



2015 - 2016

Model Arab League

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council on Political Affairs

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National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations



Original draft by Kandice Miles, Chair of the Council on Political Affairs at the 2016 National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Honorable Delegates,

Welcome to the Council on Political Affairs and the 2015-2016 Model Arab League season! My name is Kandice Miles and I am honored to be your Chair at the National University Model Arab League. I am a senior Chemistry and History student at Converse College. I have participated in model programs since my freshman year at Converse and I have found it to be a very rewarding experience. I hope that whether you are a first time debater or a MAL veteran you will find it as rewarding as I did, as well as grow during your time with Model Arab League this year.

The Middle East region is going through some extreme changes as of late, such as regime changes, widespread instability, and large increases in insurgent activities. It is an imperative time to understand the factors and aspects of the conflicts within the region. The Council on Political Affairs can make impactful and necessary changes to policies in the Middle East due to its extensive jurisdiction. While you are preparing for your MAL conferences this year, keep in mind your country and Council and how each is able to shape policy. Also, keep your country's vital interests in mind.

I am looking forward to a great debate season for all who are participating. I am very much looking forward to meeting many of you, as well! I hope you will be thorough and diligent in your preparations for your conferences, and I hope to see unique solutions to the problems put forth in debate this year. I want to remind you that this is a learning experience, and I want to see each of you grow as a debater and delegate.

Good luck!

Best regards,

Kandice Miles
Council on Political Affairs

Topic 1: Developing League-wide strategies to deter outside influence and to maintain political sovereignty and self-determination in light of regional developments

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

This topic is broad and, at first glance, relatively straightforward. The language begins by referencing League-wide action, denoting a focus on deterring the influence of actors from outside the region or outside of the League. These might include any number of international actors like the United States, Russia, European countries, or more local actors like Iran or Turkey. An alternate reading could allow delegates to focus instead, or additionally, on inter-regional influence, a choice some countries may find politically expedient for their own reasons. This would open discussion of influence *between* member states, ‘outside influence’ being defined as the meddling of Arab countries in each other’s affairs. Several prominent examples would be relevant here.

Yet another way to read the topic, however, is more complicated though no less valid for many member states. ‘Outside influence’ may also be defined as influence from non-state actors, or especially transnational groups like Al-Qaeda or Daesh¹. This interpretation becomes murky in some scenarios, such as who might be considered the ‘outside influence’ in Yemen – the Yemeni Houthis with their Iranian cheerleaders, the Yemeni government led by Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and their Saudi and GCC backers, Al-Qaeda, the United States? Nevertheless, this prism is an important one to be considered.

Council members might find this topic challenging because several Arab nations are currently experiencing political transitions. This transfer of power, especially in the Middle East, can be a lengthy process, meaning each state’s political sovereignty is especially vulnerable. Conflict and chaos often allow for the expansion of outside influences. Additionally, there is little consensus in the Arab world regarding relationships with outside forces. Many League members are accustomed to relying on outside influences for security and aid, while others are suspicious of external forces.

Finally, delegates should consider the implications of defining ‘political sovereignty’ and ‘self-determination.’ Naturally, these interpretations will be influenced by the above, but beyond that, these two terms must be viewed through the lens of the region. Whereas nearly every Arab country may be termed authoritarian or semi-authoritarian, most delegates will interpret these terms as the ultimate control and independent authority over a nation by the central government.

¹ Throughout MAL Background Guides, we have attempted to simplify and clarify word usage in reference to the group known alternately as Islamic State, ISIS, ISIL etc. by consistently labeling it ‘Daesh,’ a widely used name derived from the group’s Arabic acronym and one which the group itself despises.

B. History of the Topic in the Arab World

Since the 2011 Arab Spring, several Arab nations have undergone political regime transitions. While some pre-Arab Spring regimes remain intact, many of these governments altered their policies significantly in order to maintain authority.² A nation's change in regime or policies affects its neighbors as well, a trend confirmed by the Arab Spring. Each member of the League of Arab States thus has a stake in adopting new strategies which promote state sovereignty and self-determination.

As mentioned above, some member nations refuse to allow outside influences inside their states, while others are dependent on outside aid. Below are two examples, among many, highlighting the challenges of outside influence in the region.

