MAKING SENSE
OF THE
ARAB STATE

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Making Sense of the Arab State

EMERGING DEMOCRACIES

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Raymond Hinnebusch

The Problematique: The State Weakness–Regime Resilience Paradox

The paradox of the Middle East is the way seemingly "weak" *states*, which are chronically unstable (vulnerable to coups, revolution, and rebellion) and lack the infrastructural power needed to carry out policy, are combined with the exceptional resilience of authoritarian *regimes*.[1] Yet even though these "fierce" regimes also often enjoy high repressive capacities, they see themselves as insecure and are preoccupied with survival.[2]

Explanations of this weakness-resilience paradox in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) tend to stress either agency or structure. The former attributes the paradox to ruthless leaders who prioritized preserving the regime over all else—hence overdeveloping security agencies and stunting inclusion of social forces needed to strengthen statehood. Focusing only on regime elites is, however, problematic. If the origin of the problem of governance in MENA is bad leaders, then regime change—getting rid of the "bad" leaders, for example, President Saddam Hussein in Iraq and President Muammar Qaddafi in Libya—ought to have improved rather than worsened the situation. Instead, successor leaders replicated

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1. Kamrava, *Fragile Politics*.
2. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*.

the power-building strategies of their predecessors, which points to the inherited structural situation: the external imposition and continual reinforcement of the deeply flawed state system that came out of what David Fromkin called the "peace to end all peace" after World War I.[3] Yet overstressing this point denies the agency of MENA actors who have clearly affected outcomes.

Indeed, only by exposing the historic *interaction* of structure and agency, the approach of Weberian historical sociology, can we adequately explain outcomes. First, the inherited structure shapes what is possible for agency, foreclosing on some possibilities and making others more likely. Second, agency can nevertheless alter structure, and indeed state builders have a menu of authority-building strategies (as identified by Max Weber) from which to choose. While legal rational authority is expected to deliver superior *state* capacity, charismatic and patrimonial authority has been very effectively deployed in premodern and transitional societies to concentrate *regime* power.[4] Third, the states system (structure) and state (agency) co-constitute each other: even as the global states system constituted the regional states, so these states in their interactions reshaped the regional system over time. Put differently, the historical legacy—both inherited political culture and the external imposition of the states system—constituted the cards dealt; while most MENA state builders were dealt poor hands, how they played their hands made a difference and further set up the hands dealt to their successors.[5] This chapter takes this approach in its historical overview of state trajectories, where first the export of the flawed states system is discussed, followed by an account of the agency of state builders as they interacted with internal and external forces.

Conceptual Approaches to State Formation

Conceptualizing Degrees of Statehood

To study the paradox of durable regimes but weak states, one needs notions of stateness—criteria for judging differences among regional states and change over time. First, the notion of state weakness must be interrogated, qualified, and refined. Christopher Clapham usefully speaks of "degrees of

3. Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*.

4. Hobden and Hobson, *Historical Sociology of International Relations*; Mahoney, "Path Dependence in Historical Sociology"; Sørensen, *Changes in Statehood*.

5. Hinnebusch, "Toward a Historical Sociology of State Formation in the Middle East."

statehood," suggesting a continuum. Fully functioning Weberian Westphalian statehood, enjoying both authoritative and autonomous centralized institutions, infrastructural power to implement policy, and recognized sovereignty over its territory, lies at one pole, with failed states at the opposite pole.[6] Most MENA states would be located in the in-between zones of what Thomas Risse terms "limited statehood."[7] Moreover, state capacity has to be disaggregated into its multiple dimensions since states can be "overdeveloped" in some dimensions, such as coercion, and "underdeveloped" in others, such as fostering economic development—what Steven Heydemann refers to as "asymmetric statehood."

Further, typical of middle cases would be "hybrid governance" in which rational-legal Weberian bureaucracy overlaps with traditional informal authority, as in *neopatrimonialism*. This hybrid system may facilitate despotic (regime) power concentration, at least in the short term, but may leave a deficit of statehood, "infrastructural power" in Michael Mann's terminology, such that states have precarious control over their peripheries and cannot deliver much development or services or defend their security without sovereignty-compromising dependence on a great power patron.[8] In this scenario, state institutions typically have limited autonomy, being "colonized" to some degree by the ruling family, powerful indigenous social forces (e.g., crony capitalists), or even foreign states.

At the *failed* states end of the spectrum, this problem goes much further. The collapse of infrastructural power and the state's monopoly of legitimate violence leave "un-governed spaces" filled by rebel governance characterized by heterarchy—overlapping jurisdictions between the withered regime, non-state actors, and external powers.[9] In extreme cases, the regime center dissolves, possibly leaving a near-total anarchy (as may be the case in Libya).

Historical Sociology Approaches to Understanding State Building

We cannot explain degrees of statehood without a theory of how states (and regimes) get constructed—and deconstructed. A starting point is Mann's identification of the two dimensions of state power: despotic power

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6. Clapham, "Degrees of Statehood."

7. Risse, ed., *Governance without a State?* See also Polese and Santini, "Limited Statehood and Its Security Implications."

8. Mann, "Infrastructural Power Revisited."

9. Arjona, *Rebel Governance in Civil War*; Santini, "A New Regional Cold War in the Middle East."

denotes the concentration of power in a centralized ruling elite, a *regime*, while infrastructural power is the ability to penetrate society, control territory, mobilize support, and carry out policy.[10] The *concentration of despotic power equates with regime building and infrastructural power with state building*. Despotic power requires the autonomy of the state's center and its institutions of societal or external interests since colonization by them deprives the state of the capacity to act in some notion of the public interest. Samuel Huntington adds a crucial dimension to infrastructural power: it depends on mass political inclusion and hence entails not just bureaucratic output capacity but also political infrastructure (parties, elections) to input, or incorporate, mass participation.[11] Degrees of despotic and infrastructural power constitute continuums, with actual cases more often located at midpoints, while very high and very low power are present only in extreme cases. As such, the power profile of each state will have quite different and complex combinations of the power dimensions.

A key issue is whether there is a trade-off between despotic power (regime building) and infrastructural power (state building), since power concentration is needed to build countrywide penetrative institutions yet may stunt the mass inclusion in political institutions required by state building. In practice, the dilemma has, Huntington suggests, been overcome by the prioritization of different dimensions in different phases.[12] For him, the first phase is the *concentration* of (despotic) power in a ruling elite—by defeating rival elites. The second phase is the *expansion* of power as central elites mobilize and organize support via political institutions (e.g., a single ruling party), while in the final phase the state is sufficiently established and society sufficiently differentiated that *diffusing power*, through a multiparty system, for example, becomes desirable. Huntington argued that modernization widens political mobilization from the upper class to the middle and finally the lower classes, with regimes faced at each such watershed with the choice of either incorporating the new participants, hence increasing state power, or increasing the repression of opposition, at the possible cost of its mobilization against the regime. While Huntington's first phase equates to regime building and the last to state building, in the second, middle phase, despotic and infrastructural power expand and reinforce each other. The widening of participation is compatible with the centralization of power as, for example, middle classes are mobilized by

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10. Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State."
11. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.
12. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*; Saouli, following Elias, in "States and State-Building in the Middle East."

populist regimes against the resistance of traditional oligarchs. But if in the third phase power diffusion is aborted, the contraction of infrastructural power—or at least the inclusionary dimension of it—is likely to follow. Thus, just as power can expand, so also can it contract: intra-elite infighting can fracture despotic power, infrastructural power can wither away, and inclusion can turn into exclusion.

