

Dissent and Reform in the Arab World  
Dissidents and Reformers Speak Out

January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006

*Participants' Working Essays*

## Dissent and Reform in Libya

**Mohamed Eljahmi**

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Despite Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi's international rehabilitation, the Libyan leader remains resistant to reform and intolerant of dissent. His ultimate goal—preservation of power—remains unchanged. His decision to abandon his weapons of mass destruction program was not a moral epiphany but rather a calculated attempt to launder his image in order to earn him an exemption from the U.S. effort to democratize the Middle East. So far, his strategy is working. The U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, for example, has licensed companies to enter into business with Libya.<sup>[1]</sup> Washington's policy toward Libya is counterproductive, however. People across the Middle East juxtapose U.S. rhetoric regarding terrorism and dictatorship with the White House embrace of Libya and conclude that the Bush administration is insincere.

### The Rise of Qadhafi

Advocates of engagement and reconciliation with Qadhafi's Libya often have little understanding of the nature of the ruler or the state that he has constructed. Qadhafi's history belies his ambitions and should undercut the seriousness with which policymakers accept his word. He first entered the public spotlight when, on September 1, 1969, he and other "Free Unionist Officers" overthrew the constitutional monarchy of King Idris, nullified all constitutional protections, and announced their Revolutionary Command Council to be the highest authority in Libya.

Initially, the new Libyan regime sought to parallel Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalist discourse.<sup>[2]</sup> In exchange, the Egyptian government helped solidify the shaky Libyan junta. Nasser's regime embraced Qadhafi and instructed him on how to use media and propaganda to strengthen his grip on power. Egyptian advisors exported their bureaucracy to Libya and helped transform the Libyan education sector to sharpen its focus on Arab nationalist and revolutionary principles.<sup>[3]</sup> Nasser also helped Qadhafi overhaul the Libyan security apparatus.<sup>[4]</sup> In return for investment capital, money, and an outlet for Egyptian workers, Nasser provided Qadhafi with legitimacy, protection, and advice.

Qadhafi's grip on power was, nevertheless, far from secure. In December 1969, Egyptian intelligence helped disrupt a plot by the Libyan defense and interior ministers to overthrow the Libyan regime. Their ideological impetus appeared to be growing nationalist unease over Qadhafi's tilt toward Egypt and the radicalism of the more junior Revolutionary Command Council members.<sup>[5]</sup>

Qadhafi survived the coup plot but concluded that his power depended upon tight control. His Revolutionary Command Council issued a "Law for the Protection of the Revolution," making it a criminal offense to proselytize against the state, to arouse class hatred, to spread falsehood, or to participate in strikes and demonstrations.<sup>[6]</sup> Within

weeks, the Revolutionary Command Council assumed total public control over Libya. Qadhafi assumed formal control as both prime minister and defense minister. He curbed any significant delegation of authority beyond family and his closest associates.

In subsequent years, Qadhafi instituted an Islamization and Arabization campaign to cleanse Libyan society of Western influence. He removed Latin street signs, banned the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, closed the U.S. and British bases, and expelled both foreigners and much of the Libyan Jewish communities.<sup>[7]</sup> He converted Tripoli's cathedral to a mosque and Benghazi's cathedral to a headquarters for the Arab Socialist Union. Prior to their expulsion, Qadhafi forced the Italian community to exhume the remains of their dead to take back to Italy, an event he televised live.

The Cairo-Tripoli détente began to unravel in September 1970 after Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser. Sadat mistrusted Qadhafi. While Sadat agreed to a limited partial union between the two neighbors in 1972, he remained suspicious of Qadhafi's offer for a full union in which Sadat would be president and Qadhafi defense minister.<sup>[8]</sup> Qadhafi's ambitions worried the Egyptian ruler. Qadhafi was a man who did not hesitate to turn on his allies for the sake of empowerment. He may have thought himself another Shishonk I, a Berber officer from what is today Libya, who led a palace coup to found the twenty-second dynasty of Egypt (945-745 B.C.E.). While the Egyptian embrace had enabled Qadhafi to consolidate his power, the student had begun to emerge from the shadow of his master.

### **Ideology of Repression**

On April 15, 1973, Qadhafi moved to cement power, unfettered by commitments to Cairo. He launched a systematic assault on the Libyan bureaucracy and intelligentsia. Speaking in Zuwarah, he delivered what became known as his "Five-Point Address," in which he declared:

- suspension of all existing laws and implementation of *Shari'a* (Islamic law)
- purging the country of the politically sick
- creation of a people's militia to protect the revolution
- administrative revolution; and
- cultural revolution<sup>[9]</sup>

The speech was replete with religious symbolism. Delivered on the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, the five points paralleled the five pillars of Islam. The Zuwarah address marked the start of Qadhafi's absolute rule. He canceled school summer vacation and dispatched Benghazi University law students and clerics from Al-Azhar University in Cairo to indoctrinate primary and secondary students in his political vision. I was an eighth grade student at the time and forced to attend the summer "cultural school." We were indoctrinated with revolutionary rhetoric and religious teachings.

Qadhafi's speeches reflected his ruthlessness. He warned anyone who tried to organize politically that they would face repression. "I could at any moment send them to the

People's Court ... and the People's Court will issue a sentence of death based on this law, because execution is the fate of anyone who forms a political party," Qadhafi said during a speech in Tripoli on November 9, 1974.[\[10\]](#) He backed his threats with action. There were public hangings and mutilations of political opponents.

