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Regional Organizations and Internal Conflict: The Arab League and the Arab Spring

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BRICS Policy Center Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas - BRICS



Global South Unit for Mediation

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Executive Summary

The Arab uprisings and the subsequent political, security, and humanitarian consequences seriously challenged the Arab League's ability, authority, legality, and legitimacy to intervene in domestic conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. This paper examines the role of the Arab League in the Arab Spring. It aims to explain the policies of the Arab League towards Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. It also seeks to identify continuity and change in the policies of the Arab League since 2010. I also utilize analytical frameworks from the fields of international relations theory, conflict resolution, and regional organizations to explain the Arab League.

I argue that multiple domestic, regional and international forces influenced the policies of the Arab League during the Arab Spring. The survival interest of the ruling Arab regimes and regional distribution of power indeed play a significant role in the policies of the Arab League but they are not the only forces. There are other factors that also significantly influenced the policies of the Arab League, including the institutional, normative, and know-how power of the Arab League itself, international human rights norms, dominant perceptions of the conflict at stake, the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL), and great powers involvement in the Middle East and North Africa. The interaction of these factors accounts for the different policies of the Arab League towards Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen.

Regional Organizations and Internal Conflict: The Arab League and the Arab Spring

Dr. Raslan Ibrahim

1. Introduction¹

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been suffering from several internal conflicts since the eruption of the Arab Spring in Tunisia in December 2010. The Arab Spring, which began as peaceful popular uprisings for human dignity, social justice, and democracy, has evolved into an Arab Winter manifested in civil war in Syria, failed state in Libya, fragile democracy in Tunisia, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), military coup in Egypt, and Arab military interventions in Yemen and Bahrain. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed and millions have become refugees and internally displaced persons.

The Arab uprisings and the subsequent political, security, and humanitarian consequences seriously challenged the Arab League's ability, authority, legality, and legitimacy to intervene in domestic conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. This paper examines the role of the Arab League in the Arab Spring. It aims to explain the policies of the Arab League towards Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. It also seeks to identify continuity and change in the policies of the Arab League since 2010. I also utilize analytical frameworks from the fields of international relations theory, conflict resolution, and regional organizations to explain the Arab League.

I argue that multiple domestic, regional and international forces influenced the policies of the Arab League during the Arab Spring. The survival interest of the ruling Arab regimes and regional

(1) This working paper was written during my fellowship at the Global South Unit For Mediation, July-September 2015.

distribution of power indeed play a significant role in the policies of the Arab League but they are not the only forces. There are other factors that also significantly influenced the policies of the Arab League, including the institutional, normative, and know-how power of the Arab League itself, international human rights norms, dominant perceptions of the conflict at stake, the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL), and great powers involvement in the Middle East and North Africa. The interaction of these factors accounts for the different policies of the Arab League towards Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen.

First, the Arab League was most active in its policies towards Syria and Libya, which experienced major civil wars with massive human rights atrocities that fall under the category of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P). The League expelled Syria and Libya from the regional organization. This is first time in its history that the League expels a member state for massive human rights violations. The League utilized international human rights norms (R2P) to justify its policies towards Libya and Syria. Unlike its indifference towards mass killings in the past (Iraq under president Saddam Hussein regime, Darfur, and Syria under president Hafez el-Assad), the League did intervene in various ways in Syria and Libya to stop mass killings. The League also supported the international intervention in Libya. This is a major change in the policies of the Arab League.

Despite several attempts of mediation, the League failed in resolving the Syrian civil war because of the high complexity of the conflict itself, and the intervention of regional and great powers in Syria. Needless to say, the League has no control on many of the domestic, regional, and international actors involved in the Syrian civil war. The lack of trust between Syria and other members of the Arab League (Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular) also accounts for the League failure in mediating and resolving the Syrian crisis. But even a much more powerful international organization such as the United Nations Security Council failed to stop the Syrian war.

Second, the League supported Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Bahrain and Yemen. But the League policies towards Yemen and Bahrain are driven not only by the relative power and interests of Saudi Arabia but also by the dominant perceptions of these particular conflicts. The conflicts in Yemen and Bahrain are perceived by Arab regimes as proxy wars of Iran rather than internal Arab conflicts. This perception at least partly constitutes the Arab League support to the ruling regimes in Bahrain and Yemen. The Arab League support to Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen and Bahrain is also a change from the League's traditional policy of non-intervention. Yet, the ruling regimes in Yemen and Bahrain formally asked Saudi Arabia for military intervention.

Third, the role of the Arab League towards the processes of democratization and transitional justice in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya following the collapse of the old regimes was absolute non-intervention. The lack of institutional, normative, and know-how power in these particular fields account for the League's lack of support to democratization and transitional justice in these countries. This pattern of behavior reflects continuity not change in the Arab League's human rights and democracy policy.

Structure of the Paper

The next part of this paper introduces the analytical frameworks for the study of regional organizations. I review International Relations theories and their specific accounts of international organizations. I review Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, Constructivism, English School, Regionalism, and Comparative Politics accounts of international organizations.

Part Three reviews the relevant literature on the role of regional organizations in conflict management,

mediation, and democratization. This section introduces the reader to major characteristics and trends of regional organizations in conflict management, mediation, and democratization. It also helps to situate the Arab League within the context of regional organizations in general in order to avoid ungrounded “Arab exceptionalism” accounts.

Part Four focuses on the Arab League. First, I briefly review the literature on the power of Arab League. Second, I conduct content analysis of the Charter of the Arab League particularly the articles that are relevant to conflict management. Third, I discuss the record of the Arab League in conflict management since 1945 based on quantitative data sets. This sub-section also includes a short discussion of the League traditional policies towards humanitarian crises and the civil conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon.

Part Five critically discusses the role of the Arab League during the Arab Spring. I address the policies of the Arab League towards Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. In the conclusion, I summarize the main findings of this research paper.

2. Part Two: Regional Organizations: Theoretical Perspectives

International Relations theory provides helpful analytical tools to identify the underlying and proximate causes of regional organizations including the design, power, and policies of regional actors. “All the leading theoretical paradigms of IR have something to say about regional order” (Paul 2012: 6). This section briefly reviews Realism (Waltz 1977), liberal Institutionalism (Keohane 2012), Constructivism (Wendt 1999), the English School (Bull 1977), Regionalism and regional organizations (Hurrell and Fawcett 1994; Acharya and Johnston 2007) and comparative politics perspectives of international and regional organizations.

The Arab League is a regional organization, a particular type of international institutions. Keohane and Martin define institutions as “persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations. They can take the form of international organizations, international regimes, or informal conventions” (Keohane and Martin 2003: 78).

Realism

Realism posits that international organizations have no power in the realm of war and peace. As John Mearsheimer explicitly puts it, “institutions are not an important cause of peace” (Mearshiemer 1994/5: 7). The causes of war and peace are merely a function of distribution of power, not international institutions, in the international system (13). Institutions have no independent effects on state behavior; they are endogenous and epiphenomenal to state power and interest. For realism, “International organizations are ultimately either dominated by the most powerful states, or are designed to be irrelevant to international affairs” (Simmons and Martin 2001: 330). The realist perspective of international institutions originate from its basic assumptions of international system: the structure of anarchy and its consequences including self-help, fear, uncertainty, lack of trust, relative gains, and balance of power (Waltz 1977).

Realists explain regionalism by international distribution of power, emphasizing the outside-in pressure to explain regional order and regional transformation. For example, realists account for the emergence of European integration by the presence of U.S. hegemony. Realists also account for the rise of regionalism in the Third World as a response of weak states to strengthen their position in international system (Hurrell 1995: 341). While it is possible to use realist theory of international system to explain regional systems, it is important to keep in mind that regional systems are not autonomous; they are still under influence of international great powers that may support or oppose the rise of regional powers or regionalism in general (Paul 2012: 10).