Weber provides an alternative model, drawing on Ibn Khaldun's cycle of authority creation in North Africa, that may be more appropriate for the MENA region, The trajectory begins with the rise of an inclusive movement built on egalitarian ideology under a charismatic leader.[13] After the movement establishes or seizes the state center and concentrates power, charismatic leadership historically followed a cyclical trajectory of "decline" into patrimonial forms. Time-tested patrimonial power-building techniques—clientelism, divide and rule—have historically proven robust and appeared to regime builders as "natural" ways of creating support and constraining opposition in premodern societies, at least in the short term but over the longer term they risk precipitating resistance by the excluded. This cycle of decline can be arrested to the extent that rational bureaucratic infrastructure capable of penetrating the periphery and co-opting social forces is developed. In modernizing societies, this often results not in pure rational-legal statehood but rather in hybrids such as *neopatrimonialism* wherein the bureaucratic dimension serves the aims of the patrimonial leader yet, if developed enough, can constrain the arbitrariness of the ruler's "despotic" power. Yet this pathway may obstruct, even close off, Huntington's third stage of power diffusion.

A glimpse at MENA's historical record reveals that in actually existing states despotic and infrastructural power dimensions have varied together in complex ways. Thus, low despotic power (high intra-elite contestation) and low mass inclusion were typical of the early independence landed oligarchies—combining weak regimes with weak states. Under the authoritarian populist republics that dominated the sixties increasing despotic power was paralleled by an expansion of mass inclusion—resulting (temporarily) in strong regimes that increased state strength. But the two dimensions could also be separated, as in "post-populist" republics that emerged after the 1980s where the maintenance, even increase, of despotic power coexisted with different degrees of infrastructural power in different functional domains. Thus bureaucratic capacity, especially secu-

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13. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*; Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*.

rity services, remained robust even as political inclusion and service delivery shrank; thus, states could be "strong" in certain dimensions in certain time periods and not others.[14] This gave regimes impressive authoritarian resilience through the 1990s and beyond but it also signified the abortion of power expansion through inclusion and popular participation, which, as Huntington predicts, did indeed lead in MENA uprisings to mobilization outside and against state institutions. Regimes proved vulnerable in the uprisings to both the fracturing of despotic power as the ruling elites fell out and, in parallel, the withering of the state center's monopoly of legitimate violence, leaving ungoverned spaces where rebel governance arose. Making the transition to Huntington's last power-building stage, in which legal rational authority is combined with power-diffusing, inclusive political institutions, is a challenge MENA regimes have not yet met, with Turkey perhaps a partial exception.

To understand the reasons why different choices and trajectories prevail in different times and places requires, however, that we go beyond theory and more thoroughly examine the historic record of state-building projects and stateness deficits in MENA. The next section does this by first examining the *structure* that framed the context for regional state builders and then by examining the *agency* of state builders in both periods of state strengthening and of state weakening, thus showing how the interaction of structure and agency shaped state-formation trajectories.

The Structural Origins of MENA's Weak States

The Export of the Westphalian States System and Late Development

State weakness in MENA originates in its historically "late" imposition from without. In the English School narrative, the Westphalian states system was "exported" from the Western core to the periphery in the age of imperialism.[15] The multiethnic Ottoman Empire was destroyed, and the Western imperial powers arbitrarily divided it up as it suited their geopolitical interests, imposing new states—initially territorial "shells" and bureaucratic command posts—and co-opting oligarchic ruling classes. Thereafter, nationalist movements fought for independence, and after decolonization indigenous state builders tried to fill these territorial "shells" with political

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14. Risse, *Governance without a State*.
15. Bull and Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*.

institutions and national identities. They sought to forge a national identity among their populations since claiming to represent the nation was the key to legitimacy, hence the ability to mobilize populations to fight and pay taxes that were essential to survive in international power struggles.[16] The greater the congruence of national identity with statehood, the more robust the latter was thought likely to be; the less congruence, the greater the levels of internal conflict and irredentism. Thus, the nation-state model, affording legitimacy inside and enhanced power capacity vis-à-vis the outside, could alone defend their newly won sovereignty. National sovereignty required a drive to "catch up" with the core, beginning with Ottoman "defensive modernization" and later exemplified in Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's forging of a Turkish nation-state out of Ottoman ruins. Arab leaders who inherited states in the former Ottoman domains faced the greater obstacle of Western-imposed arbitrary borders but, similarly, sought to forge the nation from above accompanied by Weberian state centralization of power.

However, it was by no means inevitable that Westphalia would effectively take hold outside the West, and indeed the gaps between the ideal and the reality of both Weberian statehood and sovereignty were acknowledged to be wide and particularly marked in MENA for several reasons traceable to its late timing and the arbitrary manner of external imposition.

Identity-Territory Incongruence

Several factors obstructed the importation of the nation-state model in MENA. First, in this arid region of trading cities and nomadic tribes, the strongest identifications attached to substate units—cities, tribe, religious sects—or the larger Islamic *umma*. Islamic empires were built by instrumentalizing both supra- and substate identities while their boundaries fluctuated greatly as they rose and fell, such that identifications with these territorial states (*dawla*) were often tepid.[17]

But equally important, the post–World War I Western imposition of often arbitrary boundaries erected major additional obstacles to the nation-state model by cutting across preexisting identities and frustrating an emergent Arab identity through the fragmentation of the region into multiple ministates. The new state sovereignties coexisted with and contradicted supra-state Arabism and Islam, diminishing loyalty to the indi-

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16. Smith, "States and Homelands."
17. Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche-Orient*.

vidual states.[18] This incongruence between the new territorial states and preexisting identities was especially marked in the Arab Mashreq where, following the infamous World War I Sykes-Picot Agreement, the dismantling of historic Syria and the invention of Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon led to a continuing contestation of state legitimacy by competing supra- and substate identities. This identity heterogeneity made it harder to generate consensus around an inclusive national identity within states and kept them vulnerable to insurgency, irredentism, and trans-state interference. Yet it also enabled political agents—regime builders and their opponents—to instrumentalize multiple identities in their power struggles, including *both* nationalism and substate identities such as tribalism and sectarianism, inadvertently keeping alive identities that competed with loyalty to the nation-state.

