The "Rebirth" of a Dead Organization?: Questioning the Role of the Arab League in the "Arab Uprisings" Process

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Abstract

The League of Arab States, known as the Arab League (AL), has historically proven to be largely ineffective in its endeavors at conflict resolution within and between Arab states. The AL has had neither impact nor respect in the region. However, since 2011 it has demonstrated uncharacteristically decisive stances during political uprisings in Libya and Syria, raising hopes for it becoming a more effective regional actor. Some scholars evaluate these attempts as signalling the rebirth and reassertion of the AL, while others consider them as a façade for appeasing the protesters and international society. Many also see the AL as having continued its passive stance.

This paper analyzes the involvement of the AL in political upheavals, unrests as well as civil wars that emerged along with the Arab Uprisings and asks whether the AL has played an 'effective role' or has 'functioned well' in adressing security challenges and in efforts mediating disputes in member states. In other words, whether it has acted purposively and has been able to shape outcomes in the Arab Uprisings process.

Drawing from the literature on regional organizations, this article focuses on AL's main organizing principle, institutional capacity and operational experience to evaluate its performance in addressing security challenges

and contributing to conflict resolution. It is argued that the AL can not turn into an effective regional organization because of problems with its overemphasis on sovereignty as an organizing principle, organizational weaknesses and difficulties in decision making, and lack of credibility. In order to be more effective, it needs to enhance human rights protection mechanisms and play a proactive role at least in post-conflict situations.

Key Words

Arab League, 'Arab Uprisings', regional organizations, conflict resolution, human rights.

Introduction

Since December 2010, starting with Tunisia, many countries in the Arab world including Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria observed mass mobilizations in the form of street protests and revolts, which have come to be called the Arab Spring, Arab Uprising(s), Arab Awakening, and Arab Revolts. Arab states have been heavily influenced by these developments and the political landscape has been transformed

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by the events that forced governmental change in Egypt and Tunisia, destabilized Yemen and Bahrain, and led to civil war in Libya and Syria. The League of Arab States, known as The Arab League (AL) intervened in this political transformation process as the sole regional organization of which all of the self-identified Arab states are members. It appeared as a natural regional interlocutor despite the fact that it has long been known as an ineffective organization that supports the traditional status quo in the region. However, some scholars and journalists argue that the AL has proven to be a more useful regional organization during the Arab Uprisings, particularly in Libya and Syria, because it has attempted to take a stance against dictatorial regimes and to favour popular calls for democracy.[1] The Arab Uprisings transformed the AL because it diverged from its traditional philosophy of non-intervention towards involvement in Arab states' domestic affairs.[2] Some analysts linked this proactivity with the growing influence of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which are able to dominate the AL because of their wealth, and the ongoing internal problems of traditional Arab countries such as Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.[3] Colombo has identified a "double standard approach", in which these two countries influenced the AL in an inconsistent and interest-driven way.[4] For example, while they supported the Bahraini monarchy against the protestors without raising the issue to the AL, they chose to utilize the AL to call for international military involvement in Libya and Syria.

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On the other hand, evidence shows that the AL's stance on Libya and Syria is not a radical shift. First, the AL failed to undertake efforts at independent dispute resolution in Libya. In Syria, there are particular diplomatic constraints limiting actions, and the AL retains a fundamental lack of institutional capacity to resolve the conflict without reliance on international support. Hence, even if the regional balance of power were not in favor of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the AL would only be able to play a limited role because of other factors than regional power distribution.

Drawing from the literature on regional organizations, this article focuses on the factors of main organizing principle, institutional capacity and operational experience to evaluate the AL's performance in addressing security challenges and contributing to conflict resolution. It is argued that the AL

has neither the willingness to play a substantial role due to its over-emphasis on sovereignty, nor the adequate institutional capacity to become an effective agent due to its organizational weaknesses and difficulties in decision making and enforcement procedures. The League also lacks credibility due to its poor record in solving previous conflicts and enforcing human rights protection. Nevertheless, the AL's quest for an active role and for visibility in intra-state disputes has been observable during the Arab Uprisings, particularly in the Libyan and Syrian crises. Thus, it can be said to have displayed tenacity and flexibility in its diplomatic initiatives, played a salient role in the internationalization of issues, and questioned the possibility of adopting new measures like building a specific regional peace-keeping force.

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The paper will review the literature on regional organizations and the ways in which organizations achieve collective action, in order to provide a theoretical framework for assessing the performance of the AL. Similar to many other regional bodies, the AL was designated as the provider of a forum for mediating disputes. Hence, it has been expected that it would take some collective initiatives to settle members' intra-states disputes that occurred along with the region-wide Arab Uprisings, thus threatening the security of the entire region. The literature on regional organizations provides answers for the following questions that are also important in examining and measuring the effectiveness of the AL. These questions include issues of why organizations like the AL are established in the first place, which functions they should carry out, ways in which their performances can be evaluated, and which factors influence their performance. After this review, the paper moves on to discuss the historical background of the AL and to present evidence of the AL's initiatives during various crises. The discussion section will provide an analysis of factors influencing the League's performance.

