

The Arab State

A Historical Sociology Approach⁽¹⁾

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Abstract: This study presents a theoretical framework on and empirical accounts of state formation, development, and deformation in the Arab world. Taking a comparative historical methodology, the article raises several questions: What is the difference between a regime and a state? What kind of regimes emerged in the Arab world and how do we explain variations in their formations and types? Why have some state-building processes failed whilst others succeeded? The study's main finding is that state building in the Arab world can be described as a bell-shaped curve rather than a linear approximation of Weberian or Westphalian notions of statehood.

Arab State

Regimes

Social Fields

Bell-shaped Curve

Historical Sociology

Introduction

Students of Political Science and, more specifically, Middle East Studies are inevitably drawn into seasonal topics such as democratisation, authoritarian resilience, violence, wars, revolutions, Islamism, or sectarianism. But there is one topic that they could not escape from, "the mountain all political scientists sooner or later must climb",⁽⁴⁾ and that is the study of the "state". In most studies the state lurks in the background, in others it is the gateway that enables the investigation, and yet in others it makes the core of the research. Like an inexorable volcano, the need to examine the state erupts regularly, whether it is through Max Weber trying to remind his

countrymen of its importance,⁽⁵⁾ Norbert Elias linking it to the "civilising process",⁽⁶⁾ Samuel Huntington highlighting its role in keeping order in developing societies,⁽⁷⁾ or Charles Tilly and his colleagues trying to "bring it back" to the analysis.⁽⁸⁾

Literature on the Arab state has not missed these eruptions. The populist revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s, which incorporated angry peasants and middle classes in social reforms programs, and the growing scope and permeability of states in other cases, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iraq, or Libya, all highlighted the centrality of the state and the causes

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4 Joel Samuel Migdal, *State in Society: Studying how States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 231.

5 Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation", in: Hans Heinrich Gerth & Charles Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2001).

6 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom & Stephen Mennell (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

7 Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968).

8 Theda Skocpol, Peter B. Evans & Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds.), *Bringing the State Back in* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

of its "durability". The rise of the political economy approach in the 1990s, coupled with attempts to explain the "Arab exception" to democratisation, generated important avenues to understand the nature of the state in the Arab world.⁽⁹⁾ The infiltration of the Arab region by international powers highlighted the role of international factors in the making or, indeed, unmaking of states in the region and presented challenges to our knowledge of the state.⁽¹⁰⁾ The consequences of the Arab uprising of 2011 have, furthermore, exposed the need to understand the Arab state, which has invited several contributions.⁽¹¹⁾ The Arabic literature has emphasised the "crisis" of the modern Arab state.⁽¹²⁾

Is it time to revisit the "state" in the Arab world? Certainly. 2016 marked one hundred years since the gradual emergence of states in the Middle East region. In 1916, two colonial powers, Britain and France, conspired to divide the region into spheres of influence. The conspiracy enabled the emergence of political entities: territories, communities, and regimes. A century later, these political entities reveal many perplexing political trajectories and outcomes. Some (such as the Arab monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait) have remained immune to the political upheavals of the twentieth or twenty-first century. Others (such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Yemen and Lebanon) have undergone major socio-political changes and wars; in 2016 some have disintegrated (Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen), some are struggling to survive (Lebanon), and one (Tunisia) — only one — was in the process of democratic consolidation.

The literature on and the experience of the Arab state in the last century generate many questions on its making, nature, development, or collapse. Despite the expansive literature, only a few works have taken the Arab state as their central focal point. In this study, we draw on and develop this literature. We ask: How do we conceptualise the state and the state-building process in the Arab world? What is the difference between a regime and a state? What kind of regimes emerged in the Arab world and how do we explain variations in their formation and types? Why have some state-building processes failed whilst others succeeded?

In this study we offer a theoretical framework on and empirical accounts of state formation, development, and deformation in the Arab world. Taking a comparative historical methodology, we examine and compare several cases with varying outcomes on the state-formation/deformation spectrum to advance our main argument. The study is divided into four sections. In the first, we offer our theoretical framework that draws on the Historical Sociology (HS) tradition. HS is particularly suited for the study of state-formation, for it accounts for the factor of change over time transcending, as we shall see, the binaries that divide social scientists, including "structure versus agent", "materialism versus culture" or, as in International Relations (IR), "domestic versus international". In the second section, we present a conceptualisation of the Arab state. We propose to rethink the state as a *process* of formation/deformation that is situated within *social fields*.

Rethinking the state as a process that pits different groups against one another, we identify the main

9 Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995); Adeer I. Dawisha & I. William Zartman (eds.), *Beyond Coercion: The Durability of the Arab State* (London: Croom Helm, 1988).

10 Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Adham Saouli, *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation* (London: Routledge, 2012); Rolf Schwarz, *War and State Building in the Middle East* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012).

11 See: Raymond Hinnebusch, "Change and Continuity after the Arab Uprising: The Consequences of State Formation in Arab North African States," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2015), pp. 12-30; Adham Saouli, "Back to the Future: The Arab Uprisings and State (re) Formation in the Arab World," *Democratization*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2015), pp. 315-334; Mehran Kamrava, *Inside the Arab State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Ruth Hanau Santini, *Limited Statehood in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia: Citizenship, Economy and Security* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

12 See, for example: Abdallah al-Arawi, *Mafhūm al-Dawla* (Casablanca and Beirut: Markaz al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabiyya, 2006); Khaldoun al-Naqeeb, *al-Dawla al-Tasalluḥiyya fī al-Mashriq al-'Arabī al-Mu'āšir: Dirāsa Bannā'iyya Muqārana*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2004); *Jadaliyyāt al-Indimāj al-Ijtimā'ī wa Binā' al-Umma fī al-Waḥān al-'Arabī* (Doha and Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2014); Adel Mujahid al-Sharjabi et al., *Azmat al-Dawla fī al-Waḥān al-'Arabī* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2012); Burhan Ghalioun, *al-Mihna al-'Arabiyya: al-Dawla Did al-Umma*, 4th ed. (Doha and Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2015).

actors as *regimes* and their *rivals*. Taking social fields as the main *structures*, state formation/deformation as the main *process*, and regimes and their rivals as the main *actors*, this framework offers the conceptual and analytical tools for empirical analysis, which we do in the last two sections. In the third section, we examine state-building processes and the varying regime types that emerged in the Arab world. In the fourth section, we engage in both a chronological analysis, which divides the analysis into five periods, from the "Age of Liberal Oligarchy" (1920-1950) to the Arab uprisings of 2010, and in a thematic one, which offers illustrations of failed and successful state-building processes.

Our main finding is that state building in the Arab world can be described as a bell-shaped curve rather than a linear approximation of Weberian or Westphalian notions of statehood. This is at least

in part because while state builders learned how to create more resilient regimes through successful strategies of monopolizing power, they were unable to effectively combine this with the inclusive institutions needed to legitimize their power and satisfy a broad coalition of social forces. While *regime* building might have been a necessary first step toward *state* building, over-stress on the former, especially the drive for regime survival, retarded the possibilities of movement toward the latter. Thus, what we find is that state-building in most cases has failed to produce independent institutions that rise above political actors and ones that can regulate political conflict. Instead, institutional building has either stalled, as in cases where regime survival succeeded, at the peak of the curve; or have eroded and collapsed when regimes failed to sustain a monopoly over the material and ideational sources of power.

