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### Identifying Truly Fragile States

Seth Kaplan

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# Identifying Truly Fragile States

That the Arab Spring caught the world off guard is hardly surprising. Interpreting overt stability as a reflection of fundamental strength or resiliency has often set the international community up for surprise. Few forecast the dissolution of the Soviet Union, for example; far too few in Washington anticipated what would follow the invasion of Iraq. These are reminders that apparent stability can be little more than an illusion.

The converse can be equally misleading. Just as the international community tends to see stability as strength, it often equates crisis with fundamental fragility. Many countries face episodes of crisis, some of which can even initiate transitions to new political orders. But not all such countries are structurally fragile, plagued by deeply entrenched sociopolitical and institutional problems. Some states pass through their fragile moments relatively easily, leveraging their assets to reorient themselves in more positive directions within reasonable periods of time. States that are fundamentally fragile, however, buckle under these crises, stagnating or spiraling into violence.

Fragile states are not like other states. They function—albeit barely—according to a different set of sociopolitical dynamics. As such, they harbor uniquely formidable obstacles to stability, development, and democracy. Because of these problems, all transitions are not created equal, and the underlying strength or fragility of societies undergoing those transitions helps determine their success and, more broadly, the prospects for political and economic development.

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Seth Kaplan, a Professorial Lecturer in the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University, is the author of *Betrayed: Politics, Power, and Prosperity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development* (Praeger Security International, 2008). He runs the website <http://www.fragilestates.org/> and can be reached at [seth@fragilestates.org](mailto:seth@fragilestates.org)

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The predominant measures used to gauge the strength and progress of fragile countries have centered on a narrow view of governance, ignoring the critical factors discussed below that truly determine fragility. A 2012 OECD report on fragile states, for instance, emphasized the importance of the *vertical* state-society relationship fifteen times and social contract between government and its people thirteen times through its 108 pages, but completely ignored the factors shaping the *horizontal* society-society dynamics (such as the relationship between different ethnic, religious, and ideological groups) that determine how this relationship evolves and whether such a contract can be fashioned.<sup>1</sup>

As transitions in Tunisia and Egypt hang in the balance, as states from Libya to Burma enter crucial periods, and as places such as Afghanistan and Iraq continue to struggle, there is a critical need for a framework that makes sense of the society lying beneath the crisis or calm of the day. More importantly, there is a need to understand what constitutes real fragility, how it confounds development efforts, and what can be done to alleviate it.

### Misunderstanding Fragility

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Over the past decade, the issue of state fragility has vaulted up the foreign policy agenda of the United States and other developed countries. As Robert Rotberg wrote following the September 11 attacks, “the threat of terrorism has given the problem of failed nation-states an immediacy and importance that transcends its previous humanitarian dimension.”<sup>2</sup> In the increasingly interconnected 21st-century world, no country—no matter how powerful—is safe from the threats posed by well-organized extremist groups operating in weakly governed states.

Yet, despite the growing interest, there is little consensus on what constitutes a fragile state or how to identify one. There are as many lists as there are definitions. The most widely cited is *Foreign Policy*’s Failed States Index (FSI), produced in conjunction with the Fund for Peace, a Washington DC-based nonprofit. Each year, the FSI ranks countries according to twelve social, economic, political, and military indicators.<sup>3</sup> In 2012, Somalia topped the FSI’s list of “failed or failing states,” followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, and Chad. Groups such as Britain’s Department for International Development (DFID), the Political Instability Task Force (originally the State Failure Task Force), the Brookings Institution, the World Bank, and the OECD have all published reports or lists ranking failed or poorly governed states.<sup>4</sup> The results these lists produce can vary a lot at times.

Each list has its virtues. Yet, by focusing on the supposed symptoms or outward manifestations of fragility, they draw a misleading map of the fragile world. Certain governance measurements may actually say little about a country’s political and economic prospects—for instance, rapid population

growth, included in the FSI, may not prove politically destabilizing if an economy is flourishing. Including income level as an indicator, as the World Bank does, suggests that poverty plays a role in fragility despite a lack of empirical evidence for this argument (on the contrary, many fragile states are middle-income countries such as Nigeria and Pakistan). Regime type, which plays a role in most indexes, is a category that groups a wide range of countries despite their differences in legitimacy and performance (China and pre-2011 Libya, for instance, may have both been authoritarian but their similarities ended there).

