

# SSICSim 2012: The Arab League



Message from Under-Secretary General:

I would like to welcome you all to the inaugural SSICSim Conference. Our team has worked hard to provide our delegates with a realistic Model United Nations experience dealing with the Arab League and a sample of the plethora of challenges it has faced and faces. We hope that you will enjoy your roles at the Arab League Committee of SSICSim 2012!

Sincerely,

Shahryar Pasandideh  
Under-Secretary-General, SSICSim 2012

**Under-Secretary-General: Shahryar Pasandideh**  
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## Overview of the Arab League



Flag of the Arab Revolt

### History: Reclaiming the Arab Destiny

The Arab League was inaugurated on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1945, a full month before the birth of the United Nations in San Francisco. As the paroxysms of violence unleashed in the Second World War brought about the unraveling of the French and British colonial order in the Middle East, the Arab peoples saw their great chance to declare their collective independence and reclaim the glory of their illustrious ancestors. For the first time since the fall of Baghdad to Hulagu Khan in 1258, the destiny of the Arab World lay not in the hands of Mongols, Turks or Europeans, but in the hands of the Arabs themselves.

As the six founding members of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia gathered in Cairo in 1945, war was in the air. In 1948, Yemen would join the League in its abortive attempt to crush the nascent Jewish State of Israel, which had infuriatingly imposed itself in the heart of the Arab World. The ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict (and the “Palestinian Question” that it engendered) would prove to be a long-lasting boondoggle for the Arab League, an eternal reminder of its failure to protect the Arab heartland and Arab honour. In 1979, the League chose to temporarily abandon its Cairo headquarters after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made peace with the Zionists. Even the admission of dozens of new member states failed to offset the malaise of internecine Arab wars such as the Gulf War, or the League's impotence as the United States penetrated the region and propped up local rulers in the guise of its vaunted “War on Terror”. The Arab League gradually came to be seen as irrelevant, especially when compared to other regional organizations such as the EU or ASEAN.

But as always, the wheel of time has turned, and new avenues abound for the Arab League.

The Arab Spring of 2011 has injected new life into the region, with Arab youth marching bravely in the streets to stake control over their future. At the same time, this regional earthquake poses new challenges for the League. Non-Arab powers such as Iran, Turkey and the United States, the traditional bugbear, threaten to exploit the Arab Spring for their own selfish ends. How will venerable monarchies such as Qatar and Jordan interact with newborn revolutionary states such as Egypt and Tunisia? What of the ongoing strife in Libya? And what if Saudi Arabia and Iran, staring at each other across the Gulf armed to the teeth with both weapons and ideology, should come to blows? Former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban once claimed that “The Arabs never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity”. Now is the time to prove him wrong once and for all.

## Structure and Powers of the Arab League

In a broad sense, the Arab League sees itself as a vehicle for promoting closer ties among member-states and coordinating their policies and economic, cultural, and security plans with a view to developing collective cooperation, protecting national security and maintaining the independence and sovereignty of member-states; thereby enhancing the potential for joint Arab action in all fields. In short, the League seeks to defend the communal interests of the Arab peoples in an unpredictable and unforgiving world order.

The League's formal structure was defined in its 1945 Charter, which established the five main arms of the organization:

1. **Summit Conferences:** Summit conferences are called when the need arises. The first occurred on 13 January 1964 in Cairo, Egypt. The heads of state and government attend these sessions – 12 ordinary and 11 extraordinary summits have been convened – and discuss major issues affecting the Arab community. The result is a communiqué, a type of resolution that states the general position of the leaders. These resolutions form the basis from which the other bodies work; 195 have been passed. The Charter does not provide for a summit conference, yet the League's members view them as critical to the forward progress of the organization. This crisis committee will take the form of a hypothetical Arab League Summit Conference to be held in January 2012.
2. **Council of the League:** The Charter established the Council as the League's supreme body, defining its formation, scope of authority, rules of procedure, and voting. All member states are members of the Council, and each has one vote. Unanimous Council decisions are binding on all members; majority decisions are binding only on those members that have accepted the majority decision. Financial and administrative resolutions need only be passed by two-thirds of the members to be binding upon all. In the event the Council is debating hostilities between two or more members, the aggressor nation is not permitted to vote on the resolution. Affiliate or standing committees assist the Council in conducting its work. The Council is mainly concerned with pursuing the objectives of the League and monitoring the implementation of the