His megalomania was unchecked. He claimed that his rule was a "third international theory," an alternative to both communism and democracy. In practice, his theory devastated civil society and destroyed both separation of powers and constitutionalism. He consolidated his governing philosophy into *The Green Book*.[\[11\]](#)

*The Green Book* consisted of three parts: "The Solution to Democratic Problems," published in 1975; "The Solution to the Economic Problem," in 1977; and "Offering Solutions to Complex Social Problems," in 1981. Enacting the *Green Book* eviscerated every aspect of society. He used the second part to justify the confiscation of private businesses, nationalize private property, and cap the income of Libyan families.[\[12\]](#) Libyan society, once tolerant, grew less so. The third part undercut the position of women, which it labeled the "feebler sex,"[\[13\]](#) and berated black Africans, whom it labeled a lazy race liable to multiply without limit.[\[14\]](#)

In January 1976, the first General People's Congress of the Arab Socialist Union convened in Tripoli.[\[15\]](#) On March 2, 1977, the Congress re-convened with Fidel Castro as the guest of honor.[\[16\]](#) At the Congress, Qadhafi declared Libya to be a "state of the masses" (*al-Jamahiriyya*) in which he derived power from neighborhood committees. While he claimed that such a system enabled popular representation, in actuality, it allowed Qadhafi to reach deeper into society in order to transform an authoritarian system into a totalitarian one. The terror began almost immediately. Shortly after Castro left Libya, Qadhafi authorized the execution of twenty-two officers who had participated in a 1975 attempted coup, in addition to the execution of several civilians.[\[17\]](#)

Implementation of the *Jamahiriyya* system forced dependence upon the state. While Qadhafi retained ultimate political and budgetary authority, he created a hierarchy of organizations to enforce his will. At the national level, he established a Permanent General Secretariat—run by his cousins Zanati Zanati and Ahmed Ibrahim—to oversee the General People's Committee, a General Secretariat, and the General People's Congress.

The various institutions are cogs in a bureaucracy that goes nowhere. The General People's Congress convenes annually, appoints the General People's Committee, and adopts resolutions of the Basic People's Congresses but has neither independent budgetary authority nor oversight of the armed forces. Its irrelevance to key policy decisions was demonstrated in 1980 when Libya went to war with Chad without a single General People's Congress discussion. More recently, the General People's Congress did not discuss the government's decision to surrender Libyan suspects in the Lockerbie bombing for trial in Scotland nor to pay compensation to the victims' families.

Some 453 Basic People's Congresses meet quarterly to discuss an agenda pre-determined by Qadhafi.[\[18\]](#) Each Basic People's Congress elects a secretariat and a collection of People's Committees, which are diverse in function, focusing upon issues such as public works and health. All votes are cast in open ballots, allowing the state to punish dissent.

Overseeing the various secretariats is the General People's Committee, which, in effect, acts as a council of ministries. Here, Qadhafi has allowed a non-family member to take control. He has appointed Shukri Ghanem, a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, to head the General People's Committee, putting a Western-educated face forward to interact with the outside world.

Revolutionary committees monitor the Basic People's Congresses and People's Committees and report to Qadhafi via a Permanent Revolutionary Committee. According to the U.S. State Department, 10 to 20 percent of Libyans work in surveillance for these committees,[\[19\]](#) a proportion of informants on par with Saddam Hussein's Iraq or Kim Jong Il's North Korea. Qadhafi has embedded revolutionary committees throughout government, in factories, and in the education sector.

There are no judicial checks and balances. The judiciary is ill-defined, allowing regime elites to use multiple security forces to harass ordinary Libyan citizens. Revolutionary committees run prisons with little or no documentation of the inmate population or of such basic data as crime and sentence. Revolutionary committees dispense justice, targeting, in particular, participants of the Basic Peoples' Congresses who voice opposition to the state's agenda. Dissent is illegal under Law 75 of 1973, which denies Libyans freedom of expression. Participants have disappeared after Congress discussions. On October 19, 2002, security forces arrested my brother, Fathi Eljahmi, after he spoke out for political and democratic reforms at the local Basic People's Congress.

Qadhafi's death squads terrorize the population. Since 1980, when he ordered the liquidation of dissidents—"stray dogs"—at home and abroad, Libyan agents have killed political dissidents, both real and perceived. In December 1993, Libyan agents kidnapped former Libyan foreign minister and dissident Mansur Kikhia, one month before he was to receive U.S. citizenship.[\[20\]](#) Abdel Salam Jalloud, Qadhafi's former second-in-command, justified the assassination of dissidents, saying, "Many people who fled abroad took with them goods belonging to the Libyan people ... Now they are putting their illicit gains at the disposal of the opposition led by Sadat, world imperialism, and Israel."[\[21\]](#) Libyan television broadcast hangings and mutilations.

Libyans in the United States have not been immune to Qadhafi's rampage. In 1980, while the Libyan government still maintained an embassy in Washington, a Libyan agent attempted to assassinate dissident Faisal Zagallai, a doctoral student at the University of Colorado, Boulder. The bullets left Zagallai partially blinded.[\[22\]](#)

Perhaps the most dangerous tool of judicial oppression is the Law of Collective Punishment, passed in 1997, which allows the state to sanction entire families, towns, or districts for the wrongdoing of individuals.[\[23\]](#) There are no checks and balances.

Qadhafi rules supreme. His nationalization of private property has allowed him to exert complete control over the economy and also keep foreign investors in check. Fulfillment of the needs of all Libyan citizens depends upon their absolute obedience.[\[24\]](#)

### **Radicalizing Religious Expression**

Qadhafi has sought to dominate not only Libya's political society but also its religious life. Before Qadhafi seized power, most Libyans—especially those in the eastern (Cyrenaica) and southeastern parts of the country—followed Sanusi teachings. Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi (1787 - 1859), who founded the Sanusi order in 1837, was an Islamic reformer who believed in austerity, simplicity, and the free interpretation of the Shari'a law. He criticized the rigid interpretation of the Qu'ran by strict Sunni schools in Egypt and what is now Saudi Arabia.[\[25\]](#)

In the early 1970s, Qadhafi began to saturate the Libyan media with condemnation of spirituality and introduced Salafist rhetoric encouraging obedience to the ruler. Street posters created by his regime carried slogans such as "Obey those in authority" and "Every shepherd has his own flock." Libyan television showed security officers interrogating former Sufis and then leading them to repent from practicing *dikhr* (meditation). He sought to suppress the independence of Sanusi preachers, razing the Sanusi mosque and university and desecrating the graves of the Sanusi family.[\[26\]](#)

Qadhafi has consistently used the cloak of religion to propagate his politics. In 1970, he founded the Islamic Call Society (Jam`iyat ad-Da`wa al-Islamiya) whose charter calls for proselytizing in Africa and elsewhere. In the late 1970s, the Jam`iyat ad-Da`wa al-Islamiya was placed under the supervision of the Libyan External Security Organization, where its role was expanded to include subversion and propaganda.[\[27\]](#)

Qadhafi has adopted a guise of religiosity to affirm his rule and intimidate opponents, whom he calls *zanadiqa* (heretics). With messianic megalomania, he has adopted the identity of various Islamic prophets. In his first communiqué on coming to power in 1969, he compared himself to Abraham by declaring, "With a single blow from your heroic army, the idols have fallen and false gods have been destroyed."[\[28\]](#) Later, he wrapped himself in the symbolism of Jesus and Muhammad.[\[29\]](#)

In 1976, Mohammad Hassan, Qadhafi's court musician, penned a song in which he called Qadhafi "Messenger of the Arabian Desert," drawing a parallel between the Libyan dictator and the Prophet Muhammad. In a 1979 interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, Qadhafi called his *Green Book* "the new gospel,"[\[30\]](#) again implying a parallel between himself and Muhammad, whom Muslims believe received the Qur'an from God through the angel Gabriel.