Another variant of realism is the hegemonic stability theory, which posits that international order, including the power of international organizations, is dependent upon the existence of a hegemon who has the power to impose order. But the relationships between hegemony and regionalism are more complicated than the realist account. Regionalism could emerge as a strategy to balance a hegemon. For example, the Gulf Cooperation Council is often seen as an alliance formation to balance against rising Iran. Regionalism could also emerge as a way to restrict the exercising power of the hegemon. European integration could be viewed as a regionalist policy to constrain the power of Germany. Regionalism could also be as an act of bandwagoning in which weak states bandwagon with a regional hegemon.

In general, realist theorists posit that regional organizations have no independent effect; rather they are endogenous to the power and interests of the most powerful actors in the system. Realism claims that distribution of power, not international organizations, is the driving force of international politics. They also emphasize the importance of hegemony for regional organizations and regionalism in general (Hurrell 1995: 344). But if realists are correct that institutions have no independent effects on state policy and governments do not comply to international institutions, so why do rational states spend so much time and resources to build international organizations? Why do rational states still work through international organizations at all if the latter have no impact on international relations? Realism has difficulty to solve this puzzle (Simmons and Martin 2001:330).

Liberal Institutionalism

Liberal institutionalism, on the other hand, seeks to show the power of institutions in “achieving cooperation under anarchy” (Axelord and Keohane 1985). According to this theory, international organizations and institutions mitigate the negative effects of anarchy because they provide information that reduces uncertainty and fear, and increase trust in the international system (Keohane and Martin: 80). International organizations help states “to overcome problems of collective action, high transaction costs, and informational deficit or asymmetries” (Simmons and Martin: 331). Liberal institutionalism does not see regional institutions as a form of balancing or bandwagoning. Rather they are created for the benefits they provide to member states (Hurrell: 352).

In contrast to realism, liberal institutionalism emphasizes the agency of international organizations. Even though states form institutions, the latter can still maintain agency and influence outcomes independently from the power and interest of the states. As Keohane and Milner have put it, “the endogeneity of international institutions to state power and interest does not render those institutions, and particularly international organizations, epiphenomenal” (104). Structures of interests and power do not determine outcome. Indeed, there is space for international organizations to have agency, autonomy and independence in affecting international politics (106).

Liberal institutionalism also addresses the difficulty of institutional change and institutional

adaptation to new realities. International institutions are designed to solve particular problems at a particular time but they could persist despite changes in the problem and circumstances. “The sunk costs involved in creating institutions, and the risks involved in discarding old institutions, create tendencies toward persistence of institutions even when circumstances change” (Keohane and Martin: 106).

Liberal institutionalism does not distinguish between regional and international organizations. But one school of liberalism, Liberal Peace Theory, accounts for zones of peace by institutions, democracy, and interdependence. These are three pillars of liberal peace theory (Russett and Oneal 2001). Neo-functionalism is another type of theories of integrations that is very influential in explaining the European integration but arguably its relevance to regions outside Europe is less clear (Hurrell: 349).

From the perspective of liberal institutionalism, regional institutions enjoy agency, independence, and autonomy from member states. They also exercise influence on state behavior. Regional organizations are important forces of peace. Liberalism also emphasizes the importance of values of liberalism such as human rights and democracy. Liberal institutionalism, however, does not address the impact of international organizations on domestic politics. Instead, they focus on international outcomes (Pevehouse 2002: 518). Liberal institutionalism also does not directly address the link between regional organizations and internal conflicts.

Constructivism

Constructivism situates international organizations within their inter-subjective social context. International norms and principles constitute the identities, interests, roles, and social power of international organizations. On the other hand, international organizations are ‘socializing agents’ as they create, reflect, teach and diffuse international norms to member states (Finnemore 1993).

The relations between international organizations and states are also mutually constitutive. International organizations constitute states’ identities and interests. They can alter the identities and interests of states as a result of the later interactions over time within the set of rules of the organization. While realism and liberal institutionalism take states as unitary actors and assume their identities and interests, constructivism problematizes the interests and identities of the state and examines how international society and organization constitute them. Legitimacy also plays an important part in constructivist theories. The legitimacy of international organizations in the eyes of its member states and societies, for example, affect the power and effectiveness of international organizations in solving international conflicts.

Regarding regionalism, constructivism “overestimates the importance of regional identities and the discourse of regions and region-building.” (Hurrell: 353). Thus, the continuity of regionalism is dependent on shared identity and community. The relationships between states in a region are understood in term of shared community (we-ness) and identity rather than short time self interests. Constructivism also emphasizes the importance of self-perceptions and self-understandings in politics (352-353).

English School

The English School of International Relations perceives international politics as an anarchical society rather than anarchical system. Despite the absence of a world government, states

constitute an international society with shared values, norms and interest. Traditionally, English School scholars have “tended to de-emphasize formal organizations” (Crawford 1996), viewing these as relevant only to the extent that they strengthen and render more efficient the fundamental institutions of international society: Diplomacy, International Law, War, Great Power Management, and Balance of Power (Buzan 1977). Recently, though, English school scholars have turned to the study of international organizations in the anarchical society, analyzing particularly the relationship international institutions and international organizations (Buzan 2004).

Domestic Level Theories

Domestic level theories of regionalism emphasize the importance of state coherence and regime type to regional integration. “The possibilities of regional cooperation and integration are likely to depend very heavily on the coherence and viability of states and state structure... The absence of viable states (in terms of both effective state apparatus and mutually accepted stated territorial boundaries) makes the process of region-building difficult, if not impossible” (Hurrell: 354). Strong regionalisms have taken place in regions with strong, viable and coherent state structure. Regionalism and state strength are two sides of the same coin; they are not in conflict with each other.

Arab states in general are weak and incoherent states, which might explain the weakness of regional organizations in the region. The Arab states suffer from low level of institutionalization and they fits more with “sultanistic” states (Springborg 2014) and personal rule system (Jackson and Roseberg 1982). The current internal conflicts make the Arab states even less coherent, which could negatively affect regionalism and regional organizations in the near future. Accordingly, it is the incoherent structure and institutions of the state rather than the regime type that account for weak regionalism.

Finally, comparative politics theories focus on regime type and regionalism. More specifically, they emphasize the link between liberal democracy and regional integration. Others see regionalism as a means to protect domestic processes of democratization (Pevehouse 2005). But the clear weight of democracy in regionalism is unclear as there are other forces that push towards the same direction. There are regions in which regionalism did take place despite the absence of democracy. For example, the intensification of cooperation within ASEAN took place despite the fact that there was only one member state considered a democracy (Hurrell: 356).

The theories described above shed light on different explanatory variables that might be useful to explain the Arab League. Of course, there is no single theory that explains every aspect of the Arab League. Andrew Hurrell suggests a “stage theory” approach, applying different theories to different stages of regionalism. For example, realism can explain the early stages of regional organization by the presence of common threat and hegemony. But after formation, the logic of liberal institutionalism, regime interest, and constructivism take place to account for the continuity and change of the organizations over time.

While IR theory help us to understand international organizations in general, it is important to note that none of IR theories differentiates between international and regional organizations. They focus on international organizations in general without considering the qualitative differences between regional and international organizations. Furthermore, IR theory also does not directly address the specific functions of international organizations in the realm of civil conflicts. The research programs of conflict management, mediation, and democratization fill this gap.

3. Part Three: Regional organizations and conflict management

Regional Organizations and Conflict Management

Regional organizations are most common type of international organization in the international system (Pevehouse 2002: 520). The United Nations encourages and even authorizes regional organizations to contribute to regional peace and security. Article 52 of the United Nations Charter explicitly recognizes the role of regional organizations in peace and security:

“Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.