plans and programs adopted by the League. Through the Council, the League promotes joint Arab action on a wide range of economic, cultural and political activities. In addition, the Council has the power to amend the Charter, mediate disputes between members, act on applications for membership, and accept withdrawals from the League. Other functions include the establishment of affiliate bodies and the appointment of the Secretary-General.

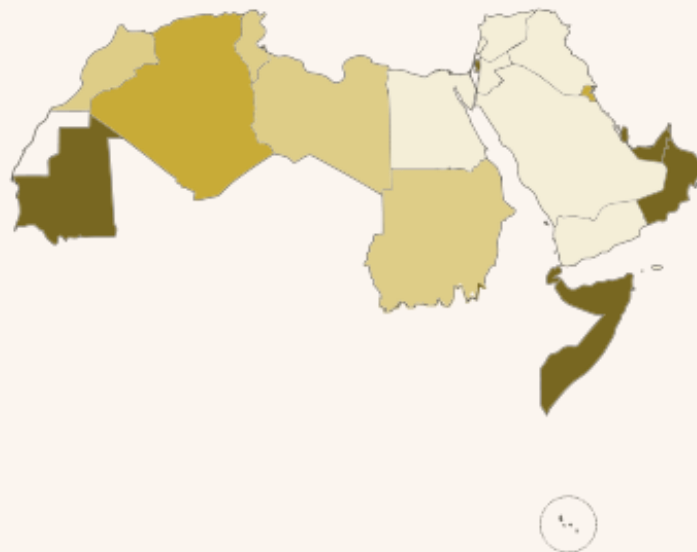
The Council meets twice a year – in March and September – in regular session and may convene in an extraordinary session if so requested by two or more members. The Treaty for Joint Defense and Economic Co-operation provides for the establishment of a Joint Defense Council that consists of the foreign and defense ministers of the members. Its main task is to adopt whatever means and measures it deems necessary – including the use of armed forces – to repel any act of aggression against any member and to restore peace and security. The Treaty also provides for an Economic Council. In 1977, after recognizing the importance of social issues in development, the Council reorganized the Economic Council into the Economic and Social Council.

3. **Technical Committees:** The Charter called for technical and specialized committees to assist members in discussing technical matters related to Arab cooperation. Since its inception, the workload for these committees increased and specialized ministerial councils were established to permanently discuss these issues. Three of the standing, technical committees continue to exist: Administrative Court, Investment Arbitration Board, and Higher Auditing Board.
4. **Secretary-General:** The day-to-day operations of the Agency are the responsibility of the Secretary-General. The Secretary General is appointed by a two-thirds majority of the Council. The primary responsibility is the overseeing of the Secretariat, which is the administrative body of the League and the executive organ of the Council. The Assistant Secretaries-Generals assist the Secretary-General and oversee the various departments and agencies. The League's current Headquarters are in Cairo, Egypt. The General Secretariat Departments include: Bureau of the Secretary-General, International Affairs, Arab Affairs, Palestine Affairs, Information Affairs, Economic Affairs, Social Affairs, Legal Affairs, Military Affairs, Administrative & Financial Affairs, Internal Audit, Institutional Development Unit, Documentation and Information Center, Principal Bureau for the Boycott of Israel in Damascus, Arab League Center in Tunisia City, and the Arab Center for Legal and Judicial Research in Beirut. There are three affiliate organs: Arab Fund for Technical Assistance to African States in Cairo, Arab Music Academy in Baghdad, and Higher Arab Institute for Translation in Algiers. The Secretariat also maintains missions in various cities, including New York, London, Beijing, Brussels, and Washington, D.C.
5. **Specialized Ministerial Councils:** The councils are designed to coordinate policies amongst Arab states. Each ministerial council holds regular meetings and proposes common policies to the Secretariat and the Council. Twelve such councils have been established: Information, Interior, Justice, Housing, Transport, Social Affairs, Youth