Core-Periphery Hierarchy and Weak Statehood

European expansion also incorporated MENA into the periphery of the world capitalist system. Local industries and trade routes that provided the economic base of the Ottoman state were undermined or captured, a process deepened under direct colonial rule during which regional economic relations were shattered and reoriented to the core economies. The peripheralization of the MENA economy meant its incorporation into a global division of labor as primary product (agricultural and mineral raw materials) producer and exporter to the core (often of a single product, such as cotton or oil) and dependent on imports of technology and manufactured goods from the core capitalist states. Because raw material terms of trade are poor or take a boom-bust character leading to debt, dependency was continually reproduced. The development of an industrial bourgeoisie was retarded while compradors (large import-export merchants), great landlords, and oil monarchs exported their profits to the core. This kept the area economically underdeveloped, hence politically and militarily weak.[19] Even today, in no region is the absence of NICs (newly industrialized countries) more striking than in MENA.

The arbitrary external imposition of territorial boundaries made for big variations in the resource endowments available to state builders. States with a sufficient territorial mass and population, together with resources such as land, water, and hydrocarbons, were better positioned for sustain-

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18. Buzan and Gonzales-Palaez, eds., *International Society and the Middle East*.
19. Amin, *The Arab Nation*.

able development: lopsided endowments made for lopsided dependent development. Thus, the concentration in the Gulf of huge hydrocarbon resources in small-population microstates unable to defend themselves against larger neighbors inevitably made for high dependence on the core. Large populations without resource endowments, such as Egypt, faced enduring economic vulnerabilities.

This political economy shaped the kinds of ruling-class coalitions on which regimes were erected and whether their development policies required inclusion or exclusion of social forces (Gramsci's historical bloc), thereby impacting state strength.[20] Thus, as Barrington Moore argued, varying strategies of agricultural modernization shaped regimes: while the move of the landed oligarchies toward capitalist agriculture alienated peasants—making them available for anti-regime mobilization that destabilized the early liberal oligarchies—the inclusion of peasants was crucial to stabilization of the subsequent populist republics.[21] In parallel, reacting against retarded industrialization, interventionist regimes arose and attempted to overcome dependent development via statist "revolution from above."[22] This leveling of the class terrain, together with oil rent, enabled the rise of Bonapartist regimes that, in balancing above and autonomous from any one social class, developed considerable despotic power. These regimes fostered state capitalism, which under neoliberalism morphed into crony capitalist regimes that inflicted austerity on the middle and lower classes, shrinking the regimes' ruling coalitions and withering their infrastructural inclusion. The peripheral political economy, whether reacting against or succumbing to core constraints, shaped the ups and downs of state formation in the region.

Constraints on War as a Road to State Building

Charles Tilly famously showed how war created stronger and more inclusive states in the Western early developers. War making required the development of bureaucracy to collect taxes, which drove demands for representation. Mobilizing populations for war on the basis of nationalism empowered their demands for democratic and social rights.[23] In MENA, the region's fragmentation into multiple states with often-contested borders did lead to regional insecurity. However, many state builders from

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20. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*; Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics*.
21. Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.
22. Trimberger, *Revolution from Above*.
23. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990*.

the beginning enjoyed protection by international patrons that was institutionalized through treaties and military bases to the point that some states, notably in the Arab Gulf, could therefore dispense with reliance on citizen-soldiers. Later, arms transfers substituted for treaty mechanisms. Given high regional conflict, arms access was critical to the security of states, allowing suppliers to use arms as instruments of influence over regional states. As foreign aid to facilitate arms sales and oil revenues increased in MENA in the 1970s, states also had less need for taxation and hence for robust bureaucracy.[24]

While in the West survival of the fittest anarchy allowed the multitude of small political units to be absorbed in the construction of larger stronger states, in the periphery, the Western core powers' periodic interventions in MENA were aimed at preventing an "organization of the region" against them by a dominant regional power.[25] Thus, at the beginning of Western penetration, Muhammed Ali's attempt to create an Egyptian empire was checked by a Western concert of powers; the Western intervention against Iraq replicated 150 years later the unwillingness of the global great powers to permit any local power to challenge their control of the region. In sustaining the multitude of weak states in the region by international guarantees of their borders against absorption by stronger regional powers, the global order deterred wars of expansion in which less viable political units would be absorbed by stronger states.

States therefore remained weak because many were small, populations did not initially strongly identify with them, and ruling elites put in power by Western imperialism or buttressed by Western support lacked legitimacy. This made regimes even more dependent for survival at home on support and resources from core patrons. Indeed, after Iraq's 1991 defeat, Western treaties and bases in Arab Gulf states that had been rolled back in the period of Arab nationalism were restored, amounting to near protectorates typical of the pre-independence period. Thus, what Robert Jackson called quasi-states survived despite lacking robust Weberian statehood within, through support from without.[26] None of this was by accident: the imperial West, far from seeking to export fully sovereign states, aimed to establish a hierarchy in which MENA states inhabited the bottom rungs. They did this by dismantling the existing Ottoman great power and fragmenting the Middle East into a multitude of weak states, which enjoyed merely a semi-sovereignty that would be compatible with

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24. Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth*.
25. Lustik, "The Absence of Middle East Great Powers."
26. Jackson, *Quasi States*.

the survival, even after independence, of informal Western empires and hegemonies over the region.

Telescoped Developmental Challenges

Late developers face a telescoping of the challenges of development. For Leonard Binder and Joseph LaPalombara, conditions for political development were optimal when its distinct challenges were solved sequentially, with state building and nation building, for example, preceding the expansion of participation and social distribution.[27] By contrast, in developing countries, the telescoping of these challenges greatly increased stress on the state. This problem was greatly exacerbated by the way the MENA states system was exported—resulting notably in identity-territorial incongruence and economic underdevelopment.

Thus, in early developers, the prior development of a sense of shared nationhood diluted the conflict inherent in the expansion of political participation, but in later developers, participation that was expanded in the absence of hegemonic national identities increased the risks of communal conflict.[28] MENA's multiple identities, both supra- and substate, made the region particularly susceptible to this dynamic. Additionally, in the early developers, the prior development of the economy enabled expanded welfare distribution, but in developing states, regimes were under popular pressure to redistribute at a time when economic modernization had been retarded by the core-periphery system. Hence, a "premature Keynesianism" manifested in the region's "populist social contract," diluted capital accumulation and made the region dependent on rents and aid, and, at a later point, left them highly vulnerable to the global surge of neoliberalism.[29]

Intra-Regional Variations in State Formation

The significant degree to which all MENA states were shaped by the interaction of the above structural factors helps us understand their *similarities*—notably their shared vulnerabilities, such as identity-state incongruence and external dependency. However, differences of *degree* in the common vulnerabilities allow us to pinpoint key variations across the region in state strength (and their causes). In particular, external territorial demarcation

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27. Binder and LaPalombara, *Crises and Sequences in Political Development*.
28. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy."
29. Waldner, *State Building and Late Development*.

created sharp variations in both identity congruity and resource endowments, which are the primary shapers of variations in state-building trajectories, indicative of how far the structure inherited from imperialism has outweighed local agency in shaping variations in such trajectories.