The first example is Libya, where a great many influences are continuing to impact the country four years after Muammar Al-Ghaddafi was ousted from power and killed. By 2014, two rival governments had formed: the internationally recognized parliament operating out of the country's east, and a rival parliament formed after the Libya Dawn takeover of Tripoli. Both might be considered internal actors, though they might each seek to label the other 'outside' due to their respective international supporters.³ Complicating the picture are multiple transnationally affiliated groups, such as Daesh operating out of the city of Sirte, which might also claim not to be an outside influence due to its local support. The Arab League, for its part, has backed the internationally recognized government and has endorsed sending arms to support Libya although such arms transfers violate a United Nations weapons embargo on the country.⁴

The situation in Syria is far worse and far more complicated. Divisions among League members have handicapped its response to the crisis, with many members backing various components of the opposition to Bashar Al-Assad's government, yet several who support Assad.⁵ Iran and Iraq (who is facing its own issues with Syria spillover) both back Assad. Russia is also intent on maintaining Assad's position, even with military intervention. Turkey backs the opposition, but opposes the Kurdish anti-Assad forces. The United States backs both the opposition and the Kurds. The Gulf Arab countries oppose Assad and back the opposition forces, though allegations have been made that the Gulf monarchies support more fundamentalist-oriented groups which lie closer to Daesh ideologically. Each of the above parties opposes Daesh, although elements in the greater anti-Assad opposition forces collaborate with Daesh and may even be linked to a variety of terrorist outfits. The tapestry is complicated – terribly complicated. Who might be

² Blight, Garry, Shelia Pulham, and Paul Torpey. "Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests." The Guardian. 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>.

³ Nichols, Michelle. "U.N States Press Libya Deal with Promise to Help Rebuild." Reuters. October 2, 2015. Web. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/02/us-un-assembly-libya-idUSKCN0RW1UY20151002>

⁴ Jones, Rory. "Arab League Supports Libya's Plea for Help in Fighting Islamic State." WSJ. March 1, 2015. Web. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/help-us-beat-isis-libya-asks-arab-neighbors-1439909234>.

⁵ Masters, Jonathan. "The Arab League." Council on Foreign Relations. October 1, 2014. <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/arab-league/p25967>.

considered outside influencers with negative impacts is widely debated and poorly understood.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

The Political Council will need to identify and review previous strategies used to control the influence of outside forces in Arab nations. All previous methods that have been attempted have been narrowly one sided and therefore discriminate against those from the other viewpoint. Several means attempted by the League in the past have been along the lines of keeping outside influence totally out of the MENA region. However, many countries are reliant on Western help for things such as basic necessities.

When developing League-wide strategies, the Council will have to keep in mind the differing positions on outside influence for all of the member states of the League. Keeping these things in mind will help in finding a League-wide strategy and solution that will work in favor of more members. A solution that will be League-wide will be all encompassing but not mandatory. This will allow states to maintain their sovereignty but will allow others to get the aid they need. Also, a good strategy will be a long lasting solution that can be used for many issues and not the specific issues going on in the MENA region today.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Where does my country stand on the topic of outside influence?
- Does my country support Western help if needed?
- Do my allies support Western influence?
- How have the recent regional developments affected my country and its ability to maintain sovereignty?
- How have the recent developments affected my country and its ability to maintain its self-determination?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Can the Political Council come up with a way to work with outside influences to benefit all?
- How can the League invite outsiders to come in without allowing them to do whatever they please?
- Can the League set up a chain of command to allow permission to be given for outside influence to be allowed in to the region?
- Will the strategies be able to help all the members of the League?
- Will the new strategies be implemented against a country's wish?

IV. Additional Resources to Review

[Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests](#)

[Arab League Supports Libya's Plea for Help in Fighting Islamic State](#)

[Background: The Arab League](#)

[Arab World Insists on Support of West for Palestinian Statehood](#)

Topic 2: Considering the effects of sectarianism and gender participation on the political systems of Arab states

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

For the purposes of this topic, “sectarianism” will be defined as the division of a larger group into smaller factions. These subdivisions, often known as sects, are often a result of differing religions or ethnicities. “Gender participation” in political systems denotes the ratio of men to women holding political positions of power. The Political council should focus on how sectarianism and gender participation affect the political systems of Arab nations. These effects might differ by state.

In most Arab countries, members of the dominant political party often discriminate against those who do not identify with their religious sect. Individuals in this situation may find it difficult to participate in politics. Religious minorities are often denied access to government positions, and some individuals do not receive promotions due to their religion. Thus, minorities are often underrepresented in positions of power, both in the private and public sectors.

The number of females filling significant positions within Arab governments is considerably low. Only two Arab countries boast female political participation rates over 15%.⁶ Many member states have only recently passed laws allowing women to participate in the political arena. Because women and religious minorities lack representation in the political systems of Arab states, their political interests are often underrepresented as well.

