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Christopher M. Davidson. *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies.* London: Hurst & Co., 2012. 224 S. ISBN 978-1-84904-189-8.

Christopher M. Davidson. *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies.* London: Hurst & Co., 2012. 256 S. ISBN 978-1-84904-122-5; ISBN 978-1-84904-121-8.

Stig Stenslie. *Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of Succession.* London: Routledge, 2011. 168 S. ISBN 978-0-415-69334-9; ISBN 978-0-203-14780-1.

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Since the Arab spring has wiped off some authoritarian regimes from the political map of the Middle East and spared some others, there is an increasing debate in academia about the reasons behind these diverse trajectories of political change. Whereas massive protest erupted in the republics, led to regime change and in more recent times to a tangible crisis of the state (such as in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, or Syria), the monarchies Morocco, Jordan, and those on the Arab peninsula have remained more or less stable. However, this vivid debate about a perceived "monarchy-republic-gap" and the durability of the monarchies is divided along at least two lines: one group of scholars focuses on the potential reasons for the monarchs' robust grip on power (including single or comparative case studies), whereas another group identifies circumstantial evidence for an emerging collapse of the monarchies. Obviously belonging to the first group, Stig Stenslie (2012) investigates "Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia" by critically reflecting the widely-used variables of regime stability and by proposing an elite-centred approach of how to better assess the reasons for the longevity of the Saudi monarchy since its independence in 1932. This case study is contrasted by Christopher Davidson's 2011 edited volume on "Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies" and, particularly, by Christopher Davidson's 2012 monograph with the telling title "After the Sheiks", in which he predicts the coming collapse of the Gulf monarchies within the next "two to five years" (p. ix). From this perspective, at first glance, Stenslie's focus on regime stability seems to be a bit out of date as he is concentrating on regimes that are anyway destined to collapse in the near future.

Stenslie's rather short monograph (135 pages excluding appendices) on Saudi Arabia begins with a critical, although narrow discussion of Michael Herb's 1999 seminal work "All in the Family" Michael Herb, All in the Family. Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies, New York 1999. , in which Stenslie identifies unanswered questions regarding the "reasons he [Herb, TD] presents for the elite unity" (p. 3). Stenslie furthermore claims that family rule in itself does not offer much explanatory power for unity and stability. Hence, the author puts the Saudi elite in the very centre of his analysis, looks for patterns of elite integration and tries to generate empirical data for his main argument saying that "the Al Sa'ud [family, TD] is far more united than what is commonly believed" (p. 2). Based on empirical findings derived from about 100 interviews conducted in the Gulf region between 2003 and 2009, the author comes up with a conceptual framing in order to better grasp the reasons for the high level of elite integration in Saudi Arabia. At first glance, this level of elite integration might be puzzling due to multiple family branches with different standings and access to the centre of political power and decision making with only

a few privileged seniors being at the top of the hierarchy. In a rather convincing manner he focuses on three different sets of variables that are expected to cause variation in the degree of elite integration. Elaborating on his first variable, which he calls sociological preconditions, he looks for a shared background, that is to say social homogeneity with common values and norms, followed by the second variable of symbols and threat perception (from within and outside) and, eventually, followed by institutional mechanisms (formal and informal) defining the elite's composition and internal working procedures. By using an elite-centred approach and by putting domestic patterns of Saudi politics at the forefront of his analysis of regime stability, Stenslie makes a convincing point in saying that the Saudi elite is partly consensually united and institutionally embedded. This offers added value beyond well-known variables such as rents (oil revenues), ideology (Wahhabism) and security (Western support) with their limited explanatory power beyond the macro-level (p. 14). Yet, this debate – related to the patterns of state building in the country and the distributional structures, practices and modes of clientelism that emerged out of them (p. 134) – would have needed a much more comprehensive discussion in view of the state of the art, in particular with regards to Steffen Hertog's Steffen Hertog, Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats. Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia, London 2010. arguments on the metamorphosis of the Saudi state and the development of various fiefdoms for material patronage in the early days of state building that laid the ground for a "hierarchical, vertically divided hub-and-spoke system" (Hertog 2010, pp. 10ff.). Also, beyond any doubt, the most striking challenge for the Saudi ruling family is yet to come, namely the transfer of power from the second generation (sons of founder Abdel Aziz Al Saud) to the third generation (grandsons). Stenslie is definitely right when arguing that the dynasty might be in danger if the third generation will not agree on the second generation's norms of political decision-making and not agree on what such legitimate processes are. Though he states that the high level of elite integration may be seen as crucial for the Saudi family having overcome succession crises as "the most acute collective action challenge faced by family dynasties" (p. 2), the respective chapter 6 on the challenge of succession (pp. 104–132) remains analytically and even methodologically unconnected to the aforementioned, valuable conceptual framing of elite integration.