First, stronger states emerged where their foundations and boundaries resulted from indigenous agency. States that originated in military expansion, especially over many centuries—as was true of the cores of Middle East empires in Turkey and Iran—had a head start in state formation over those that were part of imperial peripheries, like the Arab states. Particularly in the exceptional case where the state escaped Western imperial takeover, as in Ataturk's successful repulsion of imperial occupation of Anatolia after Ottoman collapse, the state had more agency to defend boundaries that satisfied identity and incorporated the balanced power resources (sufficient land, population, and natural resources) to minimize dependency on the core and allow the state to defend its territorial sovereignty. To a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia also partly fits this scenario, being able to expand despite imperialism rather than being diminished by it. And, even where imperialism does occupy a long-existing state, if it ratifies inherited indigenously forged boundaries , it is less likely to permanently debilitate state strength—hence, Morocco's and Egypt's relative state strength compared to the Levant.

On the other hand, the most *externally weak* states are those with unbalanced resources, notably small territories that make self-defense impossible and huge hydrocarbon resources that make them natural targets of expansive neighboring powers, as in the Arab Gulf. These states are the product of external global powers (Britain) obstructing expansion by larger indigenous state builders—the Ottoman Empire, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran—to protect dependent client regimes that would otherwise have been absorbed, thus eliminating the weaker states and leading to stronger regional powers. These weak states remain dependent on external great powers for survival; hence, they lack much nationalist legitimacy but substitute for it by traditional legitimacy and rentier social contracts that co-opt tribal societies.

States are more likely to be weak *internally* when they are directly the products of imperial engineering, with arbitrary boundaries that frustrate more than satisfy identity, as, to an extent, in Syria. Among the weakest states are those where identity cleavages are institutionalized at the expense of national identity in so-called consociational regimes (Lebanon, post-invasion Iraq). These are the states with the lowest capacity to deliver public goods (relative to their resources); the least able to monopolize violence

over their territory; the most penetrated—they are often battlegrounds of rival states; and the most vulnerable to civil war. In spite of this, since they give all communal elites a stake in the status quo, they have proven very durable despite their governance dysfunctionality. Of all the Levant states, Jordan is the most extreme case, lacking sufficient economic capacity within its arbitrarily imperial-assigned boundaries to support itself. Jordan is thus permanently dependent on subsidies and protection from without, which is provided to enable its service to the West as a buffer state between Israel and the Palestinians and the wider Arab world.

State Formation over Time

Agency I: Regime Construction and State Strengthening (1960–90)

The "original sins" of a flawed state system were major incentives for the state building that peaked in the 1970s and 1980s. State builders were not without agency and, indeed, had certain advantages: as late state builders they could imitate not only early Western state-building strategies but also the practices designed to promote a speedy catch-up by other late developers, such as the communist model of industrialization pioneered by the USSR that was widely imitated in the populist republics. Late developers can also take advantage of technology transfers (political and economic) from the core to compensate for telescoping developmental challenges. These allowed regimes and states to seemingly strengthen over time. But these solutions turned out to have their own negative side effects that made them unsustainable and paved the way for a return to weaker statehood after 1990, and particularly after 2010. As such, state formation in MENA has followed a bell-shaped curve.

Early formal independence (1945–56) was inevitably a period of state weakness and semi-sovereignty, in terms of both external dependence and internal territorial control. Internally, semi-feudal landed classes or tribal formations created or reinforced under imperialism—ruling as liberal oligarchies or monarchies and reproducing peasant impoverishment and global dependency—were, in most cases, too narrowly based to survive the politicization of the middle and subordinate classes. Their regimes were also highly permeable to trans-state and international penetration, with external interference in their politics the norm and irredentist projects to reconstitute state boundaries in the name of supra-state identities (Pan-Arabism, Pan-Syrianism, Pan-Islam) widespread. Thus, in the era of Pan-

Arab revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, many oligarchic and monarchic regimes were overthrown, initially replaced by equally unstable military regimes subject to "praetorianism"—coups and riots, for example. In time, however, two kinds of regime proved able to advance state formation: the populist authoritarian republics (PA) and the traditional rentier monarchies. This narrative mostly applies to the Arab states, with non-Arab Turkey, in particular, on a different trajectory, as noted above.

Populist Authoritarian Republics (PAs): These regimes tended to come to power in settled class societies with large cities and peasantries that experienced considerable nationalist mobilization and struggle, owing either to a particularly damaging impact of imperialism (Syria, Iraq, Algeria) or to longer length and intensity of imperial colonization (Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia). In the anomalies (Yemen, Libya) where republics came to power in tribal societies, the regimes would prove more fragile and have to make greater use of traditional practices such as tribal *asabiyya*.

The emergence of the PAs was, in the first place, an outcome of revolutions against the oligarchic order that brought to power broader-based movements recruited from the middle class and peasantry. Under the new regimes, revolution from above involved land reform, nationalizations of the heights of the economy, and state-led import substitution industrialization (ISI) that was meant to break foreign dependency and the power of the old oligarchies, put the levers of the economy in the hands of the new elite, and mobilize popular constituencies.[30] This leveling of threats and constraints from regimes' domestic societal and international environments prepared the way for their stabilization.

However, stabilization also took the deployment of the region's historically proven Khaldunian practices that, fused with imported Weberian political technology, produced durable neopatrimonial hybrid regimes.[31] Thus, typically charismatic, military or ruling party leaders concentrated "despotic power" in "presidential monarchies," relying on appointment to the command posts of the security bureaucracies of "trusted men" (owing to shared tribal, sectarian, or local *asabiyya*). This was combined with co-optation via clientelism of independent or opposition elites. At the same time, the bureaucratic side of neopatrimonialism was expanded such that ministerial bureaucracies, ruling parties, and corporatist institutions penetrated society and co-opted broader social forces, widening the support bases of regimes and producing a measure of infrastructural power that

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30. Trimberger, *Revolution from Above*.
31. Bacik, *Hybrid Sovereignty in the Arab Middle East*.

enabled PA states to propel economic modernization and more equitable distribution of its benefits. The Leninist-like single party proved particularly effective at both concentrating despotic power and expanding a kind of participation.[32] Thus, the populist version of authoritarianism excluded the old oligarchy while incorporating (through corporatist institutions and populist social contracts that traded political loyalty for welfare entitlements) salaried middle-class, worker, and peasant constituencies.