One should not measure fragility solely by bad governance—especially as defined in the West. A country may be corrupt and hold elections that unfairly advantage the political party in power, thus not measuring up to Western standards of "good governance," but it may be sufficiently inclusive and well-governed to be quite stable. To use a term favored by Harvard's Merilee Grindle, "good enough governance" that can deliver important public goods—infrastructure, agriculture support systems, and well-managed schools—can come in many forms.<sup>5</sup>

Many East Asian countries have had long periods during which they scored poorly on many of the governance indicators used to measure fragility, but they were not necessarily fragile. Indonesia and Vietnam, for instance, have consistently ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world, and China among the least democratic. As a result, they score worse on these indicators than is warranted: in 2005, the FSI ranked both Indonesia and Vietnam as more fragile than Nigeria, the Gambia, and Libya.

This focus on symptoms has yielded little predictive power. Some countries display few of the symptoms of fragility, only revealing their shortcomings when moments of crisis arrive. Others, such as North Korea and Pakistan, exhibit symptoms—and indeed many profound problems—yet are surprisingly resilient, confounding the frequent prognoses of imminent collapse.<sup>6</sup> Some countries plunge or soar in the rankings. Pakistan deteriorated from 34th on the FSI in 2005 to 9th in 2006, suggesting a marked increase in its fragility when fatalities from terrorism began to rise. Nigeria moved from 54th in 2005 to 14th in 2011 as hope faded in its 1999 transition from military rule to democracy. The Arab Spring exposed the fragility of many states previously considered robust. In 2010, Syria placed 49th on the FSI; sitting at 111th and 133rd, respectively, Libya and Bahrain hardly seemed ticketed for tumult.

Understanding fragility is further undermined by the reality that crises periodically challenge all states, strong or weak. These fragile moments, in which a country struggles to overcome a shock or long-term inadequacy that threatens its most basic institutions, are most devastating to states that lack the resilience to adapt. Fragile moments can spark transitions—periods between the

breakdown of one regime and consolidation of another. But there are many other fragile moments: an economic depression, a contested election, a spike in food prices, a secessionist movement gaining traction, rising drug or criminal violence, and war can all require countries to take exceptional action to change what is not working in their basic operating system.

**Why do some countries pass through crises quickly, while others seem stuck forever?**

The length of a fragile moment can vary substantially. In some cases, the challenge passes within weeks, such as in the aftermath of the disputed 2000 U.S. presidential election. In contrast, Kenya's fragile moment after its 2007 election dragged on for months (some would argue years). After the 2003 invasion, Iraq disintegrated into competing factions with little to hold them together; its fragile moment continues almost a decade later. Understanding why some countries

pass through their crises quickly, while others seem stuck in them forever is key to differentiating between resilient and fragile states.

### **Reevaluating State Fragility<sup>7</sup>**

A state's ability to navigate its challenges is chiefly determined by two factors: the capacity of its population to cooperate and the ability of its institutions (formal and informal) to channel this cooperation to meet national challenges. These two factors shape how a government interacts with its citizens; how officials, politicians, military officers, and businesspeople behave; and how effective foreign efforts will prove in upgrading governance. In short, they determine to what degree a society is able to nurture a locally driven, productive system of governance—a prerequisite for any attempt to develop or democratize.

**A state's ability to navigate its challenges is chiefly determined by two factors.**

Together with the set of policies adopted by a government, they determine a country's capacity to advance.

Fragile states are deficient in both areas. Their populations have little capacity to cooperate in pursuit of public goods. Put differently, they suffer from political-identity fragmentation. When combined with weak (or dysfunctional) institutions, political-identity fragmentation works in a vicious circle that severely undermines the legitimacy of the state, leading

to highly unstable political orders that are hard to reform. Identity is crucial to create legitimacy, because a legitimate political order is usually built around a

cohesive group—and uses institutions that reflect that group’s historical evolution. A cohesive identity, in turn, depends on many factors. History and identity can matter more than ethnic or religious homogeneity, as India and Indonesia’s internal cohesion attest.