In 1992, the Libyan regime issued a commemorative stamp on the anniversary of its takeover ("the Al-Fateh revolution") which depicts Qadhafi on a white horse that appears to be leaping into the sky, an allusion to Al-Buraq, the white winged beast that Muhammad mounted on his overnight journey from Mecca to Jerusalem.

Such religious egoism has not dissipated with time or with Libya's recent rapprochement with the West. In April 2005, Revolutionary Guard commander Hasan al-Kabir al-Qadhafi reiterated the same theme when he said there existed a special relationship between the leader and God and called Qadhafi a *murabit* (a living saint).[31] During a July 2005 meeting, the General Union for Producers, in effect, a state-controlled trade union, told Qadhafi, "We value and are proud of your imamship for millions of Muslims from East to West, so that the banner of Islam can be raised so high to fulfill the will of Allah." [32]

Qadhafi has used his rapprochement with western Europe and the United States to portray himself as anti-Islamist, but the reality is more complex. While Islamist groups have targeted Qadhafi, his consistent flirtation with Islamism suggests that he may not be adverse to a tactical alignment, perhaps by seeking to brand his own form of Islamism. General Charles Wald, deputy commander of the U.S. European Command, who suggests that Tripoli shares Washington's concerns about radical Islamism,[33] is naïve. Washington once trumpeted Saddam Hussein as an anti-Islamist, but following his 1991 defeat in Operation Desert Storm, the Iraqi leader used religion as a crutch.

### **Has Rapprochement Worked?**

Foreign policy realists can argue that sometimes the price of compromise is worth it. In the case of Libya, though, it is not. In the latter years of the Clinton administration, Qadhafi quietly reached out to U.S. interlocutors. Engagement was cost-free for the Libyan leader. There is no evidence that he was sincere. At the time, he neither curbed his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction nor his support for terrorism. In 2000, his self-described ransom payments to Abu Sayyaf terrorists in the Philippines, for example, allowed the group to expand in both numbers and capability.[34]

President Bush's willingness to use force against Saddam Hussein motivated Qadhafi to change his position. He saw Washington defy the will of many European allies and saw the failure of the Iraqi president's strategy of stalling. Qadhafi offered to forfeit his weapons of mass destruction program. His concession was tactical, however, a shrewd calculation of the weak ingratiating itself to the strong. While Qadhafi forfeited his program and some equipment, the knowledge remains and, with the lifting of United Nations and European Union sanctions, the ability to upgrade and reconstitute the program.

Washington's embrace of Tripoli has been premature. Domestic policy is a window into the character of rulers. In Qadhafi's case, it shows he has not changed his behavior or perspective. Rather than reform, he has sought only the image of reform. He abolished the Exceptional Court, for example, in order to demonstrate a new commitment to the rule of law, but rather than end prosecution of political crimes, he simply shifted jurisdiction for them to criminal courts. Despite rhetoric meant to attract foreign investment, there has been no economic liberalization.

Treatment of minorities can be a barometer of sincerity. Here, too, Qadhafi fails. According to Raphael Luzon, chairman of the Libyan Jewish community in Great Britain and deputy president of the World International Federation of the Jews of Libya, "Qadhafi ordered the destruction of all Jewish cemeteries in Benghazi and Tripoli. Despite Qadhafi's recent declarations that Libyan Jews are welcome to come back and visit, Libyan authorities have refused to grant me permission to visit Libya three times."[\[35\]](#)

The case of my brother is also instructive. On March 12, 2004, Bush stood in the East Room of the White House and declared:

We stand with courageous reformers. Earlier today, the Libyan government released Fathi Eljahmi. He's a local government official who was imprisoned in 2002 for advocating free speech and democracy. It's an encouraging step toward reform in Libya. You probably have heard, Libya is beginning to change her attitude about a lot of things.[\[36\]](#)

Within two weeks, though, the regime had arrested him again. During his brief furlough, Eljahmi had granted interviews on a number of Arabic-language satellite stations calling for more rights.[\[37\]](#) It was one thing to promise reform but quite another to tolerate it. With no White House reaction to Eljahmi's re-arrest, Qadhafi extended his crackdown. In 2004, Libyan security arrested brothers Fawzi and Naji Eissawi. Fawzi's crime was sending this author e-mails. He also imprisoned dissident Abdul Razzaq al-Mansouri.[\[38\]](#) Washington's continued silence in the face of Qadhafi's crackdown may have emboldened the Libyan leader. In June 2005, regime elements murdered dissident Daif al-Ghazal.[\[39\]](#) Today, hundreds of new political prisoners occupy Libyan jail cells. But Washington has not withdrawn any of its carrots to protest Qadhafi's insincerity nor insisted that the Libyan leader's gestures be more than fleeting.

There has been some positive action by U.S. officials. Pressure by Senator Joseph Biden (Democrat, Del.) was largely responsible for the initial release of Fathi Eljahmi. When visiting the People's Congress, Biden demanded democracy and human rights for Libyans and also held the Libyan regime responsible for the downing of Pan Am 103.[\[40\]](#) Prior to the end of his tenure, Secretary of State Colin Powell drew much abuse from the official Libyan media when he said, "We have no illusions about Colonel Qadhafi or the nature of his regime."[\[41\]](#) The next day, the Libyan news agency JANA quoted foreign minister Abdel Rahman Shalqam as saying that Libya "will begin filing a law suit against him [Colin Powell] because his statement implies insult and libel against all Libyans."[\[42\]](#) *Az-Zahf al-Akhdar* also published an article that contained personal and racial insults about Powell. The article also referred to President Bush as "emperor" and U.S. intelligence as "mafia."[\[43\]](#) In the Arab world, such bombast is a sure sign that the initial comments struck an official nerve.

