



Constructing

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in the

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FRED H. LAWSON



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*To Professor Iliya F. Harik
teacher, mentor, colleague*

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Preface

All too often the Arab world is written off as a region where the normal rules do not apply. This attitude produces one of two equally deleterious consequences for academic inquiry. The most common result is that students of political science simply ignore events, trends, and developments in the Arab countries. Theoretical debates in international relations and comparative politics go on without taking into account any empirical evidence drawn from the Arab world. Textbooks include no cases from this part of the globe, either by original design or, as in two cases with which I am familiar, after deciding in the end not to include a chapter on a pivotal Arab case that had been explicitly commissioned for the collection. One of the reasons that Stephen Walt's pathbreaking study of the dynamics of international alliance formation caused such a sensation, it seems to me, was that it treated inter-Arab diplomacy as an ordinary regional system. It is disappointing, albeit it par for the course, that Walt's book remains unique in this respect.

More rarely, the Arab world is incorporated into mainstream debates or textbooks, but is presented as the antithesis of whatever outcome or pattern is under investigation. Because so much current work in political science concerns liberal democracy (why it appears, what institutional forms it takes, what impact it has on international disputes, and so on), this state of affairs might be understandable. But to paraphrase a Brian Barry remark about the prisoner's dilemma, there is more to social science than liberal democracy. Once a wider range of research topics comes back into fashion in academia, we can only trust that scholars will at last give up the presumption that there is little to learn from Arab experience.

One great benefit of having spent the last two decades working at a small college, pretty much by myself, is that I have been inoculated against (or able

to avoid contracting) whatever bug it is that blocks the cross-fertilization of political science and Arab studies. It is particularly gratifying to find that the immunity can be passed on to successor generations. When they sit down and think about it, undergraduates find it possible to apply concepts from the broader fields of international relations and comparative politics to Arab cases. And they turn out to be equally adept at explaining things that happen in the Arab world in terms of concepts they wrestle with in their other classes. It is this spirit of intellectual inventiveness and curiosity, unblinkered by conventional prejudices, that gives me hope for the future.

When I have at last stuck my head out into the wider world, I have been most fortunate to discover colleagues willing to offer stimulation and encouragement. Laurie Brand first pointed out that a set of overlapping conference papers contained the seeds of a book. It is thanks to a suggestion from her that this material has taken the shape of a unified monograph. When my enthusiasm for the project was flagging, Edward Ingram revived my spirits — as he has done on two other occasions over the course of my career — by accepting much of the material on Syria as an article that appeared in the September 2000 issue of *The International History Review*. I appreciate not only his initial support but also his permission to reprint large parts of that article here. Stephen Krasner let me borrow a batch of unpublished essays that played a key role in focusing my thoughts concerning the elusive topic of sovereignty. It was also his advice that I aim high in looking for a publisher. I am delighted that it is his own university's press that took the bait.

William Ochsenwald convinced me that a comparative study of Westphalian sovereignty in the Arab world required a North African case; Julia Clancy-Smith persuaded me that the case should be Tunisia. Paul Lalor, Edmund Burke III, Laurence Michalak, and Amy Aisen made it possible for me to obtain access to scarce publications on Tunisian history. John Taylor of the U.S. National Archives first introduced me to the wonders of Record Group 226, when the modern military records section was still located in a cramped upstairs office in the old building on Pennsylvania Avenue. A succession of quick trips to the new facility in College Park could only have been productive thanks to the efficiency and good humor that he and his coworkers have shown me over many years.

Roger Hayden, James Gelvin, and an anonymous reader for Stanford University Press made exceptionally constructive comments on the draft

manuscript. I might well have spent another five years trying to deal with all the points raised by these early critics, except that Kate Wahl pushed me to meet a quick deadline. For this I am exceedingly grateful.

This whole project originated in a paper prepared for a December 1998 conference that marked the reopening of the Center for Arab and Middle East Studies at the American University of Beirut. Over lunch in the AUB faculty dining room, I learned that my invitation to participate in that remarkable event had come at the recommendation of my undergraduate teacher at Indiana University. It is out of deep appreciation that I dedicate this book to him, with the hope that it approaches the high standard that he always expected of his students and consistently exemplifies in his own scholarship.

