

Avoiding the Regime Change curse through a Constitutional Monarchy

Minerva University

SS166 - Designing Constitutions

Prof. Kukis

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Avoiding the Regime Change curse through a Constitutional Monarchy

On regime change throughout history

Through a historical lens, empires have fallen and risen, but regime change, according to Jones & Kewes (2019) is “a thing of the 1920s”, referring to a relatively stable monarchical system from 1100 to the 1900s despite many revolutions and wars (Anckar, 2018; Gerring et al, 2020). Scholars also know that trying to achieve political, security, economic, or humanitarian goals through regime change often culminates in civil wars, leads to lower levels of democracy, and increases repression (Denison, 2020). In other words, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”; this is what Denison (2020) calls the paradox of regime change. Researchers such as Downes & Monten (2023) agree that there cannot be a rapid rupture in a regime that, looking back into history, will last a couple of decades and fall apart.

Geddes et al. (2014) emphasize that despite the passage of seven decades since World War II, only approximately 45% of leadership changes in autocracies have culminated in regime change. Remarkably, more than half of these regime changes manifested as transitions from one autocracy to another, with less than a quarter of dictatorial ousters resulting in democratization. Among the four categories of regime change—democratic to authoritarian, authoritarian to democratic, democratic to democratic, and authoritarian to authoritarian—the most prevalent is the shift from authoritarian to authoritarian (Geddes et al., 2014). There is substantial evidence that regimes led by dictators with wide personal discretion over policy making (as is the case with Syria, cite articles of the constitution) are less likely to democratize after regime breakdown, as are dictatorships forced from power and dictatorships ended by violence (Geddes et al, 2014)

With the paradox of regime change in mind, it is imperative to maintain certain elements of the current Syrian regime to build upon the strengths of the regime and address its weaknesses.

This paper operates under the assumption that Bashar Al-Assad's regime is an illegitimate but highly personalist dictatorship that builds upon his father's 30 years in power, with the Al-Assad family being considered the country's most infamous dynasty (Skvorc & Drimhiller, 2022). Therefore its goal is to propose a solution to the country's new executive institution post-war that builds upon the central figure of the current head of state to unify instead of separate.

The goal of stability post-war

We were all in agreement in class that Syria needs stability post-war to recover and start addressing the problems that caused the civil conflict to begin with (Chen et al, 2008). To build stability, nevertheless, it is necessary to think long-term, as in at least five decades ahead, which, based on the previous calculations of how long regimes have been lasting in the 20th and 21st centuries, is an arduous task. The class's constitution establishes a parliamentary system with a democratically elected prime minister and a democratically elected ceremonial president to serve for a six-year term (see articles II and III); however, it did not specify how many terms the president can serve or if the terms can be consecutive or not. This opens a challenge to the new constitution: how many times can the president serve? This paper will address this question in the following paragraphs.

Thus, this paper's arguments center around the main goal for Syria should be long-term stability to recover from war build a solid base of legitimacy, and build upon the previous regime's strengths, which can only be achieved through the implementation of a constitutional monarchy led by the descendants of Faisal I of Syria and Iraq during the Arab Kingdom of Syria given its popularity as national hero.

Why a ceremonial president will not suffice¹

Article II of our constitution stipulates a parliamentary system, which, compared to the current presidential system, is a better choice given that presidentialism breeds dual legitimacy with the question of who represents the people being unanswered with the election of a parliament and president with divergent political beliefs (Linz, 1985). Given Syria's ethnic division and political tension, a presidential system would be unable to form coalitions, increasing deadlock and political disunity. A post-war country cannot recover from disunity and instability (Hoeffler, 2012).

Eliminating presidentialism, the debate is between a parliamentary system and a constitutional monarchy, essentially, who gets to represent the "State of Syria".

Dual leadership roles in a parliamentary system emphasize the decentralization of power, which can lead to inefficiencies and coordination challenges with the potential for a lack of clear delineation between their respective powers, resulting in confusion and a lack of accountability (Bracher, 1964). This decentralization can damage the effectiveness of decision-making processes and limit the government's ability to respond quickly and decisively to emergent crises, threatening the democratic system's stability and functionality (Bracher, 1964).

