



The Arab League

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The Arab League is a regional international organization with 22 member states. Founded in 1945, the Arab League works to coordinate the efforts of Arab states in a variety of areas, such as economics, social welfare, and health. The Arab League works to find nonviolent solutions to disputes between members. Key focus areas for the organization include regional unrest and the path to Palestinian statehood. Headquartered in Cairo, the Arab League meets biannually¹. While not a United Nations agency, the Arab League is signatory to a Protocol of Agreement with the UN. The two organizations cooperate on issues such as human rights and economics².

I. Preparing for a Post-Oil World (with a case study of the United Arab Emirates)

Statement of the Issue:

Oil is an extremely valuable resource for many nations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The region is home to over half of the world's known oil reserves³ and produces roughly a third of the world's petroleum. As of 2018, Saudi Arabia led the region's oil production, followed by Iran and Iraq⁴.

While oil made the region's current development possible, the problem of oil dependency has emerged as the global economy shifts away from fossil fuels and towards a more sustainable future. Oil provides most of the revenue for some oil exporters' budgets. For example, Saudi Arabia currently uses oil revenues to cover 80% of its government's budget⁵.

What the next energy transition will look like remains unclear, but it is in the best interests of countries in the MENA region to become independent from oil as quickly as possible. Past energy transitions have occurred at different rates, but the shift away from fossil fuels to low-carbon energy sources will likely occur faster than previous transitions because it is being driven by the need to mitigate climate change, not the availability of new energy-producing technology⁶.

Countries in the MENA also have an incentive to phase out oil because of the state of the region's environment. The regional environment is susceptible to climate change. If global temperatures continue to rise, the risks presented by factors such as crop failures and water shortages will increase as well⁷. Because of these risks, it is essential that countries in the region contribute to global efforts to lower greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent a regional climate disaster.

The current economies of oil exporting are not environmentally or financially sustainable. As environmental regulations increase across the world, it is going to become increasingly difficult for countries to profit off of oil sales. Oil sales are declining and will likely continue to do so⁸. Oil producing states need to begin changing their financial and legal systems to accommodate an oil-free economy⁹. Failure to make this change will likely result in the creation of vulnerable weak or failed states¹⁰.

History:

Oil was discovered in the MENA in 1908 when William D'Arcy struck in oil in Persia¹¹. Since then, regional production has increased significantly. In 2020, countries in the MENA produced approximately 27.7 million barrels of oil each day¹². As the oil industry grew, so did cities such as Dubai, which went from a small town to a technologically advanced city due to the oil and real estate industries¹³.

Despite the benefits oil has provided the region with, it also presents a significant economic weakness. The prices of commodities such as oil fluctuate. By creating economies dependent on a product with an unstable price, countries in MENA built economies that would be impacted by changing oil prices¹⁴. Since the discovery of oil, environmental regulations have changed as well. Historic oil-purchasers, such as the European Union, have imposed regional policies that are impacting oil exports to the region. European carbon taxes are making it harder for Arab oil exporters to sell their products in Europe¹⁵, demonstrating how modern policies are presenting challenges for oil exporting states' economies.

Discussions of oil independence began around 2005¹⁶. Since then, several regional oil producers have begun investing in renewables and working to diversify their economies in order to prepare for a shift away from oil¹⁷. The United Arab Emirates is emerging as a regional leader in both areas¹⁸.

Renewable energy use has increased in the MENA region in recent years. In addition to serving as an alternative to oil, factors such as population growth and the falling prices of renewables are driving this change¹⁹. UAE set a goal to source 27% of its energy from clean

fuels by 2021. Specific Emirates, notably Dubai, have set additional targets, with Dubai aiming to source 75% of its energy from clean sources by 2050 and reduce its total energy use by 30% by 2030. In order to accomplish these goals, the UAE is investing in renewable energy and nuclear power²⁰. UAE's capital, Abu Dhabi, is also seeking to invest in the developing liquid hydrogen industry, which could provide an opportunity for the country to help build a new low carbon energy industry²¹. Renewable energy projects in the UAE are often contained to small areas and driven by regional competition. Countries such as UAE and Qatar are building small, sustainable city projects to flaunt their sustainable innovations, showing how competitive relationships between states can help drive change²².

UAE is also a regional leader in economic diversification. Many of the Gulf states are investing in research and educational programs to help diversify their economies, but the extent of changes that UAE has made to its institutions in order to prepare for a post-oil world are the most extensive and holistic²³. The efficacy of these changes is particularly prominent in Dubai, which only derives 1% of its GDP from oil. With that being said, Dubai's economy has stagnated in recent years²⁴ which demonstrates that shifting away from oil does not guarantee continuous economic growth.