Testifying before Congress, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Burns said, "We will express our deep concern over individual cases, such as the re-

detention of political opposition leader Fathi Eljahmi." [\[44\]](#) Arab satellite television stations broadcast Burns's comments and boosted the morale of our family.

Nevertheless, such official statements are few and far between. Qadhafi appears only to be buying time, utilizing meetings with some U.S. politicians and Western politicians such as Canadian prime minister Paul Martin and British prime minister Tony Blair to bolster international legitimacy and deflate the morale of Libya's democratic underground. Every time Libyan television is able to broadcast photos of a prominent Western politician meeting with and implying endorsement of Qadhafi, it is a propaganda coup for the regime.

### **Building a Better Future for Libya**

Qadhafi may have pledged to abandon terrorism and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, but his assurances are fleeting. His evolution and political development suggest unrestrained megalomania.

With oil in excess of \$60 per barrel, U.S. forces bogged down in Iraq, and international sanctions lifted, the Libyan leader is no longer in a position of weakness vis-à-vis Washington and the West.

An understanding of his personality and history suggests Qadhafi to be impervious to change. Real security for both Libya and the United States will require democratic reform in Libya. There is no indication, however, that Qadhafi is willing to loosen his grip on all levers of power, regardless of his pursuit of rapprochement with the West.

Given Qadhafi's hold on society, reform will not be possible without outside pressure. Washington can play a supportive role in encouraging Libyan reform. First, it can deny Qadhafi legitimacy. Expansion of commercial ties absent pressure to democratize undercuts reform and is contradictory to the rhetoric of President George W. Bush.

The White House's failure to stand up for dissidents and democrats hurts the U.S. image, not only in Libya but throughout the Middle East. If Washington wants to win hearts and minds throughout the Arab world, it must adopt a more consistent approach to the abuse by dictators of their citizenry. There is no reason, for example, why the White House should condemn the murder of Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir [\[45\]](#) but remain silent after the assassination of Libyan journalist Daif al-Ghazal. If the Bush administration is serious about democracy, it should demand that Qadhafi abolish laws preventing the exercise of basic political rights and tie rapprochement to the release of political prisoners. In the interim, there should be no diplomatic visits unless the Qadhafi regime allows independent organizations such as Physicians for Human Rights and the Red Cross to visit the hundreds of political prisoners in Libyan custody.

Until there is democratic change, the State Department should be wary of cultural and educational exchanges. They should not be fooled by Qadhafi's request to send Libyan students to study at U.S. universities. The Libyan regime will embed regime apparatchiks

and intelligence officers. At a minimum, they will seek to intimidate Libyan Americans. They may also seek to assist radical groups within the United States.

Washington has blundered with its rapprochement to Libya. Arab press throughout the Middle East has suggested that the rapprochement with Libya is proof of U.S. insincerity about democracy. During an interview with Al-Jazeera television, Qadhafi's son Saif al-Islam said that the U.S. government has exempted Libya from the democratization of the Middle East by accepting Qadhafi's *Jamahiriyya* democracy: "Initially the United States had the idea of exporting the Western model of representative democracy to the Arab world. More recently, the United States has changed its approach, supporting local versions of democracy,"<sup>[46]</sup> he said. Such inconsistency fuels hatred and harms the long-term interests of both Libya and America.

[1] "[Termination of Emergency Declared](#) in Executive Order 12453 with Respect to the Policies and Actions of the Government of Libya and Revocation of Related Executive Orders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, Sept. 20, 2004.

[2] John L. Wright, *Libya: A Modern History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 122.

[3] Mansour O. el-Kikhia, *Libya's Qaddafi, The Politics of Contradiction*, reprint ed. (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 42.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] George Tremlett, *Gadaffi: The Desert Mystic* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1993), p. 181.

[6] Geoffrey Leslie Simons, *Libya: The Struggle for Survival* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 192-3.

[7] Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, p. 140.

[8] Martin Sicker, *The Making of a Pariah State* (New York: Praeger, 1987), p. 52.

[9] Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, p. 179-80.

[10] *Al-Inqad*, special issue on human rights in Libya, no. 37, 1993. Law 71 (1972) banned political parties.

[11] While several editions exist, all references to the English edition, unless otherwise noted are to Muammar al-Qadhafi [*sic*], *The Green Book* (Tripoli, Libya: Public Establishment for Publishing, Advertising, and Distribution, 1981[?]). [The Green Book](#) can be accessed in Arabic on the official site of the Revolutionary Committees Movement.

[12] *The Green Book*, pp. 43-69.

[13] "Al-Mar'a (The Woman)," *ibid.*, pp. 92-106.

[14] "Al-Sud (The Blacks)," *ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

[15] Simons, *Libya: The Struggle for Survival*, p. 195.

[16] Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, p. 191.

[17] Tremlett, *Gadaffi: The Desert Mystic*, pp. 164-5.

[18] Kikhia, *Libya's Qaddafi, The Politics of Contradiction*, p. 53.

[19] "[Libya](#)," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, Feb. 28, 2005).

[20] "[Overview of State-Sponsored Terrorism](#)," *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1998).

[21] Tremlett, *Gadaffi: The Desert Mystic*, p. 243.

[22] *The New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1981.

[23] "[State-Civil Society Relations: Libya](#)," Program on Governance in the Arab Region, U.N. Arab Development Program, accessed Aug. 1, 2005.

[24] *The Green Book*, p. 54.

[25] Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya, State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 88.

[26] "[Sanussi Dynasty of Libya](#)," official website of the Gilanis, accessed Sept. 22, 2005.

[27] Lillian Craig Harris, *Libya: Qadhafi's Revolution and the Modern State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), p. 85.