The Members of the United Nations entering into such arrangements or constituting such agencies shall make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies before referring them to the Security Council.

The Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council.” (UN Charter)

However, regional organizations have played only limited roles in the management of conflicts during the Cold War (Diehl 2007: 537). In this sense, the Arab League’s weak record during the Cold War does not necessarily reflect the Arab exceptionalism as is often claimed.

However, the role of regional organizations has changed dramatically after the end of the Cold War. As Diehl puts it, “the end of the Cold War marks a turning point, with an upsurge in regional conflict management activities, including peacekeeping and mediation, as well as an expansion of organization roles into areas such as election supervision” (Diehl 548).

The dramatic increase of regional organizations in conflict management is clearly evidenced in their role in peacekeeping operations. The total number of regional peace keeping operations increased from only 9 before 1989 to 31 operations conducted since 1989 (Diehl 538). The rise of regional organizations involvement in conflict management did not come at the expense of the involvement of the United Nations. Since 1989, the United Nations conducted more than three times more peacekeeping operation than during the entire Cold War period (Diehl 539).

In theory, regional organizations have distinctive advantages in the realm of conflict management vis-à-vis international organizations. First, regional organization might be more able to reach a common agenda and policies because member states are more likely to share the same history, economic and political development, and a similar outlook towards regional problems. These similarities could facilitate consensus over conflict management. Second, regional organizations enjoy greater support from the parties involved in the conflict. Regional organizations are more likely to be perceived as legitimate and credible actors especially by non-Western countries that suffered

from Western imperialism and colonialism. The legitimacy of regional organizations enhances their effectiveness in conflict management. Third, regional organizations also have the advantage of enjoying more control over third party states such as neighboring states that would help solving the conflict. Fourth, regional organizations might also understand better the roots of the conflict as well as its cultural, social and political context. They also have the willingness to address the underlying causes of the conflict because a possible regionalization of the conflict would directly affect the member states of regional organizations. But regional organizations have distinctive disadvantages as well. They might be incapable of controlling external actors. For example, the Arab League has no control over Israel, Turkey and Iran despite their involvement in conflicts in the Middle East. Regional organizations are likely to be incapable of restraining regional or global powers because of limited resources (Diehl: 540-543).

In practice, the effectiveness of regional organizations in conflict management “remains mixed. Regional associations are not inherently superior (or inferior) to the United Nations in conflict management efforts. Still, it is hard to argue that regional actions are not at least as beneficial as, or superior to, inaction in most cases” (Diehl: 548).

There is also significant variation across regional organizations with respect to conflict management. “The contribution of regional bodies to conflict prevention and resolution varies greatly from one case to another.” Some regional organizations have been very successful while others have failed completely. Some were successful in certain types of conflict but not in others. Some have been successful in certain periods of the conflict but not others (Nathan 2010: 2). The variation in the effectiveness of regional organizations is influenced by multiple factors, including state formation, state power, domestic and foreign policy, the level of development, distribution of powers, external powers, and the nature of conflict and threat. The relative importance of these factors also varies from one case to another (Nathan 2-3). Yet, Nathan asserts that there are “two necessary conditions for peacemaking effectiveness [of regional organization]: member states must believe that the organization’s peacemaking mandate and mechanism serve their respective interests; and there must be sufficient normative congruence among these states to enable close political co-operation, cohesion and trust” (Nathan 19).

In evaluating the effectiveness of regional organizations in conflict management we should also take into account the following factors. First, regional organizations deal with different types of conflicts with various level of intractability. The Arab League and African Union have to deal with contactable border conflicts while Latin America had settled most of its border disputes already by the end of nineteenth century. Western Europe is also free of intractable conflicts. Thus, the Organization of American States and the European Union have the “leverage” to deal with new types of security and threat (Diehl 2007; Nathan 2010).

Second, some regions suffer from more internal rivalries than others. The Middle East, for example, suffers from the Arab-Israeli conflict, Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry, and inter-Arab rivalries rooted in the specific history of the region. Western Europe and Latin America, on the other hand, lack serious regional rivalries. Third, the mandate and authority of the organization also influence its ability to manage regional conflicts. Some organizations are limited by strict respect to absolute sovereignty, which limit their interference in domestic conflicts.

Fourth, regional organizations vary regarding their level of independence. Some function only as a forum for meetings of state representatives while others have gained some independence and autonomy from member states (Hurd 2011). Fifth, regional organizations differ in their power and resources. Some organizations have more political, economic, military, institutional, and logistical resources than others. The Gulf Cooperation Council has financial resources but it is

weak, politically and militarily to send peace-keeping mission to Syria. The Arab League also lacks know-how in the realm of democratization, transitional justice, and election monitoring as we see below (Diehl 2007; Nathan 2010; Acharya and Johnston 2007). Six, the complexity of conflicts, which contain multiple forces interact with each other, makes it difficult to isolate the independent effects of regional organizations. The six factors above illustrate the difficulty of comparing the relative effectiveness of regional organizations.

Regional Organizations and Mediation

Mediation is one of the most common methods of conflict management. During the Cold War, regional organizations were not active mediators but their mediation efforts increased significantly since the end of the Cold War. Before 1975, the average mediation attempts of regional organizations were only two per year, whereas after 1989, regional organizations conducted an average of almost 20 mediation attempts per year (Diehl 538). The increase in the mediation activities of regional organizations did not come at the expense of international organizations. In fact, the mediation activities of the United Nations increased at a faster rate than that of regional organizations (Diehl 2007).

Some scholars argue that regional organizations have distinctive advantages as mediators vis-à-vis international actors. Regional organizations are “insider mediators” who are “closely connected to the conflict at hand, with an intimate knowledge about the local conditions, and a stake in the outcome” (Elgstrom, Bercovitch, and Skau 2003: 12). First, regional organizations have superior knowledge of the conflicts and a strong interest to resolve them. The member states of regional organization also fear the regionalization of the conflict, which makes them particularly interested to prevent or solve it. Second, geographic proximity enables regional organizations to react faster than international organizations. Third, regional organizations have the ability to provide a forum for formal and informal dialogue due to dense network of personal contacts with the disputant actors. Fourth, the actors engaged in the conflict prefer regional organizations because they fear that international organization internationalize the conflict, which means they lose their autonomy and control over the process and outcome of the conflict. In other words, regional organizations keep the conflict local in the region (Elgstrom, Bercovitch, Skau: 18).

Elgstrom, Bercovitch, and Skau’s quantitative data suggests that “regional organizations are more successful mediators than the UN” in international disputes. “Regional organizations achieved a full settlement in 8.2 per cent of the cases in which they were involved, compared to only 3.1 percent by the UN. Regional organizations achieved some success with their mediation (that is a cease-fire, partial or full settlement) in 41.1 percent of cases; the UN achieved success in 32.1 percent only” (17).

Yet, the effectiveness of regional organization is dependent upon the type of conflict. Regional organizations are not particularly successful mediators in civil conflicts. “Despite their attractive qualities, peace settlements achieved in civil wars through regional organization mediation are dramatically more likely to fail quickly than those emerging from other forms of conflict management: 52% of civil war settlements facilitated by regional organization mediators fail in less than a week” (Gartner 2011: 380).

Civil wars are more likely to result in fragile settlements due to their nature. First, civil wars are often characterized by power asymmetries, giving the stronger party the confidence to win the war without external intervention. Second, civil wars often involve zero-sum issues that are hard to solve, such as who should rule the state. Third, civil wars often involve non-state actors who are

neither unitary nor coherent, making the problem of commitment and implementation of agreement particular difficult to achieve.

