is caused by the conviction that "dual (or multiple) nationality is anathema to the idea of loyalty to the state, and can result in confusion regarding jurisdiction in cases of disputes, as well as in matters relating to military service and employment in sensitive posts."[13] Nevertheless, as already mentioned, that rule sometimes does not apply to nationals within the GCC; there are members of certain tribes whose historical territory lies across the modern state borders, who hold dual citizenship (see below).

In total, about 50,000 people were naturalised in the UAE (until 1997), constituting about 8 per cent of the national population[14]. More recently, however, the practice has been severely curtailed and today it does not contribute significantly to the local population growth. In turn, Saudi Arabia naturalised between 1989 and 1992 only 15,058 people[15], and Oman, between 1986 to 1996 only 1,861 people[16]. Most of them were Arab women married to nationals[17]. Also today, naturalisation in all GCC countries is limited mainly to foreign spouses of national men[18]. But even this right carries with it several restrictions. Foreign wives of citizens can usually obtain local passports only after a probation period lasting several years and at times the right of citizenship is extended only during the duration

---

[13] *Ibidem.*

[14] „Emirates News", 13 Aug. 1997.

[15] „Arab News", January 3, 2004.

[16] As calculated by the number of passports issued by the Naturalization Department, *Statistical Yearbook 1996* (Muscat, Ministry of Development).

[17] J. al-Jasser, *Naturalization in the Gulf.*

[18] Occasionally, also certain well-educated and well-connected long-term Arab immigrants are discretely given citizenship.

of a marriage (that is, women may have to return their passports if divorced)[19]. In Saudi Arabia the law forbids foreign women to get the Kingdom's citizenship if they married certain government officials, members of the Saudi armed and internal security forces or Saudis while studying abroad. Foreign women married to a Saudi national can apply for the citizenship only if marriage was sanctioned by the interior ministry[20]. The Qatari law of 1989 altogether banned certain categories of state employees from marrying foreigners: ministers, members of the diplomatic service, officers of the armed forces, police and intelligence, and Qataris studying abroad. Others needed permission from the authorities. Male Qatari can request it if they have some "social reasons" for marriage, sufficient funds to support a family, not more than one wife already, and not more than one divorce history before. The wife cannot be younger from the man by more than 15 years. Female Qataris need permission to marry as well. All these measures apply only to non-GCC citizens; relatives, even without the Qatari citizenship, are also not to abide by this law[21]. Similar law exists in Oman since 1993 and is planned to be introduced in the UAE as well[22].

Foreigners married to national women, if such a legal possibility exists at all, are normally not eligible for citizenship, and are required to have a job and a local sponsor to stay in the country. Children from such marriages are not automatically considered nationals since citizenship usually passes to offspring only from the paternal

---

[19] For example, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman require that five years pass between a person's naturalization and his wife's being granted citizenship. The UAE require that the spouse reside in a country for three years after her husband is naturalized in order to be granted citizenship, while Qatar requires for that purpose two years. al-Jasser, *Naturalization in the Gulf.*

[20] *Ibidem.*

[21] P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality,* p. 149.

[22] *Ibidem.*

side[23]. Therefore, very often wives and children of naturalised citizens remain naturalised citizens. In the UAE, paradoxically, the illegitimate child of an Emirati womAn is better provided by the law – can have the country's citizenship – while her legitimate child by a foreign husband will probably never get it[24]. In the UAE, a national woman married to a foreigner may lose her citizenship[25].

In Saudi Arabia, on May 23, 2005, the amendments to the Kingdom's naturalisation law went into effect. These amendments allowed residents who had legally lived in the country for 10 years to apply for Saudi nationality under certain conditions; earlier, formally only five years of permanent residence was required but the authorities rarely put that clause into practice[26]. Moreover, the new law allows children of Saudi women married to foreigners to acquire citizenship when they reach 18 years of age. The non-Saudi husband of a Saudi woman may be granted citizenship once his children have obtained Saudi nationality. Despite provisions formally allowing the Kingdom's

---

[23] For example, in January 1998, the Cassation Court in Manama rejected the plea of three people applying for Bahraini citizenship, stating that the fact that they had Bahraini mothers did not qualify them for that right as their fathers were of Iranian origin. „Khaleej Times", 10 January, 1998.

[24] P. Dresch, *Debates on marriage and nationality*, p. 157.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 151.