Despite the progress UAE has made to independence from oil, the country does not appear ready to be independent from oil at this time. During July of 2021, OPEC Plus, the international organization that regulates global oil production, faced a policy stalemate as UAE requested an increase to its oil production quota²⁵. UAE also currently lacks a taxation system to encourage a shift away from domestic oil use and a population with the technical skills to fully transition the country away from oil²⁶.

Analysis:

Independence from oil is going to be essential for the future of the MENA region. Given the current dependence on oil, countries need to begin preparing to transition away from it as quickly as possible as the current exporting economy model is not going to be viable in the future²⁷. Phasing oil out of the MENA's economy is going to be a complex process. Countries that are heavily reliant on oil revenues will need to find alternative sources of funding and alter their legal systems to extract new sources of income. Policy changes such as the implementation of an income tax in oil exporting countries that do not currently have one could help accomplish this goal²⁸.

Working with oil companies to help facilitate a transition away from oil could help make an oil-free MENA possible. Having oil companies add renewables to their portfolios could help

them develop renewable industries. Oil companies could also work on carbon-capture technologies²⁹. Oil companies also offer expertise in areas such as transporting liquids. Given the potential for liquid hydrogen to become a low-carbon fuel, companies that know how to move large amounts of liquid could prove essential to creating a hydrogen fuel industry³⁰.

Countries with previous or ongoing conflicts may struggle to transition away from oil. The impact of prolonged conflict in states such as Syria and Iraq will impact their ability to transition away from oil due to the burden of war on their economies³¹. The current structure of many oil industries in the MENA may also present a challenge to transitioning away from oil. Most oil industries in the region are controlled by a single company or family. Convincing the people who control this industry that it needs to be phased out may be challenging due to their personal investment in oil³².

Conclusion:

The MENA region needs to shift away from oil. Countries need to start preparing for this transition as quickly as possible in order to avoid becoming weak or failed states. Transitioning away from oil will require that oil exporting states overhaul their economies, a process current oil companies can help them with. Countries may face a variety of challenges when trying to become independent from oil, but all must work towards this goal in order to survive in a post-oil world.

Questions:

1. How can oil producing states diversify their economies?
2. What role should regional organizations such as the Arab League play in helping the MENA transition away from oil?
3. How can oil companies help make a transition from oil possible?

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II. After the Uprisings: Moving Towards Political Stability Following the Arab Spring

Statement of the Issue:

The MENA is considered to be one of the most unstable regions in the world¹, with instability increasing after the Arab Spring. Since the uprisings, several Arab League members have been locked in civil wars. Others have been repressing protests². Not all Arab League members experienced protests during the Arab Spring, but the impact on the region was profound. Tensions between activists and governments increased. Regimes are generally choosing to suppress dissent rather than responding to the problems which caused the protests³, creating a negative feedback cycle where tensions between governments and their people are rising.

The regional unrest has negative consequences for all Arab League members, not just those directly involved in the protests. Following the Arab Spring, forced migration increased. For example, the Syrian Refugee crisis is being caused by the Syrian Civil War which started because of the Arab Spring uprisings in Syria. Extremist groups have also gained traction in the region since the start of the Arab Spring⁴. Because these problems are not contained to political boundaries, problems cannot simply be addressed on a country by country basis.

While most of the Arab Spring uprisings did not accomplish their goals, they demonstrated that many people in the Arab world want to see reform in their countries. More importantly, the protests established a precedent of protesting government and showed that governments are vulnerable to dissent⁵. Countries in the MENA cannot ignore the demands of their people. If the sources of the uprisings are left unaddressed, countries that had uprisings may see more in the future. Countries that did not experience uprisings should not consider themselves immune to such problems; if they have similar problems, their people may likewise start uprisings⁶. The members of the Arab League need to focus on creating long term peace and stability, not just managing existing dissent.

History:

The governments of the postcolonial MENA have a long history of struggling to establish legitimacy. Following decolonization, many rulers in the MENA struggled to gain acceptance from their people and used a militaristic approach to governance in order to maintain sovereignty and control over their territories⁷. As the 20th century progressed, most governments in the MENA remained authoritarian. Countries in the West began providing "democracy aid" to the region, which was intended to help reform the area; however, it should

be noted that this aid was intended for reforming governments in the MENA, not inherently changing their nature, and so governments in the region generally accepted the aid while staying authoritarian⁸. During this period, patronage systems played an important role in preserving authoritarian regimes. By maintaining a robust system of state-provided social and economic benefits, such as jobs in the civil service for college graduates, authoritarian regimes effectively prevented dissent from interfering with their governance⁹.

