

# Disunited Nations?

## Arab Nation-States and the Arab Spring

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### 1. Nationalism & Revolution: Framing the Debate

From the beginning of 2011, millions of Arabs took to the streets calling for freedom and democracy. As they toppled one dictator after another, the international community followed every event with amazement and anticipation of what was to follow. The collective uprisings, dubbed the Arab Spring, posed pressing questions: why and how did the revolts happen, and what did they mean for the region's future? In order to answer these questions, this paper examines the effects of these uprisings on the Arab nation-state. It does so from three separate perspectives: explaining the colonial legacy in the Arab region, its flawed traditions of government, and the impact of technological change.

### 2. Defining the “Arab States” : Neither Arab nor States?

The first chapter looks at the incongruity between the colonial influence and existing traditions that weakened the foundations of the modern Arab states. Following an overview of the diversity amongst the Arab nations, the paper turns to the historical reasons behind this fragmented nature; a detailed look into the history of colonialism reveals the adoption of imported models of nation-states that worked against traditional notions of family, tribes, and Islam.

### 3. The Arab States and Its Enemies 1950–2011

The second chapter has as its focus the failure of the Arab governments to redress the fragility of their own national structures. Two distinctive types of challenges faced by the government reveal themselves: fabricated challenges on one hand, represented in political oppositions, intellectuals, and Israel, and actual challenges on the other, socioeconomic issues such as a growing population and widespread human rights abuse. By examining both categories in turn, it becomes clear that Arab governments had been fighting the former at the risk of ignoring the latter. The chapter concludes by examining censorship as the key reason such precarious situation endured.

### 4. The Year of Change

The third chapter analyzes the external influence that laid the groundwork for the revolts by breaking the system of censorship identified in the last chapter as the backbone of the Arab regimes. It examines three technological developments of satellite television, Internet, and mobile phones, and their psychological impacts on the Arab population, as well as the ways in which they became powerful tools for the opposition. Global trends are also examined, in particular the nonviolent civic movements of which the Arab Spring bears strong characteristics. The chapter then turns to the two pillars of forces within the Arab society—the army and the mosque—that took on a unique unifying role in the uprisings, making them possible to happen at that time and that place.

### 5. The Arab Future: More Tribes, More Flags?

By way of conclusion, the paper argues that these weaknesses in the current national system in the Arab world will likely become more explicit as a result of these uprisings. This in turn may lead to a changed political map of the area, as it can be seen in the varying outcomes of the Arab nations: some will stay consistent, others may breakdown, and monarchies could be forced to adopt changes in order to survive. At the same time, the future of the region will be greatly determined by the resurgence of complex, but potentially unifying forces such as Islam, as well as its progress in addressing the basic economic and social needs of the people.