Countries with strong social cohesion are based on what Cornell University professor Benedict Anderson would call an “imagined community” able to differentiate between compatriots and outsiders.<sup>8</sup> The natural feeling of affinity and group allegiance that a common identity produces channels itself into country development, yielding states that are more stable, better governed, more development-oriented, and better able to deal with crises because common challenges trigger cooperation. When South Korea faced a financial meltdown after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, for example, its citizens largely eschewed bickering and sought instead to make personal sacrifices to the nation. Individuals queued for hours to donate their valuables—including gold, wedding rings, jewelry, and medals—in a gesture of support for their beleaguered economy.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to imagine the citizens of Lebanon—or any other country sporting stark political-identity fractures—responding similarly. Although the Lebanese national anthem proclaims “all of us for the nation,” a 2009 *New York Times* article quoted a Beirut sign undressing this empty platitude: “All of us for which nation?”<sup>10</sup>

Where social cohesion is lacking, political fragmentation and weak governing bodies feed upon each other, undermining state legitimacy. Divisions can make arduous the formation of apolitical state bodies capable of distributing public services and applying the law evenly. The absence of these bodies further sharpens the divisions. As New York University professor William Easterly has written, diversity only dampens economic growth in the absence of effective institutions.<sup>11</sup>

**Fragile states suffer from political-identity fragmentation.**

## Why Transitions Reveal True Fragility

Transitions test states more than any other type of fragile moment, creating a power vacuum and unleashing a society’s emotions with unparalleled force. Competing political identities surge in importance just as the formal structures of government are least able to manage them. It is worth mentioning that even cohesive, highly institutionalized countries—such as Japan following World War II, Poland in 1989, or Slovenia in 1991—may face transitions.

These pressures bring into stark relief the differences between fragile and resilient states. Whereas resilient states can rely on strong social bonds, trust,

and a set of informal institutions establishing how to work together despite differences of opinion, fragile states cannot. As a result, the forces unleashed by a transition bring a society in a resilient state together, while pushing a society in a fragile state apart. Resilient states can work even when their governments fall. Leaders come together to settle disputes in a way that builds trust, strengthens ties, and leads to the establishment of a new and widely acceptable political order. In fragile states, the reverse is often true. During transitions, leaders compete in ways that undermine trust, weaken ties among them, and yield an unstable political order with low legitimacy. The power vacuum in the first case is quickly filled; in the second, crisis acts as a centrifuge, dividing society into its components.

Contrast Tunisia and Syria's experience in the Arab Spring. In the former case, the major political forces came together quickly—or as Columbia University professor Alfred Stepan has argued, well before the uprising—to work on the transition.<sup>12</sup> Even though the country has faced many problems since, they are still working together peacefully (if not always agreeably). While consolidation of a new political order takes time even in a cohesive society, Tunisia's cohesiveness suggests that it will proceed relatively steadily and orderly toward that goal. In Syria, opposition forces are unable to cooperate on almost any level, leaving the country vulnerable to a protracted bloody conflict, perhaps with another autocratic leader emerging at its end. Although some have argued that the divergent paths of the Tunisian and Syrian transitions lie in the choices of political elites, especially in the security apparatus—Tunisia's mainly accepted change, while Syria's mainly resisted it—these choices are the product of histories and sociopolitical dynamics which have conditioned expectations.

The different responses to the fragile moment can be traced to the different elements that make up the two countries. Tunisia is relatively cohesive, and boasts a large middle class greatly exposed to European norms. Its government may be bureaucratic and slow, but it works. The military may have initially protected the old regime, but it was quick both to turn against it and to pledge to stay out of politics after the transition began. Syria, on the other hand, is splintered ethnically, regionally, religiously, and ideologically into many competing groups. The middle class is relatively poor, has little exposure to international norms, and has little experience with democracy or modern statehood. Plagued by patronage and corruption, government is weakly institutionalized and rarely apolitical. The army served one sect at the expense of everyone else. In the end, it is society's ability to cooperate *horizontally* and the country's institutions ability to channel that cooperation in a constructive direction that has determined the two countries' fates.

### Categorizing Countries

If we group states according to their levels of social cohesion and institutionalization, we get a clearer picture of the difficulties that fragile states face. Table 1, which is adapted from National University of Singapore professor Michael Hudson’s work, groups states into four categories according to their levels of political-identity fragmentation and their government capacity.<sup>13</sup> Keep in mind, political-identity fragmentation is largely the antithesis of social cohesion, and a state with weak institutions typically has low government capacity.

Systems marked by low political fragmentation and high state capabilities (category I), as in the case of almost all developed countries and developing countries such as Turkey, China, and Chile, are genuinely robust. Only this group is capable of fully tackling the challenges of development. Political systems with low fragmentation and government capabilities (category II) are relatively stable but sluggish. These have potentially bright futures if they can foster good investment climates and improve state capabilities. States with high identity fragmentation but also high government coercion capabilities (category III), such as the Soviet Union or Uzbekistan, are inherently weak and potentially unstable. States that combine low-capability governments (especially low coercive powers) with highly fragmented political cultures (category IV) are fundamentally weak and unstable. Fragile states are concentrated in categories III and IV.