Regional Organizations, Functions and Measuring Effectiveness

Economic and political cooperation attempts through regional organizations

have been long observed in world politics. Since the end of the Cold War, the number and scope of regional organizations have extended and they gotten more involved in practising collective action in security challenges. Countries share interests and problems related to their security that can be only solved through regional coordination and cooperation. The UN also acknowledged the importance of regional arrangements by stating in its Charter that mediation initiated and managed by regional agencies is one of the techniques for solving international conflicts, and UN members are encouraged to "make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements."[5]

There has been a growing scholarly literature on regional organizations. While some studies examine organizations' institutional mechanisms and autonomy, some others analyze the conditions under which these organizations become a significant actors in regional and global governance or able to produce collective security goods.[6] A plethora of studies focus on single cases to evaluate the performance of a given organization in a certain sector.[7] The field of study has been mainly dominated by empirical and theoretical research on the European Union (EU). There have also been scholarly attempts to compare different cases in order to reach generalizations.[8]

Theoretically, regional organisations can have two different functions for regional peace. Classic, neofunctional theory approaches regional integration as a driving force for peace. States prefer forming regional bodies to create common platforms for diplomacy, economic, political and cultural interactions that will inhibit neighbors from using military means. The advantage of creating a zone of peace and prosperity or "a security community" is acknowledged by all its members.[9] The EU integration process is taken as the first and most succesful example serving for this function, because it exemplifies how a regional organization transformed from being simply an instrument for economic cooperation to being a political actor, and for creating a zone of peace.

The second theoretical approach focuses on the importance of explaining the origins and the management of conflicts at the regional level.[10] The end of the Cold War demonstrated that conflicts are not confined to nation-states, they have serious implications at the subregional and regional levels in the forms of refugee flows, proliferation of weapons, and export of violence.[11] National mechanisms are often inadequate to meet these challenges and there is therefore the need to develop regional arrangements for sustainable regional peace. So, the regionalization of conflict is the reason for forming or reactivating existent regional organizations. They may contribute by containing unrest, limiting the spread and adverse impacts

of violent conflicts, and solving them in order to avoid disastrous humanitarian and developmental effects as well as to stop spillover effects into the region. It has been argued that post-Cold War conflict management would be better served by an increased focus on regional, rather than global multilateralism.[12]

Borrowing from the literature on international organizations, the effectiveness of a regional organization can be measured by examining their outputs' (referring to their programmes, operational and information activities) contributions to resolving international problems that individual states are unable to tackle and/or to influencing target actors' policies in ways conducive to the achievement of the organization's governance role.[13] A recent article by Kirchner and Dominguez provides a typology for possible instruments that regional organizations may use in security governance in a region. These are: i) stipulation of presence of treaty provisions or strategic statements with regard to security governance ii) the provision of coordination actions permitting the organization to assume roles of agenda setter, consensus maker, and lead actor, iii) implementation of common policies involving the monitoring of policies, the administration of funds and the management of personnel such as in peacemaking or peacekeeping missions and iv) enforcement and solidarity provisions via institutional courts and

bodies or via force. These instruments are used by regional organizations to become effective in preventing, mitigating, and solving both interstate and intrastate conflicts. Some might argue that using force, in particular, serves well for ending violent conflicts, nevertheless it is a less preferred instrument by member states.

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Abdel-Fatau Musah's empirical study on the the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) demonstrates that a regional organization can be effective in conflict management. ECOWAS bears some resemblance to the AL because it was established with the idea of pan-Africanism (like Pan-Arabism in the case of AL) and with a goal of establishing a larger West-African State (like the ideal of a united Arab States). It also works in a very conflict intensive region, West Africa (like the Middle East).[14] Unlike the AL, it has proven to be an effective regional organization, since its involvement in Liberia (1989-96) provided greater civilian political oversight with fewer

civilian causalties and instances of human rights violations. It was also able to contain crises in Guinea Bissou (2003) and Togo (2005), preventing the descent of those political upheavals into outright wars.[15] ECOWAS used some of the instruments Kirchner and Dominguez introduced in their typology. It has treaty provisions with regards to security governance like many regional organizations. Furthermore, when an internal conflict or unrest emerges, the ECOWAS Council of the Wise and Special Mediators intervene to seek for immediate political solutions through fact finding missions and facilitiation. If resolution does not work out, vanguard forces are deployed to seperate the belligerents and limit the spread and adverse impact of conflict. Then, according to the circumstances, force may be expanded to stabilize the situation. ECOWAS forces are then converted into a UN mission.[16]

It is expected that, similar to ECOWAS, the AL could be involved in the resolution of disputes and conflicts that arise in the region, including intrastate conflicts. It could contribute to fewer civilian causalties and instances of human rights violations, and help to contain crises and to prevent the descent of political upheavals into outright wars. Since it was not able to achieve any of these functions in the intrastate political upheavals and unrest in Tunusia, Egypt and Libya or to help in preventing the

ongoing civil war in Syria, it might be considered as ineffective in its involvement. The detailed evidence supporting this argument will be provided below. The important question is, why was it ineffective?

The literature on regionalism proposes some factors that influence the degree of regional organizations' empowerment and their ability to take collective action in solving the regional problems.[17] Factors can be grouped as those related to member states, regional common characteristics, and organizational characteristics. Factors related to member states are economic factors (human development, economic freedom, and government effectiveness), and political factors (corruption, rule of law and political rights).[18] Factors related to regional characteristics include the systemic and sub-systemic power distributions in a given region, and the presence or absence of extra regional institutions and non-state actors. Factors related to organizational characteristics include the history of the given institution, its organizing principle, its mandate, institutional mechanisms and operational experiences.[19] In addition, the nature and the intensity of regional problems may influence the capacity of organizations.