During the 21st century, the old patronage systems began to fail. As the MENA's population grew rapidly, job growth did not keep pace. Consequently, youth unemployment ballooned. Improved access to information and the emergence of the globalized international economy also undermined the efficacy of patronage systems¹⁰.

The Arab Spring uprisings began in Tunisia, with the first event of the Arab Spring occurring in December 2010. A Tunisian man set himself on fire, inspiring protests that escalated into a revolution in the country. The Tunisian government fell in January 2011 and was replaced with a multi-party democracy¹¹. Since the revolution, Tunisia has remained democratic, but COVID-19 is presenting a significant challenge for the new democracy as the Tunisian president is claiming emergency powers that could be used to subvert democracy¹².

Similar protests quickly spread to other countries, but most did not enjoy the success of the Tunisian uprisings. The Arab Spring in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen successfully produced a regime change, but Egypt has since seen the establishment of a new authoritarian regime and Libya and Yemen are experiencing civil wars related to the regime change. Countries such as Bahrain also experienced uprisings, but suppressed them with aid from states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Some countries, such as Morocco and Jordan, were able to appease their protests with reforms¹³; however, both states have since used more aggressive tactics against protesters¹⁴. Increased sectarian violence and extremism in the region are two negative legacies of the Arab Spring. Tensions between secular and religious political groups and different religious groups within countries increased as a result of the political instability amidst efforts to establish control in power vacuums. Terrorist groups such as ISIS were also able to take advantage of the situation and expand their territory¹⁵.

The post Arab Spring political order is not conducive to long term stability. The current regional powers, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, have competing goals. Israel and Saudi Arabia are seeking to maintain the current regional status quo¹⁶, which is not inherently conducive to stability as this can involve repressing dissent instead of addressing the grievances causing dissent¹⁷. In contrast, Iran and Turkey are seeking to change the current regional power dynamics which can also undermine regional stability. Alongside these regional

powers, the MENA also has several failing states, such as Yemen, which are vulnerable to being used as the venues for proxy wars between the regional powers and further instability¹⁸.

Analysis:

The Arab Spring showed how far people are willing to go to change regional politics as well as the means regimes will use to preserve their sovereignty¹⁹. While the Arab Spring uprisings generally did not accomplish what they were supposed to, it is plausible that the region will have a second round of uprisings if citizens' grievances are not addressed with substantial change²⁰.

The conditions of the MENA will likely become more conducive to dissent over time. The area is already dry and arid. Climate change is expected to exacerbate these conditions. As water shortages and crop failures occur and become more common, uprisings will likely follow²¹. Youth unemployment, one of the leading causes of dissent in the region, is also continuing to impact the region. Simultaneously, the MENA also has a growing population²². If the needs of young people are not addressed and youth unemployment continues to grow, civil unrest could occur.

The interactions between states and other states as well as nonstate actors are also important to consider when working towards regional stability. The use of weak states to advance regional powers' interests is not conducive to regional stability²³. The emergence of security complexes, or groups of states cooperating with each other on shared security goals, with alliances often forming on lines such as ethnicity or religion, can help improve security for groups of states, but are not inherently stabilizing as these can lead to rivalries between groups of states. Several security complexes, notably the Saudi-led coalition against Iran and the Arab security complex in the Levant, have a significant impact on regional stability²⁴. The nature of these interactions can cause interactions between two states in the region to have broader implications for the stability of the region at large.

Arab League members also need to evaluate how their governments are performing. Poor governance and the failure of states to provide for their people were a critical component of the 2011 uprisings. While some governments made minor reforms or created the illusion of change, most regimes in the MENA have changed little since the start of the Arab Spring. Allowing the development of a robust private sector could help replace the old system of patronage that regimes relied on for decades²⁵.

Regardless of whether or not countries experienced uprisings during the Arab Spring, all Arab League members should work to address the problems that caused the Arab Spring

uprisings. Managing the conditions that create revolts is far more conducive to long term peace and stability than suppressing uprisings²⁶.

Conclusion:

Establishing regional stability is in the best interests of all Arab League members. The problems created by regional instability can impact all member states, not just those experiencing protests. Addressing regional instability will require not only addressing existing instabilities and tensions, but also working to respond to problems before they produce uprisings. The causes of protests need to be addressed, not just the protests themselves. Solutions will need to consider both domestic and international sources of tension.

Questions:

1. How can countries address both the domestic and international aspects of regional instability?
2. What can the region do to address the problems causing protests?
3. What role should the Arab League play in establishing regional stability?

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