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Origins of States-systems

Three broad dynamics generated the states-system that took shape in the Middle East during the first half of the twentieth century: (1) the end of the imperial institutions of governance that had structured regional politics over the previous 600 years; (2) the rise of local nationalist movements in Cairo, Tunis, Baghdad, Damascus, and other major urban centers; and (3) the appearance of narrowly self-interested, territorially bounded, mutually antagonistic states. Existing scholarship most often conflates these three dynamics. Thus Alan Taylor observes that “after World War I all of the post-Ottoman societies of the Middle East and North Africa were confronted with the enormous task of reconstructing themselves as successor nation-states. The nation-building process required the termination of foreign controls, the conceptualization of national identities, and the establishment of modern national institutions capable of maintaining the internal and external viability of the new sovereign entities.”¹ Similarly, Michael Barnett asserts that “World War I, the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, the death of the Ottoman Empire, and the perception that the region was being

assailed by European imperialism through the mandate system and by Jewish immigration to Palestine caused the region's inhabitants to reconsider their political identity and what sorts of political arrangements would be most meaningful and desirable."² Such formulations fail to recognize that the end of empire, the rise of nationalism, and the emergence of sovereign states represent separate trends that must be kept analytically distinct, because they are generated by quite different factors and processes.

Moreover, imperial collapse, the growth of nationalism, and the development of external sovereignty exhibit disparate historical trajectories. In fact, it is precisely the lack of congruence between the rise of local nationalist movements and the emergence of self-interested, territorially bounded states that has convinced many scholars that nationalism and sovereignty are inherently incompatible in the Arab world, and that the underlying tension between these two principles generates an inordinate amount of conflict in regional affairs.³ Intellectual and social historians have identified several distinct incarnations of Arab nationalist thought, beginning as early as the 1840s. Elements of external sovereignty can be discerned even earlier, and became more pronounced during the first third of the nineteenth century when provincial rulers like Muhammad 'Ali in Cairo, Da'ud Pasha in Baghdad, and Ahmad Bey in Tunis carried out extensive state-building projects — even as they continued to recognize the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan. It is therefore imperative to resist the temptation to conflate these three distinct processes into a single analytical account, despite the fact that they tend to reinforce one another as time goes by.

End of Empire

There can be no question that the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire contributed profoundly to the formation of the contemporary Middle Eastern states-system. Relations among the largely autonomous governors-general (*walis*) of Cairo, Tunis, Baghdad, and Damascus exhibited varying degrees of rivalry and collaboration throughout the nineteenth century.⁴ But so long as local rulers remained subject to the higher authority — however loose — of the sultan in Istanbul, such interactions constituted a states-system only in a metaphorical sense. In the first place, widely shared principles and practices of Ottoman statecraft constituted an underlying institutional and discursive

order that effectively limited the degree of uncertainty among actors, and thereby precluded the emergence of a fundamentally anarchic regional arena.⁵ Second, successive provincial governors almost never put down roots in the territories under their command. On the contrary, walis who managed to acquire power and prestige by serving in one provincial capital regularly moved on to other, more august posts elsewhere. Third, local rulers were seldom if ever accorded formal diplomatic recognition by the great powers of Europe, whose governments tended instead to take steps to suppress strategic initiatives undertaken by ambitious walis in the name of preserving the diplomatic status and territorial integrity of the empire.⁶

So it was only after the Ottoman order disintegrated that it became possible for an anarchic international arena to take shape in the sultan's former domains. Existing scholarship connects the dissolution of empires to the emergence of states-systems in a number of different ways. Perhaps the most influential line of argument explains the rise of anarchic international orders in terms of the costs and benefits associated with any attempt to revive imperial structures of governance. Hendrik Spruyt, for instance, asserts that regional arenas made up of self-interested, mutually antagonistic states are likely to take shape whenever the former imperial core lacks the capacity to reassert its control over the former periphery.⁷ David Lake adds that anarchic states-systems can be expected to arise from the ashes of empire whenever (1) the gains that might be derived from economies of scale are insufficient to justify efforts by the former core to reconstitute the empire, (2) opportunity costs make it too expensive for the states that emerge in the former periphery to abandon their newfound autonomy, and (3) the "governance costs" associated with imposing central control over a resurrected imperial system prove to be exorbitant.⁸ By contrast, Alexander Motyl finds no compelling reason to assume that the high cost of restoring the empire will necessarily generate an anarchic regional order. Four ubiquitous factors can even improve the chances that some new form of imperial governance will arise even after the old empire has collapsed: a comparatively strong state in the former imperial core, an extensive set of residual ties between the former core and the newly autonomous periphery, a distribution of material resources that favors the former core in its dealings with the periphery, and shared borders between the former core and the new peripheral polities.⁹