- [28] "[Al-Bayan al-Awal](#)," first communiqué of the revolution, accessed Sept. 25, 2005.
- [29] "The [Brother Leader Speaks](#) at the Opening Session of the General People's Congress on Tuesday, March 2, 2005," accessed Sept. 25, 2005.
- [30] Harris, *Libya: Qadhafi's Revolution and the Modern State*, p. 50.
- [31] "The Regime Threatens to Revert to Past Oppressive Tactics," [Akhbar Libya](#) (London), accessed Sept. 25, 2005.
- [32] "The Brother [Leader of the Revolution receives delegations](#) from the Congresses of the Professional, Syndicates, Producers and Services in the Great Jamahiriyya," Revolutionary Committees Movement website, accessed Sept. 13, 2005.
- [33] Associated Press, Apr. 25, 2005.
- [34] "[Abu Sayyaf History](#)," *Combating Terrorism in the Philippines*, U.S. Pacific Command, Mar. 5, 2002.
- [35] Telephone interview with Raphael Luzon, Sept. 24, 2005.
- [36] News release, office of the press secretary, The White House, [Mar. 12, 2004](#).
- [37] For example, interview on Al-Hurrah television, Mar. 16, 2004.
- [38] ArabicNews.com, [May 25, 2005](#).
- [39] "Libya: Watchdog Condemns Journalist's Killing," Reporters sans Frontières press release, Paris, June 7, 2005.
- [40] Joseph [Biden](#), address to the People's Congress of Libya, Tripoli, Mar. 3, 2004.
- [41] Colin Powell, speech, U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., [July 15, 2004](#).
- [42] Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation, [July 17, 2004](#).
- [43] *Az-Zahf al-Akhdar* (Tripoli), July 16, 2004.
- [44] William J. [Burns](#), statement before the U.S. House Committee on International Relations, Mar. 16, 2005.
- [45] Scott McClellan, White House spokesman, Air Force One, [June 6, 2005](#).
- [46] Al-Jazeera television, Apr. 27, 2005.

## **Dissent and Reform in Tunisia**

**Neila Charchour Hachicha**

Founder of Tunisia's Parti Libéral Méditerranéen

*Neila's paper is not yet complete. Included instead is a copy of an interview that the Middle East Quarterly conducted with Neila last summer, and a copy of a piece that Neila published in Lebanon's The Daily Star on January 9, 2006.*

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**Neila Charchour Hachicha: "Tunisia's Election Was Undemocratic at All Levels."**  
*Middle East Quarterly*  
**Summer 2005**

*Neila Charchour Hachicha is the founder of Tunisia's Parti Libéral Méditerranéen. [1] Born in Tunis in 1955 and trained as an architect, Hachicha is the daughter of the late Mahmoud Charchour, a prominent Tunisian diplomat and key figure in the ruling Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique (Constitutional Democratic Rally) party, long led by modernizing strongman Habib Bourguiba. Following Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's 1987 seizure of power, Hachicha became increasingly active in opposition and has become one of Tunisia's chief dissident voices, using her Parti Libéral Méditerranéen platform to advocate for an end to the one-party state and for the establishment of a democratic, multiparty liberal system in its place. Todd Orenstein, a research assistant at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, interviewed Hachicha by e-mail on February 24, 2005.*

### **Reform in Tunisia**

*Middle East Quarterly:* What does the Parti Libéral Méditerranéen seek to achieve in Tunisia? What are its goals?

*Hachicha:* The Parti Libéral Méditerranéen, PLM, believes that democracy can strengthen national cohesion rather than create divisions and animosity within the population. Specifically, the Parti Libéral Méditerranéen aims to strengthen liberal political and economic views. For too long, we have endured a socialist economic system that facilitates dictatorship. We seek to educate both the people and regime about the necessity of moving toward liberalism. We also aim to build popular support around the Maghreb Union, which should help us integrate into the greater Mediterranean region. As a Tunisian Muslim woman, I feel closer to Mediterranean culture than to the Arab Islamic world. But we cannot achieve our goals without the Parti Libéral Méditerranéen's legalization. In Tunisia, though, party legalization is not a right but rather a favor that the government may or may not choose to bestow.

*MEQ:* Ben Ali won a fourth presidential term in October 2004, with 94.49 percent of the vote over two opponents. Was this election legitimate?

*Hachicha:* We cannot say that the election itself was not legitimate. The Constitutional Democratic Rally has held power since independence. With two million members, its power is beyond doubt. The international community supports Ben Ali. He has at his disposal the exclusive support of the entirety of state machinery. Ben Ali may hold legitimacy because he is party leader, but this is different from democratic legitimacy derived from all Tunisians. The election may have been technically legitimate, but under these conditions, it seemed like a race between a sports car and a wheel chair. It was unfair and undemocratic at all levels.

*MEQ:* How does Ben Ali use the mechanism of the state to marginalize opposition?

*Hachicha:* The regime uses all sorts of unfair and even illegal procedures to suppress opposition. He restricts access to media and financial support, even to legal candidates and parties. As a result, the opposition remains fairly unknown. There was no comparison between the time that President Ben Ali and his spouse had on television during the presidential campaign and the time that the other candidates had. There was no debate. Although illegal, repression was high. While democracy requires leadership accountability, ultimately the responsibility for action is upon the citizenry. Because of citizen complacency, it was quite easy for Ben Ali to win over 90 percent of the vote.

*MEQ:* Can internal pressure force Ben Ali to accept democratic reforms?

*Hachicha:* Internal pressure is very weak. Although it is necessary, it is far from enough. Since we have neither freedom of speech nor assembly, and because intimidation is rife, Tunisians feel uncomfortable with any political activity. Fear controls thinking. As a result, no political movement has popular or transparent enough support to really pressure Ben Ali. We are still at the stage where each political movement is only trying to build credibility in order to gain legitimacy.

*MEQ:* Do opposition parties carry significant weight in the political landscape?

*Hachicha:* Absolutely not! The regime does not show any willingness to share the political landscape. There is no opening for national dialogue. The situation is worsened because the international community keeps silent in the face of the regime's abuses. When President George W. Bush received President Ben Ali at the White House,<sup>[2]</sup> Bush insisted on the necessity of freedom of speech and political freedoms. Almost simultaneously, [French] President Jacques Chirac talked about the Tunisian miracle and said that the primary human right is to be able to eat and drink. Recently, the Italian defense minister cited Tunisia as an example of democracy in the region. Hopefully, President Bush's tour in Europe<sup>[3]</sup> will tighten trans-Atlantic relations and allow the United States and Europe to coordinate their views, declarations, and actions to help us feel more confident in ourselves to resolve our internal problems.

*MEQ:* Then, there is a role for outside pressure?

*Hachicha:* The international community has a number of tools to pressure such regimes but should not interfere in internal domestic issues since we all think that national sovereignty is very important. Unfortunately, the world community never pressured dictatorial regimes seriously until after 9-11, when such issues reached the U.S. government's agenda. Even so, there are still countries like France that support dictatorships. Because of geography and history, Europe's political impact is much stronger on a country like Tunisia than is that of the United States with whom we share no vital interests.