[26] M. Al Hakeem, *Saudi Arabia to approve new citizenship by-law soon*, „Gulf News", April 4, 2005. The 1974 citizenship law stated that individuals born in Saudi Arabia of foreign parents or of Saudi mother and a father of foreign or unknown nationality, and individuals born outside of Saudi Arabia of a Saudi mother and a father of foreign or unknown nationality can apply for a Saudi citizenship if they have permanent residence in Saudi Arabia at age of maturity, have no criminal convictions, are knowledge in the Arabic language, and submit within one year of maturity the application for naturalization. When an individual files a claim to Saudi citizenship, representatives of the Saudi government travel to the individual's locality and take affidavits from community members who are familiar with the individual's and/or the individual's family's or father's origin; http://uscis.gov.

Muslim expatriates to apply for Saudi citizenship, which many of them would be happy to obtain, it is unlikely that authorities will be willing to provide many non-Saudis with the country citizenship.

In most of the GCC states, the law permits the state to revoke citizenship for political or criminal reasons. The UAE law declares that it may happen if a citizen "serves the interests of a hostile country, or voluntarily obtains the nationality of another country". The first provision was applied on several occasions to those involved in anti-government activities. Similarly, in 1994, Saudi Arabia, in probably the most famous case, revoked the citizenship of Osama bin Laden. In turn, since the early 1980s hundreds of Bahraini citizens, especially Shiites, have been forcibly exiled from Bahrain to Iran[27]. Similar incidents happened in 1995. Some Bahraini nationals were also denied the right of return to the country, despite the fact, that under Bahrain's Constitution "no citizen shall be deported from Bahrain, nor shall he be denied re-entry."

In early 2005, the Qatari government revoked citizenship of 5,266 people from Al-Ghafran branch of Al-Murrah tribe. The government justified the decision on the ground that this branch of the tribe was of Saudi Arabian origin, and its members held Saudi citizenship, what defied a ban on dual citizenship[28].

However, some of those affected believed they were punished for their loyalty to the deposed emir, Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, or that the action against them was a belated response to a failed coup attempt in 1996 to unseat Qatar's current ruler, Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani[29]. The move was apparently aimed also at keeping a "proper" balance in Qatari society, especially in view of the upcoming first

---

[27] "Fear, Flight and Forcible Exile. Refugees in the Middle East", Amnesty International Country Report 1998, web.amnesty.org.

[28] AFP, May 5, 2005.

[29] „Arab News", April 2, 2005.

ever parliamentary elections in the country, as well as reflected strained relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, all the GCC states reserve themselves a right to withdraw citizenship of a naturalised person within five years of granting it if the individual concerned was proven to have committed a crime.

In general, with the exceptions presented above, fear of compromising economic privileges and of diluting the identity of the local population has led the GCC countries to reject the option of absorbing foreign labour, even of long-term residents, as citizens. The concern remains that naturalised foreigners cannot be fully trusted, especially in crisis situations when the loyalty to the country of origin could come into question, and they are equally suspected of having a negative social and cultural impact on the local populations .

Recently, there were a few exceptions to this rule. In Bahrain, a new citizenship law was introduced in July 2002 to allow individuals from Arab countries to obtain Bahraini citizenship. The government apparently decided to change the social structure of the country by granting citizenship rights to a large number of foreigners, mainly Sunni Arabs from around the region. Some suggest that as many as 50,000 to 60,000 people became "politically naturalised"[30]. The aim was probably to reduce the Shi'ite majority in the electorate as well as reduce the statistical dominance of the foreign workforce. The Bahrain Freedom Movement issued a declaration on the matter on September 3, 2002. It stated that the government was engaged in "relentless efforts in employing foreigners to create a workforce largely composed of non-Bahrainis to ensure total control of markets"[31]. What especially angered the Shiite Bahrainis was the naturalisation of large number of Jordanian, Syrian, Egyptian and Pakistani

---

[30] The International Crisis Group, The Middle East Report no. 40, "Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge", May 6, 2005.

[31] „Voice of Bahrain", September 2002. See also Marc Pellas, *Far from democracy in the Gulf*, „Le Monde Diplomatique", March 25, 2005.

military and police officers, judges and some other civil servants, called by them "mercenaries". Apparently, some 8,000 Saudis were also awarded Bahraini citizenship in 2001–2002, without having to forego Saudi citizenship. There were people who claimed affiliation to the Dawasir tribe that was once in Bahrain but has long resided in eastern Saudi Arabia. The Bahraini Shiite opposition considered this move politically motivated, to allow Sunnis to vote in the October 2002 parliamentary elections[32].