B. History of the Topic in the Arab World

Sectarianism has had a large effect on the political systems in the MENA region since the 2011 Arab Spring.⁷ As existing regimes became unstable and governments slowly broke down, different sects hoped to gain political clout and thus became enemies of each other. Thus, the sectarian tensions that existed prior to the Arab Spring were aggravated and turned into conflicts. Arabs were more likely to identify with their sect than with their country as a whole.⁸ This type of conflict supports a cycle of weak governments and strong sectarianism, further complicating efforts to stabilize the Arab world.⁹

⁶ "Regional Overview for the Middle East and North Africa: MENA Gender Equality Profile, Status of Girls and Women in the Middle East and North Africa." October 1, 2011.
<http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/REGIONAL-Gender-Eqaulity-Profile-2011.pdf>.

⁷ Mikail, Barah. "Sectarianism after the Arab Spring: An Exaggerated Spectre." Fride. June 1, 2012.
http://fride.org/download/PB_131_Sectarianism_after_arab_spring.pdf.

⁸ "Policy, Power and Sectarian Identities in the MENA Region." Storify. April 1, 2015.
<https://storify.com/chathamhouse/policy-power-and-sectarian-identities-in-the-mena>.

⁹ Reese, Aaron. "Sectarian and Regional Conflict in the Middle East." Understanding War. July 1, 2013.
http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/SectarianandRegionalConflictintheMiddleEast_3JUL.pdf.

Bahrain offers a concrete example of the region's exacerbated sectarianism following the Arab Spring. During the regional uprisings, a Shia majority in Bahrain began rioting against the nation's Sunni minority government. Although these tensions had existed before 2011, they only intensified during the Arab Spring.¹⁰

Due to new technologies such as social networking sites, the issue of gender participation has gained attention in the Arab world recently. Only recently have Arab women begun to receive increased rights, including the right to participate in politics. Increased access to internet allows Arabs to obtain information concerning other countries. As the Arab world becomes aware of the more equitable status women possess elsewhere, Arab women are more likely to demand equal rights for themselves. Women were especially active in the call for equal rights during the Arab Spring.

Many Arab countries have passed legislation granting women the rights to vote and to participate in politics. However, the highest number of women in an Arab parliament is 28, a very small number considering the population of women in the region.¹¹ A woman in the Arab world is thus unlikely to see her interests represented in her nation's policies or legislation.¹²

Since 1989 the Global Fund for Women has provided nearly \$10 million in vital core support to 384 women-led groups in 14 countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa.¹³ The organization was especially active in Tunisia and Egypt during the Arab Spring, encouraging women to fight for their rights in the newly established governments.¹⁴ The Global Fund promotes the diversification of political systems in Arab nations by motivating women to participate in the political sphere.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

In an effort to reduce sectarianism, policymakers have recently encouraged governments to write policies that avoid sectarian language all together. It is believed this will help encourage cooperation between different sects and possibly more peaceful nations. There is also a new initiative to encourage different sects to focus on a common economic interest. In the past, when two differing ideologies came together for the same economic interest, they were able to put aside their differences in favor of mutual benefit.¹⁵

¹⁰ Mikail, Barah. "Sectarianism after the Arab Spring."

¹¹ "Regional Overview for the Middle East and North Africa MENA Gender Equality Profile Status of Girls and Women in the Middle East and North Africa." UNICEF. October 1, 2011. <http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/REGIONAL-Gender-Eqaulity-Profile-2011.pdf>.

¹² "Enhancing Women's Political Participation & Leadership in MENA 2012-15." Westminster Foundation for Democracy. 2012. <http://www.wfd.org/upload/docs/wfiles.pdf>.

¹³ "Investing in Women's Rights Movements in the Middle East and North Africa." Global Fund for Women. 2011. <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/storage/documents/impact/gfw-middle-east-report.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Policy, Power and Sectarian Identities in the MENA Region." Storify. April 1, 2015. <https://storify.com/chathamhouse/policy-power-and-sectarian-identities-in-the-mena>.

Policymakers have high hopes for these methods because they focus on the mutual cooperation, and therefore the mutual benefit, of several sects.

