



جامعة جورجتاون
كلية الشؤون الدولية في قطر
Model United Nations

Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar

State Building: Arab League Committee

Arab League

The Arab League, also called League of Arab States (LAS), is a regional organization of Arab states in the Middle East. It was formed in Cairo on March 22, 1945, following the adoption of the Alexandria Protocol in 1944, by Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Transjordan (now Jordan), Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. At that time the league's main concerns included freeing those Arab countries still under colonial rule, and preventing the Jewish community in Palestine from creating a Jewish state (Profile: Arab League, 2013). The Arab League has since grown to 22 members.

At its headquarters in Cairo, the league is run by the general secretariat, headed by secretary general Nabil el-Arabi. The general secretariat is the administrative body of the league and the executive body of the council. Each member has one vote on the league council, "decisions being binding only on those states that have voted for them" (Arab League).

The Arab League aims to strengthen and coordinate the political, cultural, economic, and social programs of its members and to resolve potential disputes between its member states or from external states. An agreement on joint defense and economic cooperation signed in 1950 also committed the "signatories to coordination of military defense measures" (Arab League).

The Arab League was forced to adapt to the changes that occurred in the Arab world when mass protests, known as the Arab Spring, rose against the existing regimes of countries in the Middle East and North Africa in late 2010 and early 2011. The Arab Spring ignited protests in a number of Arab countries, leaving its deepest marks in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria.

In early November 2011 the Arab League announced that it reached an agreement with the Syrian government to end its bloody ten-month offensive against protesters in Syria. “Less than two weeks later, amid reports that the Syrian forces had continued to kill protesters in spite of the agreement, the Arab League voted to suspend Syria’s membership” (Arab League).

State Building

State building is the “purposeful action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups” (OECD, 2008). This refers to the set of actions undertaken by national and/or international actors to establish, reform and strengthen state institutions that are either weak or missing. The key goals of state building include “provision of security, establishment of the rule of law, effective delivery of basic goods and services through functional state institutions, and generation of political legitimacy for the set of state institutions being set up” (Brinkerhoff, 2006).

States are fragile when their structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic means for poverty reduction, development and to maintain and enhance the security and human rights of their populations. International engagement and local investment need to be concerted and sustained on building the relationship

between state and society in two main areas. “Firstly, supporting the legitimacy and accountability of states by addressing issues of democratic governance, human rights, civil society engagement and peace building. Secondly, strengthening the capability of states to fulfill their core functions is essential in order to reduce poverty. Support of these public areas will in turn strengthen citizen's confidence, trust and engagement with state institutions” (Firtz and Menocal, 2007).

There are two main theoretical forms to the definition of state building. The first form is associated with external actors, such as foreign countries, that forcefully attempt to build or mend the institutions of a fragile post-conflict or failing state. This views state building as the activity of one state in relation to another and is normally coincided with intervention. The second form takes into account states that are willing to undergo state building, at which other wealthier and more powerful states are obliged to support the efforts. This view reflects state building as a national process forced by the relationship between the state and society.

The three most recognized approaches to state building are good governance, enhanced public management and decentralization. Firstly, good governance refers to successful ways in which a government can create public institutions that protect people's rights in a state. Secondly, enhanced public management describes market-oriented managerial reforms using market-like approaches towards the public sector to implement a development plan. Lastly, decentralization aims to reduce rent-seeking behavior and inefficient resource allocation associated with centralized governments. By doing so, a government aims to disperse mainly economic power to all factions of the society, setting up stable institutions and services. One must remember, however, that “the aim of state building is not the use of physical force, but rather the

establishment of a state as a concentration and expression of collective power without the need to exercise coercion” (Canovan, 2004).

The Arab Spring

The issue of state building is of great importance to the Arab League, especially in light of the Arab Spring. “Intrastate conflict and civil wars represent the principal form of organized violence since the end of the Second World War, and certainly in the contemporary era. The broad impact of intrastate conflicts – in terms of human destruction, political and economic consequences, insecurity across borders, and their impact upon international politics more broadly – suggest that these conflicts reflect and also drive major political change” (Lemay-Hébert and Newman).

The Arab Spring was set into motion with the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid on December 17, 2010. In a final desperate act by an individual that was forced down by state corruption, repression and incompetence, Bouazizi gave rise to a region-wide wave of sympathy, an empathy that was quickly politicized by the public recognition of his depression. It was the unvoiced long-term failure of Arab states to deliver their promises such as political freedom and economic development (Dodge). The Arab Spring reached and affected a large number of countries in the Arab League, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria.

Tunisia

Following the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a number of increasingly violent protests and street demonstrations spread across Tunisia, clashing with police and security forces, and resulting in scores of deaths and injuries. Ultimately, they led to the ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January

14, 2011, ending his 23 years in power. The mass public demonstrations against Ben Ali and his regime came as a response to the “corruption, poverty, political repression,” high unemployment, food inflation and lack of freedom of speech that Tunisia was forced to undergo for years (Jasmine Revolution). The ousting of Ben Ali, however, did not end the civil unrest and disorder in Tunisia.