This case study on Saudi Arabia is extended to a comparison of all six Gulf monarchies in the 2011 edited volume on "Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies" by Christopher Davidson. Six in-depth case studies provide an account of the monarchies' rather short history, specific paths of state formation and different trajectories of state building after independence. All case studies follow – and this contributes much to the added value of this edited volume – a similar outline: they all begin by referring to national specifics in state formation, then stress political structures and personalities, go on by placing the monarchy in the regional and international environment and end with an assessment of the respective future challenges. This similarity of analytical access, on the one hand, gives this edited volume a textbook character. On the other hand it remains a highly recommendable reading for scholars working on the region. Meanwhile, all well-written and well-researched up-to-date case studies share the concluding view that the future outlook of each of them is not as rosy as in their earlier decades after independence in the 20th century. Yet, none of the authors dares to predict the most likely path of future development or the collapse of the monarchies due to various challenges, threats and legitimacy crises (except Marc Valerie's piece on Oman, in which he questions the legitimacy of the basic political order, p. 156). With some humour, one might be inclined to believe that the volume's editor has kept the answer for a more comprehensive monograph.

In this 2012 monograph "After the Sheikhs" Christopher Davidson goes beyond the pros and cons of legitimacy in the Gulf monarchies since he foresees the coming collapse of the monarchies at least in their present form. Quite contrary to Stenslie's work, he critically reflects on the explanatory power of ruling dynasties as argument for regime longevity (p. 13). Though focusing particularly on the United Arab Emirates, Davidson is able to make a strong point for all six Gulf monarchies, yet the evolution of his main "collapse thesis" remains vague at best. Davidson begins by outlining major threads in the research literature before introducing Gulf specifics in state formation (introduction and chapter 1). Davidson makes a comprehensive point in identifying the domestic and external variables that may explain monarchical survival (chapters 2–3). He proceeds by pointing at the mounting internal pressures in chapter 4 (for example cleavages in the domestic labour markets, declining resources and demographic development) before stressing rising external pressure for change in chapter 5 (for example Iranian threat or the "unholy alliance" with Israel).

By elaborating on these variables of monarchical sur-

vival or collapse, "After the sheiks" is a brilliant compilation of empirical material, very dense and to the point regarding the scope and limits of the "ruling bargain" between the ruler and the ruled (citizenship populace). Nonetheless, the conclusion that these rising domestic and external pressures will inevitably cause the collapse of these polities is not convincing, lacks methodological clearance and is not fully connected to the arguments before. Quite surprisingly, Davidson even negates the impact of different kinds of statehood in view of the Arab spring, when claiming: "[...] these pressures will soon lead to the collapse of the Gulf monarchies [...] I claim that this collapse is inevitable [...] because many of the pressures that had been building up in the Arab republics are now also manifest in the Gulf monarchies, even if sometimes below the surface" (p. 2.). In between the lines he suggests a deterministic 2.0-version of the king's dilemma, which Samuel Huntington first developed in his 1968 monograph on "Political Order in Changing Societies". Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, New Haven 1968. He claims as if there were an inevitable collapse because of the monarchs' inability to overcome their legitimacy crises independent whether being a tiny monarchy like Qatar or a big regional player like Saudi Arabia. Hereby, Davidson seems to go one step too far by leaving his sound, comprehensive grasp of an evolving legitimacy crisis in the Gulf monarchies and by deriving from this narrative the conclusion of a looming collapse of the Gulf monarchies altogether. The same applies to the flattening of the "polity gap" between republics and monarchies and the obvious unevenness within each type of polity. Similar to a very broad spectrum in the "monarchies camp", even in the republics not all regimes have witnessed massive social protest and have undergone a regime change due to protest. The Algerian case shows this par excellence: Though the Algerian civilian-military regime is destined to be held accountable to a very similar balance sheet like in Tunis or Cairo, the collapse does not necessarily have to be around the corner as long as internal cleavages in the Algerian elite do not lead to centrifugal forces and open a window of opportunity for protest. Hence it is not only the prevailing legitimacy crisis that makes mass protest a successful option, effective protest against an authoritarian regime also relies on elite ruptures within the regime in order to make regime change possible (additional preconditions may also apply). Regional events may serve as a catalyst but are definitely not a guarantee for similar outcomes due to the decisive importance of domestic conditions.

There is certainly no doubt the monarchies' fall may also come, but there is a list of variables applying in the monarchies that stand in sharp contrast to the republics. First, in the Gulf monarchies we may detect a much more diverse tool-box of legitimation sources for the incumbents, that is to say the ruling dynasties. Second, Gulf specifics such as a political and social order derived from pre-state patterns (for example family rule or state-society relations around shura and majlis principles), external protection, substantial capability and capacity to distribute wealth and the interwoven character of the regime/ruling family and the state, in which both are two sides of the same medal, are still strong impediments of regime change. Eventually and third, having said all this, in the republics the slogan *al-shaab yurid nisqat al-nizam* ("the people want the fall of the regime") was a tangible option as the state enjoyed legitimacy independent of the regime. In the Gulf, the fall of a regime, that is the ruling family including its formal and informal patterns, would induce the fall of the state in most cases. This implies that there is much more at stake for a prospective mass protest compared to the republics. Anyhow, this option's attractiveness for many segments of the citizenship populace may be at least doubtful. Saudi Arabia would even need a new official denomination! Again, this does not mean that it may never happen, but the stakes are much higher.

To sum up, all three books are highly recommendable reading. They cover different spectra, certainly come to different conclusions but give valuable contributions to an increasingly vivid scholarly discourse – from various disciplinary angles – on a region that was far too long neglected by Middle East scholars.

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