

Excerpt from a research paper on the Arab League as of the spring of 2015

International organizations face the distinct challenge of unifying states with disparate identities. Their charters attempt to lay the foundation for cohesive organizations. These organizations utilize the theory of socialization to build upon the unity and cohesiveness set forth in the international organizations' charters. Socialization is the process of instilling loyalty to a system from a group of people, organizations or states in which they accept the prevailing values of that system and its institutions. Nation states typically have a stronger sense of socialization than international organizations because they thrive off the implementation of values such as patriotism and nationalism. International organizations employ socialization in an effort to “affect peoples’ systems of belief and patterns of behavior” (Archer 142). Without a global governing body, the ability for organizations to socialize is severely weakened. Overall, international organizations have been minimally effective in the socialization process. International organizations have worked to “socialize” their nation states to act in certain ways acceptable to the international community or adopt values similar to those of the greater international community. A 1978 study by R.L. Butterworth concluded,

The institutionalization of shared norms and perceptions will enhance the force of national reputation and organizational precedent in effecting inter-state cooperation...Habits of co-operation will enhance the importance of policies that stimulate compliant behavior through consensus, rather than coercion (Archer 144).

Butterworth found the Arab League to have less success in socialization than other international organizations such as the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations (Archer 144). “Of all the regions of the world, the Middle East probably has the weakest regional organizations and record of cooperation and coordination of policies,

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despite historical efforts to unite around ideological pan-Arabism” (Karns 210). The Arab League constantly struggles with disunity among its members. Although successful in the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, the League has otherwise failed to coordinate on vital issues such as the 1990-1992 Gulf War, the 2003 Iraq War (Masters) and Syrian civil war (Moftah). Michael Broning with *Foreign Affairs* said the League rarely lives up to the inherent standards contained in its mandate. According to Broning, the few times the League has collaborated on issues are the exceptions, not the rule (Moftah). Arabs have taken notice of the shortfalls of the Arab League, many of whom believe the Arab League has operated long past its usefulness in the region. In a report by *Al Jazeera*, young Arabs expressed their concerns regarding the unity (or lack thereof) in the Arab League. A young woman identified as Kebri said there were two ideas that brought the Arab world together with the creation of the Arab League – Arab unity and Palestine. Arab unity no longer exists, Kebri said. And the Palestinian conflict remains an international hot topic, still unresolved decades later. A man by the name of Khayat told *Al Jazeera*, “If Arab unity led to the establishment of the Arab League, then it should mean that member states make an effort to unify the divisions that are threatening to tear Arab countries apart” (Makary). While Arab states may be united by a common language, culture, history, and pan-Arabism, there are severe and threatening divides among Arab states. The efforts of Arab states have done little to remedy this. Through time, Arab unity has decreased but the organization still strives to promote this ideal of Arab unity among its member states (Karns 211).

The Islamic ideal of the *ummah* or holy community disrupts the Arab League's mission of unity. The *ummah* encourages Muslims to unite across state and cultural lines. Some states foster nationalism and the importance of the *ummah* while others assert the power of the nation-state

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over the *ummah*. The member states of the Arab League are divided among those that place the *ummah* above the nation-state and those who suppress the *ummah* (Nasr). This religious tension between member states is an underlying factor influencing the lack of cooperation in the Arab League.

The League's military action is sporadic and limited. In 1961, the League took joint military action to prevent Iraq from taking over Kuwait in its time of fragility when gaining its independence. The League authorized another joint military action in 1976 in the Lebanese civil war. The League fully backed the Saudi Arabian proposal to normalize Israeli relations as long as Israel agreed to fully withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. The Arab League does not always see eye to eye with the United Nations or other international organizations. The League extended its support to the government of Sudan although the U.N. and International Criminal Court prosecuted Sudanese government officials for crimes against humanity including genocide. Although the League was active in these instances, it has chosen to not involve itself in numerous other skirmishes. The League did not involve itself in the wars with Israel in 1948, 1967 or 1973 nor did it act in Yemen's civil war or the Iran-Iraq War. It condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, but did not act. Arab League member states were divided on the issue of how to avoid a United States war with Iraq in 2003 (Karns 212). Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain supported (or did not openly object to) the United States' military action in Iraq. Syria and the Palestinian Authority starkly opposed these actions by the U.S (Moran). Some member states hoped to persuade Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to disarm, but a decision was not reached. Cooperation among the member states of the Arab League is sparse. "The organization's problematic identity, leaders' fear of restrictions on sovereignty, and the weak institutional design explain that poor record" (Karns 212).

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Historically, the Arab League's efforts have been primarily focused on issues concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the Arab League is notably dis-unified, the hostility towards Israel acts as a kind of glue to keep the League intact (Karns 150). Other inter-governmental organizations including the U.N., the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference play a role in the Arab-Israeli conflict alongside the Arab League. The U.N. has organized five peacekeeping operations since 1948 including the U.N. Truce Supervision Organization, the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, the U.N. Emergency Force and the U.N. Disengagement Observer Force. These forces help to lessen the conflict between Israel and its neighbors. A peaceful settlement, however, still has not been reached. The Arab League pushed for Palestine to create the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) at its first summit in 1964. The Arab League then encouraged the Non-Alignment Movement to accept Palestinian rights. The U.N. adopted these same Palestinian rights. Unfortunately, the Arab League did not foresee the PLO voicing its opinions separate from that of the Arab governments that pushed for its creation. Evidently, the Arab League created a rogue entity it could no longer directly control. The conflict between Israel and the Arab states became a three party fight with the addition of Palestine, beginning in the late 1960s (Karns 369). After the Six-Day War, the Arab League was significantly weakened by differences among the Arab states. Nearly 40 years later, the League endorsed Saudi Arabia's proposal to normalize relations with Israel under certain conditions. In return, Israel had to withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. The deal also included the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and foundation of a "just solution" to the refugee problem (Karns 370). Before peace talks can be successfully held, clear and consolidated leadership within Palestine must be determined. Independent of the Arab League, Arab states took action to mediate power-sharing agreements

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between the Fatah-led PLO and Hamas, the two groups vying for power in Palestine.

Negotiations with Israel and governance of the West Bank and Gaza will be easier if the Arab League unifies to deal with the most pressing issues in the region.

Overall, international organizations have proven in the past to be uniquely effective in areas such as peacekeeping, refugee assistance, political and economic development aid, security sector reform and human rights promotion. As Israel and Palestine approach an agreement, the Arab League will play an invaluable role in preventing member states from undermining the peace agreements as long as the Arab League can stay intact. These agreements may include a demilitarized zone or the presence of peacekeeping forces. These actions will require assistance from Arab League member states. For peace in the region, member states must accept the idea of a two-state solution. As recent as January 2015, the Arab League said it will push for a U.N. resolution to end Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands (Ahram online). As the U.N. Security Council met for its first formal meeting of 2015 on the Middle East, Arab League officials meeting in Cairo informed the Security Council of this proposed resolution (Gladstone).

For peace in the Middle East, the Arab League must continue to socialize its member states. The Arab League can break the standard of dysfunctional regional organizations if its members unify to make a change in one of the more corrupted regions in the world. As the world's eyes turn towards the Middle East, the Arab League has an opportunity to prove itself. The League can show the rest of the world that peace is obtainable when states collaborate on a human level in lieu of fighting based on identity.

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