

The King Is Dead! Does It Matter?

[Martin Kramer](#)

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The Washington Institute has recently been sponsoring a series of discussions about sudden succession in the Middle East. Each session focuses on scenarios that might unfold if a specific ruler or leader departed the scene tomorrow. Questions include these: Would the sudden change lead to different policies? Would it affect the stability of the respective countries involved, or the region as a whole? What would be the impact on U.S. interests? Would the manner of a leader's departure make a difference? The discussions also probe how the U.S. government might adjust to the new situation or influence outcomes.

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This essay, first in a series resulting from these sessions on sudden succession, sets the scene by asking whether a major leader's departure is necessarily history changing. Martin Kramer examines past cases of unexpected departures of twentieth-century regional leaders, in Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. He suggests that the impact depends mostly on where the hand of fate interrupts the leader's career. Paradoxically, the more successful a leader has been in realizing his larger goals, the less consequential his exit.

THE AUTHOR

MARTIN KRAMER is The Washington Institute's Koret Distinguished Fellow and author of one of its most widely read monographs, [Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America](#).... [\(MORE\)](#)