and Sports, Health, Environmental Affairs, Telecom, Energy and Electricity, and Tourism. Each member's corresponding government minister sits on the appropriate ministerial council. Within this category are numerous specialized Arab agencies. These include: Council of Arab Economic Unity, Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), Arab Administrative Development Organization (ARADO), Arab States Broadcasting Union (ABSU), Arab Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), Arab Academy for Science and Technology (AAST), Arab Labor Organization (ALO), Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), Arab Satellite Communications Organization (ARBSAT), Arab Interior Ministers Council, Arab Atomic Energy Board (AAEA), Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), and Arab Civil Aviation Association. There are also a group of Arab Financial Institutions: Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, Inter-Arab Investment Guarantee Corporation, Arab Monetary Fund, and Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID).

Plans have also periodically emerged to strengthen and streamline the League's structure by adding an Arab Parliament and an Arab Court of Justice. The Arab Parliament's hypothetical home lies unfinished in downtown Damascus, a poignant metaphor for the turmoil currently facing the Arab World. Widespread outrage over the execution of Saddam Hussein in 2006 and outstanding arrest warrants for Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir sparked calls for a robust Arab Court of Justice, although it too has so far amounted to nothing.

Below is a map of the current membership of the Arab League, with lighter shades indicating an earlier accession date and vice versa:



In addition, four states boast of observer status in the Arab League: Eritrea, Brazil, Venezuela and India. Arabic is an official language in Eritrea, while Brazil and Venezuela host extensive minorities of Arab descent as well as blossoming political ties with many Arab states. India views observer status as a strategic vantage point into a key region in global geopolitics and a method of outmaneuvering Pakistan, its Muslim arch-rival. Arabic-speaking Chad is often mooted as a future League member, while Israel has been boycotted and denied entry despite containing a 20% ethnic Arab minority. Newly-sovereign South Sudan has indicated its reluctance to join the Arab League, which may be cause for concern in the near future.

# Issue #1 – Invasion of Kuwait



The date is August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1990. Something unprecedented has happened: an Arab state has dared to brazenly invade and annex a neighbouring Arab realm, a member in good standing of the Arab League. But how did it come to this? Why have Arab swords been unsheathed, not against a foreign enemy or aggressor, but against their own brothers?

Just two short years ago, Arab martial energies were directed outward, not inward. From 1980 to 1988, Saddam Hussein's secular Iraqi republic waged a devastating war against the newly-declared Islamic Republic of Iran and its dangerous revolutionary ideology. In addition, Hussein had proclaimed his intent to “liberate” the majority-Arab Khuzestan region of Iran, a pledge that received approving nods from the Arab League and other Arab states. The oil-rich Gulf states lavished Iraq with funding for arms and infrastructure, with the small Emirate of Kuwait donating over \$8 million dollars worth of arms to the cause. In sum total, Kuwait incurred costs of up to \$14 billion dollars in aiding its Arab ally. And that is where the trouble began.

In 1988, Iraq was forced to sign a humiliating peace treaty to end its stalemate with Iran. In the final settlement, Iraq failed to liberate Arab territories; in fact, Iranian troops were occupying parts of Iraq when the war finally concluded. His country's economy shattered by the war, Hussein asked Kuwait to forgive his massive debt, citing his “sacrifices for the Arab nation”. The Emir of Kuwait, Jaber III Al-Sabah, refused. At the same time, Iraq urged OPEC to reduce its crude oil quota, aiming to drive up international prices and invigorate the flagging Iraqi oil industry. Due to its focus on refining, Kuwait actually argued for an increase in crude production, which the Iraqi government decried as a form of “economic warfare”. To cap off the oil-related claims, Hussein accused Kuwait of slant-drilling into the massive Rumaila oil field, located just over the Iraqi side of the border between the two states.