Fourth, mediation could be perceived as intervention in domestic affairs and violation of sovereignty of the state that is suffering from civil war. Fifth, the government engaged in a civil war tends to avoid the intervention of outsider mediators because the negotiation process recognizes the status of the opposition groups, which is a powerful social recognition. Sixth, the parties involved in civil wars fear that regional organization might be manipulated by member states that support either the government or the opposition. Civil wars tend to internationalization in the sense that the parties involved in the conflict receive support from external actors. “Neighboring states get involved in over half of civil wars” (383). As a result of the six factors above, third-party mediation in civil war only takes place as a last resort – which generally means when the conflict cannot be resolved by the domestic actors engaged in civil war.

It is important to emphasize that it is the nature of civil conflict rather than the regional organizations that makes the settlement of civil war difficult to achieve by regional organizations. “Regional organization conflict management does not cause conflict management failure. Rather, regional organization mediation is only selected in civil wars that are hard to manage, signaling a type of dispute that is highly intractable and unlikely to lead to stable resolution” (388). Thus, when we evaluate the effectiveness of the Arab League in conflict management, we should take into account the types of conflict and its level of complexity.

Regional Organization and Democratization

Regional organizations could also support democratization processes in member states. (Pevehouse 2002). Some regional organizations, such as the OAS and AU, modified their rule of sovereignty and non-intervention to authorize intervention in member states to protect democracy in member states.

Regional organization can exert economic and diplomatic pressure on democratizing states to continue and deepen the democratization process otherwise local interest groups could stop the move from authoritarian to democratic regime. The external pressure can take different forms including sanction and even expulsion the state from the organization.

Regional organizations can play a particularly important role when one member state experiences a breakdown of democracy, such as in cases of a military coup. The Organization of American States (OAS), for example, intervened in Guatemala after the military coup by Jorge Serrano in 1993. Partly due to the pressure of the OAS, Serrano was removed and a civilian president was installed (Pevehouse 523-524).

Regional organizations can also mitigate the fears of local forces from democratization; regional organizations can commit to local groups that their interest will not be jeopardized by democracy. Regional organization can help democratization through socialization internal groups such as the military, altering their belief systems to be more favorable of the democratic regime (Pevehouse 2002).

Regional organizations can also perform other roles such as “teacher” of the norms of democracy, guiding local groups on how to reform the regime and how to conduct elections. Regional organization can also monitor elections and support the practices associated with transitional justice. All by all, regional organizations can help to “lock in” the member states in the democratization process.

Pevehouse, however, claims that not every regional organization can support democratization. “Organizations with a higher democratic density are more likely to be associated with democratic transition” (529). Only regional organizations whose members are mostly democratic can help democratization processes. This type of organization is also more trusted by local elites to fulfill their commitments.

This short discussion of regional organizations and democracy is relevant to the purpose of this paper, as Tunisia and Egypt and Libya went through democratization processes and had to deal with transitional justice. The process of democratization has not been successful so far. Egypt even experienced a military coup against a democratically elected president. As we see in the final section of this paper, the Arab League did not play any role to help the democratization processes in the Arab countries.

The discussion above illustrates the importance of distinguishing the different types of internal conflicts/crises associated with the Arab Spring. They do not fall under the same category of conflict: peaceful uprisings, civil war, democratization, military coup, transitional justice, humanitarian crisis etc. We must take into account the nature of the conflict when evaluating the Arab League because the effectiveness of the Arab League might vary across different types of conflicts. We should also situate the analysis of the Arab League within the general research on regional organizations and conflict management to avoid “Arab exceptionalism” accounts.

4. Part Four: The Arab League

Critical Literature Review

In the literature on regionalism in the Middle East, there is broad consensus that the Arab League failed as a regional organization. “In the Middle East, regionalism of conflict has been realized, but it has failed to generate durable regional structures for conflict prevention and conflict management” (Balamir Coskun 2008: 91). The Middle East is “region without regionalism” (Aarts 1999). “The Arab League was designed to fail as a supranational entity” (Barnett and Solingen 2007: 182).

Realist accounts emphasize the absence of regional hegemony in the Middle East to account for the weakness of the Arab League. However, Egypt under Nasser was a quasi-hegemony but the League did not experience any change to reflect Egypt’s predominant power. Also, changes in the distribution of power in the Middle East, such as the decline of Egypt’s power after the 1970s, did not cause changes in the policies of the Arab League.

Ian Lustick emphasize the role of Western great powers in preventing the emergence of regional hegemony and regionalism in the Middle East (Lustick 1997). But as Barnett and Solingen claim, international great powers had little influence on the Arab League since its formation in 1945 (2007: 180-181).

Other scholars account for the weakness of the Arab League by its Charter particularly the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, and the decision making unanimity rule. Yet, we must be careful not to over-exaggerate the impact of sovereignty. Sovereignty is not an obstacle to economic cooperation and political cooperation (Donnelly 2006; Suganami 2007). Notice also that Arab states frequently intervened into each other’s domestic affairs at least until 1980, despite

the rule of sovereignty enshrined in the League Charter.

Others account for the weakness of the League by its unanimous rule but as Ghassan Salame puts it, “there is no need to establish majority rules, since even when the unanimity is possible it [Arab League] remains ineffective” (In Barnett and Solingen: 213). The League passed over 4000 resolutions since its formation in 1945 until the 1980s, but 80 percent of these resolutions never implemented despite unanimous support (Salame 1988). Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in December 2010, the Arab League expelled Libya and Syria in response to massive human rights violations, even though not all Arab states supported the resolutions, which is a violation unanimous rule.

Constructivist accounts in general emphasize the importance of a shared identity for a successful regionalism, but it seems that the shared Arab identity was not sufficient for the strong regionalism in the Middle East. Barnett and Solingen even argue that the shared Arab identity was an obstacle to regionalism in the Middle East (2007: 181).

Other accounts combine elements from different theories. Fawcett and Gandoise, for example, offer four variables to explain the weakness of regionalism in the Middle East: Arab nationalism, absence of regional hegemony, authoritarian regime, and external influence (Fawcett and Gandoise 2010). Barnett and Solingen also provide an account that combines identity and regime survival. “The politics of Arab nationalism and shared identity led Arab states to embrace the rhetoric of Arab unity in order to legitimize their regimes, and to fear Arab unity in practice because it would impose greater restriction on their sovereignty. The Arab League was a reflection of these interests and fear.” (181). Thus, the Arab League was originally designed to fail. “The Arab League was designed to fail as a supranational entity, and in that sense it reflects the triumph of domestic regimes with little interest in developing robust regional organizations” (182). But the strength and legitimacy of Arab regimes as well as Arab identity changed over time, especially after 1970s (Gause 1992; Barnett 1998) and still the effectiveness of the League did not changed accordingly.

There is no one single theory that can explain every aspect about the Arab League. We should have a flexible and inclusive approach. We should also adopt “stage theory” approach that applies different theories to different stages of the Arab League or regionalism in the Middle East (Hurrell 1995: 358). We should also be aware of the relative strength of the League across issue areas such as economic, political, culture, security etc. Finally, we should be careful to have clear independent and dependent variables in explaining regionalism in the Middle East (Lawson 2008). Much of the literature that asserts “complete failure” or “death” of the Arab League impose goals (Arab unity) that were never been part of the original goals of the Arab League.