This article will focus on the role of organizational characteristics to evaluate AL's effectiveness in taking collective action in intra-state conflicts during

the Arab Uprisings. Hence, it will test three hypotheses: i) an overemphasis on sovereignty as an organizing principle inhibits the organization's ability to take collective action, thus it has an impact on the AL's effectiveness; ii) the weaknesses in the AL's institutional mechanisms and its lack of adequate operational experiences negatively influence its effectiveness; 3) the AL's poor performance in previous crises creates a credibility problem and this influences its level of effectiveness. Before discussing these hypotheses, a look at the background of the AL is in order.

Regional Organizations in the Arab World and the Arab League

Middle Eastern countries constitute a regional system due to their geographic proximity, common language, religion, social culture, political and economic commonalities, as well as more or less similar historical experiences (with the exception of Israel and Iran).[20] However, the area is relatively under-regionalized and less-integrated, and it lacks a functioning collective economic, political and security framework.[21] As Balamir Coşkun notes: "In the Middle East, regionalization of conflict has been realized, but it has failed to generate durable regional structures for conflict prevention and conflict management."[22]

The Arab League's poor performance in previous crises creates a credibility problem.

The roots of integration attempts in the region can be traced back to the 19th century, when Arabs living under the authority of the Ottoman Empire aspired to establish some kind of union.[23] Since then, the ideal of Arabism, then Pan-Arabism have been sustained among mainly Arab nationalists, who believed that Arab countries should achieve unity since they share the same interests, geography, history and culture, they are therefore entitled to form a union.[24] Serious proposals were set forth after the Second World War. General Nuri al-Said of Iraq proposed to reunify Syria, the Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan as one State and to form an Arab League with a permanent Council. The council would be responsible for common defence, foreign affairs, currency, communications, custom and protection of minority rights.[25] On 25 September 1944, a Preparatory Committee, composed of the delegates of the Arab states, met in Alexandria in order to discuss the various proposals about the unity scheme. The idea of full union was found unattainable given the fact that countries did not want to give up their sovereignty. The Preparatory Committee, except for Saudi-Arabia and Yemen,

decided to sign the Alexandria Protocol on 7 October 1944, thus providing a base for the establishment of a League of Arab States. It would be governed by a council called the Council of the League of Arab States, whose membership would be based on the sovereign equality of the member states.[26] The League of Arab States, then known as the Arab League, emerged with the signing of a modified version of the 1944 Alexandria Protocol, by the delegates from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on 22 March 1945. Since its establishment, membership in the AL has been limited to independent Arab states.[27] As of 2013, it has 22 member states, including Syria, whose membership is currently suspended. It leaves out major non-Arab regional actors in the Middle East, namely Iran, Israel, and Turkey, although Turkey has joined in many summits of the AL as an observer, along with Brazil, Eritrea, India and Venezuela. Turkey also established the Turkish-Arab Cooperation Forum within the AL in 2007.[28]

As pointed out above, the AL has been part of the broader and ambitious political project of Pan-Arabism. The idea of Arab unity was bolstered by the foundation of Israel and the long-lasting Arab-Israeli conflict. The motivation behind the AL's establishment confirms the second theoretical function of regional organizations, "regionalization of conflict". The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a true-sense regionalized conflict, threatening to many Arab countries. Similar to other conflicts, it has led to refugee flows, proliferation of weapons, and export of violence with serious spillover effects in the region. Arab countries have sought for ways in which they could act collectively against the security threat, thus common threat and common Arab identity have emerged as uniting themes. They aim to build closer relations and to coordinate their political activities in collaboration through the AL.

On the other hand, member states of the AL have a strong stance against any form of organization that would be perceived as a threat to their sovereignty.[29] Since its establishment, the AL guarantees to safeguard member states' independence and sovereignty, as well as to take the affairs and interests of all Arab countries into account.[30] Sovereignty has been emphasized in all treaty provisions, statements and practices as a main organizing principle. Article Eight of the League Charter states that "each member state shall respect the systems of governments established in the other member states and regard them as exclusive concerns of those states." Such emphasis on sovereignty is closely related to the characteristics of the member states. Many of them are authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes enjoying very limited legitimacy and have inward-looking survival strategies aimed at

consolidating the personal power of their leaders.[31] Not only competing domestic political agendas, but also the suspicion and lack of trust derived from the history of bilateral relations, hinders possible cooperation.[32] Therefore, political factors related to member states and regional characteristics have influenced the organizational characteristics of the organization. Member states prefer to grant very little autonomy to the AL, in order to maintain the status quo in internal and regional affairs.[33] As Barnett and Solingen have argued, the "League's design should not be seen as an unintended outcome but instead as the result of the clear imperative of regime survival that led Arab leaders to prefer weak regional organizations."[34] The sanctity of state sovereignty, as an organizing principle, has therefore been an important impediment to the AL in taking an active role in regional affairs, specifically in intervening in intra-state conflicts. What about the other organizational characteristics of the AL that can affect its performance, including its mandate, decision-making procedures, organs and operational capacity?

