



It's Time to Close the Arab League

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Arab League has been an abject failure on every metric throughout its existence. As it is apparently constitutionally incapable of serving the better interests of its member states, it should be shut down.

The Arab League is a union of 22 Arab-speaking Afro-Asian countries and four observers headquartered in Cairo, Egypt. The idea of such a League was [mooted in 1942 by the British](#), who wanted to rally the Arab states against the Axis powers during WWII. The League did not take off until March 1945, however, just before the end of the war.

The 22 members of the Arab League as of 2018 were Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE, and Yemen. The four observers are Brazil, Eritrea, India, and Venezuela.

In its early years, the Arab League concentrated mainly on economic, cultural, and social programs. It held the first Arab petroleum congress in 1959 and in 1964 established the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO). That same year, despite objections from Jordan, the League granted observer status to the newly-established PLO, upgrading this status to full membership twelve years later.

The scope of the failure of the Arab League is unprecedented in the history of international leagues. It failed to prevent the establishment of the state of Israel despite its Secretary-General's genocidal threat that such a move would lead to "[a war of extermination and momentous massacre](#) which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacre and the Crusades"; nor has it ever dealt constructively, compassionately, or even particularly shrewdly with the

Palestinian refugees in its member states. In September 1970, the Arab League failed to mediate a solution to the fierce confrontation between Jordan and the PLO, or Black September as it is commonly known, which exacted thousands of fatalities and led to the PLO's expulsion to Lebanon and other neighboring countries.

In 1990, the League failed to solve the Iraqi-Kuwaiti dispute over oil and had nothing constructive to do or say either in the run-up to or following the Iraqi invasion and brutal occupation of Kuwait. Despite prohibiting members from using force against one another, its member states have done just that on many occasions. Egypt invaded Yemen in the 1960s. Syria occupied Lebanon between 1976 and 2005. Iraq, as mentioned, invaded Kuwait in 1990. Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania have used force against each other to find a solution to the Western Sahara issue since 1975. These are but a few of many examples of conflicts and confrontations among members of the League.

The Arab League has consistently failed to address any of the urgent challenges that have arisen over the decades within the Arab world, notably the escalating Iranian Shiite insurrection in the Middle East. The League has played little role [in fighting terrorism](#) and radicalism in the region or in advancing the integration process among its members. Nor has it ever had much to contribute on the problem of rampant violations of basic human rights throughout the Arab world. It has had nothing constructive to suggest on how to manage the dramatic movement of vast numbers of refugees in recent years and is largely silent on the brutally destructive wars currently ongoing in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

Arab League summits tend to end with big declarations, no decisions, and no plans for action. The long string of internal crises in the member states includes economic distress, pollution, social unrest, lack of respect for human rights, terrorism, and numerous civil wars that have exacted untold human suffering and dislocation. The League, which provides nothing to help those states solve or even cope with those problems, has lost any status it might once have claimed to be an active, influential regional actor.

On top of all this, the Arab League has been suffering a [budget crisis](#) over the past few years. According to its Secretary-General, Ahmad Aboul Gheit, the League's budget is around \$60 million, which he notes is nothing compared to the GNP of the Arab world. Gheit warned that the organization's financial crisis has been worsening for several years and said some of its activities could stop entirely if member states do not meet their obligations to contribute. "Some countries which should contribute a big share to the budget have not paid a single dollar," he said.

The Arab League's resolutions are prefabricated, out of date, out of touch, and reflexively anti-Israeli, all of which keeps the League in a state of paralysis. The weaknesses of the League mirror the weaknesses and deficiencies of the Arab states that are dependent on external patrons for military, financial, and diplomatic support. This vacuum provided an opening for the Iranian-supported "Shiite Crescent," which has flourished and now represents a serious challenge to the interests, trade routes, and security of states across the region.

The relationship between Israel and the Arab Gulf States is showing signs of increasing warmth, but the habit of collective antipathy toward Israel is hard to break. [The foreign ministers](#) of the League's member states recently unanimously adopted a resolution rejecting the Trump Israeli-Palestinian peace [plan](#).

The Middle East has gone through dramatic shifts in terms of threats and interests, and the Arab states ignore those shifts at their peril. The threats posed by Iran's radical regime, for example, have led to a new reality whereby Israel and its Arab neighbors share increasingly similar perceptions of common security threats. If peace can be achieved, the economic and security cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors can create a prosperous Middle East that is connected by a common desire for security and economic opportunity. If the Arab League is incapable of even considering such a bright prospect or of taking care of its own with any semblance of competence, the time has come to close it down.

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