

All in the Family

Michael Herb, Albany: State University New York Press, 1999, 351 pp.

Despite the instability usually attributed to the Middle East, today one finds an unusual level of stability in eight of its monarchies. When most countries of the world are converting to some form of "democracy," what has led this type of state system to such stability? In his book, *All in the Family*, Michael Herb, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University, provides the most thought-provoking work on Middle Eastern monarchies since rentier state theory became fashionable. Herb determines that "there are two distinct forms of monarchism in the Middle East. One is resilient and the other is not" (p. 235). His basic thesis is that the key to the survival, persistence, and resilience of monarchies in the Middle East is the willingness and ability of the ruling families to saturate the most important positions in the state apparatus. He terms this "dynastic monarchism"—the idea that "the ruling family forms itself into a ruling institution, monopolizing the key offices of the state" (p. 235). In the unsuccessful type of monarchy, the king "maneuvers among various forces—the army, the parliament, and the parties—and when he loses balance the monarchy falls" (p. 235). Case studies are used to illustrate both monarchical models: dynastic (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Oman) and nondynastic (Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, Jordan, and Afghanistan – usually excluded from studies on the Middle East). This book relies on comparative analysis and is based not only on archival research, but also on interviews and secondary sources.

In the second and third chapters, "The Emergence of Dynastic Monarchy and the Causes of Its Persistence" and "Arabian Society and the Emergence of the Petro-State," respectively, the reader gets a sense of the rise of the petro-state and how it enabled dynastic monarchies to emerge. He asserts that they emerged because the ruler's relatives "had powerful bargaining resources which they could use to help rulers stay in power, to aid aspiring rulers in achieving power, or to attack and depose sitting rulers" (p. 22). Thus, the emergence of the petro-state added another dimension in intrafamily negotiations. Dynasties consolidate power by limiting the status of any individual or clique. Coalitions are built by the rulers through distribution of government positions to relatives as a means of assuring their cooperation. Dynasties are strengthened by forming consensus on the issue of succession rather than depending on primogeniture. As a result, a ruler is held accountable to his family who

appointed him. Herb demonstrates, with the case of King Saud in 1964, that rulers who do not observe the accountability to the family can face deposition.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Herb presents case studies of the dynastic monarchies with particular attention given to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. He demonstrates that conflict within the ruling families has led to bargaining among members of the family. As a result, this conflict ensures the distribution of key posts in the state bureaucracy among family members. Further, Herb argues that this process of conflict and bargaining guarantees that rulers are accountable to the dynasty or face removal by the family. Following the case studies, one finds a discussion of regime and opposition strategies in the dynastic monarchies (Chapter 6: "Strategies of Regime and Opposition in the Dynastic Monarchies"). Herb shows that various forms of resistance requires various strategies from the regime, ranging from absolutism in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (and most others) to limited liberalization in Kuwait. Both strategies have proven "workable," and Kuwait's model has provided an alternative to absolutism should it no longer work.

In Chapters 7 and 8, Herb turns to nondynastic monarchies in which individual rulers enjoy substantially more power at the cost of stability due to the lack of family support inside the state apparatus. In Chapter 7, "Libya and Afghanistan," he illustrates this point with the cases of Libya and Afghanistan, where the rulers excluded family members from key positions. In Chapter 8, "Five Nondynastic Monarchies," one finds a disappointing discussion of Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, and Jordan. With just a few pages devoted to each country, their treatment is less than the case studies promised in the introduction. Herb admits that he "left out much that is relevant. It proved impossible to give these five cases the treatment they deserved while keeping the work to a reasonable length and while maintaining the focus on dynastic monarchies" (p. 209). Perhaps for these reasons the book would have benefited from the chapter's elimination, and the incorporation of its key points in the first few chapters for the purpose of distinguishing nondynastic from dynastic monarchies. In each of these nondynastic examples (only two of which still exist), the state lacks guaranteed institutional support, resulting in instability and the need to employ various other strategies to survive.

In the concluding chapters, "Dynastic Monarchism and the Resistance of Hereditary Rule" and "The Theory of the Rentier State and Constitutional Monarchy in the Middle East," Herb restates his argument, summarizes its support, and proposes additional evidence for his argument that did not fit in the preceding chapters. Dynastic monarchies succeed because the state monop-

lizes power, resulting in a situation impossible for outsiders to overthrow the regime. Clear rules of succession and consensus from the ruling family eliminate power struggles and therefore contribute significantly to the success of dynastic monarchies. This support from the family also compels if not guarantees the monarch's accountability to the family.