The main decision-making organ of the AL is the Council of the League, made up of representatives of the member states. The General Secretariat is the executive body which administers day-to-day affairs. All secretaries of the League have been Egyptians, except

for the period between 1979 and 1991 when Egypt was expelled due to its peace treaty with Israel. The AL also has a special Council of Ministers, the transitional Arab Parliament, which has no legislative power, and a number of permanent committees dealing with cultural, economic and political issues. An informal component of the League's operational structure is the 'summit conferences' of the Arab heads of state. In terms of decision making, all substantive matters related to security and political issues require unanimity, and majority decisions are binding only for those members who vote for them.[35] The AL's voting system also makes the implementation of policies difficult. All substantive matters related to security and political issues require unanimity, which hinders achieving possible consensus, drafting common policies, and implementing them. Majority decisions are binding only for those members that vote for them. Implicitly this means that each state has a virtual veto power. Taking a majority vote is very daunting task, as there are conflicting interests among member states. The AL had adopted more than 4,000 resolutions by the 1980s, of which 80 % were never implemented.[36]

The areas of cooperation in the AL have been very limited. It has performed poorly in terms of economic cooperation, with limited inter-Arab trade and insignificant intra-regional

capital movements within the Arab world. In terms of political cooperation, a formal commitment to international human rights law only entered League conventions in 2004. This was ratified in 2008, when eleven members agreed to adopt the Arab Charter on Human Rights.[37] The human rights organs of the AL include the Permanent Human Rights Commission, the Arab Human Rights Committee, the Human Rights Department, and the Arab Court on Human Rights. The Permanent Human Rights Commission, established in 1968, is still in charge of the protection of human rights.[38] Its principal focus has been on Israel's human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Arab Human Rights Committee is the treaty body attached to the Arab Charter on Human Rights (1994, 2005). The committee can only use official state reports and information from NGOs that are registered in their countries of origin.[39] Another body within the AL, the Human Rights Department is under the authority of the Secretary General, and is supervised by the Assistant Secretary General for Legal Affairs; however it lacks a clear mandate. The last organ, the Court, is still at the planning and establishment stage. The principle of its establishment was adopted by the Member States during the Arab Summit in Doha in March 2013. Once established, individuals may raise cases about human rights violations, often perpetrated by member states.[40]

Although there are different organs in charge of human rights issues, the AL is very weak in terms of its human rights regime. This is categorized as a weak declaratory regime which includes norms but no significant decision-making procedure. It provides guidelines to member states, but these are inadequate to encourage states to implement norms and disseminate information concerning state practices. Also, it does not have bodies or procedures to determine whether violations have occurred or not. It lacks binding enforcement authority, such as judicial or quasi-judicial mechanisms or the use of force.[41] More specifically, it does not have a mandate to publicly qualify the human rights situation in member states, to investigate any allegations, to issue recommendations and resolutions, or to decide on interim measures in a given situation.[42] As the states are political representatives, it is highly unlikely that the victims of human rights violations themselves would bring cases to the AL.

Another possible field for cooperation for regional organizations is that of collective security. The AL anticipated only interstate conflicts, and its legal instruments and protocols were thus created according to interstate conflicts not intrastate conflicts, because of its emphasis on sovereignty principle. However, the League`s Charter did not propose a goal of collective defense or security. Only article five of the Charter

authorizes the Council for dispute mediation and settlement.[43] According to Pinfari, "The Council of the League was from its inception designated as the provider of 'good offices' for mediating disputes that could have led to the use of force, and as the forum in which acts of 'aggressions' should be addressed."[44] However, the AL's involvement in conflict resolution and use of force are only authorised under very strict conditions. The council may become involved in arbitration if the dispute "does not involve the independence of a State, its sovereignty or its territorial integrity," and if "the two contending parties apply to the Council for the settlement of this dispute". Further: "The decisions relating to arbitration and mediation shall be taken by a majority vote."[45] Such conditionality makes the involvement of the AL very difficult in political crises/conflicts between member states, and almost impossible in crises/conflicts within member states. In 2008, the Council got involved in the resolution of the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea at the request of Djibouti and decided to send in a fact-finding mission on the ground.[46] In the same year, the Council reacted strongly against the conviction of

Sudanese president Omar El-Beshir by the International Criminal Court.[47]

The absence of a supranational authority and any kind of authorization that requires member states' compliance on decisions can be also included as an institutional constraint. Hence, instruments introduced by Krishner and Dominquez can be seen as still very weak in the case of the AL, despite its long history. For example, it lacks central institutional courts and bodies to enforce its provisions due to an overemphasis on sovereignty. It is only able to suspend membership within the organization or impose sanctions.

> The AL is required to involve itself in developments related to the Arab Uprisings because it is the sole regional organization in which all self-identified Arab states are members.

Despite the presence of some conflict resolution mechanisms, the League has had a bad record in this field, which creates the problem of credibility. Differentiating among various types of conflicts (inter-state wars, civil wars, boundary wars and political crises), Pinfari finds that the League intervened repeatedly in minor wars, and succeeded in promoting at least a partial settlement in 40 % (8 out of 20) of the recorded boundary wars and political crises. Between 1945 and 2008, the AL was involved in 19 of 56 regional conflicts. It had a 21 % success rate for its direct and partial contributions.[48] Pinfari adds that the

League proved hesitant to mediate in civil conflicts when major regional powers were involved.[49] It did not behave like a typical mediator in intrastate wars or extra-systemic conflicts in the Middle East, because member states have tended to refuse to call for any intervention in intrastate conflict.[50] As a result, the AL had to bypass many conflicts and crises arising in the region. It only managed to impose mediation in six of 77 inter-Arab conflicts, which it dealt with between 1945 and 1981.[51] Three important exceptions to the League's pattern of intervention, when it succeeded in reaching some resolution, were the Kuwait-Iraq dispute in 1961, Iraq's 1973 attack on Kuwait. and the 1976-77 conflict between Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania.[52] In the last two decades, the AL has also played a mediator/observer role in some regional issues. These include its role in negotiations to end the Israel-Lebanon war in July/August 2006, the Doha Agreement between pro- and anti-government forces in Lebanon in May 2008, and the partition of Sudan in 2011. In the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, the AL held emergency meetings, issued joint Arab declarations, pleaded with the international community to exert pressure on Israel and sought to influence the drafting of UN Resolution 1701 to put an end to hostilities. In the 2008 Lebanon case, a Qatari-led delegation and AL officials worked together under the umbrella of the AL to end the political crisis and intermittent violence that had been ongoing for 18 months in Lebanon. They also convinced the parties to elect Michael Suleiman, the consensus presidential candidate, to adopt a new electoral law, and they encouraged the formation of a unity government. In Sudan, the AL monitored the referendum held in March 2011 on the right of self-determination for southern Sudan.