In contrast, a constitutional monarchy offers a unique advantage in terms of stability, as the monarchy is regarded as apolitical and transcends the ebb and flow of electoral politics with a longer-term perspective and historical continuity compared to a president (Gerring et al, 2023). Moreover, the regular electoral cycles may lead to shifts in leadership that could impact stability with a ceremonial president (Gerring et al, 2021).

¹ #SS166- Executivestructure: see appendix B

Moreover, there are concerns that the president will not rig elections and keep getting elected (ie, Vladimir Putin in Russia), essentially, becoming an authoritarian leader analogous to an absolute monarch. That is not the end goal; not all paths should lead to authoritarianism. A modern-day constitutional monarchy, on the other hand, depends on public support for its survival, making it more accountable to the people (SOURCE, YEAR). Portugal is a modern-day example of a parliamentary system on the verge of collapse with the ceremonial president being forced to renounce while having called for new elections given that the prime minister resigned less than four weeks ago (Al Jazeera, 2023). How stable is this state?

Lastly, to answer the question above why not have a limited amount of terms that the ceremonial president can serve lies on the main value that post-war countries need to focus on: stability. Limiting terms to, perhaps, two would leave the ceremonial president to represent the state for a mere 12 years; the OECD on growth in post-war countries estimates it takes 22 years on average for countries to recover from a war (Hoeffler, 2012). There must be continuity in these two decades to focus on state- and nation-building (SOURCE, YEAR). With that in mind, the most suitable alternative in terms of democratic longevity is a monarch accountable to its people and with limited power to guide the country over a long period of time.

The Cultural and Historical Significance of Faisal I of Syria²

Faisal I bin Al-Hussein bin Ali Al-Hashemi was a member of the Hashemite family, played a prominent role in the Great Arab Revolt during World War I, and served as the King of the Arab Kingdom of Syria before being expelled by the French and as the King of Iraq until 1933 (Allawi,

² **#SS116-ContextualFactors:** I provide thorough historical and cultural analysis, tracing the origins of Syria's current ethnic and political divisions back to the European colonial period, namely the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement. It underlines the importance of historical leaders such as Faisal I in fostering unity, as well as the role of colonial divide and conquer efforts in increasing ethnic divides and creating the region's geopolitical terrain.

2014). His grandson, Faisal II was the last king of Iraq and was a cousin of Jordan's Hussein ibn Talal, as both belonged to the 41st generation of the notorious Hashemite dynasty (Allawi, 2014). His cultural significance lies in his role in fostering unity between Sunni and Shiite Muslims to promote pan-Arabism to create an Arab state that would have included Iraq, Syria, and the rest of the Fertile Crescent (Allawi, 2014).

King Faisal has been depicted numerous times in popular media, most notably in the Oscar-winning 1962 Lawrence of Arabia film.

Amir Faysal Ibn Husayni sought Syrian independence, but competing interests between Britain and France forced him to accept a compromise whereby France acknowledged partial Syrian independence under its influence (Fildis, n.d.). The aftermath of World War I caused the Ottoman Empire to fall apart, resulting in political divisions in Syria along former administrative lines (Fildis, n.d.). The Anglo-French entente decided the postwar settlement at the 1920 San Remo Conference (Fildis, n.d.). Moreover, interior Syria saw further divisions, with France creating separate states like Aleppo and Damascus to weaken pan-Syrian sentiment (Fildis, n.d.). A century later after the Sykes-Picot Agreement conflicting promises and geopolitical interests created tensions and established artificial borders and legacies that further fuel ongoing conflicts in the region (Rogan, 2016).

In other words, the current ethnic and political divides in Syria and in other Middle Eastern countries spawned from the European colonial period after the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Fildis, n.d.). This is evident by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 that divided the Arab territories, giving Mesopotamia (Iraq), the Gulf, and areas near Palestine to Britain, while Syria and the eastern part went to France to safeguard routes to India, secure oil, maintaining the Mediterranean power balance, and protecting financial interests (Fildis, n.d.).

Recent historical discoveries, particularly in Ali Allawi's new biography, *Faisal I of Iraq*, emphasize Faisal's secular leadership, high-minded tolerance, and commitment to Arab nationalism rooted in tolerance and fraternity, which diverges from the sectarian conflicts prevalent in the Middle East today (Radjy, 2015).