Kuwaiti *bidun*

In Kuwait, the situation of "non-indigenous" permanent residents has been particularly complex.

Kuwait has created different categories of citizens, unequal in rights. In 1948, the first two decrees on the matter defined as "originally Kuwaiti" members of the ruling family, those permanently residing in Kuwait since 1899, children of Kuwaiti men and children of Arab or Muslim fathers also born in Kuwait[33]. Naturalization was possible for people who had lived in Kuwait for at least 10 years, were employed, and spoke Arabic; it could also be granted to other people "by special order for valuable services." On the other hand, citizenship could be revoked as a penalty for diverse crimes, among them "propagating anti-Islamic ideas".

A decade later the citizenship law was introduced (the Kuwaiti Nationality Act of December 14, 1959). This law defined Kuwaiti nationals as those persons who were residing in Kuwait in 1920, and had maintained residence there until 1959 ("Everyone who came to Kuwait pre 1920 is a natural Kuwaiti")[34]. Moreover, only those inhabiting the area before 1920 became Kuwaitis "by origin" (the

---

[32] "Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge".

[33] J. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1990).

[34] A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 47.

so-called first class citizens), while those who arrived later became "naturalized" Kuwaitis (second-class citizens). Children of Kuwaiti fathers, born in Kuwait or outside its borders, became Kuwaitis as well; children of Kuwaiti mothers and non-Kuwaiti fathers were denied this right. Thus, the 1959 law widened the category of original Kuwaitis by establishing 1920 as the residency criterion, but at the same time narrowed the eligible population by excluding children of non-Kuwaiti men (i.e. children of "Arab and Muslim fathers born in Kuwait"). The *jus soli* principle was just replaced by one of *jus sanguis* nature. The date 1920 was chosen as it was the year of the battle of Jahra against the Ikhwan forces of Ibn Saud, the event which saw, as it is often claimed, the birth of an explicit Kuwaiti national awareness[35]. Nevertheless, the law did not make clear what residing in Kuwait in 1920 means. At that time, Kuwait was already recognized as an independent country under a British protectorate, but the country's borders were defined only later: in 1922 with Saudi Arabia, and in 1923 with Iraq. Moreover, the forces defending Jahra were composed not only of the long-settled inhabitants of the town, but also of nomadic tribesmen. On that basis, members of both groups were later granted Kuwaiti citizenship, establishing a pattern of offering this right not only to the permanent residents of certain locality but to migratory groups as well[36].

The Nationality Law of 1959 was amended several times. In particular, the amendment of 1960 allowed the naturalization of

[35] M. A. Tetreault, *Stories and Democracy. Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 45–46).

[36] Longva describes the different perception of citizenship by urban Kuwaitis vs. tribally oriented ones. While for the first, national identity is bound up with the connection between the citizen and the territorialized community (previously the town, today the nation-state), in the Bedouin tradition, with absence of attachment to a particular territory, people's identity is connected with the ruler, whom they follow, and display allegiance and loyalty to. A. Nga Longva, *Citizenship in the Gulf States.*

no more than 50 people a year: a restriction which seems to have been meant for non-Gulf cases only. Later, the amendment of 1966 allowed Arabs who had resided in Kuwait since 1945 and non-Arabs who had resided there since 1930 to apply for Kuwaiti citizenship. That possibility was later expanded to Arabs who had lived in Kuwait for at least 10 years continuously and to non-Arabs who had lived for 15 years. Finally, a 1981 amendment restricted the grant of Kuwaiti nationality only to Muslim applicants.

Using a clause permitting granting citizenship to everyone "who served the country and who deserves it", in the 1960s and 1970s, the government gave citizenship to thousands of badu living in Kuwait but whose tribes originated outside the country. The government encouraged these people to work and settle in Kuwait, fearing that otherwise the large number of workers from other countries would dominate the labour market. badu were characterised as completely loyal to the monarchy and, therefore, did not appear to be as radical as the politically active Palestinian, Lebanese or Syrian immigrants. In addition, badu were needed to counterbalance a growing anti-government opposition from the urban commercial establishment. As a consequence, by 1980 as many as 200,000 people had been naturalised in Kuwait. In the 1980s, this procedure continued, with 10,000 to 17,000 people naturalised each year[37]. In 1994, the parliament passed a law stating that every male born to a Kuwaiti father, including naturalized ones is Kuwaiti by origin[38]. Thus, tens of thousands of second-class citizens, children of naturalized Kuwaitis

---

[37] Ministry of Planning, *Annual Statistical Abstracts*. It is interesting to note that the law prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims; however, citizens who were Christians before 1980 (and children born to families of such citizens since that date) were allowed to transmit their citizenship to their children.