The Charter of the Arab League

The Arab League was founded in Cairo on March 22, 1945. The founding members of the League were the newly independent Arab states of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, and Yemen. The negotiations over the design of the League took place in a regional context of inter-Arab rivalry during which the ruling Hashemite dynasty of Transjordan and Iraq attempted to impose their sovereignty over Syria and Saudi Arabia. Syria also perceived Lebanon as part of historical Syria. In other words, the negotiations on the design of the Arab League happened in a context within which the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of some Arab states were seriously threatened by fellow Arab states. The norms of sovereignty that are often assumed or taken for granted in IR theory were in fact deeply contested in the Middle East in mid 1940s.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria feared the Hashemite dynasty regional ambitions. They sought to protect the principle of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Arab states in the Charter of the Arab League. Therefore, it is no co-incidence that the Charter of the Arab League clearly and explicitly states the goal of the League as the protection of the sovereignty and independence of its member states:

“The purpose of the League is to draw closer the relations between member States and co-ordinate their political activities with the aim of realizing a close collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries” (Article 2) (*italics added*).

“Every Member State of the League shall respect the form of government obtaining in the other States of the League, and shall recognize the form of government obtaining as one of the rights of those States, and shall pledge itself not to take any action tending to change that form” (Article 8).

The Charter also specifies the organizational structure of the League. The Arab League is composed of a General Secretariat and Council, but they lack any significant autonomy or independence from member states, which makes it difficult if not impossible for the League to develop any agency. The decision making process also reflects the concern to prevent external intervention in internal affairs of member states. As put in Article 7: “The decisions of the Council is taken by an unanimous vote that shall be binding on all the member states of the League; those that are reached by a majority vote shall bind only those that accept them. In both cases the decisions of the Council shall be executed in each State in accordance with the fundamental structure of that state.” Over time, the council of the Arab League was overshadowed by the new informal practices of “Arab Summits” of heads of Arab states. This informal institution became the most important aspect of regionalism in the Arab Middle East.

The Charter devotes three specific articles for conflict resolution and mediation. Clearly, they were designed to deal with international conflict not internal conflict:

“The recourse to force for the settlement of disputes between two or more member States shall not be allowed. Should there arise among them a dispute that does not involve the independence of a State, its sovereignty or its territorial integrity, and should the two contending parties apply to the Council for the settlement of this dispute, the decision of the Council shall then be effective and obligatory. In this case, the States among whom the dispute has arisen shall not participate in the deliberations and decisions of the Council.

The Council shall mediate in a dispute which may lead to war between two member States or between a member State and another State in order to conciliate them. The decisions relating to arbitration and mediation shall be taken by a majority vote.” (Article 5)

Article 6 also states:

“In case of aggression or threat of aggression by a State against a member State, the State attacked or threatened with attack may request an immediate meeting of the Council. The Council shall determine the necessary measures to repel this aggression. Its decision

shall be taken unanimously. If the aggression is committed by a member State the vote of that State will not be counted in determining unanimity.”

The Charter also gives the League an authority to expel member states: “The Council of the League may consider any State that is not fulfilling the obligations resulting from this Pact as excluded from the League, by a decision taken by a unanimous vote of all the States except the State referred to” (Article 18).

Since its formation, the League has expanded in terms of member-states. The number of member states expanded from 7 in 1945 to 22 members including Palestine in 2015. The League added some committees to its structure but they still lack autonomy and power. For instance, the human rights organs of the League include the Permanent Human Rights commission, the Arab Human Rights Committee, the Arab Human Rights Department, and the Arab court on Human Right. The League even adopted the Arab Charter of Human Rights.

Yet, the Arab League’s human rights regime exists on paper only, with no impact on internal affairs of member states. The permanent human rights commission was founded in 1968 but its main focus has been Israel’s human rights violation in the occupied Palestinian territories, even though Israel is not a member of the Arab League. The Arab human rights committee can only use official state reports and information from NGOs that are registered within their own countries. The regional human rights regime does not have an enforcement authority; it cannot even “publicly qualify the human rights situation in member states, to investigate any allegations, or to issue recommendations” (Mencutick 92).

The Arab League is a strictly inter-state organization. Only an independent Arab state can be member of the League. The focus is exclusively on the states and their relations based on the respect to their sovereignty. There is no mention of any mechanism to deal with internal conflicts or new types of security such as terrorism. Moreover, the Arab League was not designed to promote human rights and democracy. It was not even designed to promote the welfare of the Arab nation or societies and it was not created to achieve political integration among Arab states. Rather, the main goal is to promote cooperation among Arab states and to protect their sovereignty and independence.

The Arab League and Conflict Management

The literature on the “failure” of the Arab League in the realm of conflict management is generally based on the findings of three different quantitative studies. The first is Awad’s in which he claims that the League succeeded in resolving only six out of seventy-seven inter-Arab conflicts it dealt with between 1945 and 1981 (1994: 153). But as Binfari notices, “Awad does not provide any reference, table or detailed discussion to substantiate his claim, being satisfied to mention this figure ‘without elaborating’” (Binfari 9).

The second research is of Josef Nye’s (1971) in which he compares the Arab League, the Organization for African Union (OAU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) in managing conflicts between 1948 and 1970. He concludes that the Arab League was the least effective among the three. But his study focuses only on three interventions of the Arab League: the Lebanese civil war in 1957, the war between Iraq and Kuwait in 1961-63, and the Yemen civil war (Binfari 6).

The third is Marc Zacher’s research in which he reports that the Arab League successfully

mediated in 12 percent of the conflicts in the Middle East between 1946 and 1977. This figure is lower than OAU (19%) and OAS (37%). Zacher argues that the Arab League did not engage in conflicts that involved regional states from the competing blocs of the Cold War. For example, the Arab League did not intervene in Lebanon's conflict with the United Arab Republic in 1958. Zacher also argues that the parties involved in conflict often did not appeal to the Arab League, reflecting the weakness of the organization in the eyes of the states in the region (In Barnett and Solingen: 214). But he also mentions cases of success, such as the League's achievement in resolving Iraq's conflict with Kuwait in 1961 and the League's successful resolution of Algeria-Morocco conflict in 1963. The role of the League was also successful in Taif accord that ended the civil war in Lebanon (ibid). But according to Pinfari, Zacher's list of conflicts in the Middle East is also partial (Pinfari 9).

Pinfari provides updated data on the Arab League that takes into account the types of conflicts. He finds that the Arab League mediated in 19 out of 56 conflicts in the Middle East from 1945 to 2008 (34 percent). The League achieved "full success" in five conflicts (9 percent) and "contributed to success" to 21 percent of the conflicts. This is not a great success but also not complete failure.

The performance of the League varies across types of conflicts. "The conflict resolution record of the League is extremely disappointing in particular in relation to civil wars...the League has often hesitated to become involved in internal strife, even when they evolved into sub-regional conflicts with the intervention of neighboring states. In fact, it intervened as mediator in only five of the 22 major civil wars that occurred in the Middle East since 1945" (Pinfari 10). "What we see is a persistent pattern of non-intervention in almost all major civil wars, which seems to reflect a shared interest by most Arab League members to reassert the *uti possiditis* rule and the inviolability of their boundaries from external interference." (11). Pinfari account for Arab League's failure in mediating civil conflict by respect to independence and sovereignty (10).

The League engaged in only 7 out of 36 major conflicts that caused more than 1000 deaths. This is primarily because one of the major warring parties of the region is not a member state-Israel. "The League did intervene in most interstate wars and extra-systemic conflicts listed in the Correlates of War datasets, but not as mediator—rather, to rally the support of other Arab countries against, typically the state of Israel" (2009: 12). Yet, the Arab League adopted the 'Arab Peace Initiative' for comprehensive peace and normalization with Israel in Beirut Summit in 2002. However, Israel never responded seriously to this significant move by the Arab League.