*MEQ:* Can the Bush administration's Middle East Partnership Initiative[\[4\]](#) make U.S. pressure more effective?

*Hachicha:* While Washington is actually doing quite a lot, I am not sure that the American administration is resolving the problems the right way. Let me give you two examples. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) may be an excellent initiative that provides a lot of money to strengthen civil societies in the Arab world. But in a country like Tunisia that has no independent civil society, with whom will MEPI work? Will it be with the legal civil society—an extension of the regime? Or will it work covertly with unrecognized associations or political movements? I think that before spending any money, the American administration should first favor a better political context that will allow an independent civil society to grow fairly and freely. Only then will the Middle East Partnership Initiative be efficient. Ironically, when I published a summary of a conversation I had in Tunis with Scott Carpenter, deputy assistant secretary of state responsible for the MEPI, in which I suggested that the American administration apply pressure to force presidents elected with more than 90 percent of the vote to resign from their ruling parties in order to allow other political figures to develop, the Tunisian government censored the Parti Libéral Méditerranéen's Internet site, and the State Department did not show any support. So what kind of democratization and freedom of speech can we expect? America should not put less pressure on Tunisia just because it is more developed than other Arab countries. Also, many American nongovernmental organizations are not allowed in Tunisia even though they could be excellent spaces of liberty, cooperation, and training. It is much easier for the American administration to get such organizations implemented in Tunisia than for Tunisians to form organizations in their own country. At least members of American nongovernmental organizations will not be persecuted.

*MEQ:* What about Europe? In 1998, Tunisia signed an association agreement with the European Union obligating the Tunisian government to promote human rights and political pluralism.[\[5\]](#) Has the agreement been effective? Has the EU been a force for democratic reform?

*Hachicha:* Yes, Tunisia signed an agreement with Europe, but the agreement is more economic than anything else. As for human rights and political pluralism, Europe exerted little pressure because the regime argued both that reform might lead to another Algeria-style debacle and that reform could only occur upon the resolution of the Palestinian problem. While European leaders understand that democracy begins with the respect of

minorities' rights, their priority continued to be stability at any price. Only a superficial pluralism emerged that was under the total control of the regime.

## **Islamism**

*MEQ:* The Tunisian government outlawed Al-Nahdha, the main Islamist party. Would Islamists dominate a democratic Tunisia?

*Hachicha:* If Tunisia were a democracy, Al-Nahdha wouldn't dominate at all. In a dictatorship, they seem to be the only effective opposition since they have access to people through the mosques and don't need to rely on freedom of the press or any authorization to associate. In fact, both the regime and the Islamists serve each other. The regime holds the Islamists up as justification for restrictions upon democracy, and the Islamists use the regime's repression as a claim to legitimacy.

*MEQ:* But couldn't democratic reforms lead to a repeat of Algeria's bloody 1992 debacle?

*Hachicha:* A legal Islamist party in Tunisia would not lead to a repeat of Algeria. Any party the Tunisian government authorizes could hardly be more restrictive than the current regime. Tunisia is also immunized to the Algerian example for two reasons. First, the women's education and civil status that President Bourguiba imposed at independence are now irrevocable rights. Women are half of the voters, and Islamists will have no choice but to respect their voices exactly. Second, our economy is based on tourism. Islamists can't restrict tourism since, unlike our neighbors, Algeria and Libya, we have no oil or gas. Any Islamic party would have to be moderate to get votes and survive in the political arena.

Differences between Tunisia's and Algeria's post-independence evolution would also limit the reach of the Islamists. While we were very open to the West, Algeria leaned more toward Arab nationalism. The Algerian army also played an important political role, which their Tunisian counterparts never did. Oil—or lack of—is also important. Algeria's oil and gas wealth has been a great incentive for people to sacrifice even their lives in pursuit of power and control.

*MEQ:* Who supports Tunisia's Islamists?

*Hachicha:* Officially, no one supports them. Unofficially, we all think that Islamic regimes financed them at least until 9-11. Being a good Muslim does not mean being an Islamist or supporting an Islamist political movement, as Al-Nahdha sometimes argues. Tunisians are moderate Muslims and are quite secular in their mentality even though secularism is not enshrined in the constitution. Of course, since 9-11, Tunisians feel protective of their religion, but they would not massively support any Islamist party, especially after all the violence they saw in Iraq from the Sunni Islamists. Tunisians are not violent people and would not allow outside Islamists to import violence. Hard-core Islamists have long since fled into exile in the West. The fact that they have not returned

indicates that they do not see a bright future here. At least in the West they have access to the press and can continue their demagoguery.

## **The Future**

*MEQ:* Will Iraq's election have an impact in Tunisia?

*Hachicha:* Of course, there is no doubt about it. It will not only impact Tunisia but it will impact the whole region. As President Bush said, "The seeds of freedom do not sprout only where they are sown; carried by mighty winds, they cross borders and oceans and continents and take root in distant lands." [6] Iraqi elections will not immediately affect those who are already in power and are able to get over 90 percent of the vote, but they will surely impact the political maturity of all oppressed people. The freedom process, although quite slow and often violent, is irreversible now. We can see it clearly in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia. The domino effect is working. As for Tunisia, only one year ago, I would not have dared speak my mind like I am doing right now. But today keeping silent is more dangerous in the short run than giving a constructive opinion. Hopefully, Ben Ali will listen carefully to avoid a political crisis in Tunisia.

*MEQ:* You have written about a national reconciliation initiative. [7] Why is national reconciliation necessary in a seemingly stable political system?

*Hachicha:* You said it: "A seemingly stable political system." Indeed, Tunisia seems stable, but it is a stability imposed through repression, a stability that is too much at the expense of human dignity and human rights. We need real stability built upon individual liberties, freedom, democracy, and rule of law to insure a lasting authentic stability. Now why the reconciliation? Islamism is not fate. Islamism is the result of dictatorship mixed with poverty and despair. Islamism is the proof that our political system failed in establishing rule of law. Both the regime and the Islamists are responsible for dictatorship since both, in different ways, do not respect the constitution. This circle of condemnation is counterproductive. We need national reconciliation. Otherwise, how can any political, democratic movement be credible, especially when the regime totally denies the existence of political prisoners? How can we exclude even a minority of citizens from the political landscape and pretend at the same time to be democrats? Reconciliation is necessary if there is to be any true democratization. If we want to be an example of democracy in the region, President Ben Ali's resignation from the ruling party should be the first step. We need an open, nonviolent government while proceeding toward an authentic inclusive democracy.