A country is not permanently confined to a particular category, though movement to a higher level of robustness takes time. All Latin American countries, for instance, suffered from some form of instability during the first

**Table 1: Four Types of Political Orders (with Examples)**

	<i>Low Political-Identity Fragmentation</i>	<i>High Political-Identity Fragmentation</i>
<b>High Government Capacity (at least in security realm)</b>	<i>I: Dynamic</i> Botswana Turkey Chile China	<i>III: Fragile but Controlled</i> Syria (before 2011) Soviet Union Iraq (before 2003) Saudi Arabia Uzbekistan
<b>Low Government Capacity</b>	<i>II: Stable but Sluggish</i> Senegal Armenia Tanzania Bangladesh	<i>IV: Fragile and Unstable</i> Nigeria DRC Somalia Libya (after 2011) Syria (after 2011)

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hundred years or so of their independence, but while progress has since been haphazard, most have become more stable and more development-oriented over time. Countries can also regress to less stable political orders.

Some countries may straddle two categories. Malaysia, for instance, is divided into three salient groups and has experienced interethnic conflict in the past. But two generations of rapid growth, political stability, and measures to alleviate social and economic inequities have strengthened the country's cohesion. It is in category I, but closer to the divider with category III than many of its counterparts.

### Categories and Transitions

This categorization provides a ready tool to understand how well equipped countries are to deal effectively with fragile moments, especially transitions. Africa and the Middle East, for instance, provide striking examples of the differences between countries on the left and right sides of [Table 1](#). With a few exceptions, the states in those regions belong on the right-hand side. Few African and Middle Eastern states had either a high degree of social cohesion or institutionalization when they gained independence. In most cases, their arbitrarily drawn borders forced together disparate—and often incongruent—identity groups. Colonizers ignored institutions, norms, and systems of governance that had developed over centuries of adaptation to local conditions, and grafted a Westernized concept of the state onto a wide variety of pre-existing forms of government and social organization. This left few unifying identities, institutions, or governance systems to bind various peoples together. The exceptions—Turkey and Israel in category I—both started with fairly cohesive populations and a core group of government officials that had extensive experience managing large organizations.

Iran may lack a highly competent government and has instituted policies that hurt its development prospects, but its cohesion and long history of self-governance ought to make any transition from the current regime relatively easy. Tunisia, especially, and Egypt (category II) are likely to be the biggest success stories of the Arab Spring because their relative cohesion and reasonable level of institutionalization will make it easier to sort out differing interests and agendas and sustain reforms, although quality leadership remains critical.

**Tunisia and Egypt are likely to be the biggest success stories of the Arab Spring.**

In contrast, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq (category IV) all gained independence lacking both national solidarity and elites with the experience to organize a

state that could create it. There were, after all, no Lebanese, Syrians, and Iraqis before World War I (the Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Alawites, Maronites, and so on who lived within their borders all were members of the Ottoman Empire). As a result, they have been forced to simultaneously develop a new national identity and build the elements of a new system of state governance. The recent turmoil in Syria reveals the artificiality of its national identity and the weak institutionalization of the state.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana was the only large country to gain independence with a high degree of social cohesion. This gave it immense advantages over the rest of sub-Saharan Africa (and made it one of the few to assume category I). It has been able to regularly conduct competitive elections since independence in 1965 and has created a fairly efficient civil service with remarkable levels of operational autonomy.<sup>14</sup> Despite building its economy on a natural resource, diamonds, it has avoided the “resource curse” precisely because its cohesiveness has yielded a far different attitude among leaders toward assets held by the state.

Except for South Africa, whose unique history has left it with greater unity and stronger state institutions than its diversity would predict (making it better prepared for a transition in 1994 than many thought), most of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa suffers from the ailments typical of fragile states. Few countries are well prepared for fragile moments.

This framework of measuring fragility also has powerful implications for Asia. In Southeast Asia, the country with the longest history of ethnic division—Myanmar—is not surprisingly the least developed in the whole region. Its transition is likely to be very rocky. China, on the other hand, has a decent chance to democratize peacefully, following a path previously trodden by neighbors such as South Korea and Taiwan (assuming it can minimize conflict with ethnic minorities concentrated in Tibet and Xinjiang). Highly cohesive and blessed with a much more robust government apparatus than any other large developing country, China has the ingredients for success even if its size, inequities, and entrenched ruling party may add complications.