Herb offers counterarguments to ideas and theories that have been used to explain monarchical political phenomena. Herb finds little correlation between opposition and revolution. For Herb, "the level of opposition is mixed enough across the cases that it does not threaten the viability of the other explanations adduced here for monarchical resilience and failure" (p. 244). The composition of the military is not a reliable indicator of monarchical success either. "The evidence from the cases, however, is decidedly mixed. In several cases the failure or survival of the monarchy clearly owes much to the composition of the military; yet in other cases the composition of the military appears to dictate against the actual outcome, be it survival or failure" (p. 244). He doesn't find the idea that western support for monarchies has significant impact on monarchical success convincing because he finds internal factors more compelling.

One of the most important issues for Herb, and in fact for the study of Gulf politics in general, is the rentier state model—the idea that dissent can be bought off with oil revenues. It is a theme dealt with throughout the book but receives its most cogent and thorough treatment in the last two chapters. Herb believes that rentier state theory has its place, but suggests that its affect has been exaggerated. Herb first reminds us that Iran, Iraq and Libya are all rentier states that have fallen to revolution. A number of counterpoints to rentier theory are offered. Herb suggests that allegiance cannot be bought because Gulf citizens feel ownership over the oil; therefore, it is not a "gift" in exchange for allegiance as rentier theory claims. He also points out that just as distribution of oil revenues can create support, it can also create enemies; the arbitrary distribution of wealth has the potential of upsetting those who realize they are receiving less than others. The king in a rentier state, even if he is able to pay the military well, must maintain the loyalty of the army. The example of Iraq in 1958 proves that the military cannot be purchased.

Herb cites three intermediate cases that are nondynastic, but have survived: Oman, Jordan and Morocco. Jordan and Morocco "clearly exhibit less stability than any of the surviving monarchies" (p. 236). As evidence, he only offers the 1957 revolution attempt in Jordan and the Moroccan Air Force pilots' 1972 attempt to shoot down King Hassan's plane—both of which happened some time ago and were isolated events. The case of Oman provides the best opportunity to foil Herb's argument and also support the rentier state theory.

According to Herb, Oman has few real threats, but that could be due to the fact that it resembles the other Gulf states. In Oman, succession is not clear and Sultan Qaboos's family does not fill the state apparatus. Therefore, it seems reasonable if not necessary to turn to rentier state theory to explain the stability observed in Oman.

Finally, Herb offers preliminary insight into the question of political development as it relates to liberalization and democratization. He asserts that since parliaments circumscribe power, dynasties will not put parliaments in place unless there is a threatening need to do so, preceded by two conditions: the opposition places value in a liberal monarchy and both the opposition and the dynasty see value in negotiated compromise. In the process of negotiation, however, opposition must be certain that not too much power is left in the hands of the dynasty and that elections are free and fair.

One may find problematic the use of "counterfactuals" throughout the book—the attempt to prove that an outcome would be different if the circumstances were different. This can be worthwhile for discussion on occasion, but is methodologically troublesome, somewhat self-serving, and inappropriate for building an argument. Additionally, Herb maintains that the dynastic monarchies emerged with the petro-state: "Thus dynastic monarchism occurs in its full-fledged form only in oil-rich countries" (p. 11). Therefore, the question arises of whether a case study of non-oil states is needed. It seems that a discussion of non-oil states would not be helpful and would also set-up somewhat of a straw man for the central argument. If a state does not have oil in the first place, is it worth discussing how the ruler did not monopolize the state apparatus with his family?

The book is written clearly, in a language free from discipline-specific jargon, thus making it available to the general public. From time to time, however, there is a certain "colloquialness" to Herb's writing that could unduly label him an orientalist; for example, "Let us consider Libya and Kuwait, which have much in common: oil, language, religion, sand" (p. 2). This kind of language should be avoided in serious, scholarly work and left for the pages of journalistic writing that seeks to create exotic representations of the Middle East. The use of Arabic sources is impressive and helps move his study from a mere biography of monarchical families toward a more indigenous analysis of monarchies in the Middle East. The text is assisted by a plethora of charts, tables, and family genealogies that are particularly important for the uninitiated and a helpful reminder for those who have familiarity. *All in the Family* will prove an important book for the unfamiliar who wish to learn about monarchi-

cal regimes or Gulf politics, as well as seasoned scholars who are interested in political theory.

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فلسطين: من أجل الديمقراطية والحرية الديمقراطية والحرية الديمقراطية والحرية

مؤلف: د. آلان مكدافى
 مترجم: د. محمد عبد الحليم

تتمتع فلسطين بالحق في تقرير المصير والسيادة على أراضيها. يجب أن تكون دولة ديمقراطية وحرية، تتوافق مع مبادئ الإعلان العالمي لحقوق الإنسان والميثاق الوطني الفلسطيني.

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