



2018-2019

Model Arab League

**BACKGROUND
GUIDE**

Council on Political Affairs

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National
Council
on US-
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Relations



Original draft by *David Stokes*, Chair of the *Council on Political Affairs* at the *2019* National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Honourable Delegates,

Welcome to the 2018-2019 Council on Political Affairs. My name is David Stokes and it is my pleasure to serve as your chairman for the 2018 National University Model Arab League. I am a student at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, where I study the relationship between international relations and religion. I've also studied Arabic at the American University of Beirut and Islamic Civilization at Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. This is my third year participating with the Model Arab League, and I am looking forward to witnessing the exciting and innovative solutions you propose in addressing this year's topics.

While I hope for a spirit of diplomacy and the resolution of all topics, I do expect all delegates to be informed of their country's actual policies so that debate will accurately represent the politics of the Arab League. Each of this year's topics presents a major challenge to the Council on Political Affairs and the League as a whole, and you will be debating issues relating to the very nature of the Arab League amid the geostrategic realities of the 21st Century. The most successful delegations will be those that have extensively researched not only their own country's positions and interests but also those of the other delegates in the room. Come prepared with concrete ideas, strategies, and coalitions in mind.

This background guide is designed to provide a general idea of the historical precedents and contemporary needs around each topic. It is not meant to be your only source of information nor does it lay out any obvious solutions to any of this year's topics. Nevertheless, this guide should serve as a starting point for your research and help you devise creative solutions.

I look forward to working with each and every one of you at conference.

David Stokes
Chairman

Topic I: Assessing the deteriorating Arab unity amongst member states resulting from increased tension from divisive international politics and creating solutions to disunity.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

In an historical event in March 1945, the seven newly-independent Arab states of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen adopted the Arab League Pact, formally establishing the League of Arab States with the mission of “strengthening of the relations between the member-states, the coordination of their policies in order to achieve co-operation between them and to safeguard their independence and sovereignty; and a general concern with the affairs and interests of the Arab countries.”¹ This landmark agreement ushered in a period of Pan-Arabism exemplified by Arab attempts to intervene in Palestine in 1948, and the subsequent rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt in 1952. The 1950s and 60s witnessed many experiments to erase colonial borders and establish a unified Arab nation, including the establishment of the United Arab Republic (1958-1961) between Egypt and Syria. The disastrous Arab defeat during the Six-Day War in 1967, however, dispelled many of the ideological underpinnings of Arabism, and with the death of Nasser in 1970 the notion of Pan-Arabism entered its period of decline.

Nevertheless, the idea of Arab unity which constitutes the *raison d'être* of the Arab League continues to receive symbolic support from Arab governments alongside state actions that directly undermine unity. Many international observers have even questioned “whether the organization has any relevance”² especially as smaller regional blocs increasingly supplant the role of the Arab League.

B. History in the Arab World

Arab unity reached its zenith surrounding the October War in 1973 which saw unprecedented cooperation among the Arab belligerents and support from the Gulf States which, for the first time, utilized their “oil weapon.” Then, in 1976, the Arab League approved the joint creation of an Arab Deterrent Force to maintain stability in Lebanon. This period of cooperation quickly disintegrated following controversy around the Camp David Accords in 1979, and Egypt’s subsequent expulsion from the League. The following decade witnessed ideological challenges to Arabism from Islamists, and the rifts between Arab states around the First (1980-1988) and Second (1990-1991) Gulf Wars.

In the aftermath of the Second Gulf War, Arab states launched several new initiatives to restore confidence in Arab unity, notably the Damascus Declaration of February 1991 which “seemed likely to supplant the moribund Arab League as the engine of joint Arab action.”³ Under this plan, the Gulf Cooperation Council would provide economic and financial support for a new

¹ Charter of the League of Arab States

² Masters, Jonathan, and Mohammed Ali Sergie. "The Arab League." Council on Foreign Relations. October 21, 2014.

³ Armanazi, Ghayth. *The Story of Syria*. (England: Gilgamesh Publishing, 2017.), 218.

military and security regime led by Syria and Egypt. However, these attempts never materialized especially as Arab unity broke down again at the 1991 Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accords.