A widely accepted alternative explanation for the emergence of anarchic states-systems out of collapsed imperial orders emphasizes the legacy of

antagonism and mistrust that permeates relations between the former center and the former provinces in the postimperial era. On this view, leaders and populations in the newly autonomous polities that had previously been subordinate to the empire share a strong predisposition to see their former overlords as untrustworthy, if not actually threatening, long after the empire comes to an end. In the case of the Soviet Union, for example, deep-seated misgivings about the possibility of resurgent imperialism on the part of the Russian Federation lingered in Ukraine, Georgia, and Uzbekistan, despite the willingness of the new leadership in Moscow to establish the headquarters of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, rather than in the Russian capital.¹⁰ Such attitudes tend to be reinforced whenever different regions of the old empire are characterized by administrative and economic inequalities, which heighten the level of animosity not only between the former core and successor states in the periphery but also among the successor states themselves.¹¹ Furthermore, new states in the former periphery often construct widely divergent combinations of ethnic and civic components of nationhood. The tensions and resentments associated with such constitutional divergences contribute significantly to the consolidation of postimperial systems that consist of narrowly self-interested, mutually antagonistic states.

Two significant difficulties—one conceptual and the other empirical—confront anyone who tries to use the extensive literature on the end of empire to explain the emergence of the contemporary Middle Eastern states-system. On the conceptual side, one would have to come up with a way to demonstrate that the most dynamic of the Ottoman Empire's many successor states—the Turkish Republic led by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk)—necessarily lacked the capacity or willingness to restore an imperial structure of governance, without falling into the trap of pointing to the appearance of a regional order made up of self-interested, mutually antagonistic states as proof that the costs of doing so were too great. As Charles Tilly remarks, “in the absence of well-established a priori measures for transaction costs and returns from empire, a cost-benefit formulation introduces into any explanation the usual circularity of such reasoning.”¹²

On the empirical side, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire prompted heightened, and more direct, intervention in the Middle East by the great powers of Europe, culminating in the establishment of novel forms of imperial governance under the auspices of the League of Nations.¹³

Nevertheless, nationalist leaderships in Cairo, Tunis, 'Amman, Baghdad, Damascus, and elsewhere in the Arab world gradually adopted postures of rivalry and antagonism in their dealings with one another, and did so in ways that did not necessarily coincide with the line that separated French-dominated from British-dominated mandatory states. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire therefore provided the opportunity for an anarchic states-system to take shape in the Middle East, but did not directly produce this distinctive kind of regional order.

Rise of Local Nationalisms

Scholarship on the birth and evolution of nationalism in the Arab world is voluminous and shows no sign of diminishing, either in quantity or in theoretical sophistication. Conventional studies concentrate on the social background and political activities of discontented elites and secret societies in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁴ Revisionist writing highlights the intense conflicts that erupted immediately after the First World War between liberal leaderships and an assortment of popular movements whose adherents championed more radical conceptions of the nation.¹⁵ Other innovative work explores reciprocal interactions between the growth of Arab and Turkish nationalisms on one hand and the transformation of Ottoman political institutions on the other during the final decades of the imperial era.¹⁶

How the coming of nationalism interacts with the emergence and consolidation of anarchic states-systems remains an undertheorized and rarely explored area of inquiry in the literature on international relations.¹⁷ Even writings that might be expected to shed light on the topic generally fail to do so. In *Nationalism and the International System*, for example, F. H. Hinsley traces the origins of the modern international order not to the appearance of nations but rather to the appearance of new kinds of disputes among the dynastic states of eighteenth-century Europe.¹⁸ James Mayall asserts that even during the age of nationalism, "the world of power politics remains intact; indeed arguably the major impact of nationalism has been to reinforce the tradition of hard-line realism, and to weaken the version in which the ineradicable egotism of the separate state was at least softened by a residual solidarity amongst states."¹⁹ Similarly, Anthony Smith assumes that "the