What is Historical Sociology and Why Use It?

In the past two decades HS has left its imprint on the discipline of International Relations (IR) and on the study of the Middle East.⁽¹³⁾ Some have tried to establish HS as a theory in IR,⁽¹⁴⁾ others a theory in Middle East IR.⁽¹⁵⁾ Here we prefer to treat HS as an interdisciplinary intellectual tradition, neither a field within the social sciences nor IR, that finds its origins in the works of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Norbert Elias and later Barrington Moore, Charles Tilly, Michael Mann, Theda Skocpol, and Philip Abrams. As an intellectual tradition HS explores the causes of historically grounded socio-political phenomena (such as industrialisation, state formation, or revolution) and their effects on individuals and societies. It aspires to understand the role of ideas and interests of individuals — as agents of change — within constraining social structures.⁽¹⁶⁾ The main

contribution HS brings to debates in the social sciences is its attempts to transcend several binaries that shape or even hinder our understanding of the political world: material/ideational; actor/structure; domestic/international. Despite its pluralist nature, this tradition is based on five main pillars.

First, the HS tradition investigates real-world problems and events, which form the basis for research. An event (think of the Arab uprisings in 2011, the Islamic Revolution in 1979, or World War I) is "a transformation device between the past and the future; it has eventuated from the past and signifies for the future [...] a happening to which cultural significance has successfully been assigned".⁽¹⁷⁾ Investigating the causes and consequences of an event opens the enquiry to several theoretical possibilities,

13 Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*; Halliday.

14 John M. Hobson, "What's at Stake in 'Bringing Historical Sociology Back into International Relations'? Transcending 'Chronofetishism' and 'Tempocentrism' in International Relations", in: Stephen Hobden & John M. Hobson (eds.), *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); George Lawson, "The Eternal Divide: History and International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2010), pp. 203-226.

15 Halliday, pp. 37-38.

16 Dennis Smith, *The Rise of Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Theda Skocpol, *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Phillip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

17 Abrams, p. 191.

which could originate in material, ideational, individual or structural spheres.

Second, HS focuses on historical processes and social configurations that tie individuals and groups as the basis of social analysis. HS will "attend to the interplay of meaningful actions and structural contexts, in order to make sense of the unfolding of unintended as well as intended outcomes in individual lives and social transformations".⁽¹⁸⁾ Such an approach, which is important to our examination of the state as a "process", "allows the researcher to problematize the existence of units we observe in world politics...and to inquire more systematically into changes in a unit".⁽¹⁹⁾

Third, and linked to its focus on processes and social configurations, HS rejects the actor/structure binary.⁽²⁰⁾ Historical sociologists situate the actor (whether it is an individual, regime, state or armed movement) within a context and focus on how the interaction between the two generates specific outcomes. The context is composed of both material (coercive, economic, and institutional) and normative (identities, values) features that *enable* or *hinder* socio-political action.⁽²¹⁾ As opposed to various IR theories, HS does not have *a priori* philosophical or theoretical bias to material/normative or actor/structural factors; rather, as Abrams emphasises, the answer to these binaries "has its real existence not in some abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon but in the immediate

world of history, of sequences of action and reaction in time".⁽²²⁾

Fourth, HS emphasises the *interaction* between domestic and external levels of analysis. Nothing captures this approach more than Charles Tilly's theory on state-making and war-making in European history as an *interdependent* process:

The very logic by which a local lord extended or defended the perimeter within which he monopolized the means of violence, and thereby increased his return from tribute, continued on a larger scale into the logic of war. Only the establishment of large perimeters of control within which great lords had checked their rivals sharpened the line between internal and external.⁽²³⁾

Again, historical sociologists do not give *a priori* preference to either domestic or international realms;⁽²⁴⁾ rather, they leave it to the research to decide *when, which and how* each realm generates a particular outcome.

And fifth, HS is devoted to theory. Although HS does not subscribe to any particular methodological or theoretical camp,⁽²⁵⁾ its attachment to real-world problems and to historical processes makes HS a field for the dialogue between theory and empirical evidence. HS rejects both grand theorising that attempts to explain a wide range of phenomena, and, on the other hand, behaviourist approaches that

18 Skocpol, p. 1; Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 1-15.

19 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson & Daniel H. Nexon, "Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1999), p. 292.

20 As Norbert Elias argues: "Contemporary usage would lead us to believe that the two distinct concepts, 'the individual' and 'society', denote two independently existing objects, whereas they really refer to two different but inseparable levels of the human world". Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 129. Elias likened social and political interactions, what he termed as "figurations", among individuals, states and empires to a social dance where you cannot think of a dance that is separable from the dancers. See: Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, p. 482.

21 As Abrams observes, HS "is ultimately about the relation of the individual as an agent with purposes, expectations and motives to society as a constraining environment of institutions, values and norms". Abrams, pp. 7-8.

22 Ibid.

23 Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime", in: Skocpol, Evans & Rueschemeyer (eds.), pp. 184-185.

24 Ironically, such HS approach of the interaction of the domestic and international is in agreement with the Kenneth Waltz's neorealism, which is usually the target of criticism of historical sociologists in IR. Waltz argues that "To say that it would be useful to view international politics from the systems level is not to argue that the system determines the attributes and the behaviour of states but rather to keep open the theoretically interesting and practically important question of what, in different systems, the proportionate causal weights of unit-level and of systems-level factors may be". Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, UK: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 48-49.

25 Skocpol, pp. 361-362.

shun theory.⁽²⁶⁾ The major task of HS is "to perform a balancing act between theoretical and empirical work, and between recognizing the complexity of the social world while at the same time ensuring that one does not become lost in minutiae".⁽²⁷⁾

These elements of the HS traditions are useful to examine state formation/deformation in the Arab world. In the following section, we build on HS's main pillars to develop a theoretical framework specific to state formation/deformation in the Arab world.

States and State-building: Structures, Processes, and Actors

The framework we develop here establishes what Rueschemeyer defines as a "fruitful intellectual framework for the investigation",⁽²⁸⁾ which identifies and justifies why certain factors, processes, and concepts are important to understand and explain political phenomena. To understand the state and the process of its formation or deformation, there is a need to first identify and second connect the main structures, processes, and actors that have shaped the states and state-building formation process in the Arab world.

Structures: Social Fields

The starting point to understand the state in the Arab world, is to identify the social contexts that the state emerged in and developed within. We argue that the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in what became the Middle East did not produce unified and consolidated "nation states".⁽²⁹⁾ Rather, what emerged can be conceptualised as "social fields", which form the social contexts where states *formed*, *developed*, or *deformed*.⁽³⁰⁾ Initially, these social fields were nothing but the demarcated spheres of influence of Britain and France. However, the demarcation of these fields sets them on paths that takes its own, independent trajectory. A social field includes three *structural* components: a geographical boundary (a space), a material structure (climatic

and economic bases), and a cultural structure (tribal, ethnic or religious composition); and two *emerging* properties: a political sphere and state institutions.

First, social fields include a geographical and by consequence a social boundary, which sets a field apart from others. In reality these boundaries, which with time formed the political and legal borders that are recognised by some but not necessarily all external actors, are contentious: preserving or revising them is part of the political struggles of state formation. The geographical location of a social field determines not only its internal political dynamics, but also its relations and role in the broader regional system.

