The Arab League

Background Guide

EagleMUNC
Boston College Model United Nations Conference

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Dear Delegates,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to EagleMUNC V! My name is Jack Massih and I am the Under Secretary-General of Political Affairs. I am a senior at Boston College studying Political Science and Economics. I began participating in MUN my sophomore year of high school and have been hooked ever since. I joined the EagleMUNC team as a freshman for the first year we moved off BC’s campus and into Boston, and it has been a joy to witness the conference continuously grow and evolve since then. The Political Affairs team has been working incredibly hard to prepare for the most innovative and exciting conference in EagleMUNC history. I am looking forward to seeing all of your creative and thoughtful responses to the diplomatic predicaments and crises you confront over the weekend.

Best,
Jack Massih
Under Secretary-General Political Affairs, EagleMUNC V
Introduction: Letter from the Chair

Hello Delegates!

Welcome to EagleMUNC V! My name is Tory Sivco and I have the distinct pleasure of serving as the chair of the Arab League committee. I am from Sandwich, Massachusetts, a small town on Cape Cod and I have been involved in Model UN since my freshman year of high school. I am now a junior in Boston College's Morrissey School of Arts and Sciences majoring in Political Science with a minor in International Studies. I first became interested in politics when the advisor of my high school’s MUN club encouraged me to attend the first meeting. I quickly became hooked and have been ever since! This will be my third EagleMUNC, serving in the past as a simulations staffer and the chair for last year’s Press Corps committee. As a delegate of the Arab League, you have chosen an exciting committee with topics extremely pertinent to the current state of the world. The issues you will be seeking to resolve in committee are the same as those on the agenda for the Arab League and United Nations today, and impact the foreign policies of other nations outside the Arab World.

In line with this year’s theme, “The Interplay of Power and Ethics” it will be this delegations challenge to address the instability in the Middle East, focusing on developing migrant and refugee policy, strengthening counter-terrorism efforts, and ensuring human rights to all its inhabitants. This region is plagued with a plethora of inter and intrastate conflicts including but not limited to displaced persons, human trafficking, illegal drug trade, the rise of ISIS and other extremist groups, and food and
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water shortages. It is your duty to decide how you will best use your nation’s power to ensure the most promising solution for not only your own people, but also the region as a whole. To prepare for this committee, I advise delegates to become familiar with current events in the region. Due to the nature of the Arab World, a great deal could and most likely will change between now and the conference. It is in your best interest to remain up to date with not only what is going on in your own respective nation, but in all countries involved. I look forward to meeting you in March, and in the meantime please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns at Sivco@bc.edu.

Best,

Tory Sivco

Historical Background

The Arab League was first established in March 1945 as a confederation comprised of 22 Islamic nations, including Palestine, that the league acknowledges as
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an independent state, with seven founding members including Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Yemen. Following World War II, there were deep concerns of disunity and colonial divisions; the Arab League was thus chartered with the intention that the members would work together to protect common interests, strengthen ties with each other and coordinate their policies.¹ One of these common interests was to prevent the emergence of a Jewish state in Palestine, an issue that still remains prominent today. At the time, another one of their main goals was to free remaining Islamic countries from colonial rule. They sought, and continue to seek, cooperation on issues regarding the economy, terrorism, national identity, social welfare, and healthy living conditions. Nonetheless, the League has received criticism for its poor governance, inefficiency, and backing of the agendas of autocratic and corrupt rulers/governments.² Today, the League functions day-to-day under a general secretariat that acts as an administrative body. Twice a year, however, the league’s Council convenes and is composed of representatives of member states.

Many nations in the League gained their political freedom through insurgency, an organized plan to undermine the current political system and/or the use of violence to seize control of the government in a region. Many have also dealt with several shifts in leaders, regimes, and political structures since the establishment of the Arab League.³ This post-colonial trend in the Arab world has led to the rise of oppressive regimes, some which still persist today, and the increase of civilian uprisings.

² Ibid., 2.
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Understanding the background of the league will help you to formulate how you want to see the body function moving forward.