More tellingly, the Hussein regime condemned the very existence of a sovereign Kuwait, claiming it as rightfully Iraqi territory stolen by British colonialists. Kuwait had long been administered as part of the Ottoman vilayet of Basra, a large city in southern Iraq. A 1913 treaty formally transferred Kuwait to British control, a move that Iraq disingenuously claimed was designed to deny Gulf access to any future Iraqi state. Finally, Hussein justified his actions by arguing that the Emir of Kuwait is widely unpopular and deserved to be deposed, setting a worrying precedent for certain other Arab regimes. More cynical observers maintain that the Iraqis simply covet Kuwait's tempting and nearly defenseless oil fields and refineries.



On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1990, Iraq finally made good on its year-long sabre-rattling, launching a massive invasion of Kuwait by land, air and sea. Kuwait's small military mounted a spirited resistance but was overwhelmed within two days. Emir Jaber managed to flee to Saudi Arabia as his palace guards staged a brave rearguard operation – his brother Fahad was not so lucky, as he was shot and then run over by an Iraqi tank. The scattered and confused remnants of the Kuwaiti Army retreated into Saudi Arabia, while Emir Jaber ponders his next steps from a hotel in the Saudi town of Dhahran. Meanwhile, President Hussein has installed a puppet regime in Kuwait, while simultaneously proclaiming the former Emirate to be Iraq's 19<sup>th</sup> province.

The exiled Emir has now appealed to the Arab League to safeguard the sacred sovereignty of his country. As a first step, he is demanding the suspension of Iraq from the Arab League as punishment for the violation of its charter, an action that would require a two-thirds majority of the League's voting membership. Failing that, Emir Jaber is calling for a pan-Arab campaign of economic sanctions and even military force to oust the Iraqis from his patrimony. He is most likely to receive support from Gulf Kingdoms such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who fear further aggression from Hussein to monopolize the flow of Gulf oil and solidify his position as ruler of the Arab east. Egypt, a Western ally, is also likely to support harsh measures to coerce the Iraqis to leave Kuwait, or at least rescind their virtual annexation.



Other states may pursue more nuanced or complex approaches to the crisis. Syria is led by a Ba'ath regime similar to that of Iraq, but Syrian President Assad fell out with Hussein after a nasty ideological schism in the 1980's. Jordan has traditionally backed stability and Western interests in the Gulf, but its large Palestinian population may prompt it to support Hussein, regarded by most Palestinians as a hero for his staunch anti-Zionism. Needless to say, the United States and much of Europe are deeply unsettled by the toppling of a Western ally through such a callous act of aggression. The Arab League will have to consider possible American intervention in the crisis, especially if the Arab response seems indecisive or impotent.

But why should the Arabs care about Western sensibilities? After all, this is an internal Arab matter, not an excuse for meddling on the part of America or its Israeli lapdog. The time has come for the Arabs to set their own house in order, and to prove that the word of the Arab League carries meaning, that it can decree life or death. In an intra-Arab conflict, only Arabs can be winners - or losers.

## Issue #2 – Libyan Civil War



The date is March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. This has been a turbulent year for the Arab World, as the people have emerged, seemingly as one, to shout “The people want to bring down the regime” (*Ash-sha‘b yurīd isqāṭ an-nizām*). It all began when Mohamed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian vegetable seller, was fined and humiliated by local police. The desperate breadwinner set himself on fire in the main square of Sidi Bouzid, providing the literal spark for a popular revolution. By mid-January, long-time President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had fled to Saudi Arabia on his private jet, never to return.