Second, the material structure of a social field involves the climatic and socio-economic environment that shapes state-building. For example, the history of Saudi state-formation cannot be divorced from the climatic conditions of the desert, the historical difficulty of establishing centralised political power, and, in the 20th century, the discovery of oil. On the other hand, Egypt's long history in statehood can be understood by the presence of the Nile River protected by deserts on each side, a stable population, and a centralised political rule involved in the organisation of irrigation, agriculture, and the policing of social conflict. Variations in climatic conditions have also shaped the socio-economic structures. Some such as Saudi Arabia, Algeria, or Qatar are endowed with

26 Colin Hay, *Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 44-49.

27 George Lawson, "Historical Sociology in International Relations: Open Society, Research Programme and Vocation," *International Politics*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2007), p. 356.

28 Dietrich Rueschemeyer, "Can One or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains?", in: James Mahoney & Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds.), *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 318, 329.

29 Rather, as Raymond Hinnebusch observes, the arbitrary drawing of political boundaries created a "build-in irredentism", which continues to shape the region's political divides. Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, p. 155.

30 Saouli, *The Arab State*, pp. 8-28; For Neil Fligstein, "fields refer to situations where organized groups of actors gather and frame their actions vis-à-vis one another". See: Neil Fligstein, "Social Skills and Theory of Fields," *Sociological Theory*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2001), p. 108.

natural resources, such as gas and oil;⁽³¹⁾ others, like Egypt or Syria, have relied on agrarian-based economies, giving, for example, rise to populist regimes with progressive national projects in the post-independence era.⁽³²⁾

Third, a social field is composed of a cultural structure or composition, which includes its ethnic, religious, tribal, and linguistic characteristics. Some social fields (such as Lebanon, Iraq, or Syria) are heterogeneous in the religious and ethnic make-up, others (such as Tunisia and Egypt) are homogeneous, and still others are tribal (such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or Kuwait). These varying social fabrics have shaped the state formation process, whether in nation building, regime types, or in the process of monopolising the use of violence, as we elaborate below.

The above three components form the main components of a social field, the cultural and material environments within which politics and political struggles take place. We need to identify two other emerging spheres in a social field. First, the political sphere, is where political actors — be they leaders, tribes, political parties — struggle for power over economic resources and cultural meaning and significance. Social fields thus become sites of *opportunities* and *constraints* for political actors who, in their struggle for predominance, politicise various elements of the cultural structure (such as a religious idea, sectarian community, tribe) or material structures (such as a social class). Political struggles find their resolution in the second emerging property of a social field: institutions. Institution building occurs "in the context of powerful actors attempting to produce rules of interaction to stabilize their situation vis-à-vis other powerful and less powerful actors".⁽³³⁾ In addition to the urge to stabilise relationships, institutions are designed to reproduce dominance. This is key in the process of state formation but is also important in understanding

resistance to political dominance, which sometimes leads to state deformation.

Processes and Actors: State Formation, Regimes, and Rivals

In the above analysis we have simply described the main components of a social field as the structure through which we can understand state formation. What about the process itself? Here it might be useful to pause and ask what a state *is*. Max Weber offered a definition of a state that he intended to be an ideal type, a heuristic device that we utilise to assess real world cases. He conceptualised the state as a "compulsory political organisation" whose "administrative staff successfully uphold the claim to the *monopoly* of the legitimate use of physical forces in the enforcement of its order...within a given *territory*".⁽³⁴⁾ The key questions in understanding Arab state formation is how and when does a monopoly of the use physical force take place? How does the monopolisation of violence become legitimate? These questions have occupied many historical sociologists.⁽³⁵⁾

In trying to understand and explain state formation/deformation in the Arab world, we argue here that this process involves the *monopolisation* of three interrelated areas of political life in a social field: monopolise the possession and use of violence, an ideological framework, and the economic resources that enable that former two. First, by monopolising coercive power (organs such as the police, security, and army) a group prevents its rivals from obtaining the means of violence that would otherwise threaten its own domination. Monopolising coercion is a crucial element of state-making, and is a necessary condition for economic exchange and, more broadly, the establishment of a political and legal order. Theoretically, in social fields where the means of violence is dispersed, war and anarchy emerge.

31 Steffen Hertog, "The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2010), pp. 282-318.

32 David Waldner, *State Building and Late Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

33 Fligstein, p. 108.

34 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenhner Roth & Cluse Wittich (eds.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

35 Elias, *The Civilizing Process*; Tilly.

In the Arab world, as we shall see, the monopolisation of coercion has been at the heart of state formation processes. Starting in the 1950s in republics like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen or Libya, we observe a varying but steady process of competition within and domination over the army, which then extends

to other spheres of socio-political life (political party, civil society, economy). In Arab monarchies such as Jordan or Saudi Arabia, the monopolisation of coercion was subsumed by the ruling families who ensured their control of this sphere by installing their allies in key institutions of state institutions.

Table 1
State-building: Structures, Process, and Actors

Structures	Process	Actors
Social Field	State Formation/Deformation Monopolisation of :	Regimes and Regime Rivals
Geographical Boundaries	Coercion	
Cultural Composition	Ideology	
Economic Structure	Economic Resources	

Source: Prepared by authors.

Second, is the control over economic resources. Whilst tax-collection in European state formation was crucial for kings to wage war, suppress internal rivals, and ultimately build states,⁽³⁶⁾ in the Arab world control over natural resources, such as oil, has given ruling regimes relative autonomy from social groups, power to reward allies or punish rivals, and ultimately the means to buttress coercive power. In republics (such as Egypt, Syria, or Tunisia), control over or influence in the economy — whether through import-substitution and land reforms of the 1950s and 1960s or through crony capitalism of post-populist regimes — provided regimes with an influential economic tool to reproduce their power.

Third, in state-formation processes, political actors compete to monopolise the ideological sphere. Political actors preserve their domination by (re-)producing an ideological framework, which could be a political doctrine (Arab nationalism; socialism), a religious idea (Islamism), or sectarian identity (Shi'ism). These frameworks serve more than one purpose. First, they demarcate certain identities, norms, values, and visions which then sets the standard of accepted and expected social and political behaviour.⁽³⁷⁾ Second, they are crucial in the process of *nation-building*: the construction and reproduction of a national idea in

the process of state formation. Thirdly, ideological frameworks are important to mobilise and organise segments of society against external or internal rivals. Lastly, they are pivotal in legitimising the domination of one group over the other. Arab revolutionary republics (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya, or Algeria) of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, championed ideas of Arab Nationalism, socialism, anti-colonialism and national independence to de-legitimise the rule of their predecessors and to suppress rival ideologies, such as Islamism and communism. The Saudi regime monopolised one interpretation of Islam (Wahabism), providing it with a universal ideology that transcends tribal and regional divides and to legitimise its power.