[38] The amendment to the citizenship law reads: "Offspring of a naturalized Kuwaiti are treated as first-class citizens if their father was a Kuwaiti at the time of their birth", „Arab Times", February 7, 1994.

obtained citizenship. In effect, in the late 1990s, naturalized Kuwaitis constituted approximately a third of the national population.

Nevertheless, until mid-1990s, most of these people could not vote or run for public office; a naturalized person obtained voting rights 30 years after becoming a Kuwaiti citizen. The appointment of a naturalized citizen to a senior-level government position required special permission. Finally, the law of 1994 slightly changed the situation, reducing the period during which a naturalized person was denied the vote from 30 to 20 years. All these laws considerably expended the size of the electorate; the first was noticeable in the 1996 elections.

Until now, Kuwait has not resolved the problem of many "stateless" persons, the so-called *bidun* (not to be confused with badu)[39], who may have lived in the country for several generations, but who have never obtained citizenship[40]. The true *bidun* are either former nomads who previously had no formal citizenship and whose tribes usually originated from the territories of Iraq (sometimes also from Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, and Iran)[41], or other undeclared former residents of these states. Many such people came to Kuwait to join the newly created army as most Kuwaiti men did not wish to serve in the military[42]. The Ministry of Defense listed them as stateless to avoid

---

[39] In Arabic *bidun jinsiyya* means "without nationality" or "without citizenship".

[40] See, for example, *The bidun of Kuwait: 'Citizens without Citizenship'* (New York, Human Rights Watch/Middle East, 1995).

[41] Most bidun of his type came from the Shammar and Anayzah tribes.

[42] For many badu, service in the police and the military was a natural extension of the traditional role many they had played earlier as personal guards to sheikhs. They were perceived as loyal to the Emir and potentially less dangerous for state stability as they were usually disinterested in the ideological concerns of the time, as e.g. Arab Nationalism. On the other hand, service in the security forces was often the best career choice for them as without citizenship they could not legally own business in Kuwait. Jill Crystal, "Public order and authority. Policing Kuwait", in: P. Dresch and J. Piscatori, *Monarchies and Nations*, pp. 174–178.

the embarrassment of having to admit to hiring foreign mercenaries, especially from the neighboring countries[43]. In the later years, many badu with unclear nationality status continued to arrive in Kuwait, either legally or illegally, often exploiting to their advantage a gap in the residence rules that excluded Bedouin tribal members from obtaining visas to enter Kuwait[44]. These people also joined the category of *bidun*. Later, the *bidun* group expanded further by the addition of those individuals who qualified for Kuwaiti citizenship in accordance with the requirements of the 1959 nationality law, but who failed to submit a request by the appointed deadline (1966). Their reasons were different: some perceived the nationality issue as unimportant at the time, others did not understand the legal aspect of citizenship, were too sick or too old to undertake necessary actions, had lost their parents prematurely, or refused to register believing that they qualified for first degree citizenship but that the government wanted to give them second category citizenship[45]. Finally, the group has been enlarged by children of all such people. In effect, the population of *bidun* continued to grow continuously, and in the 1980s exceeded the 200,000 mark. Therefore, the *bidun* composed a large part of Kuwaiti population; according to the data available, in 1985 there were 207,310 *bidun* in the country, as compared to 437,978 Kuwaiti citizens[46].

For a long period, all these people, like the previously mentioned badu who later became naturalized, were allowed to work and

---

[43] A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 51.

[44] A.-R. Assiri, *The Government and Politics of Kuwait: Principles and Practices* (Kuwait, 1996), p. 24; A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 72, note 7.

[45] When the citizenship law was issued in 1959, the special investigation committees were formed to decide about nationality and provided those considered Kuwaiti with nationality identification cards. Many residents of Kuwait clarified then their status and obtained citizenship. Some, however, for various reasons did not contact the committees and became *bidun*.

[46] R. Maktabi, *The politics of citizenship in Kuwait*.

reside in Kuwait, practically permanently, without, however, being formally granted the status of citizen and without clarifying their former nationality. Some have no home other than Kuwait and consider themselves genuine Kuwaitis but do not possess appropriate documents to prove their identity. Others have simply tried to use the existing opportunity to live in Kuwait, hoping that one day they will be able to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship.