However, the turmoil was just beginning. Inspired by their Tunisian brethren, the youth of Egypt rose up against Hosni Mubarak, calling for his resignation. Although Mubarak resorted to heavy-handed repression to dissuade the protestors, he was forced to step down on February 11<sup>th</sup> as his nation slipped into chaos. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, a shadowy clique of generals linked to the ancien régime, stepped into the gap and promised to gradually steer the country to real democracy. The tiny Gulf kingdom of Bahrain has also recently suffered from social unrest, with the largely Shi‘ah masses gathering in central Manama against the Sunni monarchy on February 14<sup>th</sup>.

Three days later, the wave of revolution finally reached Libya. Sandwiched between two Arab states whose dictators had already been overthrown, Libya was always likely to suffer similar domestic unrest. But the “unique” personality of Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution Muammar Gaddafi ensured different government response unseen in Tunisia, Egypt or elsewhere.

Since seizing power in a 1969 coup d’état, Gaddafi has done his best to systematically uproot all independent political and social organizations in his domain, while pursuing an idiosyncratic foreign policy. Although Libya’s Jamahiriya system of government is officially

described as a form of local direct democracy, critics charge that it as a mere sham designed to perpetuate Gaddafi's reign through corruption and intimidation. On the other hand, progress in certain aspects state is undeniable; Libya's literacy rate, life expectancy and HDI rating have soared under the Brotherly Leader's watchful eye. To this day, Libya remains debt-free, large due to its oil wealth and relatively small population.

Gaddafi's foreign policy can best be described as a farcical game of musical chairs. After the death of the Gamal Abdel Nasser, the iconic pan-Arabist leader of Egypt, Gaddafi sought to position himself as Nasser's ideological heir. He attempted to stymie a peace agreement in Sudan between the Arab North and Black African South, and launched failed attack on Egypt in 1977 after Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor, shocked the Arab World by making peace with Israel. Gaddafi constantly meddled in the affairs of Chad, his destitute southern neighbour, culminating in a humiliating defeat in the Toyota War of 1987.

The Brotherly Leader proved a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause until 1995, when he suddenly expelled 30,000 Palestinians from Libya after the “treacherous” Oslo Accords. Libya under Gaddafi also gained notoriety for backing a coterie of other anti-Western forces, including the IRA, Red Army Faction and Liberian dictator Charles Taylor. Gaddafi ordered the bombing of a Berlin nightclub in 1986, prompting American air strikes against Libya. The unrepentant Libyan leader was then linked to the deadly Lockerbie bombing two years later.



After the Invasion of Iraq and ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Gaddafi did an about-face, dismantling his nuclear weapons program and garnering praise as a Western “ally” in the so-called War on Terror. Western leaders such as Barrack Obama, Tony Blair, Nicholas Sarkozy and Silvio Berlusconi showcased their hypocrisy by lauding their erstwhile enemy, even while he continued to suppress dissent at home and balk at calls for reform.

By mid-February 2011, both Tunisia and Egypt, the most populous country in the Arab World, had undergone massive waves of social unrest that forced the resignation of their erstwhile leaders. Sandwiched between these two nations, Libya seemed sure to follow as merely the next domino to fall in the seemingly inexorable march of the Arab masses.

Sure enough, demonstrations began in the city of Benghazi on February 15<sup>th</sup> to protest the arrest of local human rights activists. Opposition groups declared a “Day of Revolt” for February 17<sup>th</sup>, sparking anti-Gaddafi protests and riots all across the country, from Tobruk in the East to Nalut in the West. Protestors even tried to capture Green Square in downtown Tripoli, the beating heart of the Gaddafi regime. For a few days, the situation became so chaotic that many predicted the imminent flight of the Brotherly Leader, as his forces seemed to have lost control of the Libyan people.