When one group succeeds in monopolising the coercive, economic, and ideological spheres, a *regime* is formed, which is different from a state. A regime is a coalition of forces that is connected by ideological, political, and economic interests and that strives to monopolise power in a social field. Regime formation triggers the process of state-building. To consolidate and reproduce power, a regime designs security, intelligence, police, party, and social *institutions*. These institutions are constructed as "public" or "state" institutions, but in the early process of state-building they are the private

36 Tilly.

37 Saouli, "Back to the Future".

domains of the dominating regime and only with time begin to acquire a public identity, and this historically depended on the extent of political incorporation of different societal forces.⁽³⁸⁾ A regime is, thus, *one* dominant group ruling over others in a social field. Max Weber was aware of this distinction, arguing that "Like the political institutions historically preceding it the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence".⁽³⁹⁾

What do these regimes want? In essence, a regime's main goal is to maintain power: this is a prerequisite for the achievement of any ideological or developmental goals. Regimes operate within two analytically separable but in reality interconnected arenas: within a social field and within the states-system. This conceptual focus on regimes relocates the analysis from "state security", dominant in IR, to regime security: "security of those who profess to represent the state territorially and institutionally". Security/insecurity is, thus, defined

in relation to vulnerabilities — both internal and external — that threaten or have the potential to bring down or weaken state structures, both territorial and institutional, and governing regimes.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Thus, in trying to conceptualise the state formation process in the Arab world, it is important to conceptually distinguish a regime from a state. We can now take this one step forward to understand the dynamics of state formation/deformation. Regime domination generates resistance by affected groups within a social field. Hence, all attempts of state-building in the Arab world have generated opposition, which came from social and political movements, oppositional leaders, or tribes. These oppositional forces, which usually hold different ideological frameworks, have constituted not mere opposition to a ruling government but *alternative* regimes that seek to (re-)build the state. To challenge incumbent regimes, oppositional forces have aimed to *de-monopolise* the ruling regime's monopoly over ideology, economic sphere, and even violence. Resisting regime dominance involves the political mobilisation of aggrieved segments in society through the activation of identity groups or economic social classes present in a social field.

What does all this entail? The state and its formation in the Arab world should be conceptualised as a "process" involving a dynamic of *domination* and *resistance* by various groups. As such, state formation is not a unilinear process, heading always in the direction of consolidation; rather, it is possible for states to deform.

Variations and Evolution of Regime Types

Several distinct phases in MENA state formation can be identified.⁽⁴¹⁾

The Age of Liberal Oligarchy (1920-1956)

The MENA's state building process had been initiated under Western colonialism in the region. To govern the conquered areas the imperial powers had to co-opt local elites, in the process fostering a new ruling stratum from the pre-existing class of Ottoman notables and tribal leaders. To give them a stake in the

new order, they were allowed to establish large private property in land as power bases and were co-opted into new state offices (or confirmed in old ones). The imperial powers also imported or reinforced existing state structures: bureaucracies and armies. Imperialism further completed the incorporation of MENA states into the periphery of the world capitalist system in which their role was to supply the West with raw materials (cotton, oil) and markets for Western manufacturers which, ruining traditional industries

38 Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

39 Weber, "Politics as a Vocation", p. 2.

40 Mohammad Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 9, emphasis original.

41 See, for classic overviews of state formation in the region: Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

and dominating the market for manufacturing, at least initially impeded the formation of a local industrial capitalist class. The most important consequence of the imposition of the Westphalian state system from without was the incongruence between state/territory and identity which kept loyalties robust to sub and supra-state identities at the expense of the state and built irredentism (movements to redraw boundaries) into the system. The colonial experience was widely rejected in much of the region, giving rise to independence movements, which, with the weakening of the colonial powers in WWII, succeeded in achieving formal sovereignty for the various Arab states.⁽⁴²⁾

However, the new state builders were handicapped from the outset by the tepid legitimacy of the new states and the perception that the new leaders remained clients of the West. Indeed, the region was dominated by oligarchic and monarchic regimes still under British hegemony and economically dependent. Post-independence, state — or regime — building took place amidst a widespread breakdown of traditional authority in the years after independence that unleashed a vacuum in which contending social forces battled for power. The emerging middle class challenged the authority of the liberal oligarchs and monarchs who were inheriting power as Western imperialism gradually withdrew from the region. The middle class was mobilised by ideological parties that promoted radical new ideologies that displaced oligarchic liberalism. The dominant Arab nationalist movements raised demands for an end to Western bases and treaties, Pan-Arab unity, and liberation of Palestine, combined with a redistribution of wealth, particularly land, and breaking economic dependency on the West through state sponsored industrialisation

The post-independence liberal oligarchic regimes, with formally liberal elite contestation but little mass inclusion, faced revolt from the emerging middle class and workers and the peasantry. The middle class sought to mobilise workers and peasants but although

they often had some success in this, they were at a disadvantage in elections that turned on command of patronage. As a result, they turned to the military, where the officer corps was often dominated by politicized middle class officers, to challenge upper class elites.

A key watershed moment in de-legitimizing the liberal oligarchs was the failure of the newly independent Arab states to prevent the establishment of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians; this particularly alienated young army officers and beginning in 1949, not long after the Palestine war, a wave of military interventions destroyed notables' parliamentary rule across much of the region; far from ushering in a stable new order, however, it unleashed a an era of instability — of coups and revolutions--that lasted till the 1970s.⁽⁴³⁾

The weak Arab states, too unstable to conduct rational foreign policies, resorted either to anti-imperialist rhetoric to appease domestic opposition or efforts to secure outside security guarantees against it. The exceptions were non-Arab states of Turkey and Iran, which, more the products of indigenous state builders than foreign imperiums, enjoyed the greater legitimacy that gave leaders the autonomy in foreign policymaking to pursue policies resembling classic reason of state and directed chiefly at perceived external threats.

This unevenness of state formation, issuing from the earlier independence of Turkey and the transplant of a mobilised Zionism into the region, meant the Arab states confronted much stronger non-Arab opponents. Before long, the limited military capabilities of the Arab regimes and their shared dynastic/oligarchic ideology brought them to accept the rules of a multi-polar system — that no state should endanger the vital interests of its neighbours.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This order was, however, soon aborted by a confluence of several forces. Narrow based oligarchic regimes suffering de-legitimation from their association with the

42 On imperialism in the Middle East and its impact on the region, see: Jeremy Salt, *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); David Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East: 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Avon Books, 1989); Lawson, "Historical Sociology in International Relations".

43 Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

44 Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Crystallization of the Arab State System: 1945-1954* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993).

old imperial powers could not contain the rising nationalist mobilisation of the middle class, which embraced versions of Arab or Islamic identity as the most effective weapons against the oligarchic order, and especially as they infiltrated the army and captured the coercive apparatus from the oligarchs. With some exceptions (the less mobilised Gulf monarchies), these regimes fell across the region in the fifties, opening the door to a new era in MENA politics.

In this period, the social fields remained highly contested given especially the incongruence between the geographic boundaries established from without and economic and social (tribal, ethnic, sectarian) which spilled across borders, although far less so in a few cases like Egypt where there was much greater congruence organized around the Nile valley. Nor did any group manage to monopolize state building resources. Thus, the ruling oligarchies might have had command of economic resources, notably landed estates and oil in the Gulf, but they lacked secure control over their coercive apparatuses and suffered from ideological deficits. Thus, regimes and states remained very weak, insecure in the face of both internal and external threats.