For quite a time the *bidun* were widely accepted as part of Kuwaiti life. Their men constituted a large proportion of the country's military and police forces (in the 1980s up to 80 per cent[47]) and their status was close to that of the so-called 'certified' Kuwaitis. They received numerous privileges as nationals, except public housing and state-sponsored loans. Those employed in the military and other government jobs were often even granted Kuwaiti passports (although not the "normal" ones, but "special" temporary documents). Similar to the Kuwaitis in outlook, dialect and tradition, their different status was often known only to the authorities and sometimes not even to themselves (especially in the case of second or third generation of *bidun*); in official statistics they were counted alongside Kuwaitis. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti authorities have always been convinced that many *bidun* simply hide their true nationality (and/or discarded their passports) in order to gain entitlement to superior Kuwaiti economic, social and political rights. In other words, that they are economic immigrants who would like to be considered as citizens. Moreover, *bidun*, as a category, has been often perceived by "true" Kuwaitis as second class-citizens and often described in derogatory terms[48].

---

[47] Apparently, the *bidun* formed 95 percent of Kuwait's infantry before 1990–91 war; *Middle East Report*, September–October 1991. In 1995, only 25 per cent of the 20,000 soldiers were *bidun*; *The Bedoons of Kuwait: citizens without citizenship* (New York, Human Rights Watch,1995), p. 30.

[48] Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh has pointed out that *bidun* were often referred to as people "of unknown identity", "a term which means in fact 'bastard' [...]

The legal situation of the *bidun* changed in 1985 when afraid of political movements growing in the country as well as of the lasting impact of Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution and the Iraq-Iran war, the Kuwaiti government cancelled their former status, turning the *bidun* intoillegal residents. Kuwaitis became concerned that "their ambiguous status as an unacknowledged population provided a human pool into which Iraqi refugees, draft dodgers, and infiltrators as well as absconding workers and illegal aliens could easily blend after getting rid of their identity papers"[49]. As the authorities began to apply the 1958 Residence Law strictly, most of the *bidun*, who thought they were qualified, applied for citizenship (over 62,000 not counting dependants). In most cases the citizenship was not granted, and the Minister of Interior Affairs told the National Assembly that he believed 90 per cent of applicants to be lying about their past national status[50].

In 1989 the Ministry of Planning corrected the population data, removing the *bidun* from the category of Kuwaitis. As a result, the percentage of "real" Kuwaitis – i.e. the ones enjoying the country's citizenship – fell from 40 to 28 per cent of the population. As a consequence of this approach, the *bidun* lost many privileges enjoyed only by nationals and began to face difficulties in the labour market. Moreover, they were forced to apply for residency permits as any other foreigners.

The dilemma of how to treat them was aggravated by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. As the Iraqi authorities ordered all non-Kuwaiti citizens living in Kuwait to join the Iraqi forces under penalty of death, some *bidun*, voluntarily or not, found themselves on the enemy side[51]. Consequently, as the war ended, thousands of *bidun* were

---

as *al-fugu*, the mushroom (without roots) or with other insulting terms"; "The Islamic conception of migration. Past, present and future", www.lpj.org.

[49] A. Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, p. 51.

[50] *The Bedoons of Kuwait*, p. 13.

[51] *Ibidem*, p. 23.

arrested in Kuwait on collaboration charges or denied re-admission to the country as government worried about their real allegiances (and was also determined to reduce the number of non-nationals in the country). Many *bidun* were also forced into exile (apparently, around 10,000 were deported). That was an experience that was especially tragic for those among the *bidun* who had supported the Iraqis and, considering themselves Kuwaiti patriots had joined the anti-Iraqi resistance movement. Those who remained in Kuwait, approximately 170,000, (as compared to around 225,000 before the invasion)[52] became officially classified as "non-legal residents" ("citizens without citizenship"[53]), which severely restricted the possibility of their employment, receiving welfare benefits, educating their children in free public schools and so forth[54]. A majority of those working in the military or security services lost their jobs[55].

Maintaining stateless status for the *bidun* contravenes international standards, which assert that citizenship is a basic human right. Therefore, the Kuwaiti authorities incur severe criticism from human rights organisations in the West, especially since, in 1975, the country had ratified the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness[56].

[52] This number was quoted by „Al Watan", 23 November 1997. Assiri noted that in mid-1994 there were 116,694 of them, i.e. 7.2 per cent of the total population, about 53.7 per cent of the pre-invasion figure, *The Government and Politics of Kuwait*, p. 25.