Over the past two decades, the Arab League has witnessed several brief moments of Arab unity, such as the adoption of the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002, and the near unanimous suspension of Libya and Syria during the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, the Arab world remains divided over the increasingly sectarian nature of regional politics, the lack of a common policy with regards to conflict zones in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and the ongoing dispute between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Moreover, the role of the Arab League itself is being gradually eroded by the formation of smaller, more effective regional organizations like the Arab Maghreb Union, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the latter of which has garnered much attention around its unified joint responses in Bahrain and Yemen.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

As the conflicts in Iraq and Syria demonstrate, Arab politics in the twenty-first century are no longer dominated by common ideas of Arab unity, but are instead discussed primarily in the far more divisive language of nationality and sect. While the League remains nominally committed to the idea of Arab unity, examples of joint action are the exception rather than the norm. If the Arab League is to maintain any relevancy in regional politics, it must overcome political and sectarian differences and develop new ideas about Arab unity that are compatible with the geostrategic realities of today.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What has been my country's historical approach to Arab unity?
- What is the role of the Arab League in achieving my country's foreign policy goals?
- Why have past attempts at Arab unity largely failed?
- What other regional blocs have succeeded in presenting a united front to the world? Are these models transferable to the Arab League?
- What obstacles, whether sectarian or political, exist to greater unity in the Arab world? Does my country promote these obstacles or try to overcome them?
- How do sect, ethnicity, and language inform Arab identity?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Does the Arab League play a viable role in regional and global politics? Should it continue to do so?

- How should the Arab League interact with regional and sub-regional organizations like the GCC?
- What does Arab unity look like in the twenty-first century? What constitutes Arab unity?
- How can the Arab League reconcile state sovereignty with the notion of Arab unity?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Charter of the League of Arab States](#)
Officially adopted in 1945 in Alexandria, Egypt, the Arab Pact (or Charter) codified the spirit of Arab unity prevalent in the 1940s-1960s, and remains the longest-serving experiment to unify the Arab world. It constitutes the basis of the Arab League to this day.
- [The Arab League](#)
This 2014 report from the Council on Foreign Relations provides a useful history of the Arab League and a brief summary of the internal divisions currently facing the League.

Topic II: Formulating ways to increase societal inclusion and political involvement amongst individuals who may be susceptible to insurgent group recruitment.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations have historically been dominated by military and security responses, aptly demonstrated by the foreign military interventions in Afghanistan (2001), Syria (2014), and Yemen (2015). Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that a more effective government response to insurgent and terrorist groups involves rectifying societal and political barriers within the national community. In 2004, the International Peace Institute concluded that “strengthening state institutions and enhancing their capacity to provide security and development based on principles of good governance are essential for sound conflict management... In turn, good governance and security sector reform need to be embedded in a predictable legal environment supported by culturally appropriate rule of law programs.”⁴ This idea was quickly adopted by the United Nations in its Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2006, whose aims include “Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism” and “Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.”⁵

B. History in the Arab World

Arab League responses to terrorism and insurgencies remain dominated by military, security, and judicial measures as codified in the 1998 Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, which contained many provisions relating to security but nothing related to reforms designed to reduce the appeal of militant groups. Since 1998, the Arab world has experienced numerous insurgencies, notably with the Al-Qaeda insurgency in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the civil war in Iraq, the Al-Qaeda insurgency in the Islamic Maghreb, the post-Arab Spring wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and the Islamic State insurgency in Iraq.

Analysing these insurgencies through the lens of the security-development nexus reveals startling similarities among many of the abovementioned examples. The civil wars in Iraq and Syria, for instance, are driven primarily by Sunni groups traditionally excluded from positions of power, whether in the decades of secular Ba’ath rule in Syria or in the Shi’a-dominated post-war political situation in Iraq. Many onlookers have thus suggested that the key to peace and stability in the Middle East is internal political reform and the creation of stronger civil society and inclusive governing institutions. The Washington Institute identifies Morocco as a positive example of such reform, saying, “While it remains a constitutional monarchy, after the Arab Spring protests the government implemented democratic reforms to the constitution. Today, the process of gradual democratization continues with few signs of the disastrous unrest that is

⁴ Stan, Flavius. "The Security-Development Nexus: Conflict, Peace and Security in the 21st Century." IPI - International Peace Institute. October 14, 2004.

⁵ "UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy | Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force." United Nations.

shaping most of the region.”⁶ This position is shared by the Arab League itself, which has maintained since the 2004 Alexandria Declaration that internal political reform is a major security requirement for the majority of Arab states.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Arab political systems are dominated by minority regimes and exclusive institutions, both of which contribute to widespread regional instability and the proliferation of insurgent and terrorist groups. Military responses to insurgencies have largely failed both historically and in the present day. The pressing challenges facing the Arab world in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, the Sudan, Somalia and elsewhere, demand a new approach to counter-insurgency proposals. The extensive scholarly research on the security-development nexus leaves little room for doubt that a successful counter-insurgency strategy must include real political reform, anti-corruption campaigns, and the opening up of civil society to those groups that are historically excluded from full participation in the national community. Despite the Arab League’s nominal adoption of these strategies in 2004, they have yet to be implemented. The Council on Political Affairs must chart a new path and adopt innovative strategies to encourage societal and political inclusion within Arab states.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What are the current insurgent or terrorist threats facing my country? Looking ahead to the future, what domestic threats could arise that would threaten the country’s government?
- What are my nation’s commitments to the international human rights regime? What are some areas that my country has reformed or has promised to reform?
- How has my country responded to the global shift in favour of human security and the development-security nexus? Does my country view insurgency as primarily a security threat or as something more political?
- What role does civil society play within my national community?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- In what ways is the development-security nexus applicable to conditions in the Arab world?
- What is the role of the Arab League in identifying and promoting domestic political reform?

⁶ Geri, Maurizio. "Promoting Strong and Inclusive Institutions in the Middle East." The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. February 25, 2016.

- Is domestic security and insurgency a matter within the Arab League's purview? What role should the Arab League have in coordinating a response to domestic security issues?
- How can the Arab League work with the United Nations and the international human rights regime to promote domestic political reform?

IV. Additional Resources

- [The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#)
The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted in 2006 and reviewed periodically every two years. It outlines an effective counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency procedure consisting of four major pillars, two of which involve the security-development nexus and a concentration on good governance and the international human rights regime.
- [The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism](#)
Serving as the basis for Arab counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations since 1998, the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism is a prime example of the military-centric approach to combatting terror and insurgencies. A close analysis of this document may indicate several areas needing improvement, such as disregard for the root causes of terrorism and insurgency in the Middle East.
- [The Alexandria Declaration](#)
Adopted by the 2004 Arab League Summit, the Alexandria Declaration commits the Arab League to a policy of promoting political and democratic reform within Arab states and acknowledges that the lack of inclusive institutions has contributed to violence and insurgency in many Arab states.
- [The Security-Development Nexus: Conflict, Peace and Security in the 21st Century](#)
This 2004 report from the International Peace Institute is a landmark study of the security-development nexus that has formed the basis of subsequent scholarship on the link between inclusive government and security.
- [Promoting Strong and Inclusive Institutions in the Middle East](#)
This article published by the Washington Institute in 2016 highlights the need for political reform in the MENA region post-Arab Spring. It focuses extensively on the role civil society and inclusive institutions, or the lack thereof, contributed to the insurgencies and civil wars plaguing the Arab world since 2011.
- [The Global Regime for Terrorism](#)
This 2011 report by the Council on Foreign Relations provides a useful summary of the current global strategy on suppressing terrorism and insurgencies across the world.

Topic III: Identifying sources of external interference in Arab affairs and creating League-wide measures to improve regional independence and sovereignty from external actors.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Due to its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the MENA region has been dominated by foreign regimes and empires since classical times. Since the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate in 750, the Arab lands of Southwest Asia and North Africa have been subject to a revolving door of foreigners, including the Persians, the Crusaders, the Seljuq and Ottoman Turks, and finally the Italian, French, and British empires. Upon decolonization, the Arab world immediately found itself subject to competing American and Soviet designs in the context of the Cold War, while simultaneously resisting the expansionist projects of Israel, an entity widely considered to be the last vestige of colonial imperialism. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Arab world has increasingly been penetrated by Iranian-backed actors in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Meanwhile, the “rejectionist front” of Arab states, historically led by Assad’s Syria and Qaddafi’s Libya, has vehemently condemned American interference in the Arab world, especially in regards to the Third Gulf War (2003) and the ongoing War on Terror.

B. History in the Arab World

In 2014, an Iranian parliamentarian bragged that, “Three Arab capitals⁷ have today ended up in the hands of Iran and belong to the Iranian Islamic Revolution... Today we are at the peak of our strength, we impose our will and our strategic interest on everyone in the region,” before adding that the Houthi takeover in Yemen added a fourth capital in Iranian hands.⁸ Since the American-led collapse of the Baathist regime in Iraq in 2003, and the rise in that country of Iran-backed militias, Iran has steadily increased its influence throughout the Arab world, leading Jordan’s King Abdullah II in 2004 to remark of a rising “Shi’a Crescent” menacing the Arab world. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Iranian penetration into states like Syria and Yemen has become much more pronounced, with Hezbollah and Iranian Revolutionary Guards openly backing the Assad regime in Syria, and the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels orchestrating a coup in Yemen. In 2010, WikiLeaks revealed that “Arab leaders have repeatedly singled out [in private] Iran as the greatest threat to regional stability”⁹

Another source of foreign interference in the Arab world stems from the United States and its Western allies, including France, Great Britain, and Israel. Notable instances of this include the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the NATO-led campaign in Libya in 2011, and the 2017-2018 missile strikes in Syria led by the United States, France, and Great Britain. Aside from these direct actions, the United States is also a major player behind-the-scenes, providing economic and military assistance to Arab regimes from the Gulf to Egypt and Jordan. While the United States’ intrusion into Arab affairs is generally welcomed by Arab governments (with the

⁷ Presumed to be Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, and later Sanaa as a fourth

⁸ "Sanaa Is the Fourth Arab Capital to Join the Iranian Revolution." Middle East Monitor. September 27, 2014.

⁹ Trager, Eric. "Behind the Arabs' Iran Double Talk." New York Post. December 13, 2010.

exception of the “rejectionist front” that has largely collapsed since the Arab Spring), the Arab street remains sceptical, and at times openly hostile to American interference.

Relative newcomers to the Arab world include Turkey and Russia, both of which have become major players in the Syrian Civil War since 2015. As of 2018, both countries have armed forces operating within Syria, with Russia backing the Assad regime via an aerial campaign, and Turkish forces occupying the Kurdish-dominated region of Afrin.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

In recent years, despite numerous changing actors and the longstanding conflict with Israel, Arab attention has largely shifted in focus from the threat of Israeli expansionism to that of Iran. Moreover, with the collapse of the rejectionist front in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, overt American intervention has likewise been viewed more positively as a way of counteracting Iran, especially among the Arab states in the Gulf. Despite widespread Arab resistance to Iran, demonstrated by joint GCC action in Bahrain, the large coalition fighting in Yemen, and the victory of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq’s 2018 parliamentary elections, the Arab League has historically struggled to resist foreign interference whether from Israel, the United States, or Iran. The most recent attempt of resistance, the Arab Neighboring States Forum first proposed in 2010, experienced immediate difficulties and collapsed during the Arab Spring. This area is one in which the Arab League has no real unified policy, giving the Council on Political Affairs an unprecedented opportunity to introduce new and innovative solutions.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How has my country historically dealt with non-Arab states, especially NATO powers, Israel, and Iran? Is my country a beneficiary of a non-Arab state?
- How does my country view outside actors in the region? Does my country view any one state as particularly threatening or destabilizing?
- Are some foreign actors more threatening to my country than others?
- What constitutes foreign interference in Arab affairs? Should foreign interference encompass the actions of non-state actors, like the United Nations, transnational corporations, civil organizations, and transnational militant groups?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What tools are available to the Arab League that allow it to protect Arab independence?
- How can the Arab League protect the sovereign right of member states to engage in international diplomacy while at the same time protecting against foreign interference?
- Which non-Arab actors should the Arab League encourage in the region, if any?

- What constitutes an effective response to meddling in Arab affairs? What enforcement mechanisms are at the League's disposal?
- How should the Arab League respond to member-states that actively court external backing?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Arab Neighboring States Forum](#)
This proposal adopted at the 2010 Arab League Summit in Sirte, Libya, would establish a forum where the Arab League would interact with its neighbors as a unified body in an attempt to restore Arab sovereignty and negotiating power in the region.
- [The Arab League and Iraq](#)
This 2005 report from the Council on Foreign Relations describes the proxy conflict in Iraq around that country's 2005 elections. This was one of the Arab League's most notable attempts to curb Iranian penetration of the so-called "Shi'a Crescent."
- [Arab League Condemns Iran](#)
In an emergency session of the Arab League in 2017, the League produced a strongly-worded statement condemning Iran as a major threat to stability in the Arab world.
- [Saudi Arabia Stresses Unity to Confront Iran Meddling in Arab Affairs](#)
Amid the most recent flair-up between the Arab world and Iran in 2018 (resulting in the suspension of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Iran), Saudi Arabia has called for greater Arab unity in confronting Iran and pointed out the Arab League's failure to do so.