Egypt

Similar protests began in Egypt on January 25, 2011, escalating into a full-scale revolution aimed to overthrow the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Millions of protesters from all socio-economic backgrounds gathered all over the country, focusing on legal and political issues including police brutality, state of emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, corruption, and economic issues including high unemployment, food price inflation and low wages. “As the demonstrations gathered strength, the Mubarak regime resorted to increasingly violent tactics against protesters, resulting in hundreds of injuries and deaths” (Egypt Uprising of 2011). The primary demands from protesters were the end of the Hosni Mubarak regime, the end of emergency law, freedom, justice, a responsive non-military government and a say in the management of Egypt's resources (Egypt Uprising of 2011).

Mubarak and his government were overthrown on February 11, 2011, transferring power to the military. The Muslim Brotherhood headed by Mohammed Morsi was voted into power in late June 2012. In November, however, demonstrations against Morsi and the Brotherhood placed the country under a second wave of unrest. This mainly came in response to a temporary constitutional declaration that granted the president unlimited power (Egypt Uprising of 2011).

Eventually, Morsi and the Brotherhood were deposed by the military on July 3, 2013. Ongoing violence still pertains in Egypt, primarily in response to the coup.

Libya

Libya was another scene for revolution in the Arab world where on February 15, 2011, antigovernment rallies were held in Benghazi by protesters angered by the arrest of a human rights lawyer, Fethi Tarbel (Libya Revolt of 2011). This sparked demonstrations against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's rule and by February 18, the opposition party controlled most of Benghazi, the second-largest city in Libya, and managed to repel Gaddafi's military troops and militia forces. By February 20, protests had spread to the capital Tripoli, reflecting signs of civil unrest and setting a civil war in motion.

The government's increasingly rising violence against protesters and other civilians was highly condemned by the international community, ranging from foreign leaders and human rights organizations. "It also seemed to damage the coherence of the regime, causing a number of high-level officials—including the minister of justice and a number of senior Libyan diplomats, including the Libyan ambassador to the United Nations—to resign in protest or issue statements condemning the regime. A number of Libyan embassies around the world began to fly Libya's pre-Qaddafi flag, signaling support for the uprising" (Libya Revolt of 2011). Military soldiers and air force pilots were also among those that chose to defect and oppose the regime.

"On March 17 the UN Security Council voted 10–0—with abstentions from Russia, China, Germany, India, and Brazil—to authorize military action, including imposition of a no-fly zone to protect Libyan civilians. The Qaddafi regime responded by declaring an immediate cease-fire, although there were reports that pro-Qaddafi forces continued to launch attacks after the announcement and that heavy fighting

continued in Benghazi” (Libya Revolt of 2011). Two days later, France, the United States and the United Kingdom started a bombing campaign against Gaddafi forces, later joined by a coalition of 27 states, and eventually administered by the NATO. The opposition was able to gain control of a large portion of Libya, maintaining their offensive and prolonging the civil war.

In late August, opposition forces captured Tripoli, scattering Gaddafi’s government and ending his 42 years of power. In a desperate attempt to hold control, Gaddafi and his loyalists moved to the Sirte, which Gaddafi declared Libya’s new capital. The fighting continued till October 20, when anti-Gaddafi fighters seized Sirte, killing Gaddafi in the process.

Syria

Syria is another country that has been engulfed by the raging fumes of the Arab Spring. In March 18, 2011, antigovernment protests broke out in Syria in the southwestern city of Dar’a in response to the arrest of several children for writing antigovernment graffiti. Several people were killed when security forces opened fire at the protesters. Demonstrations and protests soon spread across other Syrian cities, marking the start of the uprising. From the early days of the crisis, the Assad regime responded aggressively, resorting to the country’s security services to break up demonstrations, often with live ammunition, and to arrest suspected anti-Assad activists. These harsh tactics backfired at the Assad regime as increased violence stirred further unrest (Syria: Uprising and Civil War).

The civil unrest has since escalated into a full-scale civil war between the Assad government and the opposition forces led by the Free Syrian Army. The situation has attracted the attention of the international community and has taken its toll on the world of politics. It has extended beyond Syria’s borders and onto

negotiation tables between the United States, Russia and China in regards to intervention, along with violent clashes between both sides of the Syrian conflict in countries such as Lebanon. As of December 2, 2013, it is estimated that 126,000 people have been killed in Syria (Reuters).

The Arab Spring also affected countries such as Yemen, where the government was overthrown, Bahrain, Iraq, Algeria and Sudan, where major protests took place, and many other Arab League countries. The notion of state building is thus extremely important in the case of the Arab League and Arab world. Without state-society acceptance, the Arab world spiraled into a phase of revolution and widespread discontent, initiating civil disorder and chaos.

Questions to Consider

- How should the Arab League governments react to the societal demands?
- How can the notion of state building be tackled without the use of violence and disorder to implement it?
- Who should intervene in countries affected by the Arab Spring to introduce reforms and stability?
- Should state building in the Arab world come in the form of forced intervention? Or should states hold the capacity to implement it?
- Should foreign countries intervene for the sake of protecting human rights?

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