During prolonged street protests in Bahrain and Oman in the summer of 2011, the AL kept its silence despite the fact that some human rights activists and opponents of the regime were ill-treated, tortured, imprisoned, lost their citizenship, and were given death sentences due to their political activities.

The AL received some credit for its performance in these instances. On the other hand, a number of historical developments have raised questions about the AL's credibility over the years. The first development was Egypt's agreement with Israel in 1979. The League had long tried to rally the reaction of Arab states against Israel because the Palestinian cause is of central importance

and is a unifying and mobilizing theme of regional politics.[53] However, many states favored a better relationship with Israel for their own domestic interests over the course of time. When Egypt, an influential member of the League, signed a peace agreement with Israel, it was expelled from the organization. The expulsion lasted between 1979 and 1989, but the AL's credibility was eroded as a result. The Gulf Wars were the second test for the AL. The First Gulf War seriously damaged what little remained of pan-Arabism, putting Arab regimes on competing sides of the war. The strategic vulnerabilities and preferences of states meant there was little success in building region-based Arab cooperative security. In the Second Gulf War, rhetoric condemned the war, even labeling it as an aggression against an Arab state, but practice followed states' interests. The AL held meetings at the ministerial level but it failed to generate a common stance due to objections, reservations and abstentions. While the AL condemned the war and called for the immediate withdrawal of Coalition forces from Iraq, it was neither able to prevent the American invasion of a member state nor to reconcile conflict among Iraqi factions. These demonstrated deeper polarizations within Arab countries, further weakening pan-Arabism and discrediting the AL. In the case of post-war Iraq, the presence of many factions raised the question of whether the AL could serve as an impartial mediator in internal Iraqi affairs. Al Marashi notes that Kurdish and Shiite Islamist factions in the Iraqi government were distrustful of the regional organization, as opposed to an Arab Sunni opposition that had called for a greater role for the League to counter American dominance in Iraq's political process.[54] The League's reconciliation initiative failed due to the conflict of identities, the lack of legitimacy and the credibility of the AL itself. As a final example, the League was also discredited by its inactivity over the genocide in Darfur carried out by Sudanese supported Arab militias.

Arab League Responses to the Arab Spring Revolts

The AL is required to involve itself in developments related to the Arab Uprisings because it is the sole regional organization in which all self-identified Arab states are members. The AL appeared as a possible regional interlocutor and a partner for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the UN, which preferred to coordinate with a regional actor to overcome their own legitimacy and credibility problems in the region.

While the AL was silent during the uprisings in Tunisia, it cancelled its annual summit in 2011 because of the turmoil there. At the first top level

AL meeting after the protests, an Arab economic summit held on 19 January 2011 in Cairo, the head of the AL, Amr Moussa, said that the "Arab soul is broken by poverty, unemployment and general recession", and he warned that "the Tunisian revolution is not far from us, Arab citizens entered an unprecedented state of anger and frustration."[55] As a response to this call, Arab leaders committed to grant US $2 billion to faltering economies. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait promised to pay half of the grant. But it was not clear how the funds would be dispersed and who would be qualified to benefit. In the same meeting, Egypt's (former) President Hosni Mubarek emphasized the importance of economic cooperation, framing it as a national security priority.[56] The AL proposal, based on grants, proves that it was not able to adequately address the roots of protests, particularly the serious limitations to the political freedom of Arab publics, and their social dissatisfaction compounded by corruption, nepotism, unemployment and lack of opportunities.[57] Grants were very much considered as 'bribes' to appease the masses and protect governments against uprisings, regardless of their poor human rights records, weak governance and political repression[58] The AL could be expected to take a firm stance in the beginning to address not only the economic roots of the problem but also Tunisians' call for dignity, equality and social justice. After the

president of Tunisia was ousted, however, the AL showed its support.[59] It called for Tunisians to reach a "national consensus on ways to bring the country out of this crisis in a way that guarantees respect for the will of the Tunisian people."[60] The AL's involvement in the post-revolution transitional period in Tunisia did not go further than this.

> As death tolls increased and the Syrian government failed in opening a dialogue, the AL suspended Syria's membership in an extraordinary meeting held on 12 November 2011.

In the case of the Arab Spring revolts in Egypt, Nabil Al-Araby, following the Egyptian Amr Moussa, was appointed as the AL secretary-general in May 2011. Al-Araby was well known due to his support of the Egyptian protest movements. He was among thirty high-profile Egyptians acting as liaisons between the protesters and the government, and then served as foreign minister in the post-revolution cabinet between March and May 2011 before taking up his post at the League. The AL's selection of Al-Araby was considered as demonstrating its support of the uprisings. But its support remained limited to this appointment. When the Egyptian case become more conflictual, culminating in an the ousting of the

Muslim Brotherhood government by the Egyptian army in 2013, the AL was asked by human rights organizations and networks in the region to take an active role and put the situation in Egypt on the agenda of the Council.[61] Despite this, however, the AL did not intervene in the Egyptian crisis.