The Arab League also partially contributed to the resolution of war between Israel and Hezbollah in July 2006. Hezbollah fighters attacked Israeli patrol across the border, killing three Israeli soldiers and kidnapping two, which led to 34 days of deadly wars that killed and injured thousands of Lebanese and hundreds of Israelis. The Arab League initiated an emergency summit on July 15 amongst division of Arab states between Syria who supported Hezbollah on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and Egypt the criticized Hezbollah for its acts on the other hand. On August 7, a second meeting of the Arab League was held in Egypt reemphasizing the League support to Lebanon. The League also formed a special committee headed by UAE and Qatar and the Secretary General of the League to represent the Arab position in the Security Council negotiations to end the conflict (Dakhlalah 2012: 66).

Dakhlalah summarize the mediating role of the League during this war and links it to Pinfari's framework:

The Arab League's role in this war was essentially one of mediation between the different Lebanese and Arab parties, thereby facilitating an acceptable common Arab and indeed Lebanese stance towards the modalities of peace. When this was achieved...the Arab

League was able to successfully engage in Security Council negotiations on the drafting of UNSCR 1701, which ended the war. This intervention highlights a 'partial contribution to success' in the case of a major extra-systemic conflict between a non-Arab state and Arab guerrilla movement involving more than 1000 battle death (Dakhlalah 67).

These different rates of success in different types of conflict pose a challenge to "designed to fail" thesis because "under certain circumstances and in certain areas, it [i.e. the Arab League] succeeded in abating local crises and wars" (Pinfari 18).

Before the Arab Spring: The Arab League and Civil Conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon

In this short subsection I review the role of the Arab League in two civil conflicts that happened not long time before the eruption of the Arab Spring: Iraq and Lebanon. Following the American invasion in Iraq, the new U.S. authority in Baghdad appointed the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) but the Arab League refused to recognize the IGC as a legitimate representative of Iraq, for not been elected by Iraqi people. The decision of the League was also driven by its concern that recognition of IGC would provide an Arab legitimacy to the American occupation of an Arab country. Iraq's seat at the Arab League remained empty despite requests from IGC. The League also refused to open a mission in Baghdad. But due to international pressures, the League eventually accepted a representative of IGC in September 2003 but limited his mandate for one-year period only (Al-Marashi 144).

Furthermore, the League rejected a request from IGC to deploy Arab peacekeeping forces in Iraq. During the Arab summit in Tunisia in March 2004, Iraq officially asked for an Arab peacekeeping force to be deployed in Iraq. But the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Mousa, rejected the request, claiming it is "impossible" to send Arab Peacekeeping forces because the request must be submitted by a legitimate government, implying that IGC is illegitimate. He also added, "what is certain is that Arab troops cannot join with troops occupying another Arab Country" (quoted in Al-Marashi 144).

The Arab League also condemned the Iraqi Constitutional Committee for its failure to define Iraq as an "Arab State" in its draft of the constitution. Moreover, Mousa condemned the federal structure of the regime that gives the Shia and Kurds the opportunity to have a regional autonomy within Iraq, which could threaten the Arab identity of Iraq. The League was particularly concerned about the Arab identity of Iraq, as well as the increasing Iranian influence in the country. Obviously, the rules of sovereignty and non-intervention did not prevent Mousa from interfering in internal political process inside Iraq. On the other hand, the new leadership of Iraq criticized the League lack of support in the political process in Iraq.

In October 2005, the Arab League eventually sent its first delegation to Iraq, under regional (mainly Iraq) and international pressure. During the visit, the League had to deal with different ethnic groups of which most of them share negative views of the League, largely driven by history and identity. Representative of the Shiite community, for example, accused the League for not representing all Iraqis but being biased for the Sunnis. They also criticized the League for its silence on Saddam Hussein atrocities against the Shiite communities in the past, and they also criticized the League for its unwillingness to condemn the post 2003 war terrorist attacks that targeted the Shia community in Iraq.

The Kurds also did not trust the Arab League and they criticized its silence on Saddam Hussein

atrocities against the Kurds, including the use of chemical weapons attacks on Halabja in 1988. The Sunnis, on their behalf, held more positive views of the League and saw it as a regional body that can protect the Sunni Arabs in the new Iraq. But some Sunni groups, particularly the Baathists and the insurgency, accused the League of being manipulated by the United States. Obviously, the history of the League, its identity, and its policies alienated important Iraqi groups who did not view the League as an impartial mediator.

However, the League eventually succeeded to host a conference of Iraqi reconciliation in the League headquarters in Cairo in November 2005. Representatives from Iraqi Shiite, Sunnis, Kurds and Turkmens political parties and factions attended the conference. The conference was “fruitful” in enabling various groups to meet face to face and discuss the future of Iraq. There was a consensus that a future reconciliation conference will be held in Iraq but the violence in Iraq overshadowed the process of reconciliation (153).

Al-Marashi claims that the failure of the reconciliation process was due to the timing of mediation initiative as the conflict did not reach “mutually hurting stalemate” at the time of interference. The league also had very few coercive tools to impose agreement on armed insurgent groups (Al-Marashi and Keskin 2008:257). Notice also there are regional and international powers were deeply involved in Iraq such as Iran and the US but the League has no control on them. But despite the sectarianism in Iraq and the crisis between IGC and the League, the latter succeeded in hosting a conference of national conciliation of Iraq.

The Arab League and Lebanon’s Internal Crisis

The assassination of Lebanon Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on 14 February 2005 put Lebanon into a new crisis that divided the countries into two camps: Hezbollah and its allies, who are supporters of Syria’s intervention in Lebanon, and a coalition of Sunni, Christian and Druze factions who opposed Syria and call for the evacuation of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Under regional and international pressure, the 15000 Syrian troops left Lebanon on 28 February 2005. But this was just the beginning of a new internal crisis in Lebanon. The sudden withdraw of Syrian forces, along with regional powers involvement in Lebanon domestic politics, intensified the internal conflict between the two camps, which included political assassinations and sectarian protests. From the onset of the crisis, the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Mousa, tried to ease the tension between Lebanon and Syria, Syria and the international community, and the internal factions within Lebanon (Dakhlalah 2012).

Yet, the domestic conflict in Lebanon got worse when the Lebanese Cabinet decided that Hezbollah’s telecommunication network was illegal and a violation of state sovereignty. The supreme leader of Hezbollah described the resolution as “open war” against Hezbollah (Dakhlalah 2012). Militias of the opposition (Hezbollah, Amal and others) invaded Sunni neighborhoods in Beirut, arresting Sunni militia members and shut down the main media offices of the opposition. The military clashes spread to other parts of Lebanon with over 65 dead and 200 wounded.

Lebanon was on the edge on new civil war. The Arab League held an emergency meeting called for by Egypt on 11 May. The AL Council issued Resolution 6915, mandating the formation of a Ministerial Committee headed by Qatari foreign minister and Secretary General Amr Mousa to deal with the Lebanese crisis. Three days later the committee arrived in Beirut and held talks with representatives of the two fighting camps. On May 15, the Committee announced the negotiation process would continue in Qatar the following day.

The Doha Dialogue contained bilateral and multilateral talks over five days which eventually led to an agreement On May 21. The AL directly contributed to success of conflict resolution of the Lebanese crisis. It was a success story of the Arab League in which Qatar play an important role as put by Dalhalah: “The AL’s role in Doha was not simply that of a patron to a Qatari initiative; rather the Qatari intervention was part and parcel of the AL’s ongoing efforts to resolve the Lebanese crisis” (72).

The League success in mediating the Lebanese crisis is largely due to its ongoing intervention in Lebanon from the start of the crisis, since the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005. This enables the League to keep communication with the relevant internal and regional actors. The Arab League’s ability to directly contribute to success in 2008 was also due to the relatively lack of direct intervention of extra-regional actors (73).