The prototype of the consolidated PA state was President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, where a combination of charismatic leadership, bureaucratic expansion, and populist revolution became a widely imitated model for establishing authority in other Arab republics.[33] Egypt had, however, long enjoyed a degree of stateness lacking elsewhere in the Arab world. What was remarkable was that even in notoriously fragmented Syria and Iraq, which had no such tradition, quite similar Ba'thist leader-army-party regimes were consolidated by incorporating, via bureaucratic and party organization, coalitions of broader social forces. Malik Mufti showed how growing stateness was reflected in the extension of infrastructural power, in terms of command over the economy, delivery of state education and increased literacy, investment in physical infrastructure, and creation of large bureaucracies and military forces, measurable by the growing proportion of GDP in state hands.[34] Indeed, it was widely believed in the 1980s that Arab states' durability was down to factors "beyond coercion," such as the development of institutions.[35]

War and war preparation had a role in propelling state bureaucratic expansion, citizen inclusion through conscription, and national identification with the state. Indeed, Arab populist authoritarian regimes legitimated themselves largely through nationalism, which was regularly inflamed by periodic conflicts with external enemies, notably Israel. Wars also propelled the exceptional role for the military in defending the state, particularly in countries bordering non-Arab states. The buildup of military capabilities was manifest in the unprecedented ability of Syria and Iraq to wage war with huge conscript armies prepared to fight for the state against its enemies (most striking was the willingness of Shiʿa Iraqi Arabs to fight for Iraq against Shiʿa Iranians in the Iran-Iraq War). Yet the nationalist mobilization of citizen-soldiers was diluted in many other MENA states where access to rent and external protection relieved pressure on regimes to trade

32. Huntington and Moore, eds., *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society*.
33. Dekmejian, *Egypt under Nasir*.
34. Mufti, *Sovereign Creations*.
35. Dawisha and Zartman, *Beyond Coercion*.

political rights for urgently needed taxes and conscription, thus diluting war's inclusionary dynamic. And conscription in Syria and Iraq propelled corporatist rather than democratic inclusion.

Traditional Rentier Monarchies: In certain situations, the traditional monarchy also proved an effective road to state formation.[36] The monarchies were, until the mid-1970s, seen as more fragile than the republics, suffering from what Huntington called the "King's Dilemma."[37] These regimes were traditionally based on landed and tribal elites. To survive they had to modernize, but doing so strengthened the forces that could undermine them, notably a new middle class that seemed to reject traditional authority and, with the rise of nationalism, sought to reverse the monarchies' Western alignments. This vulnerability was manifest in the military coups that toppled several monarchies across the region in the 1950s and 1960s—albeit mostly in the settled societies while they survived on the tribal peripheries of the region.

Indeed, monarchies tended to survive only if some of the following conditions held: they were most congruent with small-population tribal societies or ones divided between settled and tribal populations, wherein the monarchy was based on support from tribal elites and the urban middle class was small or was later co-opted via large oil rents accruing to the regime. Their establishment also required external agency and protection, either from a British protectorate established over what was previously a fluid tribal entity (Gulf emirates) or, in the case of Jordan, through the literal carving out of a state in southern Syria for a British client king. Or else the monarchy had indigenous roots but nevertheless acquired Western protection or patronage (Saudi Arabia and Morocco). Finally, it was no accident that of the monarchies that fell, nearly all did so before the height of the oil boom. Once the monarchies were awash with oil, they became nearly immune to overthrow, at least in the many cases where small populations enabled the co-optation of the whole citizenry, while noncitizens were imported to do the manual labor and were easily expelled if they demanded political or socioeconomic rights.

Monarchies also had a certain advantage in generating despotic power where, as in tribal societies, traditional legitimacy remained viable. One monarchy that seemed robust, that of Saudi Arabia, survived owing to the tribal nature of society, its religious legitimacy from the Wahhabi movement, and as the guardian of the Islamic holy cities and the selective strategies of modernization that preserved traditional values, hence authority.

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36. Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East"; Gause, *Oil Monarchies*.

37. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.

The regime kept the military small so that it could be significantly staffed by members of the royal family or by loyal tribes such that conscription and middle-class recruitment to the officer corps were minimized. The large ruling family functioned not only as a "ready-made" regime core but also as a kind of surrogate "single party" stretched throughout society. Crucial, however, was the growing oil wealth that, particularly after the 1970s oil boom, allowed groups that had hitherto seemed susceptible to Arab nationalism—the new middle class and oil industry workers—to be co-opted by jobs and material entitlements. Western alignment also turned out to be a plus for monarchies that were perceived to enjoy British or US protection against revolutionary forces.

It is worth comparing Saudi durability to that of the Shah's monarchy in Iran, where amassing oil wealth, rather than immunizing the monarchy, increased its vulnerability. Indeed, Iran was a classic case of the King's Dilemma, where royal modernization helped create the forces and conditions that brought the monarchy down. In Iran, oil led to massive social mobilization—urbanization, expansion of education—and raised expectations that could not be met because of Iran's very large population and the disproportionate allocation of the benefits of oil rent to regime crony capitalists. The political system provided no effective channel of political inclusion for the mobilizing middle and lower classes. Further, the monarchy enjoyed little legitimacy: Having alienated the clergy via its Westernizing form of modernization that marginalized religion, the Shah lacked the religious legitimacy claimed by the rest of the region's monarchies. He also lacked the main regional alternative, nationalist legitimacy, because, having been put into power by a Western-backed coup against the popular prime minister, Muhammed Mossadeq, who had nationalized Iran's oil, the Shah was seen as a Western puppet by many Iranians. Indeed, the Shah spent large amounts of oil income on expensive Western arms and positioned Iran to act as a Western "gendarme" in the Gulf. The Iranian experience exemplified how many of the same factors that led to increased regime resilience in the Saudi case—big oil revenues, Western alignment—could, where there was a legitimacy deficit and a large, mobilized population, produce increased vulnerability.

Even where monarchic *regimes* showed resilience, monarchy was, unlike in the republics, accompanied by continuing *state* weakness. Indeed, rent (whether from oil or aid) debilitated the tax collection capacity, thus the bureaucratic muscle, of the state.[38] And, in enabling the co-optation of populations via material benefits, rent retarded their incorporation through

38. Chaudry, *The Price of Wealth*.

political institutions, except to a degree in Morocco, Jordan (which had less rent), and Kuwait. Many economies were highly tertiary and reliant on expatriate labor, thus debilitating the work ethic among citizens and exporting much of their capital to the West rather than investing it in their tiny domestic markets or in the region. Thus, the economic basis of national power (industry, skilled labor forces) was undeveloped. Not being able to defend themselves—because many states were deliberately created too small by the British and most distrusted their own populations too much to establish conscripted standing armies—they could not dispense with Western protection; hence, their sovereignty was limited outside as well as inside.