But on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Gaddafi broadcasted a defiant, rambling speech from his compound in Tripoli, blaming the uprising variously on “Al-Qaeda,” “the Zionists,” and “psychedelic drugs”. Aside from a few hotbeds of anti-regime sentiment such as Misrata and Zawiya, rebel control was limited to Cyrenaica in eastern Libya, while Gaddafi's battered forces had coalesced in Tripoli and the country's West and South. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, former Gaddafi confidante Mustafa Abdul Jalil formed a National Transitional Council in Benghazi, providing for the first time a semi-official veneer to the opposition forces. Meanwhile, the vengeful Libyan Army massacred demonstrators in Tripoli and placed Misrata under siege, leading NATO countries such as Britain, France and Italy to consider limited military intervention such as a no-fly zone.

The Arab League must now act before the situation in Libya gets out of hand. Can Arab leaders stand idly by while their innocent brethren are mowed down merely for resistance to tyranny, that most sacred of Arab impulses? Can governments such as that of Syria or Saudi Arabia, which might themselves fear overthrow in this so-called “Arab Spring” afford to back the protestors at the expense of their rulers?

In truth, Arab opinion is deeply divided over Libya. Although few Arab states will openly support Colonel Gaddafi, there is a confusing and dizzying array of options available in the aftermath of the breakdown of law and order in his country. Most gung-ho in favour of military intervention will be Qatar, whose Al-Jazeera media empire has played a key role in facilitating and publicizing the revolt. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would likely side with their

Gulf neighbour in supporting at least a no-fly zone, perhaps with Western help. The positions of Jordan and Iraq are less clear, and may be subject to the possible spread of "Arab Spring" activities to their home fronts.

Syria and Lebanon, both allies of Iran, certainly share no sympathy for the dictator in Tripoli, especially after his post-9/11 rapprochement with America. Lebanon in particular has great interest in the fall of Gaddafi, after the mysterious disappearance of Shi'ite cleric Musa al-Sadr in Libya in 1978. However, both countries regard Western meddling in Libya as anathema, and will do their best to push for homegrown Arab intervention, or else no intervention at all.

Today, the fate of Libya hangs in the balance. For the first time in a generation, the Arab League has the opportunity to remake an Arab state in its own image. At the same time, it has the chance to bolster or crush the hopes of a generation, and shape the Middle East that will emerge from this year of turbulence.

## Issue #3 – Tensions with Iran



The date is January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012. To the East of the Arab patrimony, the Zagros Mountains bubble and shake, as if transformed into malevolent volcanoes. For many years now, Arab kings and presidents have peered nervously toward Iran, wondering if and when the Islamic Republic will finally unleash its formidable military strength against its myriad foes. More importantly, who might be the unlucky victim of Iran's wrath? America? Israel? Or an Arab state?

The Arab and Persian peoples share a long and complicated history. Long before the rise of Islam, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanian rulers of Iran were projecting their influence over the Arabian Peninsula, establishing valuable networks of clients and trading connections up and down the Eastern Arabian coastline. At times, Persian control extended even to distant Yemen in the Southwest.

However, the coming of the Prophet radically altered the situation. Within twelve years of Muhammad's death, his largely Arab followers had occupied all of Persia, merely kicking in the rotten door of the exhausted Sassanian Empire. Over the course of the following centuries, virtually all Iranians would convert to Islam, and even contribute to the new faith's spread to India and Central Asia. But unlike the Syrians, Egyptians and many others, the Iranians did not assimilate into Arab culture or abandon their proud heritage. By contrast, the Pahlavi language incorporated Arabic elements to form Parsi, the official language even to this day. Soon enough, the conquerors had become the conquered, with Iranian Buyid princes pulling the strings behind the Caliph's throne in Baghdad.

During the sixteenth century, the Safavid dynasty forcibly converted Iran to the minority Shi'a stream of Islam, erecting a further barrier between Persia and its largely Sunni Arab neighbours. In the aftermath of the First World War, Iran remained one of the few Muslim

countries free of Western control, as the duplicitous Westerners imposed their “mandates” upon the Arab World. However, Britain and America continued to meddle in Persian affairs, toppling Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1941 over his lukewarm support for Germany and more infamously engineering the ouster of democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 after he attempted to nationalize Iran's oil to rescue it from the hands of Western capitalists.

