The State and Its Competitors in the Arab World

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The European-style state introduced in the Arab world after World War I did not reflect local interests or aspirations but introduced several long-lasting, and deeply dysfunctional, dynamics into modern political life. The new states came with expectations for government that would prove impossible to meet while imposing a system of rule that, far from creating citizens, often reinforced non-state identities and created deep communal resentment and anger. We see the result of this history today in the weakness of the contemporary states and the robustness of alternative political identities and movements across the region, from the Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood to Libya’s tribal militias, Iraq’s Kurdistan and Yemen’s Houthi rebels.

Dr. Lisa Anderson is Special Lecturer and James T. Shotwell Professor of International Relations Emerita at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs.