



Structure, Activities and Challenges of the Arab League and other Organisations in the Arab States

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Abstract: *This study is a contemporary examination of the structure, activities and challenges of the Arab League and its members. Our findings are that the Arab League differs from the European Union and other organizations on the basis of values, laws, politics, civil and human rights. We observed that in spite of over seventy years of its existence, there is deep misunderstanding among Arab countries. Each state concentrates on its individual interests while disregarding the whole. The Arab League is committed to resolving constantly popping-up internal disagreements within its framework. Their political, religious and ethnic values are highly hampered with other countries and organizations that are not members of the Arab League, such as the United States of America, Britain and so forth.*

Keywords: *Arab league, Arab states, activities, challenges, structure*

1. Introduction

Seven states formed the Arab League on March 22, 1945, defining its main goals as to: *Serve the common good of all Arab countries, ensure better conditions for all Arab countries, guarantee the future of all Arab countries and fulfill the hopes and expectations of all Arab countries.* The Egyptian government first proposed the Arab League in 1943. Egypt and some of the other Arab States wanted closer cooperation without the loss of self-rule that would result from total union. This study is a comparative analysis of the Arab League and other organizations in the Arab States. The Arab League is the popular name for the League of Arab States. It was formed in 1945, in an attempt to give political expression to the Arab nations. It is a voluntary association of independent Countries whose people are mainly Arabic Speaking. Its purposes are to strengthen ties among the member states, coordinate their policies, and promote their common interests (Wikipedia, Encyclopedia, 2013).

Each member-state of the League shall deposit with the Secretary-General one copy of treaty or agreement concluded or to be concluded in the future between itself and another

member-state of the League or a third state (Article XVII). By Article XVIII, if a member-state contemplates withdrawal from the League shall inform the Council of its intention one year before such withdrawal is to come into effect. The Council of the League may consider any state which fails to fulfill its obligations under the Charter as separated from the League, this to go into effect upon a unanimous decision of the states, not counting the state concerned. The Charter may be amended with the consent of two thirds of the states belonging to the League, especially order to make firmer and stronger the ties between the member-states, to create an Arab Tribunal of Arbitration, and to regulate the relations of the League with any international bodies to be created in the relations of the League with any international bodies to be created in the future to guarantee security and peace (Article XIX). Where a state does not accept such an amendment it may withdraw at such time as the amendment goes into effect, without being bound by the provisions of the preceding Article Charter of Arab League, Encyclopedia of the Orient). Article XX provides that the Charter and its annexure shall be ratified according to the basic laws in force among the High Contracting parties. The instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the Council and the Charter shall become operative as regards each ratifying state fifteen days after the Secretary-General has received the instruments of ratification from four states.

2. Structure and Activities of the Arab League: An Analysis

The League is organized into a Council, special committees, and a permanent secretariat; the secretariat has its headquarters in Cairo. The supreme organ of the Arab League is its Council, made up of all the member state; each state has one vote. Unanimous Council decisions are binding on all members. Majority decisions are binding only on those members who accepted them. The Council convenes twice annually, in March and September. It convenes in special session upon the request of two member states whenever the need arises. The League appoints, by two-thirds majority, a secretary general, who is in charge of the administration and financial offices, called the secretariat general. The secretariat general is divided into several departments concerned with political, economic, social, and legal affairs. Other specialized agencies connected with the League include the Arab League Educational, Cultural, Scientific Organization; and the Arab League Labour Organization.

The Arab League is involved in political, economic, cultural and social programs designed to promote the interests of member states. The League has served as a forum for member states to coordinate their policy positions and deliberate on matters of common concern, settling some Arab disputes and limiting conflicts such as the Lebanese Civil Wars of 1958. The Arab League has served as a platform for the drafting and conclusion of almost all landmark documents promoting economic integration among member states, such as the creation of the Joint Arab Economic Action Charter, which set out the principles of economic activities of the League. It has played an important role in shaping school curricula, and preserving manuscripts and Arab cultural heritage³. The League has launched literacy campaigns, and reproduced intellectual works, and translated modern technical terminology for the use of member states. It

encourages measures against crime and drug abuse and deals with labour issues (particularly among the emigrant Arab workforce). The League has also fostered cultural exchanges between member states, encouraged youth and sports programs, helped to advance the role of women in Arab societies, and promoted child welfare activities.

Among the most important activities of the Arab League have been its attempts to coordinate Arab economic life; efforts toward this aim include the Arab Telecommunication Union (1953), the Arab Postal Union (1954), and the Arab Development Bank (1959, later known as the Arab Financial Organization). The Arab Common Market was established in 1965 and is open to all Arab League Members. The common market agreement provides for the eventual abolition of customs on natural resources and agricultural products, free movement of capital and labor among member countries, and coordination of economic development.

In 1945, the League supported Syria and Lebanon in their disputes with France and also demanded an independent Libya; in 1961, it supported Tunisia in a conflict with France. The League early announced opposition to the formation of a Jewish State in Palestine and demanded that Palestine as a whole be made independent, with the majority of its population Arab. When the state of Israel was created in 1948, the League countries jointly attacked it, but Israel resisted successfully. The League continued to maintain a boycott of Israel and of companies trading with Israel. The summit conferences of 1964-65 established a joint Arab military command, which proved unsuccessful in implementing a united strategy for the liberation of Palestine.

Egypt's membership was suspended from 1979 to 1989 because of its treaty with Israel, and the League's headquarters were moved to Tunis. In 1988 the League endorsed the PLO's Plan for a negotiated settlement with Israel, and in 1991 Cairo once again became its headquarters. In 2002, the League for the first time offered Israel normal relations with Arab countries in exchange for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 internationally recognized borders, many of those conditions were not acceptable to Israel. For many years, closer political unity among members was hampered by a division between pro-Western member countries and neutralist or pro-Soviet ones, more recently the division has been between militant Islamic fundamentalists and Arab moderates. The League ultimately supported Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), but was divided over the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990. In 1993, the League issues a statement condemning all forms of terrorism. The US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, also entailed persistent internal armed resistance supported by some members of the Arab League like Iran and Syria. The constitution of the league provides for coordination among the signatory nations on education, finance. Law, trade, and foreign policy, and it forbids the use of force to settle disputes among members. A joint defense treaty was signed in 1950. in 2005, an Arab Parliament. The issues the parliament may discuss, however, are restricted to the social, economic, and cultural spheres. That Arab League has also made attempts at settling the present Israeli-Palestinian conflicts and Israeli-Lebanese conflict.

3. Challenges Faced by Arab League in Resolving Regional Crises

The Arab League (AL), formed over half a century ago, is facing great challenges as it

struggles to be relevant within the Arab states and avoid being sidelined in resolving regional crises. Analysts believe the future of the Pan-Arab organization largely depends on whether it can maintain its fragile internal unity and play a constructive role in resolving three pressing regional issues: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Lebanese-Israeli conflict, and also the Iraq conflict. As its membership has expanded from seven to 22, the Arab League is struggling to maintain a fragile internal unity. The delaying of some year's AL summit showed how hard it is for the organization to stick to its mission. On March 27, 2006, two days before a scheduled AL summit, Tunisia, the host country, made a surprise announcement to postpone the meeting, tantamount to dropping a bombshell to the pan-Arab organization. The Secretary-General Amr Moussa, a strong supporter of Arab unity, said shortly after the announcement that the postponement would have a "grave" impact on collective Arab action. The scheduled summit would be the first to be held after a US-led war on Iraq while its postponement was also the first of its kind in the league's 70-year history. The summit finally managed to be held on May 22-23, 2006, nearly two months later than the original date, as a result of intensive cross-country discussions and consultations. Only 14 heads of states were present while the other eight leaders bowed out for various reasons. "Libya sees itself forced to boycott the summit because it does not agree with the agenda", said Ghaddafi, accusing the pan-Arab bloc of failing to take up his proposal for a single Palestinian-Israeli State.

Libya has repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the 22-member Arab League, only reversed its decision after been persuaded by other Arab States. Sayed Eliwa, professor at Helwan University in Cairo, said it was a deep failure and the Arab people would probably pay a dear price for it. Eliwa stated that: "There is deep misunderstanding among Arab countries. Each state concentrates on its individual interests while disregarding the whole". While Kemal, the AL deputy secretary general for Palestinian affairs stated thus: Though Arab countries have common religion, culture and language, it is regrettable that we have no common vision for the future like the European Union" It is unacceptable that some people accuse the Arab League bitterly to weaken or abort its role. The Arab League is committed to resolving constantly popping-up internal disagreements within its framework, which is exactly what it should do. There is deep misunderstanding among Arab countries. The Palestinians presented the most acute example of the tension between national fighting among themselves, in particular in Beirut after the attempt to form a defined nation-state led to clashes with Islamic peoples and government. In 1970 the conflict had been with the government of Jordan. In the 1980s it was with governments of Lebanon and Syria. The Palestinian cause was therefore totally ambiguous. The appeal was across frontiers and nations, to an Islamic idealism. The practical necessity was to determine where to build a state and how that state was to be administered. Harmony had to be replaced with competition and uncertainty. In addition, Islamic nationalism could also be radical, complicating further the loyalty to international Moslem ideals. In Libya, and even in Iraq, a radical political solution was sought which was not acceptable to many of the established Arab states like Jordan or Saudi Arabia, or more especially to the Gulf states which were facing the

possibility of declining wealth in the 1980s as oil prices dropped and the war between Iraq and Iran continued. Presently, the Arab League is faced with such problems as the US invasion of Iraq, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Lebanese-Israeli conflict.

4. Comparisons with Other Organizations

The Arab League resembles the Organization of American States, the Council of Europe, or the African Union, in that it has primarily political aims; one can regard each of these organizations as a regional version of the United Nations. However, its membership is based on culture rather than geographical location (which is the basis for membership of the other organizations cited above). The Arab League differs notably from some other regional organizations such as the European Union, in that it has not achieved any significant degree of regional integration. The Arab League also differs from the European Union in respect of values, laws, political, civil and human rights. This general conformity was instrumental in securing the ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights, perhaps the most comprehensive and effective document of its kind. It also advanced the creation of a European Court for Human Rights to oversee the convention's enforcement. This court is unmatched in the scope of its competence and power to issue binding and enforceable rulings obtaining membership in the EU, which was once restricted to a handful of western European countries, is conditional upon the applicant's ability to demonstrate that it abides by a specific set of human rights guarantees. Greece, for example, was ejected from the European Council in the 1960s following the coup that overthrew its elected government, and neither Spain, Portugal nor Greece were allowed entry into the European Union until they had established solid democratic systems. In addition, civil society institutions in European countries can pursue their activities unimpeded. All these factors ensure the success of the European Commission on Human Rights and Civil Society. They do not necessarily obtain in the Arab World. The Arab League unlike the European Union have also failed to fulfill its mission and ensure better conditions for Arab countries as political repression and poverty are still rampant throughout the Arab world; some, even within the Arab world, have called for it to be disbanded.

5. Conclusion

The Arab League and Member states in the Arab League have serious disagreements among themselves, which has negatively affected them. There is deep misunderstanding among Arab countries. Each state concentrates on its individual interests while disregarding the whole. The Arab League is committed to resolving constantly popping-up internal disagreements within its framework. Their political, religious and ethnic values are highly hampered with other countries and organizations that are not members of the Arab League, such as the United States of America, Britain and so forth. Their radical *modus operandi* for the pursuit of Moslem ideals has also made them to have conflicts with the larger society. Poverty, terrorism, war and other vices have adversely affected them.

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