The Age of Pan-Arab Revolution (1950-1970)

This phase saw a reaction to oligarchy and imperialism and was enabled by global decolonisation. The Palestine war, the struggle to throw off imperialism and the Arab-Israeli conflict rapidly accelerated political mobilisation in the Arab region that destabilized most of the regions' regimes, ushering in a decade of military coups and often military-led revolutions. This unleashed praetorian instability (army coups, student revolts.) By the 1960s, the main focus of MENA politics were the efforts of regime builders to establish or restore authority. As liberal oligarchies collapsed across the region (surviving alone in Lebanon), and a string of monarchies were overthrown by the military, two dominant rival models of rule emerged, the "traditional" rentier monarchies and the "populist" authoritarian republics.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Thus,

the MENA's state formation processes were launched on two divergent trajectories.

The authoritarian republics took some time to consolidate their authority. They had emerged where the ruling oligarchy had lost legitimacy but the new rulers, typically military officers, also suffered an initial legitimacy deficit: they had neither traditional nor democratic legitimacy. Where regimes originated in middle class overthrow of Western client elites by nationalist officers, state formation meant the reconstruction of states against the opposition of the displaced upper classes and amidst Western hostility, requiring, therefore, a measure of mobilised popular support through wealth redistribution. Economic dependency on the West was eased with access to aid and markets in the Eastern bloc: thus bi-polarity at an international level was an essential condition for the success of this trajectory

The republican political elites sought to establish authoritarian modernizing regimes legitimized via the personal charisma of the leader, the promotion of nationalist and social reformist ideologies, and the creation of structures of control — armies, bureaucracies, *mukhabarat* (secret police) — that could establish a monopoly of legitimate violence over the territory of the state, the Weberian test of state formation. The main immediate problem for these new elites was keeping the coercive apparatus reliable and for a decade most failed the test of "coup-proofing". In parallel, ruling single party systems were widely adopted to satisfy participatory pressures and mobilise supporters. The ruling coalition was dominated by the "petit bourgeoisie" (small property owners, salaried classes); it embarked on a "state capitalist" path of development, i.e., the use of public sectors to propel national capitalist development, while using populist re-distributive policies to mobilise lower strata — workers and peasants — through land reform, state jobs, free education and subsidized bread. These republican regimes all sought legitimisation in radical nationalism: hence foreign policy took the form of anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric.

Egypt Under Nasser was the prototype republican regime that first successfully built a new basis of

45 Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

authority. The new elite core of "Free Officers" repressed all rivals for power, both liberals and the Muslim Brotherhood and concentrated power in their hands. Nasser emerged as charismatic leader on the basis of his anti-imperialist campaigns, notably nationalisation of the Suez Canal and foreign owned properties, and re-distributive social reforms. He concentrated power in a powerful presidency, cultivated the military as his power base, vastly expanded the bureaucracy, organized his supporters in a single ruling party and co-opted other groups into a subordinate parliament. This reflected the strategy of narrowing elite contestation and concentrating "despotic power" combined with expanding mass inclusion through redistributive social policies and national economic development. Nasser's foreign policy "victories" over imperialism allowed him to assert Pan-Arab leadership regionally which reinforced his authority at home. Egypt emerged pre-eminent among the republics from a combination of Nasser's Pan-Arab appeal and because it was the most stable, coherent and largest of the Arab powers facing weak oligarchies and unstable military regimes in the other Arab states.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Nasser exploited the post-WWII move to global bi-polarity, eliciting Soviet protection and mobilising Pan-Arabism regionally to roll back British hegemony in the name of an autonomous Arab region. The Nasserist formula was widely imitated in the other republics, albeit with variations. For example, in Syria and Iraq, because identity fragmented societies were much less governable than the more cohesive Egypt and because no charismatic leader comparable to Nasser emerged, Ba' thist state builders substituted for it a more robust ruling party built along Leninist lines, but still had to use much more coercion against opposition than did Nasser — producing a "hard" version of populist authoritarianism. In small, identity cohesive Tunisia where charismatic

leadership (of Habib Bourguiba) emerged and the regime was established by a mass independence movement that became the ruling party rather than by military coup, legitimacy was higher and repression less required, producing a "soft" version of populist authoritarianism.⁽⁴⁷⁾

The monarchies were, until the mid-seventies, seen as more fragile than the republics, suffering from what Huntington had called the "King's Dilemma". These regimes were traditionally based on landed and tribal elites. To survive they had to modernize but in doing so they strengthened the forces that could undermine them, notably a new middle class that would reject traditional authority and, with the rise of Arab nationalism, the monarchies' Western alignments became a legitimacy liability. The main threat from the mid-1950s was from Egyptian sponsored Pan-Arabism, which found resonance among the small but growing and dissatisfied middle and working classes. These geo-politically weak states also required Western protection from regional threats. Their vulnerability was manifest in the military coups that toppled several monarchies (Egypt in 1953; Iraq in 1958) across the region in the fifties and sixties, although mostly in the settled societies while they survived on the tribal peripheries of the region, in low populated unmobilised tribal or communally divided societies, mostly in the Arabian Peninsula.

One monarchy that seemed robust was that of Saudi Arabia, whose regime managed to maintain a monopoly over the coercive, ideological, and economic resources of state-building. Never subjected to imperial take-over and originating in an indigenous tribal-religious (Wahhabi-Islamist) movement of the Khaldunian type, it had a fund of "traditional" legitimacy which had readily survived owing to the tribal nature of society and the selective strategies of

46 Steven Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 53; Paul Noble, "The Arab System: Pressures, Constraints, and Opportunities", in: Bahgat Korany & Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 61-65, 74-75.

47 On the revolutionary republics, see: Richard Dekmejian, *Egypt under Nasir* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1975); John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Halpern; Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Elizabeth Picard, "Arab Military in Politics: From Revolutionary Plot to Authoritarian State", in: Dawisha & Zartman (eds.), pp. 116-146; Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992); Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Maridi Nahas, "State Systems and Revolutionary Challenge: Nasser, Khomeini and the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1985), pp. 507-527.

modernisation which preserved traditional values, hence authority. The regime kept the military small while the large ruling family functioned as a kind of surrogate "single party" stretched across society. Crucial, however, was the growing oil wealth that, particularly after the 1970s oil boom, allowed the salaried middle class to be co-opted via state jobs and the masses appeased by a welfare state. Western alignment turned out to be a plus for monarchies that were perceived to enjoy protection against revolutionary forces.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The main root of the differentiation between monarchies and republics was the impact of imperialism: where the length and intensity of the independence struggle radicalized social forces (as in Egypt or Aden) or where the imposition of the regional state system thwarted indigenous interests and identity (Syria Iraq), it generated revisionist irredentism that issued in radical republics at odds with the former Western imperial powers. Conversely, the more the new states relatively satisfied indigenous interests and identity, as in Turkey or Saudi Arabia, or where independence was achieved without political mobilisation (the Arab Gulf), status quo elites survived and newly independent states followed policies accommodating themselves to the West.