## Factoring Fragility into Policymaking

Policies that assume a uniform readiness for elections, large dollops of foreign aid, or top-down governance reform—disregarding the specific history, geography, culture, and institutions that shape a state’s capacity to navigate its challenges—often fail spectacularly. The international community must tailor its policies toward fragile states to address the fundamental challenges that threaten their stability and hinder their development.

## Five principles may help local and international policymakers chart a course to resilience.

Enhancing understanding of fragility will require better indexes and categorizations as well as more research into the sociopolitical dynamics that determine resilience when facing crises. More research is needed to distinguish countries passing through fragile moments from those dealing with entrenched structural fragility. A better understanding of the fundamental drivers of fragility will enable more effective strategies to

help states in transition, be they fragile or not. More generally, differentiating between fragile and resilient states should drive policies that bolster fragile states, in transition or not. The following five guiding principles may help both local and international policymakers as they chart a course to resilience.

### **Decentralize Government**

Where states are divided into multiple identity groups that are mostly separated into different geographical areas—such as in Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan—policymakers should work toward a balanced state that distributes power to where it is most likely to be used effectively. As Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz have concluded, “virtually every long-standing and relatively peaceful contemporary democracy in the world whose polity has more than one territorially concentrated, politically mobilized, linguistic-cultural majority is not only federal, but ‘asymmetrically federal.’”<sup>15</sup>

Asymmetrical federalism may also foster stability and—eventually—democracy in sprawling countries such as the DRC. The difficulties of projecting authority across distance are less likely to hamper regional governments, a problem that inadequate infrastructure and limited management personnel exacerbates. And citizens will likely find it much easier to hold leaders accountable because discontent, crime, and insecurity immediately affect leaders who live among those whom they are meant to serve.

### **Unify Disparate Peoples**

In countries where multiple identity groups are spread throughout the country, programs should be adopted to create stronger social and cultural bonds across groups, institutionalize cooperation, and promote reconciliation among groups with a history of conflict. Fostering a sense of nationhood requires finding a unifying force—such as Swahili in Tanzania, a unique Islamic heritage in Senegal, or clan institutions in Somaliland—to bridge geographical, historical, and identity divides within a state. Building a “nation of nations” is more likely to succeed than trying to build a state on (to use French historian Michel Cahen’s phrase) the “negation of social identities,” that is, a “nation against

identities.”<sup>16</sup> Educational, cultural, and sports programs can foster complementary cultural identities that strengthen national bonds, diminishing intergroup frictions.

There are many practical examples of steps taken to institutionalize cooperation in heterogeneous states. Somaliland has tried to ensure that parties are large, inclusive, and broad-based by limiting their number and requiring that each secure a minimum level of support in each province. India has managed to encompass its immense diversity within one country both by keeping the state secular and by decentralizing substantial power to regional governments organized in part around language groups, providing extensive systems of preferences and quotas for lower and backward castes and tribal peoples. In Indonesia, the division of revenue from natural resources between the central and local governments has reduced political frictions and ended a secessionist movement.

### **Promote Regionalism**

In regions (such as West Africa and Central America) populated by multiple pint-sized fragile states, regionalism offers the best chance to overcome the poisonous and self-reinforcing nexus of identity divisions, weak administrative capacities, undersized markets, and limited human resources. Regional associations of small, poor countries—if empowered with the necessary authority and staffed by competent managers—could gradually transform the institutional environments and economic prospects of their member states.

Robust regional structures would do much to improve state structures by setting and enforcing standards throughout their territory and exemplifying how effective institutions work. In time, robust institutions would reinforce each other, strengthening governance throughout a region—the opposite of what happens today in regions where weak states undermine each other’s attempts to advance. The CFA franc, legal tender in eight West African countries and managed by a central bank in Dakar, provides a good example of how this might work. Although the role of France in this North–South partnership is controversial at times (France has substantial influence over its management), the common money has delivered currency stability, lower inflation rates, lower administrative costs, budgetary discipline, and a less-risky business environment for investors—despite the collapse of many of its members’ governments at one point or another over the decades.

### **Creatively Supplement State Capacity**

In many cases, states on their own are unable to create and sustain some of the capacities necessary to promote stability and development. Where institutional reengineering and other creative mechanisms are unable to overcome these

deficiencies, outside assistance might be more helpful if directed at supplementing capacity rather than providing cash or technical assistance.