Enabling Structural Conditions of State Formation

In addition to the agency of state builders, the stabilization of the Arab state in the 1970s was, according to Oliver Schlumberger, due to an emerging relative congruence with its environment.[39] First, the global context of bipolarity was favorable. There was a certain diffusion of power to the periphery as nationalist movements took power across the Middle East and took advantage of great power rivalries to gain, for a period, greater sovereignty. The countervailing powers of the two superpowers made Western military intervention more difficult and created survival space for anti-imperialist nationalist regimes. Three decades of rising state formation in MENA coincided with the rivalry of the two Cold War blocs that empowered the state building of their respective clients—the West backing the monarchies, the USSR the populist republics. The Soviet Union encouraged the spread of new political technologies, notably the single mass political party, that enabled authoritarian regime builders to narrow contestation at the elite level while widening mass inclusion.[40] As the superpowers competed for clients in the Third World, Eastern Bloc technology, aid, and markets were made available at concessionary terms to the republics. Despite East-West rivalries, there was a certain global convergence in governance formulas between communism in the East and social democracy, or Keynesian "mixed economies," in the West that legitimized the developmental state as the solution to Third World modernization. This encouraged statist populist forms of state building in MENA republics, although it put the monarchies at an initial disadvantage.

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39. Schlumberger, "Political Regimes of the Middle East and North Africa."
40. Huntington and Moore, *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society*.

A second stabilizing factor was an increasing convergence, in both republics and monarchies, toward similar neopatrimonial practices that were congruent with the region's transitional societies and rentier economies. On the one hand, personalism and clientelism were congruent with the traditional patriarchal family, especially strong in tribal societies. At the same time, the region's explosion of hydrocarbon rents from the 1970s not only enabled populist distribution strategies and bureaucratic expansion that incorporated social forces into state institutions but also filled the treasuries of regimes with enormous patronage resources that across the region lubricated co-optation of local elites and businessmen via clientelist networks, thereby giving extra shelf life to premodern Khaldunian practices. Rentier economies made states independent of societal support, in varying degrees, and by clientelizing and demobilizing publics they diluted class conflicts. Paradoxically, however, while rent helped enable *regime* consolidation where it absolved states of the need to extract taxation or enforce conscription, it reduced the incentive to develop the infrastructural power that made for strong *states*.

Built-in Flaws: Sources of State Weakening

Several vulnerabilities were built into these state-building projects that would, unless overcome, enervate state strength and potentially limit regime durability.[41] First, reliance on "insider" elite *asabiyya* (based on tribalism and sectarianism) to concentrate "despotic" power tended to alienate "outsiders"—other identity groups. The extent to which outsiders could be co-opted depended on the availability of rents, which proved quite variable. In the populist regimes, revolution was partly institutionalized in single-party systems, but when ideology declined, leaders substituted elite *asabiyya* and clientelism to control state institutions, narrowing participation to cronies and clients. Thus, neopatrimonial practices, while initially strengthening *regimes*, deterred sufficient institutional development to sustain the strengthening of *states*. Such was the power of substate and supra-state identities that state builders could not avoid instrumentalizing them—as *asabiyya* or clientele networks—but this had the effect of sustaining identities that competed with identification with the state. Patrimonalized states were "fierce," as Nazih Ayubi put it, in their intolerance of opposition and high repressive capabilities but had much less of the infrastructural power needed to implement effective policies, especially to

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41. Saouli, "States and State-Building in the Middle East."

foster economic development.[42] Over the long term, the more mobilized societies that accompany socioeconomic modernization could not be effectively governed without corresponding political modernization.[43] Specifically, patrimonial tendencies had to be counteracted by the development of the mass-incorporating institutional side of the state, which, however, tended to lag behind the former, in part because socioeconomic substitutes for participation were for a time exceptionally available, especially in the oil monarchies.

Second, state-led modernization in time exhausted itself, particularly in the oil-poor republics due to insufficient capital accumulation and investment. While attacks on private property (nationalizations) alienated private capital, the public sector did not become a substitute engine of capital accumulation. Populist regimes sought to maximize their support by distributing the benefits widely, compatible with political inclusion, but this "precocious Keynesianism" sacrificed savings and investment to consumption, while population growth exceeded employment opportunities.[44] Only if the PA regime was able to foster a "national capitalist" class as a partner with the state and extract an investment surplus from society (as in Turkey) was it able to make a breakthrough from early ISI toward the next stage of capital deepening and industrial exports. While these vulnerabilities could be temporarily managed, notably when oil rents were high, in periods of declining oil prices, regimes in large-population states encountered fiscal crises. The oil-rich monarchies (with small citizen populations) did not face the same dilemma between capital accumulation and distribution or co-optation.

Third, the republics, specifically, suffered from the fact that their main bases of legitimacy—nationalism, anti-imperialism, and anti-Zionism—embroiled them in protracted and economically costly regional conflicts. While successful wars consolidate legitimacy, allowing moves toward the democratic diffusion of power, the region's history of lost wars tended to delegitimize regimes and disincentivize power diffusion; the exception was where states emerged victorious from wars of national liberation (Turkey under Ataturk and, to a lesser extent, Algeria). Such wars of independence aside, the region's many lost wars are almost entirely accounted for by the presence of Israel, a state with "strategic depth" outside the region that no Arab state can match. Thus, a key basis of state strength in the core—nationalist mobilization forged in war—was much more tenuous

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42. Bill and Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East*.
43. Bank and Richter, "Neo-Patrimonialism in the Middle East."
44. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*.

in MENA. Not only that, but nationalist regimes' hostility to Israel and imperialism attracted the animosity of the US hegemon; while Soviet protection sheltered them to some degree, they were left exposed after the end of bipolarity.

Agency II: From State Weakening to Deconstruction (1990–2020)

Just as state building was an outcome of agency within certain enabling structural conditions, so also was state weakening an outcome of agency—attempts by state leaders to adapt to a much more hostile global environment.

Global Drivers of State Weakening: While under bipolarity global dynamics had been favorable to state formation in MENA, the fall of communism and the rise of US hegemony, combined with the globalization of Anglo-American finance capital and the neoliberal revolution, made for largely unfavorable conditions, albeit unevenly between the republics and monarchies.