[53] This category of people is sometimes referred to as "denizens". "Denizen" denotes long-term residents who are neither citizens nor non-citizens. See T. Hammar, *Democracy and the Nation State: Aliens, Denizens and Citizens in a World of International Migration* (London, Avebury, 1990).

[54] For example, in mid-1990s about 10,000 of them were unemployed, and around 50,000 children of school age suffered from the inability to attend government schools. A.-R. Assiri, *ibidem*.

[55] The number of *bidun* in the armed forces went down from 17,000 before the invasion to about 8,000 afterwards. A.-R. Assiri, *ibidem*.

[56] In particular, The Amnesty International, in its yearly reports, regularly criticized the Kuwaiti government for the treatment of *bidun*.

Probably because of that criticism, but also due to the lack of sufficient number of "first class" Kuwaitis willing to join military and police forces, in the following years, Kuwaiti authorities, granted citizenship or permanent residency status to a number of *bidun*, those recognized as having sufficient links to Kuwait. Debatable cases were referred to courts for final decisions. In September 1998, the Kuwaiti government went even further and decided that genetic tests would be applied to all stateless residents to prove their Kuwaiti linkage[57]. The spokesman for the government stated, that 'adopting DNA testing is a nonnegotiable basis to assess the right of citizenship through a claim of kinship to a Kuwaiti mother, father, or other relative'[58]. Occasionally, the Emir on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan granted citizenship to orphans whose fathers were *bidun* and whose mothers were Kuwaiti. At the same time, some *bidun* acquired passports from countries with which they did not have any affiliation or even purchased counterfeit documents. Such passports – even though Kuwaiti authorities might have been aware of their illegal procurement – allowed them also to obtain residency permits, to work or to marry, yet not to obtain visas to travel abroad on these documents[59]. Despite all these actions, thousands of *bidun* maintained the "non-legal" residents status.

In June 1999, just before parliamentary elections, the Kuwaiti government took another step to resolve the problem, deciding that the essential prerequisite to consider granting a *bidun* citizenship was for him to be registered in the 1965 census, the first census held

---

[57] In July 1999, the Emir issued the decree regulating this matter.

[58] „Khaleej Times", September 7, 1998. According to the Minister of Health, following the government decision, some samples were sent for testing to London. „Gulf News", September 21, 1998. Apparently, the project was shelved shortly after its inauguration.

[59] The U.S. Department of State, "Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2000 – Kuwait"; www.state.gov.

in the country[60]. At the same time, the government gave the *bidun* time until June 27, 2000 to legalize their status or face legal action. The issue was present in the election campaign, with several deputies criticizing the government for not providing all *bidun* with identity cards to allow them to acquire driving licenses, permission to marry, legal employment, and entitlement to free education and medical treatment. These deputies claimed that in addition, the government should consider granting citizenship to the *bidun*, because doing so would reduce the number of foreigners in Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti parliament finally approved that proposal in June 2000 (Law No. 22 for Progressive Naturalization of the *Bidun*). At the same time, the parliament allowed the government to grant citizenship to 2,000 adults and their families each year[61]. That number was lowered to 600 in 2002 only to go up to 5,500 again a year later.

In the meantime, around 102,000 *bidun* were officially registered with the government committee for illegal residents. Thirty-six thousand of those who registered during the 1965 population census became entitled to Kuwaiti citizenship[62]. Out of the remaining 66,000, twelve thousand were categorized as having foreign nationality or citizenship, others were considered stateless; both groups, however, faced deportations or other legal actions after the June 27, 2000 deadline. After the deadline, the government began sending files of *bidun* to the public prosecutor to start deportation procedures, despite protests from members of the parliament. At the same time, hundreds of the exiled *bidun* launched a five-day-long sit-in protest at the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border, demanding return to Kuwait[63]. The Kuwaiti government accused Iraq of organising the protest 'to whip up the crisis' and asked the UN Security Council for assistance to avert 'the

---

[60] AFP, June 28, 1999.

[61] AFP, May 15, 2000.

[62] AFP, June 27, 2000.

[63] AFP, October 7, 2000.

grave danger' that the situation posed. To calm down the situation, the Kuwaiti authorities agreed to grant citizenship to 1,000 stateless Arabs and their families[64].