[1] Parti Libéral Méditerranéen at <http://www.plmonline.org/>.

[2] White House [news conference](#), Feb. 18, 2004.

[3] Feb. 21-24, 2005.

[4] "[Middle East Partnership Initiative](#)," U.S. Department of State, accessed Apr. 27, 2005.

[5] "[The EU's Relations with Tunisia](#)," EU External Relations, Europa website, accessed Apr. 27, 2005.

[6] White House news release, Bratislava, Slovakia, [Feb. 24, 2005](#).

[7] Neila Charchour Hachicha, "Appel à la Réconciliation Nationale," Parti Libéral Méditerranéen, [Feb. 13, 2003](#).

*This item is available on the Middle East Forum website, at <http://www.meforum.org/article/732>*

## **Neila Charchour Hachicha: “In Tunisia, the sound of enforced silence”**

***The Daily Star (Lebanon)***

**January 9, 2006**

The recent assassination of Lebanese journalist and politician Gebran Tueni highlighted how shaky press freedom was in Lebanon. Even after the "Cedar Revolution," forces opposing democratic expression have shown that rights granted on paper don't necessarily exist in reality.

While the international spotlight on Lebanon is good for Lebanese independence, Lebanon is not alone in the battle for free speech. On matters of press freedom, Tunisia, considered a success story by many in the West, is quickly seeing its positive image destroyed. Fortunately, it was not a bomb that exposed Tunisian oppression to the outside world, but rather the United Nations, during the recent World Summit for Information Society held in Tunisia between November 16 and 18.

Before the summit itself, the UN provoked criticism by accepting that such a summit could be held in a country known to be one of the most repressive when it comes to freedom of speech. It is not new for the UN to publicly display its limitations. When Libya found itself at the head of the UN's Human Rights commission a few years ago everyone laughed, and the world body lost a little more of its already eroded credibility.

I watched the ceremonies of the World Summit on television from my home in Tunis. What an irony that Tunisian President Zein al-Abidin ben Ali, basking in the glow of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's bestowed legitimacy, showed just how much disdain he has for the principle of free speech by using his monopoly over state media to censor a critical speech by Swiss President Samuel Schmid. Under the spotlight and a flow of inquiries regarding Tunisia's supposed free Internet, free press and free political life, the Tunisian regime could only show its dictatorial face.

While Annan toasted Ben Ali, eight prominent Tunisian civil society figures had been undertaking a month-long hunger strike in support of political liberty. Even Al-Jazeera accepted that the truth in Tunisia was not what is seen in five-star hotels and on tourism postcards.

While the Arab League remained silent, international reporters got a taste of what we Tunisians experience every day. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, it was Tunisian thugs who beat and stabbed French journalist Christophe Boltanski, a day after he published an article critical of Tunisia's abysmal human rights record; the [police](#) did not intervene. Police, however, did show up in force to disrupt a human rights discussion at the German cultural center in Tunis.

In Tunisia, the price for speaking one's mind is harsh. The late blogger Zouhair Yahyaoui spent a year and a half in prison for his Web commentary. The government sentenced teenagers in the southern port city of Zarzis to 19 years' in prison for having clicked on

Web sites of terrorist groups. The teenagers did nothing that analysts, journalists or curious persons do not do several times a month in any democratic state.

The Tunisian government regularly blocks access to my own party's Web site and that of other liberal and secular opposition groups. The government has even blocked the sites of legally recognized opposition parties. Ben Ali tells Washington and Brussels that he alone stands in the way of fundamentalist groups, and he adds that Tunisia is a genuine democratic republic evolving at its own standards of evolution. Indeed each country has its specific context and needs its own standards of evolution; but freedom of speech is and will always be the minimal credible standard for any newborn democracy. Unless this freedom is guaranteed, a regime cannot pretend that it is evolving toward democracy.

After the summit, Ben Ali, under international pressure, ordered the president of Tunisia's human rights' committee to listen only to recognized civil society groups and parties wanting to expose their demands to the government. Had there been a real will to bring about a political opening, the president would have proven himself to be more sincere by allowing public debates on national television.

Such debates would allow a variety of political activists to better dialogue between each other and with the government. They would allow Tunisians to feel more confident about their right to criticize the regime or the opposition. The debates would, finally, allow citizens to openly support those members of the political movements with which they identify. Without free media, there can be no civil society.

It is humiliating to be denied freedom of expression in one's own country. It was embarrassing that it needed the public intervention of the Swiss president to defend our cause and help Ben Ali remember that he must respect Tunisia's national and international commitments as a member of the UN. Democracy cannot be a favor offered by a regime under international pressure. Liberty is a state of mind that each one of us, from the grass roots to the pinnacle of power, must practice every day through tolerance and within the framework of an independent legal system.

Instead of sending its experts after a crime is committed, the UN would be better off considering preventive sanctions for those countries whose regimes do not respect the fundamental rights of its citizens.

## **Dissent and Reform in Yemen**

*This essay is not for quotation*

**Ali Saif Hassan**

Executive Director

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Yemen is at a turning point. A bipartisan group of American scholars and advisors warned in a 2004 report by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy that Yemen was in danger of becoming a failed state.<sup>1</sup> In April 2005, World Bank President James Wolfensohn told the Yemeni government that time was running out and Yemen risked abandonment by the world community. Neither the Washington Institute report nor Wolfensohn referred to the downfall of the Yemeni government. Rather, their concern lay in the future of the state. Failure to reform should not be a matter confined to the government, but an issue of vital importance to Yemenis across society.

The challenges facing Yemen are many: Population is booming while natural resources like water and oil are fast depleting. Declining resources have accentuated differences between haves and have-nots, aggravating corruption. Reform is not a matter of choice, but rather of survival.

The Yemeni government has recognized the necessity of economic reform. In September 2004, Prime Minister Abdul-Qadir Bajammal and several ministers met with the parliament, a symbolic show of unity between the executive and legislative branches, even if the ruling party dominates the parliament. Bajammal said, "What is ahead is a bitter matter," to which the attendees replied, "The present is more corrupt than corruption." While acknowledging the problems of corruption, those at the meeting did not shed light on how to break the status quo.