In Libya, by contrast, the League showed a relatively strong stance. On 22 February 2011, it suspended Libya's membership. In March, it suggested the enforcement of a no-fly zone in cooperation with the African Union and then with the UN Security Council. This was considered as an "extraordinary move" by the Arab League because it invited Western military forces to intervene on Arab territory.[62] The UN passed Resolution 1973 authorizing member states to act both individually and in regional bodies to "take all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack…while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory"[63] All of these enabled NATO to play a decisive role in Libya for swinging the war to the rebel side.[64] NATO authorized several months of airstrikes in Libya, resulting in the ousting of Libya's leader, Muammer al-Qaddafi, after 30 years of rule. But the AL did not undertake serious mediation efforts following the outbreak of political instability in Libya, where there was and continues to be an urgent need for reconciliation between different warring

parties and restruction of political institutions in order to provide stability. This could thus be considered as evidence of the AL's unwillingness and/or ineffectiveness in post-conflict periods, as in Iraq after the Second Gulf War.[65] This ineffectiveness is closely related to the organizational characteristic. The AL may only mediate if conflicting parties request such action. The AL was not able to intervene in Libya because its help was not requested.

During prolonged street protests in Bahrain and Oman in the summer of 2011, the AL kept its silence despite the fact that some human rights activists and opponents of the regime were ill-treated, tortured, imprisoned, lost their citizenship, and were given death sentences due to their political activities. Human rights organizations like the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), made calls to the secretary general, Nabil Al Araby, to urge the Bahraini government to cease human rights abuses, and to initiate national dialogue,[66] but the AL did not take any action. It can be argued that the AL's silence in these two Gulf countries was related to the serious influence of other important Gulf countries: Qatar and Saudi Arabia.[67] These two countries pushed hard to prevent the spillover effects of popular mobilization to additional Gulf countries, considering it a threat to stability, while in contrast they explicitly supported revolutionary

movements against unfriendly regimes in Libya and Syria.[68]

The real test for assessing the League's effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) is its stance during the Syrian crisis. The Syrian protests against President Bashar al-Assad, which started in March 2011, quickly turned into a deadly civil war. In 2011, the AL's Council of Foreign Ministers issued 10 statements on the situation in Syria and organized several extra-ordinary sessions. Nabil Al-Araby met Assad in July to discuss the ongoing crisis and find out whether there was hope for reform in Syria. On 2 November 2011, Bashar Al-Assad and the Arab Ministerial Committee agreed on an action plan that included halting all acts of violence, releasing the people detained after the protests, withdrawing all armed manifestations from cities and residential neighborhoods, and providing open access for concerned organizations of the AL, the Arab and international media to freely move about in all parts of Syria to view the actual conditions and monitor the events taking place.[69] Both Syria and the AL committed to preventing any type of foreign intervention as had happened in Libya. But the continuing violence made it clear that the Syrian government was not complying with the full and immediate implementation of the plan.[70] As death tolls increased and the Syrian government failed in opening a dialogue, the AL suspended Syria's membership in an extraordinary meeting held on 12 November.[71] The suspension was approved by 18 members, with Yemen and Lebanon opposing, and Iraq absent. In the evening of the same day, anti-regime protestors in Syria were chanting in favor of the AL. This was not a common occurrence anywhere in the Middle East.[72] It was a signal that the protestors were very hopeful about the involvement of the AL.

> Due to the concerns over the credibility of the AL, it was believed that the AL should have referred the Syrian issue to the international community, particularly to the UN Security Council.

The AL also decided to impose sanctions on Syria in November. Sanctions included a travel ban against senior officers, a ban on transactions with Syria's central bank and an end to commercial exchanges with the Syrian government. In decisions on sanctions, 'no' votes by member states, like those of Yemen and Lebanon, might make decisions ineffective according to the AL charter, but the charter was not taken into account at this time. For some member states, this implied that the AL charter was violated under the influence of Qatar. It is known that Qatar enthusiastically took the leadership position, exerting

control over the decision-making process in the Arab League in the last years due to its economic power and the decreasing power of Egypt, which has historically held great influence over the League.[73] Yemen and Lebanon were not required to comply. Furthermore, sanctions were not implemented by Iraq and Jordan. The Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said that "We reject sanctions because they have a negative effect on the people and not the regime…nevertheless [we] still supported the Arab League's efforts to end the Syrian crisis."[74] So, the decision-making procedure of the AL negatively influenced the possibility that sanctions as an instrument would shape the outcome.

The next serious initiative was the peace protocol agreed by Syria and the AL on 19 December 2011 (Council of the AL Resolution Number 7439). The purpose of the Protocol is declared as being to protect Syrian citizens through convincing the Syrian Government to stop acts of violence, release detainees and withdraw all military presence from cities and residential neighbourhoods.[75] The protocol mandated an Observer Mission comprising civilian and military experts from Arab countries and Arab nongovernmental human rights organizations. One hundred sixty-six monitors from 13 Arab countries and six relevant Arab organizations were appointed and were sent to 15 zones covering 20 cities and districts across

Syria. The overall goal was to lead to dialogue among the warring parties in Syria and the launching of a parallel political process. The mission reported that there was nothing frightening in Syrian cities but that in some zones, armed entities reacted by attacking Syrian security forces and citizens, causing the Government to respond with further violence. In the end, innocent citizens paid the real price for this struggle.[76] The stance of the AL mission was found to be problematic on two counts. First, Mustafa El-Dabi, a controversial name due to his involvement in war crimes in Darfur, was appointed as the head of the observer mission. Second, the report of the mission was found unreliable and subjective. Moreover, a number of factors in the monitoring process weakened the credibility of the delegation. For example, the observers were completely dependent on the Syrian government for transport and security. Their access was restricted to particular hot spots.[77] As a result, Qatar and Saudi Arabia withdrew their observers from the delegation. The AL suspended the observed mission in January 2012. It became clear that the AL was not capable of observing and objectively reporting on the situation in Syria. It remained unable to explore the realities of the crisis in its initial steps and to develop further plans. It was also ineffective in forcing Syria to comply with the protocol due to the lack of instruments.