Sectarianism and women's rights vary vastly within the Arab region. Future solutions will need to consider these vast differences; these solutions should positively affect the majority, if not all, of the countries in the League of Arab States. Diminishing sectarianism and increasing the status of Arab women will ameliorate and diversify the region's unstable political systems.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What minorities are present in your country?
- What percentage of Arabs active in your country's political system are women?
- How does sectarianism affect the political system in your country?
- Is the political system in your country hindered by an unbalanced gender ratio? If so, how?
- Has your country adopted legislation to promote female participation in the political system?
- Has your country adopted legislation to prevent sectarianism in the political system?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Can past sectarianism be curtailed to promote equal participation from all groups in a political system?
- How can the League of Arab States encourage less sectarianism and more female participation in the political systems of its member states?
- How can your country help to improve the standards for the political systems within the Arab region?
- Are there certain countries in the Arab world that have a more diverse political system? If so, how might the rest of the League's members emulate their systems?
- Can political policies in the region be rewritten to be more neutral?

IV. Additional Resources to Review

[Gender Equality Profile Status of Girls and Women in the Middle East and North Africa](#)

[Enhancing Women's Political Participation & Leadership in MENA 2012-15](#)

[Policy, Power and Sectarian Identities in the MENA Region](#)

[Sectarian and Regional Conflict in the Middle East](#)

[Sectarianism after the Arab Spring: An Exaggerated Spectre](#)

Topic 3: Defining conditions and parameters on which future League-sponsored negotiations with insurgent groups in the region might be based

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

“Insurgent groups” are defined as organizations engaged in rebellion against an established authority. The Council is tasked with identifying and developing new methods as to how to best communicate and negotiate with these insurgencies. Establishing specific “conditions and parameters” will involve choosing locations and timelines for negotiations, as well as agreeing on a structure for these deliberations. Considering the increasing number of insurgent groups in the Arab world, the Council must decide which insurgencies it will negotiate with. The Council must keep in mind previous efforts by individual member states to negotiate with these groups in the past. Member nations might find this topic difficult to discuss because each state holds different opinions concerning different insurgencies.

B. History of the Topic in the Arab World

Insurgent groups in the MENA region have caused problems for many Arab nations, as well as countries outside of the region. Over the last 30 years, the number of insurgent groups around the world has grown significantly, and there are over 70 active insurgent groups in the Arab world today.¹⁶ Many of the most recognizable organizations today have existed for years, but have recently become a larger threat.¹⁷ These groups increase instability in the Arab world by decentralizing a government’s power.

In the past, Middle Eastern nations have often tried to placate insurgent groups instead of dealing with them directly. Governments hoped that by making concessions, they might be able to avoid confronting the insurgent groups militarily. Placating an insurgency might involve giving money, natural resources, land, or power to the organization. This method has been largely discredited, because most insurgencies only continue to demand more resources once they have been placated.

Arab nations have thus begun confronting insurgent groups with sizeable military forces. In fact, recently, the Arab League decided to develop a League-wide military force to fight these insurgencies. The joint coalition is led by Saudi Arabia and boasts around 40,000 troops from ten different Arab nations. The coalition began carrying out airstrikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen in March.¹⁸ This joint force seems to be working thus far, however, its success will last only as long as the League continues to support it.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Moore, John. "The Evolution of Islamic Terrorism: An Overview." PBS. 2014.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/target/etc/modern.html>.

¹⁸ "Arab League Agrees to Create Joint Military Force - BBC News." BBC News. March 1, 2015.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32106939>.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Although military force seems to be successful in some battles against Arab insurgencies, the Arab League will find that other situations might require negotiating with these groups instead of fighting them. The Council will thus find it pertinent to develop parameters for these possible negotiations. A majority of the League must support the structure of a negotiation, such as its timeline, its location, and its enforcement mechanisms. The Council might discuss certain terms that are not to be discussed during negotiations, measures that are “off the table.”

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Is your country home to insurgent groups?
- Are these insurgent groups a threat to your country or to other nations within the League?
- Is your country currently helping or hindering negotiations with insurgencies?
- Where does your country stand on negotiations with insurgent groups?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What are the “off the table” measure that negotiations with insurgencies will not discuss?
- What is the League willing to do to establish peace with insurgent groups in the MENA region?
- How will these guidelines help to facilitate equal and peaceful debate between insurgent groups and the League?
- Will the guidelines be helpful to the League?

IV. Additional Resources to Review

[The Evolution of Islamic Terrorism](#)

[U.S. Department of State Foreign Terrorist Organizations](#)

[Arab League Agrees to Create Joint Military Force](#)

Topic 4: Exploring the effects and repercussions of changing geopolitical realities with regard to regional neighbors and developing protocols to mitigate potential risks

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

For the purposes of this topic, the Council will define a “changing geopolitical reality” as major shift in regional politics. This shift might be the result of a regime change, the creation of a new nation, a war or rebellion, the procurement of a weapon of mass destruction, or a single major event. The Council should explore the “effects and repercussions,” or the consequences, of potential major changes in the Arab region. Such shifts will undoubtedly have lasting effects on neighboring nations; these effects might be political, economic, or social. The Council should coordinate an organized response plan by developing “protocols,” measures dictating how Arab League member states will react if certain geopolitical realities change. Preparing coordinated responses will “mitigate the risks,” or lower the negative consequences, of possible regional shifts.