Reza Shah's son and successor, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, followed an almost schizophrenic foreign policy vis à vis his Arab neighbours. On the one hand, he ignored Iranian claims on Bahrain and maintained cordial relations with conservative Arab monarchies such as Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, he funded Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq as an attempt to divide the Arab nation and recognized the hated Zionist state, drawing the ire of both Arabs and his own subjects. Thus, regional leaders shed few tears when the corrupt Shah was finally overthrown by his own people.



The Iranian uprising of 1979 soon morphed into an Islamic Revolution led by the charismatic Shi'a cleric Ruhollah Khomeini. This new, fervently ideological regime scared Arab regimes of all colours. Tradition-bound monarchies such as Saudi Arabia were frightened by the sudden and unexpected ouster of a fellow monarch, as well as the Islamic Republic's heretical Shia nature. Iran's new-found assertiveness gave secular Arab republics nightmares, especially Iraq, with its large and restive Shi'a population.

In the event, Saddam Hussein's Iraq tried and miserably failed to strangle the Islamic Republic in its cradle, struggling to a stalemate in a costly eight-year war. In 1987, near the conclusion of that conflict, Arab-Iranian relations were further chilled by an unfortunate incident during the Hajj, where hundreds of Iranian pilgrims were killed by Saudi security forces. For much of the next two decades, the Islamic Republic was content to quietly lick its wounds, watching nervously as the Americans vanquished both Afghanistan and Iraq, thus surrounding Iran.

It was perhaps in response to this perceived encirclement from the United States and Iran's inclusion in President Bush's so-called “Axis of Evil” that the Islamic Republic made the



fateful decision to pursue nuclear weapons. Although President Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei insist that their nuclear program is perfectly peaceful, few regional figures seriously believe that it lacks a military aspect – or as at least designed to inspire fear by suggesting the possibility of possessing a military aspect. This process of escalating tensions had been ongoing for years, but in 2010 Iran officially declared itself a (peaceful) nuclear state. Recent IAEA reports have raised the possibility that the Islamic Republic is seriously pursuing nuclear arms capabilities.

Although former Arab League Chief Amr Moussa asserted that Israel's nuclear arsenal, an intentionally poorly kept secret, poses a far greater danger than a hypothetical Iranian stockpile, most Arab leaders are not so sure. Egypt has hinted that it will initiate a nuclear program if Iran is successful, and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia allegedly urged the Americans in 2008 to “cut off the head of the snake” by launching airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities before they reach the point of no return.

The Islamic Republic and its Arab neighbours have also engaged in sabre-rattling over the recent “Arab Spring” of uprisings and unrest. Last February, the wave of mass demonstrations reached the tiny Arab kingdom of Bahrain, situated on an island in the strategic Persian Gulf between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Demonstrating against corruption and perceived discrimination, the island's Shi'a majority was met with violent force from Bahrain's security forces, a tool of the Sunni king and his Saudi backers. When the events of February 17<sup>th</sup>, or “Bloody Thursday” proved insufficient to discourage the protestors, King Hamad al-Khalifa appealed to the Gulf Cooperation Council, a regional body dominated by Saudi Arabia. The organization's Peninsula Shield Force, largely composed of Saudi troops and police, duly suppressed the uprising.