The AL proposed another peace plan on 22 January 2012. This was crafted under Qatar's temporary (rotating) leadership of the AL Council, with strong Gulf Cooperation Council support. The plan asked President Bashar al-Assad to transfer power to a deputy, establish a national unity government and hold early elections. At the Cairo meeting on 11 February 2012, the AL called for severing diplomatic relations with Syria and providing economic and political support to the Syrian opposition. It called on the UN Security Council to pass a resolution calling for an end to the violence and demanding access for humanitarian groups. Furthermore, it asked the UN Security Council to create a joint Arab-UN peacekeeping force to oversee implementation of a prospective cease-fire, despite the draft resolution being vetoed by Russia and China in the Security Council.[78] Within the AL, Lebanon and Algeria opposed the deployment of peace keeping forces. Syria certainly did not recognize the decision. At the same time, these moves by the AL also demonstrated one of its serious shortcomings. As the AL does not have an active regional peacekeeping mission- an important instrument for regional security governance according to Kirchner and Dominguez (2014)- it had to rely on the UN for a joint peacekeeping force. This inhibited its effectiveness in contributing to a possible cease-fire in Syria. The lack of instruments can be explained by the organization design of AL and its overemphasis on sovereignty.

> The AL thought that the representation of opposition groups in the League would bring momentum for their international recognition as well as for developments on the ground.

Based on their former peace plan, the AL delegates, with the United Kingdom and France, prepared a draft resolution asking to form a joint mission for Syria in coordination with the UN. According to the AL, this observer mission would have to be larger than the first mission and go with a different mandate as well as international backing. In early February, the draft resolution was put to the UN Security Council meeting. Although it was vetoed by Russia and China, a special UN-Arab League envoy to Syria was initiated as a part of the UN resolution backing the AL plan. The envoy, Kofi Annan, proposed a six-point peace plan in March 2012. The plan asked the Syrian government and opposition to stop fighting and achieve an effective UN-supervised cessation of armed violence, pull back heavy weapons from urban areas, ensure timely provision of humanitarian assistance, intensify the pace and scale of the release of arbitrarily detained persons,

ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists, and respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully.[79] Neither the Syrian government nor the opposition complied with the plan's terms. The AL lacks instruments for enforcing its plan in the case of uncompliance. A UN unarmed observer mission with 300 observers, established in April 2012, was suspended less than four months later, because of safety concerns after fighting intensified. The UN mission expired in June 2012 and was not renewed. The AL chief Al-Araby asked for a change in the UN mandate and a new type of mission, stating:

> And by that I mean a peacekeeping force and not a military force…When there are two parties that have (resorted) to fighting, you cannot have someone just observing unless they both accept (a settlement). So what you need is someone who can impose a ceasefire and not to fight.[80]

Due to the concerns over the credibility of the AL, it was believed that the AL should have referred the Syrian issue to the international community, particularly to the UN Security Council. In January 2012, one ambassador to the League said that "the Syrian regime did not implement the Arab plan under existing Arab pressure, so there was no other way except to approach the Security Council."[81]

Member states believe that the AL will not succeed in being impartial in

dealing with regional problems. For instance, in response to the usage of chemical weapons in Syria, the AL condemned it and called for an impartial international investigation - not a regional investigation.

Although the AL member states have formed mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution since 2000, the AL does not have a mandate to become involved in intra-country conflicts.

Although its request about forming a new UN mission was not met, the AL took another step by establishing a committee on Syria in November 2012. The committee aimed to submit a plan for a political solution to the conflict in order to show a unified Arab stance regarding the international effort. This centered on the idea of forming a temporary national unity government and deploying a UN peacekeeping force in Syria to guarantee stability during the transitional period.[82] The idea of a joint UN-Arab mission to Syria came from the UN-Africa Union force UNAMID, which was sent to Sudan's war-torn western Darfur region.[83]

One of the later decisive steps of the AL was the transfer of Syria's vacant seat to the representatives of the opposition,

a delegation led by Mouaz al Khatib, on 26 March 2013.[84] The AL thought that the representation of opposition groups in the League would bring momentum for their international recognition as well as for developments on the ground. The AL's action was taken as an effort to legitimize and endorse the opposition. Such regional recognition is critical for international recognition and support, particularly for recognition at the UN. As expected, this move was considered very provocative and was harshly criticized not only by the Syrian government but also by Russia and Iran.[85]

Overall, the actions of the AL between 2011 and early 2013 have been criticized by both the Syrian regime and by anti-government protestors. The regime accused the AL of dismissing them and of violating Syrian sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention. The Syrian government conceived the proposal on a joint peacekeeping force as a 'hostile act' and an endorsement of 'foreign intervention' in Syrian affairs. On the other side, protestors have complained that the AL was too late to act and failed to meet the demands of the Syrian people. From the AL side, however, the disunity of the Syrian opposition forces made support largely impossible.