The Political Council will need to identify how a geopolitical change, such as a regime change or the creation of a new nation, could affect the MENA region as well as the League. It is also pertinent to explore how a major regional change will affect the League’s political relations with other international bodies. The Council will need to establish methods to deter the potentially harmful change, as well as prepare a response for the chance that it does occur.

B. History of the Topic in the Arab World

Each change in a country’s government causes repercussions for all the other nations surrounding it. This is especially true for those countries involved in the MENA region. The Middle East has proven to be a particularly volatile and ever-changing region, especially since the Arab Spring. Many national governments have undergone regime changes, and some have done so several times. Even though some political powers were able to continue controlling their nations, the effects of neighboring power transitions have affected each Arab country.¹⁹ The instability of Arab League nations causes problems not only for other members, but also for non-Arab international powers.²⁰

A regime change is a particularly important event, especially in the Middle East. A regime change alters a country’s political and economic relationships with many of neighbors, all of whom have are affected either positively or negatively by the regime

¹⁹ Blight, Garry, Shelia Pulham, and Paul Torpey. "Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests." The Guardian. 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>.

²⁰ Tisdell, Simon. "US Changes Its Tune on Syrian Regime Change as Isis Threat Takes Top Priority." The Guardian. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jan/25/us-syrian-regime-change-isis-priority>. and Syria's War - BBC News." BBC News. 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17258397>.

change. Perhaps some of the nation's previous allies will turn against the new regime, while previous enemies might become new allies.²¹

Iran offers an example of a nation that might undergo a major political change in the near future. As the Arab nation has reached a nuclear weapons deal with the United States, Britain, Russia, France, China, and Germany, the nation will experience a major influx of funds beginning within the next year. Assuming the deal, which specifies parameters limiting Iran's ability to produce nuclear weapons, continues as planned, major western nations will begin lifting sanctions from Iran's economy. The nation's economy will grow rapidly, after suffering under these sanctions for a decade. Some nations are wary as to how Iran will use this major increase in monetary resources. Although the regime claims the funds will be used for much-needed government infrastructure, other nations believe the cash will be used to fund well-known terrorist organizations operating in the Arab world.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

The Arab League will need to decide how it will react to Iran's newly invigorated economy. Considering that the lifting of Iranian sanctions will have a positive effect on some Arab nations and a negative impact on others, the Arab League may have difficulties establishing a unified plan of action. Besides establishing a plan as to how Arab nations will react if the sanctions are lifted, the League might also consider how to best mitigate the risk of such a major change. The Council may decide to appeal to major western nations in the hopes of stopping the deal's finalization.

Oftentimes, a major political change in the Arab world results in a proxy war for the control of a country. This can be seen in both Syria and Yemen today. However, this trend is violent and leads to fighting between member states. Future solutions need to identify the causes of geopolitical changes in the region and the most realistic options for preventing them. If there is no way to prevent the changes, then the League must establish protocols that control the change's negative consequences. The Political Council will need to research the regional impacts of major changes in the MENA region. This will help the League understand the full effects and repercussions of changing geopolitical realities in the region. Also, the Council will need to develop means to prevent conflict should a geopolitical change occur, so as to curtail future disputes.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What countries in the Arab region are most likely to undergo a major political change in the near future?
- Will unstable countries in the Arab world have an effect on your country?
- How will potential changes in political regimes affect your country?

²¹ Rabil, Robert. "Syria's Changing Strategic Landscape." *The National Interest*. May 1, 2015. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/syrias-changing-strategic-landscape-12807>.

- Do you expect a major geopolitical change in your country in the near future? How will this change affect the rest of the League? How can the League help to stop it?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can the League prepare to handle the potential risks that come with changing political regimes/leaders and other major shifts in geopolitical affairs?
- How can the League encourage positive change that will not have such harmful risks?
- How will the protocols help to prevent the potential risks of a geopolitical change?
- Can these protocols be continued in the future to help with other issues?

IV. Additional Resources to Review

[Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests](#)

[BBC News: Syria's War](#)

[Syria's Changing Strategic Landscape](#)

[Isolating Syria, Arab League Imposes Broad Sanctions](#)