The opposition parties offer no immediate recourse. They suffer from weak leadership. They do not think strategically, and so are often outmaneuvered by the ruling party which, at any rate, shows little inclination to participate in broader dialogue. Many opposition parties exaggerate their exploitation and are content to wait for political deterioration so that they might capture the fruits of the falling government, at which point they would implement some sort of magical solution imported from beyond the limits of plausibility.

The failure of the conference to address problems in more depth than a stage-managed show caused many younger Yemenis to reconsider how to address the question of reform and dissent.

Time is of essence because of the looming crisis in resources. Within the Yemeni population, the resource crunch—and its impact on quality of life—will increasingly lead to feelings of despair and hopelessness, which in turn might cause individuals to take matters into their own hands, hastening the deterioration of the situation. For reform to be successful in Yemen, it must balance cultural, social, political, and environmental factors.

### **Executive Branch Reform**

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Presidential Study Group. *Security, Reform and Peace: The Three Pillars of U.S. Strategy in the Middle East*. (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005), 40.

Within Yemen's power structure, the Presidency possesses influence without limit. Its influence is not limited to its constitutional powers. Rather, it also draws upon an influence won from political, cultural, and social history that has accumulated with time.

With this influence comes a lack of accountability. Throughout Yemeni history, the president and prime minister have always hailed from a single political party. While on one hand, this allows for coordination across government, on the other hand, it breeds complicity. At present, the limitations of presidential power are blurred. Such lack of clarity can be dangerous, especially if the division of power has not been addressed at a time when the President and Prime Minister come from different political parties.

For reform to be most effective, the Yemeni government should consider opening up as a subject for debate the nature of the presidential system. At present, Yemen uses a constructed French system, but for such a system to function well, there must be a high degree of political awareness as exists in France, but not in Yemen. An alternative could be the U.S. presidential system but, in Yemen, a simpler, less complex system, might best fit our needs. A parliamentary system would conform well to our political and social situation. Regardless of what executive system Yemen ultimately adopts, there needs to be political rules that allow for a competitive presidential election process that is free and fair, and consistent with international standards in this area.

A chief impediment to democracy is that the Yemeni citizenry cannot elect directly its district leaders and provincial governors.

It is impossible to achieve true political reform in light of the current electoral system which is built on the basis of the single-member district. A system that combines proportional representation and single-member districts could be compatible with our objectives, since parties could take advantage of the proportional representation system to nominate women as well as political and professional leaders. Single-member districts, on the other hand, preserve the right of local populations to elect their own representatives to elected positions.

The current situation regarding presidential elections turns Yemen into a single election district and sets up excessive regulations and obstacles for competition in such presidential elections. This state of affairs is unnatural.

In any case, we need to take advantage of international expertise in this area to make elections on all levels – local, parliamentary, and presidential – competitive, fair, free and civil by international standards, and to make their results reflective of the voters and their hopes, ensuring that succession occurs in a civil manner.

A further impediment to reform is the failure of the Yemeni constitution to guarantee that the majority party in parliament has the right to form the government. For democracy to succeed in Yemen, there has to be a mechanism to guarantee that electoral success is translated into electoral power.

A third layer of executive power involves local authorities. Municipalities do not have at present legal provisions sufficient to execute their duties. Nor do ordinary people have a say in who their local officials are. At present, the president appoints provincial governors, and the prime minister – with the president's approval – appoints the local districts mayors.

The problem is compounded by a lack of constitutional or legal protection of lower levels of executive power from the influence and power of its upper levels. There

is nothing, for example, to prevent the President from interfering in the affairs of a municipality. It is important to protect the local government from the influence and power of the provincial government, and it is essential to protect the provincial government from the central government, and in turn the central government from the Presidency.

### **Legislative Branch**

The legislative branch resembles a two-chamber system. One chamber consists of members of parliament whose duties and specializations are well defined, so as not to threaten the powers of the executive branch. As a result, there can be little independence among parliamentary deputies, and little chance to reform or express dissent through factions of the ruling party. Further, it is undemocratic as its members are not elected but rather appointed on behalf of the President.

### **The Judicial Branch**

As for the judicial branch, we are in need of an effective constitutional judiciary that goes beyond the current constitutional situation of the Supreme Court. The judicial branch lacks independence. At present, the President is head of the judiciary.

The court's independence is undercut by the direct appointment of all judges—including those of the Supreme Court—by the President, as he is also the president of the Supreme Judicial Council. President Salih also appointed the attorney general. This executive influence can only be undone by a revision of the formation of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Supreme Court and the rest of the judicial branch in a manner that insures its freedom and integrity.

Other institutional impediments exist. While the constitution provides for equality of rights and duties for men and women, opportunity is undercut by the practical failure to provide equal rights of education. As a result, women are underrepresented among those able to matriculate to institutions and qualify to work within the Yemeni judiciary.

### **Social Reform**

In their collective conscience, Yemenis view the Yemeni women positively. Yemenis remain proud of Belkays, the queen of Sheba, and Queen Arwa (1085-1138), who ruled Yemen during the Middle Islamic era. The current situation for women is no longer this favorable. The spread of conservative Islamic doctrine has limited their roles in comparison to opportunities of past eras.

This matter requires a national will that can transcend the current state of women. This can begin with the adoption of a constitutional text that prohibits discrimination against women and a national movement to earn women an equal share in all appointed positions, as well as an equal share in elected positions, which could be accomplished through electoral laws.

### **The Armed Forces and Security**

The armed and security forces in Yemen have enjoyed considerable societal support, and they gained an exceptional place in the past, during the official revolutionary

order that was prevalent during those times. In light of the democratic political system that is built on the principles of political accountability and the civil succession to power, though, there is a need to return to a sovereign political system. This matter requires a political discussion for the sake of coming to a national consensus on the role and place of the armed forces within the current political system. It is further important to insure its lack of interference in political matters and competition among parties, and to place it directly under civilian government control.

The goal behind this political reform program is to channel the existing national will toward achieving democratic transformation. Yemen has no choice but to do so if it is to survive and develop. Real transformation will take not only the participation and honest will of all political parties, strengthened with international partnership and expertise, but also a willingness of the president of the republic to help shape the future. At present, the president is the only person who has at his disposal all the political tools necessary to affect democratic change.