With the onset of the Cold War, the Arab world split along the lines of regime type over how to respond to Western attempts to institutionalize a post-imperial security regime in the region — at a time when the recent creation of Israel was widely seen as the work of the West. While the pro-Western regimes embraced this project, Nasser of Egypt saw it as form of neo-imperialism and advocated an alternative Arab Collective security pact. His emergence from the 1956 Suez war as a popular Arab hero and the 1958 overthrow of the pro-Western Iraqi regime, established a powerful Pan-Arab norm against

foreign treaties and bases. Nasser's potent appeal to the populations of other states made overt alignment with the West a legitimacy liability; he inspired Arab nationalist movements which overthrew oligarchies in a number of states and established similar Arab nationalist regimes.⁽⁴⁹⁾

The Pan-Arab order was enabled by the emergent bi-polar world order: the Cold war and weakening of the old imperial powers opened a brief window of opportunity in which counter-vailing Soviet power to some extent sheltered the Arab world from direct Western intervention or its full consequences. However, the practice by which rival Arab regimes tried to "out-bid" the other on behalf of the Palestine cause, seen as a main source of their nationalist legitimacy, led Syria and Egypt to blunder into the 1967 war defeat by Israel. This ruined Egyptian material and symbolic hegemony⁽⁵⁰⁾ and the ascendancy of the republican nationalist regimes that had put the monarchies on the defensive. It marked a breaking point leading to the eventual decline of the populist republican state building project.

In this period while social fields remained contested in many places, ruling regimes managed to establish monopolies of coercion, control of economic resources and credible legitimating ideologies. Ironically, successful monopolisations made states more potent threats to each other from regional rivals, but they succeeded in extracting support and resources from the global level order to check threats from rivals.

The Age of Realism: War and National Security States (1975-1990)

A third stage in state formation was apparent by the 1970s, namely the increased, albeit incomplete, consolidation of both monarchies and republics. The motive for this was the reaction of state-

48 For key examples of the literature on monarchic survival, see: Lisa Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 1 (1991), pp. 1-15; Joseph Kostiner, *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999); Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Gregory Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994).

49 Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Jamal Abd Al-Nasir and his Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Seale.

50 Avraham Sela, *The End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998); Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Fawaz Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

builders against the praetorianism and instability of the revolutionary period but also the priority given to countering increasing external military threats, particularly for the front line Arab states in the conflict with Israel, precipitating war preparation efforts that built up massive national security states.

What explains the increasing apparent stability and durability of regimes in what had hitherto been a highly unstable region? The creation of large coercive apparatuses was part of the formula, the struggle to monopolise the use of violence, but was not enough to explain stabilisation, since a main source of instability had hitherto been precisely the unreliability of the instruments of coercion. Creating institutions able to balance and contain the military, subjecting it to intelligence surveillance and stacking the officer corps with loyalists helped coup proof regimes. Crucially it was the expansion in the availability of rent following the oil price explosion of the seventies, which enabled the creation of large state bureaucracies and military machines and the co-optation of the hitherto revolutionary middle class while providing patronage for clientelist networks that kept core elites loyal and made regimes more autonomous of society. Bureaucratic institutions penetrated society and became instruments of social mobility.

However, importantly, in this period, republics and monarchies *converged* through similar neo-patrimonial practices combining elite *assabiyya* (group feeling), modern bureaucracy and clientelism. Even as bureaucratic institutions were built and expanded, their legal-rational rules were also subverted by "traditional" practices (e.g. clientalism, nepotism) with the result that developmental bureaucracies lost their political energy while corruption and military spending began to debilitate statist capital accumulation.⁽⁵¹⁾ Thus, while arguably state formation reached its apogee in this period, the seeds of decline were already being sown. Nazih Ayubi cautioned against "overstating the Arab State", which, lacking the hegemony that goes with

a secure class base, was "fierce" rather than strong — over-reliant on coercion and unable to tolerate any opposition or to relax its surveillance over society.⁽⁵²⁾

At the same time, state formation was a function of interaction with the states system. Wars generated security dilemmas, provoking realist power balancing via arms races and alliance formation. Where wars and threat levels were the highest, in Syria and Iraq, national security states were created that achieved exceptional levels of military mobilisation and armament. As for the monarchies, oil-funded welfare states stabilized them too, but, still unable to trust the middle class, they kept their armies small which required them, in consequence, to rely for their security on an increasing US naval presence in the Gulf after 1980.

Even partial advances in state consolidation had foreign policy consequences. Top elites, their power relatively consolidated, attained hitherto lacking autonomy of society in the making of foreign policy. In the republics, radical elites, either displaced or chastened by defeat in war, moderated their ideological radicalism that largely ended the initial ideological cleavage in the regional system (e.g. Assad's Syria). This in addition to declining vulnerability to trans-state ideology, with the decline of Arabism and the hardening of states, combined with rising threats from neighbouring states, resulted in increased weight being given to geopolitical reason of state over identity issues in foreign policy making.

While the states system appeared to edge toward Westphalianisation, it had yet to usher in a classical nation-states system, since the Arab regimes were unable to construct separate state identities convincing enough to marginalize competing sub and supra state identities and legitimize their material consolidation. To be sure the 1967 war had discredited supra-state Arab nationalism, but identities did not necessarily therefore attach to the individual states, in part because they lacked democratic political institutions

51 On the consolidation of regimes, see: Dawisha & Zartman (eds.); Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th vs. Ba'th: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990). On neo-patrimonialisation, see: Gokhan Bacik, *Hybrid Sovereignty in the Arab Middle East: The Cases of Kuwait, Jordan and Iraq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

52 Ayubi.

that could have convinced publics the state was "theirs".

Rather the ideological vacuum was filled by a rival supra-state ideology, political Islam, that came to constitute the main opposition in all the Arab regimes, inspired after 1979 by the Islamic revolution in Iran that the new republic set out to export. Yet Islamic movements faced stronger states than supra-state ideologies had previously, and the Iranian Islamic revolution was contained by the combined material power of the West and Iraq.⁽⁵³⁾

In summary, the main development in this period was the way increased monopolisation by regimes of the ideological, economic and coercive resources, plus institution-building enabled them to strengthen their command over their social fields in ways hitherto unseen, and in the process to insulate themselves, to a degree, from cross-border ideological penetration while containing interactions of social groups with their "kin" in neighbouring countries. Regime building for a period seemed to advance state-building.

Post-populist Development: State Weakening, Islamist and Democratic Challenges

By the eighties, but especially after 1990, it was widely understood that the statist populist version of authoritarianism on which the republics had initially established themselves had given way to a post-populist stage exemplified by a widespread turn to economic liberalisation. This was driven by structural factors: domestically, oil rent had financed a burst of state building and militarisation that ended in overdeveloped states exceeding the capacity of their own economic bases to sustain; when oil prices collapsed, regimes had to find alternative sources of investment and revenues and the turned to private and foreign capital required prioritizing their demands for a friendly investment climate.

While the economic failures of statism partly explain the post-populist turn, equally important was agency — the transformation of formerly petit bourgeoisie political elites into "state bourgeoisies" using their power to enrich themselves and which, as statism faltered, saw opportunities for further enrichment by going into business themselves amidst the new encouragement given to the re-emergence of the private sector, and notably through the influx of foreign capital (previously prohibited), particularly in joint ventures.

In this way, economic liberalisation led inexorably to state-crony capitalist alliances and a new ruling coalition of state-private-foreign bourgeoisies that replaced the state's former populist constituents, the salaried middle class, workers and peasants; pioneered in Egypt under Anwar Sadat, this model spread quickly to the other republics, including Syria and Algeria.

Far from economic liberalisation being paralleled by political liberalisation, authoritarian power persisted but was now used for different purposes than in the populist period: to impose structural adjustment (austerity for the masses), privatisation of public sectors against the resistance of the "losers", and to defend the new inequalities by demobilising and excluding the masses from the ruling coalitions.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Republican regimes that built their legitimacy on a distributive social contract moved toward a policy of trickle down crony capitalism that eroded states' social bases of support.