The Arab League and Humanitarian Crises in the Arab World

The Arab League has a dark history of humanitarian crises. In 1982, the regime of Hafez al-Assad killed thousands of Syrian citizens in the city of Hama but the League did not undertake serious initiative in order to stop to the mass killings. The League also did not condemn the mass killings of Kurds and Shia in Iraq by the regime of Saddam Hussein. Even after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, “the League never endorsed a common statement clearly condemning massacres of Shiites by Sunni terrorists in Iraq” (Barnett and Solingen: 218). The League also refused to send peacekeeping forces to Iraq.

Despite the genocide in Sudan that led to the killing of over 400,000 civilians and the displacement of over one million people, the Arab League opposed UN sanctions against Sudanese leadership. The league even held the Arab summit in Khartoum in 2006 to support the Sudanese leadership and oppose UN sanctions. The League did not contribute relief workers to Sudan; and Canada committed more aid to Darfur than the Arab countries combined (Barnett and Solingen 2018-219). “Abstaining from intervention on account of human rights violations was among the few truly consensual principles guiding Arab League members” (217).

Unfortunately, the League did not learn much from its failure in humanitarian crises in the past. The League did not adopt institutional reforms in order to strengthen its ability to handle humanitarian crises in the Middle East. The League’s failure to address the Syrian refugees crisis is a striking evidence of the lack of learning from previous humanitarian crises in the Middle East.

The discussion above provides a background on the Arab League role in conflict resolution in general and civil conflict and humanitarian crisis in particular. This background helps to identify continuity and change in the Arab League policies during the Arab Spring.

5. Part Five: The Arab League and the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring erupted in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread to Egypt and Libya in North Africa and later to Syria in the Levant, and Bahrain and Yemen in the Arab Gulf. The Arab League was silent during the popular protests in Tunisia. The League was supposed to hold a summit in

Tunisia but it was canceled because of the instability in the country. At the Arab economic summit on 19 January 2011, the Secretary General Amr Mousa, warned the Arab leaders that “Arab soul is broken by poverty, unemployment and general recession,” and “Tunisian revolution is not far from us, Arab citizens entered an unprecedented state of anger and frustration.” The Arab leaders decided to commit US \$2 billion to support the Arab economy (Quoted in Mencutek 2014: 96).

The Tunisian crisis fell under the category of minor internal conflict, but the League did not mediate between the regime and the opposition. When the Tunisian President Ben Ali was ousted, the League only called upon the Tunisians to reach a “national consensus to bring the country out of this crisis in a way that guarantee respect for the will of the Tunisian people” (quoted in Mencutek 2014: 96).

The Arab League was also silent during the post-revolution transition process in Tunisia (96). Tunisia has experienced serious difficulties to deal with democratization and transitional justice after the fall of Ben Ali regime and yet the Arab League did not help Tunisia to overcome the obstacles to complete its democratization and national reconciliation processes. The regional organization of the Arab League, unlike other regional organization, does not have the institutional, know-how, and normative power to promote democratization in member states. As mentioned above, regional organizations could help in various ways the democratization process in member states (Pevehous 2005) but the Arab League did not have the institutional power, normative power and know-how power in the realm of democratization and transitional justice. The Arab League non-intervention in Tunisia supports Pevehous’ thesis that only democratic regional organizations can support democratization (2005).

The Arab League also did not intervene in Egypt during the popular uprising there. The League did not even criticize the human rights violation of the Egyptian security forces despite calls by human rights organizations to do so. The policy of the League was particularly striking during the military coup that ousted the democratically elected president Mohamad Moursi in July 2013.

The Secretary General of the Arab League, Nabil el-Arabi, in fact supported the coup. “I will not call it a military coup,” “What happened was intervention by the military to respond to the massive demonstration reflecting the desire and determination of the Egyptian people to return to real democracy.”² He even visited capitals around the world to convince world leaders that the intervention of the military was a “popular revolution” not “a military coup.”³ The League, whose headquarters are in Cairo, did not even initiate any mediation efforts to solve the domestic crisis in Egypt. Later, the Arab League held its summit in Egypt, which provided a clear regional recognition of the new Egyptian regime of Abdul Fatah al-Sisi. On the other hand, another regional organization, the African Union, suspended Egypt from all activities after the military coup.⁴ Interestingly, two regional organizations reacted very differently to the military coup in Egypt.

Despite the collapse of the democratization process in Egypt, the League kept its policy of non-intervention. Furthermore, President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi regime have conducted serious human rights violations against members of the Muslim Brotherhood and civil society organizations but the League kept its silence despite calls from regional and international human rights organizations on the Arab League to interfere.

(2) <http://www.mintpressnews.com/revolution-or-coup-egypts-crisis-is-deepening/164956/> (accessed December 9, 2015).

(3) <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/6490-arab-league-seeks-to-justify-qpopular-revolutionq-in-egypt> (accessed December 9, 2015).

(4) Egypt resumed its activity at African Union a year after the membership was frozen.

During the uprisings in the Gulf countries (Bahrain and Yemen), the Arab League supported the policies of Saudi Arabia in this sub-region including its military intervention. The ruling monarchy in Manama formally requested the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to deploy military forces to oppress the uprising. The GCC's Peninsula Shield Force, mostly military forces from Saudi Arabia, was sent to Bahrain. But according to the GCC formal treaty, the Peninsula Shield Force was created to deal with external threats not domestic protests for democracy.

The Arab League also supported Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen to support the government against the Houthi rebels. Saudi Arabia organized a coalition of nine Arab states to support the regime in Yemen against the Houthi rebels. The Arab coalition started air strikes on March 25, 2015. Three days later, the Arab League announced the formation of regional military force in its summit in Cairo (Beck 2015: 201). The League did not even criticize the ruling regimes in Bahrain and Yemen for massive human rights violation despite calls by human rights organizations (Mencutek 2014: 97).

The Arab League's policy towards Bahrain and Yemen were heavily influenced by the predominant power of Saudi Arabia, who perceived regime change in the Arab Gulf is a threat to its national interest. But perceptions also played an important role in shaping the Arab states policies towards Bahrain and Yemen. The conflicts in Yemen and Bahrain were perceived, at least partly, as a proxy wars for Iran aiming to dismantle Sunni regimes and replaced them with Shia regimes. These shared understandings and perception of the conflict constitute the support of Arab states to the ruling regimes in these two Arab countries despite massive human rights violations there.

The Arab League policy towards the mass atrocities in Libya and Syria constitutes a major change in its traditional policy of non-intervention. Unlike its indifference towards mass killings in the past, this is the first time the Arab League takes major steps to end mass killings inside its member state. In response to the Libyan regime's mass atrocities against its citizens, the Arab League suspended Qaddafi's Libya from the regional organization in February 22, 2011. It was the first time the League suspends a member state for massive human rights violation. A few months later, in August 2011, the Arab League turned over Libya's seat to the National Transitional Council (NTC), effectively recognizing the rebel body as the legitimate authority in Libya.

In a special meeting in Cairo on March 12, 2011, the Arab League called upon the United Nation Security Council to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. The Arab League resolution proclaims that Gadhafi's government had "lost its sovereignty" and asked the "United Nations to shoulder its responsibility—to impose a no-fly zone over the movement of Libyan military planes and to create safe zones in the places vulnerable to airstrikes."⁵ All 22 Arab states supported the decision except Syria and Algeria.⁶ The decision was taken despite the violation of the unanimity rule enshrined in the League Charter.

The Arab League also strongly supported the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011 authorizing "all necessary measures" "to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jumahiriya." The resolution also imposed a no-fly zone over Libya "to protect civilians."⁷ Several Arab states including Jordan, UAE, and Qatar took part of NATO military operations in Libya authorized by UNSC 1973 resolution.

(5) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/12/arab-league-asks-un-for-libya-no-fly-zone_n_834975.html.