As the prospect of a conflict with Iraq drew closer, Kuwaiti mistrust toward the *bidun* continued to gain ever greater credence. Concerns over Kuwait's internal security were heightened in December 2002, when Saddam Hussein delivered an unprecedented address to the Kuwaiti people. Pretending to be a public apology for the 1990 invasion, Saddam's statement was a thinly veiled call on Kuwaitis to rise up against the ruling family and American troops deployed in Kuwait. The address invoked the fear of domestic instability as a backlash to the US invasion of Iraq, and many Kuwaitis viewed the *bidun* as potential troublemakers. "They are all Iraqi fifth columnists," said Abdullah Bishara, a former Kuwaiti ambassador to the United Nations[65]. Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti parliament, in January 2003, further eased restrictions on *bidun* applications for nationality. It also allowed *bidun* serving in the army and police the same entitlements as foreign workers. Moreover, citizenship was approved for 400 *bidun* who fought against Iraq during the1990 invasion, which gave the families of the *bidun* killed in action some hope that they too might acquire Kuwaiti citizenship.

It is difficult to say what the removal of Saddam Hussein brought to the situation of the Kuwaiti *bidun*. Many of them hoped that it would lead to an improvement in their status. On the other hand, some Kuwaitis expected that with Saddam gone and Iraqi border opened, all the *bidun* would go back to their supposed former home[66]. This expectation, however, did not materialize. The *bidun*-related issues have remained present in the Kuwaiti politics. In

---

[64] BBC, October 8, 2000.

[65] N. Blanford, *Stateless Kuwaitis struggle for acceptance amid deepening suspicion*, „Daily Star", January 27, 2003.

[66] *Ibidem*.

June 2004, some members of parliament proposed granting *bidun* a number of basic rights, including free education and medical care (the government eventually did). In January 2005, some Kuwaiti parliamentarians accused the Minister of Justice Ahmad Baquer, of refusing to attest marriage certificates of *bidun*, thus violating their human rights[67]. The assembly also called on the government finally to address the status of the *bidun*, stressing that there were still between 70,000 and 110,000 *bidun* with unresolved legal standing in the country.

Abdul-Reda Assiri justified this approach in the following way:

The majority of stateless persons who live in Kuwait and form a part of the social fabric and kinships have an organic relationship to the country. We have to benefit from this group before this section of the population disrupts social and political elements through widespread discontent. [Therefore, what should be done is to] grant naturalisation to relatives of Kuwaitis and offspring of Kuwaiti women married to stateless individuals, naturalise qualified experts, experts, especially technicians, physicians, and teachers born in Kuwait and still living in Kuwait, naturalise military and armed forces members and those who proved loyal and have served Kuwait[68].

Despite such calls, it will probably take several more years finally to regulate the status of most of the Kuwaiti *bidun*.

"Stateless" people in other GCC states

There are also some "stateless" people residing in other GCC states, although of a rather different background from the Kuwaiti *bidun* (and in fact often not even called *bidun* by the local populations).

---

[67] „Gulf News", January 12, 2005.
[68] A.-R. Assiri, *The Government and Politics of Kuwait*, p. 27.

Some *bidun* live in Bahrain; they are mainly Shi'ites of Iranian origin. A group of them were deprived Bahraini citizenship in 1939 when Great Britain, which dominated the country at the time, promulgated the first law on citizenship. Others lost their citizenship when they did not present themselves to the authorities within a given time after the promulgation of the law of passports in 1963. Children of such people enlarged the *bidun* group, which by the end of the 1990s consisted of 9,000 – 15,000 people. The status of the Bahraini *bidun* was similar to that of the Kuwaiti. They did not have political rights and as such they could not, for example, participate in the 1973 elections or occupy public functions. Unlike Kuwaiti *bidun*, the *bidun* of Bahrain were barred from employment in the police and the military. According to the Citizenship Law of 1974 (and 1963 law as well), citizenship in Bahrain has been divided into different categories which are stated on the passport: by birth (*bil wilaadeh*), indicating persons born to a Bahraini father; by naturalisation (*bil tajjanus*), whether born in or outside Bahrain; by ancestry (*bil silalah*), i.e. those who can prove a Bahraini ancestry[69]. The last category is reserved for descendants of people who have migrated to Bahrain in the past, or once were expelled from Bahrain, and can prove their case (such as members of al-Dawasir tribe (Sunni) in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia or members of the Qarooni and al-Asfoor clans (Shiite) in the al-Ahawaz province of Iran.