This development cannot, however, be understood apart from a coincidence of domestic vulnerability with major changes in the international system: the end of bi-polarity combined with the global triumph of neo-liberal capitalism and US hegemony over socialism that left the impression there was no alternative path for regional development.⁽⁵⁵⁾ At the

53 Simon Murden, *Islam, the Middle East, and the New Global Hegemony* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

54 On "post-populist development of authoritarian regimes", see: Samih Farsoun & Christina Zacharia, "Class, Economic Change, and Political Liberalisation in the Arab World", in: Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany & Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab world*, vol. 1 (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), pp. 261-280; Stephan King, *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Steven Heydemann, *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East: The Politics of Economic Reform Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Laura Guazzone & Daniela Pioppi, *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Restructuring of the State in the Middle East* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2009).

55 On the role of the global system and core powers in shaping regimes, see: Abbas Alnasrawi, *Arab Nationalism, Oil and the Political Economy of Dependency* (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1991); Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *The Middle East in the New World Order* (London: Macmillan 1997).

same time the oil price bust of the 1990s left many MENA states saddled with debt that greatly increased their vulnerability to Western pressures for structural adjustment and economic opening to the market and with the decline of the Eastern bloc there was now no alternative source of capital, markets or technology.

Moreover, the decline and later collapse of the Soviet Union was paralleled by unprecedented penetration of the region by US military power, notably in two wars against Iraq (1990 and 2003). On the one hand, Soviet collapse had left the radical republics exposed, without political protection they needed to blunt Western penetration and in need of Westward re-alignment that would appease the US hegemon. On the other hand, the oil monarchies were located contiguous to much larger, poorer and militarily stronger states (Iran and Iraq), and the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in particular revealed they could not survive in a world of powerful predatory neighbours without much enhanced Western protection. The result was a more overt Western presence (bases, treaties) in the region. Weakened regional states opened the door to external penetration in ways that had not been seen since before Nasser.

Indeed, as economic troubles led states to "trade" Western-friendly foreign policy for economic aid and investment, regional states were becoming transmission belts for the enforcement of Western-centric globalisation manifest in structural adjustment, unpopular and inequitable peace treaties with Israel, and cooperation with US campaigns against "terrorism" and so-called "rogue states". This, however, eroded their already precarious domestic legitimacy. The most salient determinant of policy became the effort of regimes to balance between the increased international (Western) demands on them and domestic resistance to these demands.

What had therefore become apparent was that while seemingly durable states had emerged from the decades of post-independence state building, there had been, from the late eighties, not only increasing economic vulnerability but also an accumulating loss of domestic political legitimacy from a combination of factors — failed wars, alignment with the West, economic crisis and rollback of the popular welfare; the failure to absorb demands for

political participation through political institutions, hence low accountability — that enabled widespread power abuse, manifest in corruption and human rights violations.

Unsurprisingly, in parallel to this development, various social forces were positioning themselves to challenge state power and demand fundamental reforms. The new capitalist class that prospered from economic liberalisation started to demand a share of power with the state as a condition of investment. The secular middle class (professionals, white collar workers), disillusioned by state failures, started demanding democratisation; and the victims of economic liberalisation (lower, lower middle classes) seeing a return to Islam as the answer, began demanding Islamisation of the state.

It was the rising political Islamic movements that became the main opposition to ruling regimes, spreading with the decline of secular ideologies, including Arab nationalism and the successful 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Many Islamist movements sought peaceful Islamisation from below, e.g., as republics retreated from their welfare functions, they filled the vacuum with an Islamic civil society of charities, educational institutions, banks etc. Other Islamists pursued a path of attempted violent revolution which failed in Algeria, Egypt and Syria. Regime strategies to deal with Islamism entailed varying combinations of repression (most clear in the republics); concession (e.g., limited Islamisation of the state, assimilation of sharia into legal codes); playing off secularists and Islamists to prevent their collaboration against the regime; and co-optation, most evident in the monarchies.

On the other hand, the end of the Cold war and the Third Wave of democratisation it unleashed, encouraged demands for Western style democratic reform in the region. Modernisation was creating the minimal conditions for democratic transition: increased education and political consciousness. There was a minority of semi-democracies in the region. Turkey had made a transition to electoral democracy as early as 1950 although it was frequently destabilized by military intervention or the authoritarian proclivities of its political elites. Lebanon's power sharing consociational democracy

had survived several civil wars. In response to the democratic wave, limited political liberalisation was instituted in a number of MENA states in the 1990s but it became a substitute for, not a step in the direction of, democratisation as executives retained dominant power in spite of multi-party elections to parliaments that had only limited powers to hold the former accountable.

By the 2000s, expectations for democratisation in the region had largely been disappointed and authoritarianism seemed exceptionally resilient. Arguably, something was short-circuiting in MENA the link between socioeconomic and political change posited in modernisation theory,⁽⁵⁶⁾ especially given the seeming vulnerability of regimes with declining social bases and legitimacy to demands from the increasingly educated and socially mobilised publics. Broadly two approaches have proposed to explain this:

First, a cultural exceptionalism argument blamed political culture: the lack of an underlying consensus on political community owing to identity fragmentation, the authoritarian heritage of empire-building and the anti-democratic current in important interpretations of Islam (or at least the conflict in Muslim societies between political Islam and secularists). The rival political economy approach attributed the lack of democratisation to the rentierism produced by hydrocarbon rent in the region: it made regimes more autonomous of society (less dependent on taxes) and reduced demand for democracy since regimes could trade economic benefits in return for political passivity.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Another argument was that post-populist regimes imposing austerity on the public while lining the pockets of crony capitalists could not afford to empower mass voters.⁽⁵⁸⁾ But the agency of authoritarian rulers also mattered and their strategies of "authoritarian upgrading" allowed them to dilute pressures for democratisation.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Electoral

authoritarianism (multi-party elections to parliaments) proved adept at dividing the opposition; privatisation of public sectors generated new crony capitalists with a stake in authoritarian rule. And many authoritarian states possessing substantial oil reserves, such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, seemed immune to pressures for democratisation.

Thus, the favouring of crony capitalists and foreign investors and exclusion of the masses, ushered in a seemingly resilient "post-populist authoritarianism", and while political Islam mobilised the marginalized, democratisation made little headway. However, the weakening of the state combined with the increased mobilisation of social forces opposed to post-populist authoritarianism generated the toxic environment that provided the conditions of the Arab uprisings starting in 2010.

In this period, regimes' increasing monopolisation not just of power (with the exclusion of hitherto incorporated social forces), but of economic resources, concentrated in the hands of crony capitalists, while losing their ideological hegemony, generated ever increasing resistance. At the same time, states were increasingly subject to subordination by external forces. But unlike in the previous period, the global order was no longer supportive of states' consolidation rather, in weakening their legitimacy, it undermined their very foundations..

The Arab Uprisings: State Failures, Authoritarian Restoration (2010-current)

The hidden vulnerabilities of authoritarian regimes were exposed by the Arab uprisings, which were widely seen as a reaction to the inequalities and political repression of the preceding two post-populist decades.⁽⁶⁰⁾ During its early stages, expectations of democracy were revived as the movements led by middle class youth, widely demanding political rights, succeeded in overthrowing several authoritarian

56 Raymond Hinnebusch, "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratisation Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique," *Democratization*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2006), pp. 373-395.