Forms of shared sovereignty—whereby a weak state partners with a more developed country on some aspect of its governance—could prove useful. Partnerships could form in many areas of governance, from security to elections to the judiciary. For instance, a country with a highly developed legal system could provide a “judicial blanket” for a fragile state in the form of a series of courts to adjudicate major cases and supervise lower courts. The UN International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) was established because only 2 percent of crimes in Guatemala were being solved. Monetary and fiscal policy is another potentially fertile ground for shared sovereignty, as it was in Liberia where foreign nationals helped introduce a transparent revenue-collection regime.<sup>17</sup>

### **Gradually Increase Accountability**

In states where rapid change may prove detrimental to stability or become obstructed by elites, gradual, incremental reform to make governments more accountable should be emphasized. As the Iraq experience vividly shows, dramatic change—including abrupt moves to fully competitive elections—in states with weak cohesiveness, fragile institutions, and a history of intergroup animosity can be highly explosive, undermining the whole reform agenda. It is better to prioritize unity and security, introducing more far-reaching reforms only gradually, as the evolving institutional and sociopolitical context allows.

Gradualism is not a call for sequentialism—that is, for punting serious reform—but rather an attempt to introduce reforms in a way that does not explicitly threaten the status quo, yet creates an iterative and self-sustaining process that seeps through a system and transforms societal and state relationships over time. Initiatives which improve the fiscal relationship between governments and their peoples—such as increasing the transparency and conduct of budget-making procedures, bolstering the capacity of watchdog NGOs, or boosting the proportion of revenues coming from taxes—can make leaders more attentive to their citizens. Improving the rule of law and government capacity to adjudicate and enforce it should improve responsiveness to citizens, laying the groundwork for other measures.

### **Disaggregating Fragile States**

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Fragile states demand a patient, pragmatic, and customized approach from the international community, one that peers far beyond the governance indicators and crises of the day. Attention needs to focus on underlying sociopolitical and

institutional structures and dynamics. This approach has powerful implications for the Arab Spring countries and others in transition.

Whereas Tunisia can briskly introduce change, countries such as Yemen need much more caution about rupturing the weak social ties that hold it together. While Yemen cries out for a decentralized approach, given its complex social fabric and weak centralized government, a place like Egypt, with its long history as a single state and relatively soft identity divisions, needs leadership capable of unifying what should be bridgeable differences. Policymakers, who have projected crisis ad infinitum and underestimated Egyptian society's resilience, should use what leverage they have to prod Egypt's new government toward a more inclusive governing style. Meanwhile, Syria calls out for a creative approach which empowers local and regional governments to manage their own affairs during the war, and then uses them—and strong minority-rights provisions—as the bedrock of any future state.

Regionalism can boost an economy when it needs it most, provide the opportunity to learn new governance norms, and reduce the salience of identity conflicts. It can also offer more practicable experiences and knowledge than traditional aid. Afghanistan's future depends on its ability to work closely with its neighbors on infrastructure, trade, pipelines, and border management. Myanmar ought to make full use of its existing ties with ASEAN. And both the European Union and Turkey offer unique opportunities for the Arab Spring countries in the economic and political spheres if the right framework can be developed.

In almost all cases, outside help can make a difference in the management of key institutions. While done to some extent in the security arena—such as with U.S. support to Yemen—other areas need much more help. Creatively improving judiciaries, police forces, education systems, and economic ministries will be essential if these countries are to succeed. Where institutions work relatively well, such as in Tunisia, the task is relatively straightforward, but where social divisions infect bureaucracies and courts, the challenge will be much greater.

Leaders of the international community should not assume that all good things—improved security, better public services, democracy, and so on—go together. Fragile states face myriad challenges, and these cannot all be addressed simultaneously. Each country is different, and needs an approach tailored to its unique history, make-up, fault lines, and economic potential. The greater the internal fragmentation and the less the state is institutionalized, the more an

**E**ach fragile state demands a patient, pragmatic, and customized approach.

incremental approach that works to strengthen social cohesion and adapts to local circumstances should be pursued.

## Notes

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7. Much of this material is further elaborated in my book, *Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), chapters 1–3.
8. This phrase is typically used to identify nation-states, which make up the great majority of highly cohesive countries. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
9. "Koreans give up their hold to help their country," *BBC News*, January 14, 1998, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/analysis/47496.stm>.
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12. Alfred Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations," *Journal of Democracy* 23 (April 2012): 89–103.

13. Source: Based on a table in Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 391.
14. Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 426–427.
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