At the global level, the Westphalian sovereignty that MENA regimes had struggled to actualize was becoming obsolete. Globalization fostered structures of governance "above" states, notably international financial institutions, to which they ceded parts of their sovereignty, with a disproportionate impact on periphery states.[45] Thus, Ian Clark argues that in this period the core sought to *reverse* the diffusion of power to the periphery resulting from decolonization and the Cold War and to reconstitute periphery states as merely semi-sovereign.[46] For neo-Gramscians, such as Richard Cox and Stephen Gill, this process aimed to turn periphery states into transmission belts of neoliberalism that enforced global capitalist discipline on periphery societies.[47] This provoked resistance among the victims of globalization, thereby catching states in a pincer movement from above and below—in Barber's words, between "McWorld" and "Jihad"—simultaneously weakening their sovereignty without and within.[48]

The Internal Reconstitution of States: Toward Post-Populist Authoritarianism (1990–2010): While the global order under bipolarity had enabled more inclusionary forms of authoritarianism, it now incentivized exclusionary authoritarianism needed to make regional states transmis-

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45. Friedrichs, "The Meaning of New Medievalism."
46. Clark, "Another Double Movement."
47. Cox, "Social Forces, State and World Orders"; Gill, "Globalization, Marketization and Disciplinary Neoliberalism."
48. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*.

sion belts of neoliberalism. A number of factors made MENA states vulnerable to this process. The failure of capital accumulation in the public sectors of the populist republics demonstrated the exhaustion of populist statism, forcing most MENA states to enter a post-populist phase of reintegration into the world capitalist economy (*infitah*). While the oil price boom had provided extra resources to enable significant infrastructural penetration and service delivery, and an "overdevelopment" of state apparatuses relative to their economic bases, with the oil price bust (around 1986), regimes—unable to rapidly increase domestic extraction—sought to sustain themselves via foreign debt and investment. Debt empowered International Monetary Fund–promoted structural adjustment—austerity for the masses in order to pay off debt—while reliance on foreign and private capital required a capital-friendly investment climate and export competitiveness, hence driving down wages and labor rights. This development strategy required the inclusion of emerging crony capitalists and the exclusion of the old populist constituency in a *post-populist* version of authoritarianism.

This reconstitution of the republican regimes planted the seeds that would provoke the Arab uprisings. Gilbert Aschar sees their weakness in the contradiction between the imported capitalist mode of production and the blockage of growth by crony capitalist rent-seeking patrimonial regimes that failed to invest in productive enterprise, resulting in massive numbers of educated unemployed.[49] R. J. Heyderian argues that a premature economic opening to global competition pushed by international financial institutions and the funneling of speculative foreign direct investment inflows into trade, real estate, services, and short-term ventures led to deindustrialization, thereby retarding the main pathway for increasing the technology and skilled labor needed for upward mobility in the global production chain.[50] In generating mass grievances against inequality, corruption, and the end to social protections, the neoliberal wave cost republican regimes their initial cross-class social bases. This was especially destabilizing when combined in the Arab authoritarian republics with regimes' abandonment of the nationalist stances on which they had initially been legitimized. The victims of neoliberalism withdrew their loyalty from the state and attached it to trans- and substate movements and identities—Islamism, sectarianism, and ethnicity.[51]

Nevertheless, authoritarian states developed survival strategies,

49. Aschar, *The People Want*.
50. Heydarian, *How Capitalism Failed the Arab World*.
51. Guazzone and Pioppi, *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization*.

as exposed in Heydemann's discussion of "authoritarian upgrading" and "networks of privilege" and in Stephen King's discussion of "new authoritarianism."[52] These included fostering of new crony capitalist bases of support and off-loading of state welfare functions to charities that diluted the damaging impact of structural adjustment on populations. Limited political liberalization—allowing opposition parties to compete on an unlevel playing field for parliamentary seats—enhanced regimes' ability to co-opt and to divide and rule the opposition. This was combined with the retooling of corporatist institutions, initially created as instruments of populist inclusion, into enforcers of the mass demobilization needed to impose austerity and labor discipline. Temporarily, *regimes* acquired enhanced resilience even as *states*' public functions and capacities contracted and refocused on protecting rather than diluting socioeconomic inequality. While the grievances thus fostered provided the conditions for periodic protest, which after 2010 acquired the momentum to put regimes under exceptional pressure from below, it arguably took simultaneous pressures from the international level to tip a slew of MENA countries into *state* failure.

The International Level II: War, Resistance, and Competitive Intervention: State deconstruction was further enabled by the global, post–Cold War emergence of the United States as a global hegemon, opening the door to the new phenomenon of US-engineered "*regime* change" as it targeted states it saw as resistant to this hegemony. The two decades (1990–2010) of US hegemony over MENA was enabled by the end of the bipolar check on US power projection in MENA and initiated by the 1990 US-Iraq War, which led to Iraq's defeat, a massively increased US military presence in the Gulf, and a decade of sanctions that debilitated the Iraqi state, culminating in the 2003 US invasion. Yet, ultimately, the consequence of two US wars against Iraq was not just *regime* change but also a failed *state*, a power vacuum in which jihadist, armed, non-state movements and sectarian discourses flourished and spilled out across the region. The invasion also unleashed a destabilizing regional power struggle between two axes. On the one hand, the "Resistance Front" grouped Iran with Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Palestinian Hamas, which mobilized to defend the region against the unprecedented US penetration. On the other hand, the post-Saddam shift of Iraq into Iran's orbit alarmed Sunni powers, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt (together with Jordan and Israel), who looked to the United States for protection and conducted a campaign to stir up trans-

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52. Heydemann, *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East*; Heydemann, "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World"; King, *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa*.

state Sunni animosity against what they called a "Shiʿa Crescent." Then, as Washington's failure to stabilize Iraq debilitated the declining hegemon's capacity to control events in MENA and led it to retreat to "offshore balancing," the bids of regional powers Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia to fill the power vacuum intensified the regional power struggle, especially after 2010 in the string of failing states following the Arab uprisings. The power vacuum, both regional and within failing states, also drew in other global powers: thus, the Western intervention to overthrow the Qaddafi regime in Libya provoked Russian moves to prevent a similar scenario in Syria, adding an additional layer of global rivalry to the regional power struggle.

The Arab Uprisings: Regime Change and (Degrees of) State Failure (2010–2020): The Arab uprisings starting in 2010 led to *regime* change in Egypt and Tunisia, but it was in Libya, Yemen, and Syria where its consequences for *state deconstruction* were most strongly felt. In Libya, overt Western intervention on the side of insurgents led to the collapse of the state, which a decade later remained splintered. In Yemen, Saudi and Iranian intervention intersected with civil war, leading to near state collapse and still on-going civil war. In Syria, an initially peaceful uprising morphed into violent civil war and a failing state, reversing decades of state formation and making the country the site of a proxy war.

While these civil wars were partly a result of the regimes' violent survival strategies, they would, at least in Libya and Syria, likely have successfully repressed the uprisings were it not for the intervention of hostile global and regional powers funding, arming, and providing safe haven to anti-regime fighters, even bringing their own air power to bear. In each of these states, the intervention of one power provoked competitive interference by others, driving proxy wars that heightened levels of violence and sectarianization parallel to their descent into civil war. Rival regional states, notably Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, financed the most sectarian actors, while their sectarian media discourses fostered trans-state jihadi culture, which drove much higher and more intractable levels of violent conflict, driving not just regime debilitation but also state deconstruction.