57 Hazem Beblawi & Giacomo Luciani, *The Rentier State* (London: Croom-Helm, 1987).

58 Farsoun & Zacharia, pp. 261-280.

59 Steven Heydemann, "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World," *Analysis Paper*, no. 13, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution (October 2007).

60 Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (London: Saqi Books, 2013).

presidents; seemingly democratic Islamist movements were also empowered where authoritarian regimes collapsed. But expectations of major political reform soon disappeared as the monarchies proved largely immune to the uprising, only one republic (Tunisia) actually made a democratic transition, and the others either experienced authoritarian restoration (Egypt) or civil war and varying degrees of state failure (Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq).

The main result of the uprisings was further state weakening. Where, in more fragmented societies, the regime collapsed, fully or partially, as in Libya, Yemen and Syria, civil war generated insecurity giving rise to warlords profiteering via protection rackets; and armed trans-state jihadist movements, which filled the power vacuum. As regimes collapsed in some states, while others were left standing, the regional power balance shifted: power flowed away from the core Arab republics such as Egypt and Syria that experienced uprisings, to the GCC, Iran and Turkey, which sought to intervene in and affect outcomes in the Arab republics. The Syrian uprising threatened to break the resistance axis to which the Assad regime was pivotal, hence the main barrier to full US hegemony over the region; the regional power struggle took on the increasingly sectarian form of a war between Sunni and Shia axes pitting Saudi Arabia and Turkey against Iran. However, the monarchies and Turkey overreached themselves, and precipitated Russian intervention in Syria, which restored the power balance. In Egypt, authoritarian restoration empowered a harder version of authoritarianism and in Syria came close to doing just that, at least in rolling back the opposition threat to the regime

Failing Statehood, Proxy Wars

If the Weberian state is the apex of Westphalian order, its nadir is the *failed state*. Far from an anomaly, failed states have come to constitute a fifth of world states (40 out of 200), marking a transition, Edward Newman⁽⁶¹⁾ suggests, to a post-Westphalian world where sovereignty gives way to intervention and wars are intra-state or proxy wars within states rather than

inter-state military contests. This wave of state failure is widely attributed to the pincer in which states are caught of globalisation from above and resistance (*jihad*) to it from below by (often fragmenting) identity movements.

MENA states, especially those in the Arab Mashreq, were, owing to their initial identity/territory incongruence and post-populist decline, especially vulnerable. In Syria, but also Iraq and Libya, the process of state-building (1950s-2000s) increased regime vulnerabilities due to three interrelated factors. First, intra-regime and regime-society struggles for power led to the monopolising of power by a small elite, leading to mass political exclusion. Second, to maintain power, ruling regimes turned to kinship ties (familial, sectarian, or tribal), which activated and hardened identity cleavages (which Arab nationalist thought had previously attempted to undermine). Third, domestic repression and identity divides exposed various regimes to external intervention, which in turn increased regimes' sense of insecurity, provoking increased repression.⁽⁶²⁾

But it took precipitating factors at the international level to tip weak states into failed ones: Iraq's deconstruction by the combination of US invasion and sectarian civil war within, set off regional de-stabilisation; and once civil conflict broke out in several states, competitive interference by global and regional powers, resulted in proxy wars further driving state failures. While for a period state weakening seemed in Syria and Iraq to open the door to a revision of the long-standing borders of the state system, notably by the Islamic State and Kurdish separatist movements, the anti-ISIS coalition and regional states pushed back against this revisionism. Altogether, the resilience of authoritarian rule and a largely authoritarian states system seemed exemplified yet again.

Regime Survival

In this last period, many regimes lost their monopoly of power, and were overwhelmed by resistance, setting up a new struggle among contending forces

61 Edward Newman, "Failed States and International Order: Constructing a Post-Westphalian World," *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 30, no. 3 (December 2009), pp. 421-443.

62 Saouli, "Back to the Future", pp. 315-334.

to re-monopolize power; in some places the collapse of regimes reopened contestation not only over power and economic resources but also over social fields as state control of borders broke down. Some regimes, notably the monarchies, kept sufficient monopoly over ideology and economic resources to survive the wave of uprisings. To be sure, the uprisings were initially seen by regimes in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco as threats. Saudi Arabia's loss of two allied regimes in Egypt and Tunisia endangered the regional balance of power on which Saudi power and survival relied. The rise and perceived threat of Muslim Brotherhood or Salafi jihadist movements challenged Saudi Arabia's own Islamic ideological framework and, thus, its ability to project power abroad. Despite these challenges, Saudi Arabia (and

Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE) could still activate the techniques of survival at its possession.

Domestically, the religious establishment emphasised that revolt against the ruler is not only wrong, but dangerous; the state expanded its socio-economic provisions by, for example, increasing salaries of state employees and pursuing foreign policy objectives seeking to support status quo powers and curtailing revisionist forces — both movements calling for democracy or for Islamism. In Jordan and Morocco, the regimes also exploited cards they had to hand: promises of political openings, while dividing and seizing control of the opposition and pursuing strategic patience as the Arab "spring" turned bloody in many countries, not least Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

Conclusion: The Bell-Shaped Curve of Arab State Formation

In summary, Arab state formation has described, not a progressive linear approximation of the Westphalian state system, but a *bell-shaped curve* in which state-builders' attempts to approximate it reached, from a starting point of very weak statehood, a peak and then went into decline, a process co-constituted by the interaction of global level forces (constraints, intervention, resources) and regional state building projects.

Thus, the regimes of the immediate post independent period were weak and unstable, vulnerable to separatism and military coups; states were also too weak to deliver reform policies expected by the rising middle class. However, from the 1960s, rent from both great power patrons and the oil boom enabled monopolisation of coercive, economic, and ideological power by more inclusive forms of neo-patrimonial regimes based on a populist social contract in both republics and monarchies — the republics especially exhibited some of the infrastructural capacity to deliver significant social reforms and to counter external threats.

However, by the nineties, state decline had set in, corresponding to neo-liberal globalisation under US hegemony, which, combined with falls in rent, propelled a retreat in MENA regimes' inclusiveness under pressure from IMF-promoted "structural

adjustment" and the rise of crony capitalism (empowered by IMF-imposed privatisations of public sectors). While authoritarian regimes appeared quite resilient in adapting to neo-liberalism, retaining their monopoly of coercive power, creating new crony capitalist support bases and offloading welfare responsibilities to Islamists, under the surface the seeds that would drive the Arab uprising were being planted. Above all, the republics, in particular, lost their monopoly of ideological legitimacy to opposition movements as they reneged on the populist social contracts on which they had built their social bases.

The victims of neo-liberalism withdrew their loyalty from the state and attached it to sub/trans-state movements and identities, Islamism, sectarianism, and ethnic communities. Thus, as states strength declined, so correspondingly did their penetration by global forces and their vulnerability to mobilising sub/trans-state movements relatively increase, preparing the way for a range of state failures. Still, even amidst unprecedented state decline, authoritarian regimes continued to exhibit considerable resilience, especially in the monarchies, but also in Egypt and, even where the *state* had failed, as in Syria, where the regime rump, buttressed by external support, has persisted almost a decade after the uprising had begun.

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