The *bidun* granted a passport (possible in special cases but valid only to one country and taken back at the border point upon return) is designated as an inhabitant of Bahrain. Such passports obviously have been viewed with suspicion by foreign countries. The situation of the *bidun* in Bahrain was basically solved in the early 2000s, when, with all the other political changes in the country at that time, most of them were finally granted citizenship[70].

---

[69] A. Abu-Sahlieh, *The Islamic conception of migration.*

[70] *Ibidem.*

According to some sources, in the UAE, there are around 100,000 *bidun*[71], although the authorities declare that there are none in the country[72]. Some *bidun* in the Emirates are Sunni Arabs who originated from southern parts of Iran (Hormozgan), where many Arabs from the territories of today's UAE settled in a distant past, as well as from the area of the Musandam Peninsula. Many such Arabs decided to return to the UAE after the country's independence and rapid development thanks to the oil revenues. At the beginning, the returnees were granted UAE citizenship, but later the authorities stopped granting them that right, becoming suspicious that many of the late-comers were in fact the Arabised Iranians. Living in the country are also stateless non-Arabs, mainly from the Indian sub-continent, whose families settled down in the Gulf generations ago but whose status has never been clarified[73]. Moreover, there are also some "stateless" badu or the descendants of badu who are unable to prove that they are of appropriate local origin[74]. Finally, in the Emirates there have apparently been some Kuwaiti *bidun* who came there escaping the Iraqi occupation in 1990 and were not allowed to return by Kuwaiti authorities after the war.

In Saudi Arabia, there is a large, although unknown, number of "undocumented residents", largely composed of pilgrims who did not leave the country after their pilgrimage to Mecca. Among them there is a large group of Africans and Asians and their Saudi born children,

---

[71] www. refugeesinternational.org.

[72] In March 2005, the UAE Ministry of Interior declared that there were no *bidun* in the country.

[73] They are often known as "locals with letters"; the "letter" was from the Immigration Department saying that they had applied for citizenship and it was being considered. In the late 1980s and 90s they were still accepted as locals in the workforce.

[74] The U.S. Department of State, "Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2000 – United Arab Emirates"; www.state.gov.

living in the Kingdom for decades but permanently unable to regulate their residency status. Similarly, members of certain tribes living in the border areas (in Assir and Najran) as well as members of Al-Enezi Badu tribes living in the north-eastern part of the Kingdom, have unclear citizenship status and often have only *laissez passer* for travel. There were reports in 2002, that Saudi government planned to provide citizenship to about 26,000 of such people[75]. They are sometimes also called *bidun* and are generally perceived troublemakers by both the authorities and the Saudi population at large[76].

A few people with similar "stateless" status can also be found in Qatar, for example from the Shersheni tribe[77]. That happens despite the fact that the nationality law of 1961 (with successive amendments) allows naturalisation of Arabs (after 10 years of continuous residence) and non-Arabs (after 15 years of residence). Nevertheless, even after naturalisation, native-born Qataris have priority in employment, particularly in the public sector.

* * *

Citizenship policies in the GCC states have so far been instrumental in preserving the rule of existing regimes as well as in establishing a superior-subordinate relationship between citizens of these states and other long-term residents. Groups perceived as non indigenous have been successfully controlled by the authorities through restrictive nationality and citizenship laws, residence and labor

---

[75] „Arab News", November 21, 2002.

[76] A. Abu-Sahlieh, *The Islamic conception of migration.*

[77] In an interesting development, members of the Shersheni tribe sued the producers of an Arabic sit-com for seriously damaging their social standing. The TV production portrayed Shershenis as nomads with no roots. In particular, according to the lawyer representing the tribe, a dialogue where a male character asks his sweetheart if she would marry a "Shersheni with no passport", put the tribe in a bad light and led to many broken marriages; "Gulf News", May 9, 2005.

regulations, work permits, visas, and implicit threat of expulsion contained in the sponsorship system. Only sometimes, the GCC authorities had decided for a deviation from these rules and either naturalised certain groups for political reasons, or, on the contrary, forced them to leave the country. Such policies will be most likely used also in future. Only the problem of legally stateless residents will probably be solved in the coming years.

Globalization processes, growing links between the GCC states and the international community or accession to such organizations as WTO and ILO should help to liberalize naturalisation policies. Of great importance here will be continued pressure from Western human rights organizations, emerging local civil society groups in the Gulf, and some Western governments. Nevertheless, even after obtaining citizenship, many of naturalised people will remain for a long period of time, formally or informally, not equal to "real" nationals. Tribal affiliations as well as security and concerns of the welfare state will continue to play a crucial role here.