Topic IV: Developing strategies and standards for mediation to resolve conflicts among member states, emphasizing the necessity for political solutions to military conflicts and avoiding escalation.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

The Charter of the Arab League contains clear restrictions on the threat or use of force in resolving disputes among member states, as well as provisions allowing for the Arab League to serve as a forum for dispute mediation. These provisions are enshrined in Article 5, which states that, “If there should arise among them a difference which does not concern a state's independence, sovereignty, or territorial integrity, and if the parties to the dispute have recourse to the Council for the settlement of this difference, the decision of the Council shall then be enforceable and obligatory.”¹⁰ Article 5 further states that the League decisions of arbitration and mediation are taken by majority vote, and with unanimous agreement the League will have the power to repulse aggression. Despite the long history of conflict in the Arab world, the provisions of Article 5 have only been invoked four times in League history: first in 1961 to monitor the Iraqi-Kuwait border, second in 1976 to establish the Arab Deterrent Force in Lebanon, third in 1990 to repulse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and finally in 2011 to send an observer mission to Syria. A much more common method of mediation has simply been to bypass the Arab League altogether and seek state-sponsored mediation by a third party. This reliance on third party states has in many cases undermined the mediation and arbitration capacity of the Arab League.

B. History in the Arab World

Since the 1980s the Arab League has developed a lacklustre reputation as a mediator of Arab disputes. Even in the clearest case of intra-Arab aggression, when Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait in 1990, the League's response was nearly paralyzed by Iraq's allies in Jordan and the PLO. For this reason, member-states have since preferred third-party mediation, usually by a powerful Arab state. Two prime examples of this both involve Lebanon. In 1989, a settlement was negotiated under the auspices of Saudi Arabia to resolve the ongoing civil war in what became the Taif Agreement. Yet again, amid the political crisis in Lebanon in 2008, Lebanon's political class looked to Qatar to negotiate the Doha Agreement which ended the crisis. Most recently, during the ongoing dispute pitting Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates against Qatar, the parties involved have largely bypassed the Arab League as a mediating partner and instead sought states like Kuwait or the Sudan to host bilateral negotiations.

The refusal of many member-states to accept the mediating role of the Arab League damages the organization's international reputation, calling its relevancy into question. Perceptions of bias, inability, and inefficiency all prevent the Arab League from fulfilling its powers as entailed in the Charter, while the reliance on third parties to arbitrate intra-Arab disputes causes divisions and hurts Arab unity.

¹⁰ Charter of the League of Arab States

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

The Arab League today faces several enormous conflicts, both inter- and intra-state. The GCC-Qatar conflict has garnered the most international attention, but there are equally threatening disputes between Egypt and the Sudan over Nile Water, and disputes between Maghreb states over the status of the Western Sahara. Moreover, there are numerous opportunities for the League to mediate intra-state disputes in Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Somalia. However, despite these opportunities, many Arab states still prefer to seek out third-party states to mediate rather than turn to the Arab League. Any solution to this “crisis of credibility” will have to identify and correct the perceived failings of the Arab League as a mediating partner, and develop new strategies to increase the responsibility and efficiency of the Arab League when it comes to mediating intra-Arab disputes.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Does my country view the Arab League as an honest negotiating partner? What challenges exist to the credibility of the Arab League?
- How have past disputes involving my country been settled? Did that course of action give a satisfactory result?
- Should the Arab League have a role in conflict mediation among Arab states? What are the alternatives?
- How do other international bodies handle conflict resolution among their member-states? Are these models appropriate to be applied within the Arab League?
- Should UN bodies like the International Court of Justice have a role to play in mediating intra-Arab disputes?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Why has the Arab League failed historically to be included in dispute mediation between Arab states? Can these failures be addressed without major Arab League reforms?
- How can the Arab League incentivize member-states to approach the League as a mediating partner?
- Should the Arab League delegate its mediating powers to third party state actors?
- In what areas can the League function as a mediating partner in 2018/2019? Are some disputes more appropriate for the Arab League than others?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Charter of the League of Arab States](#)
Officially adopted in 1945 in Alexandria, Egypt, the Arab Pact (or Charter) codified the spirit of Arab unity prevalent in the 1940s-1960s and remains the longest-serving experiment to unify the Arab world. It constitutes the basis of the Arab League to this day.
- [Mediation and Conflict in the Arab World](#)
This essay by the Egyptian diplomat Hesham Yousef traces the historical role of the Arab League in mediating intra-Arab disputes and identifies several of its shortcomings when it comes to providing mediation to Arab disputes.
- [Setbacks in Arab League Mediation on Lebanon](#)
This 2008 article by the Washington Institute highlights the failure of the Arab League to mediate the political crisis in Lebanon, and the eventual triumph of a third-party state actor, in this case Qatar.
- [The Limits of Mediation in the Arab Spring: The Case of Syria](#)
This 2016 article provides a useful overview of Arab League attempts to mediate the Syrian conflict and its eventual failure.