The AL did not want to fully interfere in the crises in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Egypt. It limited itself in coordinating actions in the form of agenda setting and consensus making if possible. This reaction is not only related to the Arab Uprisings themselves; the original design of the AL made intervention very difficult because many crisis were considereded as the internal affairs of member states, touching on the crucial issues of independence and sovereignty.[86] The member states' concern with sovereignty prevents them from building the concrete collective security instruments noted in Kirshner and Dominquez's 2014 typology. Although the AL member states have formed mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution since 2000, the AL does not have a mandate to become involved in intra-country conflicts. While these mechanisms allow the establishment of peacekeeping missions when necessary, they do not include internal conflict situations. The AL lacks real instruments to implement common policies and is therefore ineffective in enforcing

> Despite its failures, the AL has been able to transform itself into a more effective actor in the Libyan and Syrian crises by playing a more active role compared to its previous poor performances in other intra-state conflicts in the Arab world.

provisions. Also, the emphasis on sovereignty shapes the AL's agenda-setting. The serious problems of member states regarding human rights and freedoms, which became evident during the Arab Spring protests, were not addressed in AL meetings because these issues were considered to be related to member states' sovereignty. In terms of human rights, significant attention has only been given to Israel's policies in the territories controlled since 1967. Systematic human rights violations in AL member states have often been ignored and denied. Also, the AL has not yet established its human rights court. Furthermore, despite insistence by non-governmental organizations, the AL is unlikely to support initiatives that urge the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.[87]

Conclusion

In the opening session of the Arab League summit on 25 March 2014, Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah said that "the dangers around us are enormous and we will not move towards joint Arab action without our unity and without casting aside our differences."[88] As he pointed out, the Arab Uprisings and the events afterwards made it clear that the Arab countries suffer from serious internal conflicts that challenge permanent regional

peace. Also, they have demonstrated that human rights protection is very important for the human security of the Arab states and for enduring stability in the region.

> In order to be more effective, the AL needs to work on its organizational characteristics, and enhance both its human rights protection mechanisms and instruments that might be used in conflict resolution of intrastate disputes.

Al-Sabah's selection of the AL summit to make his call is meaningful, because the AL is one of the few common platforms where all Arab states come together to address regional issues. It is also the oldest organization in which almost all Arab states hold membership. Despite its failures, the AL has been able to transform itself into a more effective actor in the Libyan and Syrian crises by playing a more active role compared to its previous poor performances in other intra-state conflicts in the Arab world. In Libya, the AL denounced the authoritarianism and atrocities taking place, and called for outside intervention. In Syria, it got involved in the process in numerous ways. For example, it built a dialogue with one of the warring parties, sent in a large observation mission,

imposed a political and economic boycott, and worked on various peace plan frameworks. This was more than it had tried in relation to Libya, Yemen and Bahrain. Second, the AL played an important role in placing the issue on the agenda of the international community - particularly the UN Security Council - through drafting peace plans, although it was silent during the protests in Tunisia and Egypt. Third, unlike in Libya, it did not fiercely promote foreign intervention from the very beginning, despite the eagerness of some member states including Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The lack of support for foreign intervention in Syria can be seen as a very wise action, given the fact that international intervention in any Arab country is problematic for member states because of the Iraqi experience. Any type of intervention might damage the impartiality of the AL because member states generally want "a political transition with a hand over of power rather than foreign intervention."[89] Further, because of its complex socio-political dynamics, Syria is seen as a fault line in the region. Foreign intervention might have dramatic spillover effects in neighboring countries. Fourth, it was the first time the AL discussed the necessity of a specifically regional peace-keeping force to settle an intra-state dispute.

Nevertheless, these partial achievements did not turn the AL into influential regional actor. It failed to function effectively during the Arab Uprisings because of its organizational characteristics, including its overemphasis on sovereignty, difficulties in decision making, the lack of instruments to enforce decisions, and the problem of credibility.

In order to be more effective, the AL needs to work on its organizational characteristics, and enhance both its human rights protection mechanisms and instruments that might be used in conflict resolution of intrastate disputes. Institutional reform of the decision procedures and a robust secretariat can bring greater leverage. It can ameliorate the problem of credibility that impedes member states in consulting with the AL and dealing with post-revolution/crisis periods, as seen in Libya and Egypt. AL's human rights work could be transformed and improved. Implementation mechanisms could be enhanced by focusing on reporting, investigation and petitions. The creation of a war crimes investigatory capacity could help the AL in gaining credibility. The possibilities are there for the AL to start functioning better in post-revolution and transition periods.

Although it is difficult to generalize from a single case, nevertheless the case in hand provides some insights about the role of regional organizations in solving regional problems. It demonstrates that member states of some regional organizations are reluctant to cooperate

in security related issues, because of their emphasis on the principles of sovereignty, nonintervention and self-determination. These concerns create serious problems for regional organizations with regards to empowernment and autonomy as well as for developing necessary instruments like peace-keeping forces. The collective commitment to deal with regional security related problems is very low. The case also shows that characteristics of problems constrain the organizations' role and impede progress. If the problems are intra-state and touch on sovereignty and regime survival, as is often the case, regional organizations may hesitate to take an active role. If the problems are long-standing and region-wide, organizations may fail to develop sustainable solutions. Overcoming these problems appears particularly difficult for organizations outside Europe. It might therefore be concluded that there is a need to have a modest expectation of what regional organization can realistically achieve in solving regional problems in conflict intense regions. They may start with enhancing human rights protection mechanisms and playing a proactive role, at least in post-conflict situations.

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