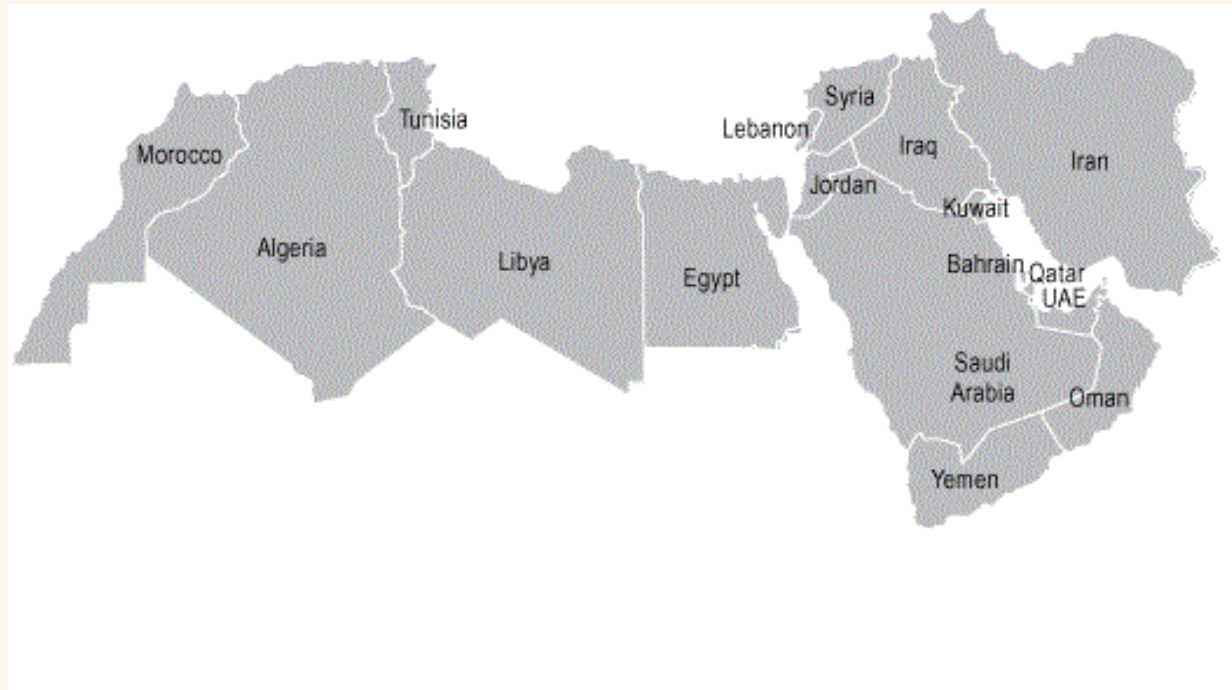
Iran has also lost face on the Arab Street over its handling of the ongoing Syrian crisis. Although it has publicly criticized its Alawite ally, Iran has continued to provide Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with arms and even (allegedly) troops as he struggles to contain a stubborn revolt against his family's regime. This stance has also harmed the popularity of Iran's once-lionized Lebanese ally, Hezbollah. Meanwhile, the Palestinian faction Hamas has moved away from its erstwhile Iranian patron and sought to curry favour with the newly

ascendant Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

If the Iranian issue should arise at an Arab League summit, sharp differences in opinion would emerge. Syria's rulers, hanging onto power by the skin of their teeth and with generous Iranian assistance, can be expected to support their patron. Lebanon, too, with its Hezbollah-dominated government, will almost certainly defend the Islamic Republic. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has also recently displayed signs of drifting toward Tehran. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan are likely to block Iranian ambitions at every step. Qatar's position is less clear, as it has taken strides to avoid conflict with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Newly-liberated Egypt and Libya will need to toe a careful line on Iran, engaging in a delicate balancing between Islamist and secularist elements within their governments while taking care to remain within the Arab consensus.

In recent weeks, violent protests have spread even to Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, home to an unruly Shi'a majority often suspected of ties to the Islamic Republic. Saudi Foreign Minister Sa'ud al-Faisal is on his way to the city of Qatif to speak with local Shi'a notables in a bid to calm tensions, having just met with King Hamad in Bahrain. Regardless of the outcome of this diplomatic overture, the Arab League will have to adapt to the changing reality, and possibly reconcile its members to a new era of Iranian power.

## Further Resources:



[CIA World Fact Book](#)  
[Middle East Ethnic Groups](#)  
[Middle East Linguistic Groups](#)

Following/ doing research from credible international news agencies will also be a get asset for the committee. Suggested agencies are Reuters, BBC, al-Jazeera, CNN, AP