(6) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12723554>

(7) [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973\(2011\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973(2011))

But since the ousting of President Gadhafi, the Arab League has not been involved in the transition to democracy process in Libya. Arab League “did not undertake serious mediation efforts following the outbreak of political instability in Libya, where there was and continue to be an urgent need for reconciliation between different warring parties.” (Mencutek: 97). The deterioration of security and political situation transformed Libya into a fragile state. The internationally recognized Libyan government asked the Arab League for military support. Libya even asked its Arab allies for airstrikes against terrorist organizations that operate within Libya. The Arab League endorsed the Libyan request and asked member states to support Libya.

The Arab League has adopted similar policies towards Syria. Following Bashar Assad regime’s mass atrocities against the Syrian people, the Arab League expelled Assad’s Syria from the regional organization on November 12, 2011. In the same resolution, the Arab League asked all its members to withdraw their ambassadors from Damascus. Furthermore, the Arab League imposed political and economic sanctions against the Syrian regime. Only Yemen and Lebanon opposed the resolution while Iraq abstained.

The Arab League even asked the United Nations Security Council to send a peacekeeping mission into Syria. In a resolution issued on February 12, 2012, the League “ask the UN Security Council to issue a decision on the formation of a joint UN-Arab peacekeeping force to oversee the implementation of a ceasefire.”⁸ Furthermore, the resolution urged the League members to “halt all forms of diplomatic cooperation” with the Syrian government. The resolution also states that the league supported “opening channels of communication with the Syrian opposition and providing all forms of political and financial support to it.”⁹

In November 2012, both the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council recognize the Syrian opposition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. “The states of the council announce recognizing the National Coalition for the Forces of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition... as the legitimate representative of the brotherly Syrian people,” GCC chief Abdullatif al-Zayani said in a statement.¹⁰ In March 2013, the Arab League granted the Arab League seat to the Syrian opposition coalition.¹¹

The Arab League also sent an Observer Mission from Arab countries to Syria in December 2011 (resolution 7439). The overall goal was to lead a dialogue between the warring parties, but the mission failed soon after. The head of the observer mission was involved in war crimes in Darfur, which undermined the credibility of the mission in the eyes of the opposition. Second, the mission was completely dependent on the Syrian government on its movement within the Syrian territories. In a few weeks, some Arab states withdrew their members in the mission and the Arab League eventually suspended the mission in January 2012.

The Arab League also attempted to cooperate with the United Nations to mediate in the Syrian crisis as evidenced in the UN-Arab League special envoy Kofi Anan’s Six-point peace plan. Neither the Syrian government nor the oppositions met the requirement of Anan’s peace plan and it failed soon after. The Arab League tried to mobilized the United Nations Security Council to intervene in

(8) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/12/arab-league-asks-un-for-libya-no-fly-zone_n_834975.html

(9) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12723554>

(10) <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/12/249215.html>(11) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17004530>

(11) <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/27/world/middleeast/syrian-opposition-group-takes-seat-at-arab-league.html>

Syria but its efforts were vetoed by China and Russia.

Despite several attempts, the Arab League failed to resolve the conflict in Syria. Several factors contributed to this failure. First, the civil war in Syria has been regionalized and internationalized with the military intervention of Iran, Hezbollah, Russia, and Western countries inside Syria. The increasing complexity of the Syrian conflict makes it impossible for the Arab League to solve the conflict by itself. Needless to say, the League is too weak and has no control on many of the local, regional, and international actors involved in the Syrian conflict.

The recent Russian intervention in Syria and the international coalition led by the United States against ISIL changed the balance of power in the Syrian civil war. The literature on conflict resolution of civil war suggests that resolution is possible when all parties believe that they cannot win the civil war by force. Thus, they turn to negotiation to solve the conflict. But the recent Russian and Western intervention in Syria made the Assad regime more confident that it can win the war by force, which negatively affects the possibility of conflict resolution in Syria.

Second, the lack of trust between Syria and some members of the League, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, is another major obstacle for the chances of the League to mediate in the Syrian conflict. Third, there are so many conflicts in the Arab World—Yemen, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt—that take place at the very same time. Many of the member states face serious domestic instability, which enforced them to focus on domestic security rather than regional security.

6. Conclusion

The Arab League adopted different policies towards the internal conflicts in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria since December 2010. First, the Arab League was most active in its policy towards Syria and Libya, which experienced civil wars with massive human rights violations. The League expelled the two member states for massive human rights violations. It is the first time in which the League expels member states for massive human rights violations. This is particularly striking given the inaction of the League towards previous human rights atrocities in member states that occurred before 2011. The League also used the principle of 'Responsibility to Protect' to justify its intervention in member states. The League also supported the international intervention in Libya. Of course, regime interests of Saudi Arabia and Qatar affected the League's policy towards Syria in particular, but they still had to utilize R2P to justify their policy of intervention in Syria. The Arab regimes and the Arab League were under local, regional, and international pressure to intervene in Syria and Libya. Thus, the League policies towards Syria and Libya cannot be reduced to regime interest and distribution of power alone.

The League also played the role of mediator in the Syrian crisis but with no success in resolving the conflict. But the United Nations, UN Security Council, and great powers also failed to stop the conflict in Syria. This is largely due to the complexity of the Syrian conflict, its regionalization and internationalization. Regional and international actors are involved in the Syrian conflict and the League has no control on these actors. The conflict between Syria on one hand and Saudi Arabia and Qatar on the other also negatively affected the ability of the League to mediate in the Syrian conflict.

Second, the contribution of the Arab League to the processes of democratization, transitional justice, and national reconciliation in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya after the failure of the old regimes was absolute non-intervention. The League did nothing to stop the failure of democratization

processes in member states. This reflects the lack of institutional, normative, and know-how power of the League in these particular fields.

Third, the League supported the ruling regimes in Bahrain and Yemen. It also supported Saudi Arabia's intervention in these two countries. This reflects the predominant power of the Saudi Arabia. But the League's policies towards Yemen and Bahrain are also driven by perceptions of these conflicts. The conflicts in Yemen and Bahrain are seen by Arab regimes as proxy wars of Iran. This perception at least partly constitutes the Arab League support to the ruling regimes in Bahrain and Yemen.

Regime interest and distribution of power, undoubtedly, play a significant role in the Arab League but they are not the only forces that shape the Arab League. The role of the Arab League in internal conflicts is also influenced by the institutional, normative, and knowhow power of the League itself which cannot be reduced to regime interest and distribution of power alone. The League's policy is also influenced by regional and international rivalries that restrict its capacity and autonomy to manage conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. The perceptions of the conflicts are equally important in shaping the policies of the Arab League towards these conflicts. Thus, all IR theories contribute to our understanding of the Arab League, not only realism (balance of power) and comparative politics (regime interest) as often assumed in the literature.

Terrorism also imposed itself on regional and international agenda, which also affected the policies of the Arab League and other regional and international actors. The fear from the spread of terrorism influenced the policies of regional and international actors towards the Arab Spring. The Arab regimes also utilize ISIL and terrorism to impose the discourse of the war on terror on the Arab public and to marginalize the discourse of democratization.

The policy of the Arab League during the Arab Spring also demonstrates that the Charter of the League influences but does not determine the policy of the League. The League actually did not follow the Charter during the Arab Spring. The League expelled Syria and Libya without unanimous support by all Arab states. Notice that the Charter states that expelling member states require unanimous support by all member state except the outlaw state.

Four years after the eruption of the Arab Spring, the Arab League is still a weak organization but not a dead organization. The League has to implement serious reforms that could strengthen its material, institutional, and normative power. Regional organizations in the Global South such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and African Union (AU) could play an important role in helping the League to implement the required reforms to be an effective organization. Regional Organizations from the Global South have the experience, power, credibility, and legitimacy to help the Arab League to become an effective organization in the Middle East and North Africa.

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