Divide to conquer

The British, just like the French, embody *divide et impera*, dividing to conquer, or, in direct terms, emphasize ethnic differences (Can, 2018). Can (2018) further explains that under Ottoman rule, Sunni Muslims were privileged but French colonial authorities, seeing themselves as protectors of religious minorities promoted autonomy for the Alawites, Druze, Maronites, and Ismailes. Thus, the current ethnic conflict in Syria can be understood as a political tool exacerbated by the European colonial past that has put a magnifying glass to emphasize differences, which Al-Assad's regime has emphasized even further (Norwegian Church Aid, n.d.).

Limitations of this system

As with any political system, a constitutional monarchy has its faults, particularly in the Syrian case. The monarchist sentiment in Syria is not well-established and the royal family's connection to Iraq's defunct royal family and Jordan's falls into the intricate web of multilateral relations amongst these countries. Not only that, but a constitutional monarchy's efficiency primarily relies on public support, which can be erratic and sensitive to various external circumstances.

Word count: 1500

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Appendix A - Revised Constitution

Article I: Sovereignty and Government Form

Syria is and will always be a sovereign country, exercising sovereignty and governance independently on its own soil.

Article II: Constitutional Monarchy

Syria's government is a constitutional monarchy, acknowledging the historical and cultural relevance of this political arrangement in creating unity and stability.

The monarchy will be hereditary, with the ruling monarch a direct descendant of Syria's Faisal I, who was instrumental in building unity and tolerance among Syria's multiethnic cultures.

Article III: Succession

The monarchy shall be transferred in conformity with the norms of agnatic primogeniture, providing a clear and orderly transfer of the monarchy within the direct line of descent from Faisal I.

In the event of an unanticipated vacancy, the next qualified heir in line will take the throne in accordance with established constitutional procedures.

Article IV: Role and Responsibilities

The monarch's role is mostly ceremonial and symbolic, reflecting the Syrian state's unity and continuity.

The monarch shall abstain from daily political activities, allowing elected government institutions to govern in conformity with the constitution.

The monarch is the primordial representative of the Syrian State both domestically and abroad.

Article IV: Parliament and the Prime Minister

Syria will establish a parliamentary system of government.

The Prime Minister shall be the leader of the government, responsible for the administration and implementation of laws, and shall be nominated by the elected parliamentary majority.

The Prime Minister is responsible to the legislature and the public for ensuring transparency, responsiveness, and effective governance.

Article V: Effective Date

This constitutional provision declaring the State of Syria as a constitutional monarchy shall come into effect as of the year 2023.

The current descendant of Faisal I shall assume the position of the monarch upon the enactment of this constitution.

Appendix B - LOs

#Contextualfactors: I thorough historical and cultural analysis, tracing the origins of Syria's current ethnic and political divisions back to the European colonial period, namely the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement. It underlines the importance of historical leaders such as Faisal I in fostering unity, as well as the role of colonial divide-and-conquer efforts in increasing ethnic divides and creating the region's geopolitical terrain.

#ExecutiveStructure: I utilized the executive structure learning objective by thoroughly comparing and evaluating various constitutional forms of executive authority. In particular, I concentrated on the advantages and disadvantages of parliamentary, presidential, and constitutional monarchies in the context of Syria's post-war governance.

The Presidential System

- Weaknesses were identified, such as the possibility of dual legitimacy and difficulties in forging coalitions due to Syria's ethnic differences.
- The risk of a president becoming authoritarian over time was discussed, bringing analogies to other countries such as Russia.

Parliamentary Structure:

- Weaknesses were investigated, including potential inefficiencies and coordination issues linked with dual leadership roles and power decentralization.
- Concerns were expressed concerning the system's possible impact on decision-making processes and crisis response.

Constitutional Monarchy

- The benefits of a constitutional monarchy, which transcends electoral politics and provides a longer-term view, were emphasized.
- In comparison to a president, the potential for continuity and historical continuity was stressed, fitting with the goal of long-term stability post-war.

AI statement: I used ChatGPT to help me break down my argument and create an outline. I also used Grammarly to correct grammatical errors.