Iconic of states' failure was loss of their monopoly of violence as Weberian hierarchy gave way to an "oligopoly of violence." However, state failure did not mean a lack of all governance or the replacement of formal hierarchy by total anarchy but rather *heterarchy*, in which authority was fragmented among several contending actors, as is well illustrated by the Syrian case. In Syria, as the state's administrative reach contracted from areas lost to opposition forces; as the state failed to provide security, the vacuum was filled by "rebel governance," which established enough local

"order" to mute violent anarchy. Sometimes, traditional (tribal or religious) leadership was activated, while in other places elected local councils were run by opposition activists.[53] The localized fighting groups that rose to defend their own areas were often built around trans- and substate ethnic and sectarian identities and generated a security dilemma rendering all less secure, as the distinction between combatants and noncombatants was eroded.[54] Both rebel and surviving regime governance frequently evolved into protection rackets by local warlords and criminal cartels, involving rent seeking and the redistribution of resources upward from the poor to enriched predators. Further reinforcing fragmentation was the fact that rival external funders financed their own clients, frequently against each other. In parallel, the shrinking of the normal economy as the national market disintegrated and internal trade barriers sprang up led to checkpoints controlled by fighters levying taxes on the flow of goods. The government lost control of many of its external borders—allowing the flow of external resources and fighters to and from neighboring countries—which all the fighting sides competed to control.[55]

Even as fragmentation generated a power vacuum, a countervailing tendency was stimulated, also notable in Syria: what might be called *competitive state remaking* in which the stronger actors competing to reestablish state-like order over the country's territory tended to absorb weaker, more localistic actors. In Syria, two exclusivist, militarized, would-be states dominated the competition—the regime rump and the jihadists—that is, those best able to play the Khaldunian cards that succeed in intensive power struggles. President Bashar al-Assad's regime adapted to civil war by adopting a more violent, exclusivist, and decentralized form of neopatrimonialism. The most effective counters to it were the Islamist movements whose charismatic authoritarian leaderships were effective in mobilizing armed activist followers yet exclusionary of all those who did not accept their visions of Islam, the most successful of which was initially the Islamic State.

But undermining these Syrian state–remaking drives were the regular violations of the state's nominal sovereignty by rival outside powers, exemplified in the carving up of Syria into sometimes overlapping spheres of influence among Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States, all with their armed client militias and exploiting the identity cleavages between Kurds and Arabs, Sunnis, and Shiʿa. The United States, in particular, effectively

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53. Khalaf, "Governance without Government in Syria."
54. Abboud, *Syria*; Zartman, *Collapsed States*; Kaldor, "Old Wars, Cold Wars, New Wars and the War on Terror"; Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict."
55. DelSarto, "Contentious Borders in the Middle East and North Africa."

obstructed both of the main state-remaking contenders, the Assad regime and the Islamic State. Similarly, Libya was caught between rival Turkey/ Qatar and Egypt/UAE coalitions backing its two rival governments. Yemen also fell apart into rival centers of power backed by external patrons. In short, the governance vacuum in failing MENA states was filled by a struggle between state remnants, trans- and substate armed movements, and external interference, producing a particularly Hobbesian version of "neo-medievalism" in which state sovereignty was contested by violent actors at the international and substate levels.

Nonlinear Trajectories: The Bell-Shaped Curve of MENA State Formation

There has been no progressive approximation of Weberian statehood in MENA. Rather, state building has resembled a bell-shaped curve, advancing from a low point after independence, reaching a high point in the 1980s, and then declining into weaker states and, after 2010, a high incidence of failing statehood. This trajectory comes closer to Ibn Khaldun's cycle than Huntington's phased political development.

The export of the states system from the core constituted a first step in state formation, creating territorial "quasi-states" but also numerous obstacles to the full reproduction of Weberian statehood, including identity incongruence, economic dependency, constraints on expansion through war, and telescoping developmental crises.[56] With independence, state builders saw defensive modernization, the adoption of the Weberian nation-state model, as best able to defend their independence. Postcolonial revolutionary republics sought to include mass constituencies to survive the enmity of old classes and imperialism: the redistribution of property under revolutions from above broke old class dominations, fostered the growth of sizable middle classes and the advancement of Human Development Index indicators, and generated broader bases of support for regimes. Traditional monarchies had to imitate some of the republics' inclusive practices to survive the revolutionary wave, and many possessed the highly favorable resource to population balance to enable this. Yet regimes were only stabilized as state builders effectively mixed Khaldunian power practices (elite *asabiyya*, personalistic charisma, clientelism) that concentrated power in regimes with Weberian bureaucratic practices that advanced

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56. Jackson, *Quasi States*.

states' infrastructural power. The replication of such neopatrimonial states across the region in both republics and monarchies indicates a shared perception among ruling elites that they had stumbled on an effective state-building model.

Yet these regimes proved vulnerable to decline owing to built-in vulnerabilities—the resentment caused by patrimonial practices, legitimacy deficits from lost wars, and the exhaustion of state-led modernization amid high population growth. All of these vulnerabilities made inclusiveness dependent on resources deriving from favorable structural conditions of the 1960s and 1970s, notably bipolarity and high oil prices. When these conditions gave way during the 1990s and 2000s to global neoliberalism, the resulting declining autonomy of the state—captured by private interests from crony capitalists to ruling families—ushered in post-populist versions of neopatrimonial authoritarianism with narrowing social bases. Thus, overall state formation reached a peak in the mid-1980s and then declined for most MENA states.

However, this state decline was neither uniform nor precipitous. Some of the structural conditions that had enabled state building persisted, albeit in truncated and uneven form, such as periods of high oil prices that continued to enrich some states. The decline of the state was selective: what was mostly lost was inclusiveness, but various control capacities, such as surveillance and the divide and rule techniques of authoritarian upgrading, actually advanced, thus tempering the overall tendency toward decline in infrastructural power. However, the shrinking of inclusion, fostering rising disaffection and opposition, precipitated the Arab uprisings that marked an unprecedented new low in state formation as multiple Arab states suffered regime collapse or partial state failure after 2010. The latter was accompanied by intensified violence, loss of territorial control to insurgents, fragmentation of governance, and penetration by foreign spheres of influence: the very antithesis of Westphalian statehood.

State failure was, of course, not uniform across states and varied considerably. Arab states that inherited historic traditions of statehood congruent with their borders (Egypt, Tunisia) suffered regime change but not state failure. Where, as in Syria, some of the protections from bipolarity were restored by the retreat of US hegemony and the return of Russia to the region, the outcome was partial state failure but not regime change: remarkably, even amid unprecedented near *state* collapse, some authoritarian *regimes* persisted or were reconstituted. Finally, some states avoided both regime collapse and state failure. The non-Arab states, Turkey and Iran, benefited from their head start in state formation as imperial cen-

ters. The Gulf Arab oil monarchies enjoyed a combination of enormous oil revenues relative to population, persisting traditional legitimacy, and foreign protection. It was these states that became, after the Arab uprisings, the last standing competitors for regional leadership, intervening to shape outcomes in the now much weakened or failing Arab republics.

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