Current Issues

Refugee/Human Rights Crisis:

Today one of the major issues plaguing the region is the refugee crisis—as conflict and exodus are impacting people running from violence and their host communities, the Middle East and North Africa are now witnessing the largest displacement the world has seen since WWII. This refugee crisis has led to a plethora of infringements of human rights that requires immediate attention. ⁴ Since the wave of uprisings in the Middle East began in late 2010, millions of civilians have been displaced from

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their homes in the face of uprisings, authoritative governments, discrimination, violence, lack of resources, etc. They continue to suffer from social injustices, starvation, restrictions on their freedom, and are often caught in the middle of disputes between opposing groups. Discrimination towards women and the deprivation of education is also an urgent concern. Women in the Middle East face extreme challenges when it comes to equality. They suffer “honor killings,” domestic violence, are restricted legally, and are deprived of privileges considered basic human rights by westerners.\(^5\) They often are ruled by their male counterparts, requiring permission from their husbands or male relatives to engage in certain activities such as traveling or going out in public. Some nations do not even allow women to vote, hold office, or receive an education. Islamic law has several provisions that leave women at a clear disadvantage. For example, under traditional Islamic law, a girl could be forced to marry a male—although women could only have one husband, men were permitted to legally have up to four wives. Women were required to be submissive to their husbands, even in the face of domestic violence. Obedience was required, this could mean never leaving the home unless told to, for example. Today, still only one in four women in the Middle East and Northern Africa are employed or looking for work.\(^6\) The culture of this region makes balancing a career with raising a family, the primary role of women. The unemployment gap between men and women has doubled in the past 25 years. If current rates of unemployment continue and all citizens of the working age are looking


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for work, it is estimated that 50 million men will be unemployed by 2050, and a horrifying 145 million unemployed women. Although many Middle East nations have recently taken measures to decrease inequality, for example allowing women to run for office, there is a long way to go. This body will have to change laws that limit female employment and to create an environment that promotes an environment that allows women to maintain the balance. In many Arab nations, members of the dominant political party frequently discriminate against those who do not identify with their religious affiliation. These populations thus feel a lack of ability to engage politically. In addition, these populations are also often denied access to certain careers, education, and promotions solely on a religious basis. These marginalized groups are thus underrepresented in both the public and private sector. In some nations, the ruling party does not even represent the majority faith of their nation, such as in Syria, resulting in the majority of a population being discriminated against, oppressed, and marginalized daily. To address the socio-economic inequalities and conflicts within the Arab League territories, it is essential to understand the Sunni-Shia divide at play in determining the political, social, and economic environments throughout the Middle East. This is an ancient religious divide that has carried its influence into modern day conflicts. Following the death of the Prophet Mohammed, followers of Islam became divided on who should be next in line for succession. Those who wanted Abu Bakr, the prophet’s advisor, to be handed down the position became known as Sunnis.

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8 Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 525.
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those who wanted the next prophet to be Ali, Mohammed’s cousin, became known as Shia, who to this day believe that the leader of Islam should be blood descendants of Mohammed himself.\(^9\) Political leaders and regimes of this region far too often use the sectarian divide of Islam to further their ambitions and take control. The divide has exacerbated and influenced the civil war in Syria, the violence in Iraq, massive intrastate rivalries such as Iran vs. Saudi Arabia, and has fueled the rise in extremist groups from both ends of the spectrum. It is quite often that the minority sect of Islam in any Islamic nation, whether it is Sunni or Shia, suffers from discrimination in the workplace, at school, financially, and is publicly treated differently. Sometimes, if the leader of nation represents the minority branch of Islam in their nation, the rest of the population suffers.\(^10\)

Situations like Syria, where an Alawite minority rules over a Sunni majority, have only exacerbated the divide within the different sects of Islam and fueled extremism from both sides. In Syria, the Arab Spring never resulted in the removal of an incumbent due to mass demands or any institutional change. Assad rather refused to renounce his role as ruler and instead, his regime has entered into a violent and bloody civil war now dragging regional powers into the conflict. Particularly in Syria, one circumstance that set the nation apart before 2011 hit and continued to have influence after revolts broke out was the ease in which Syrian society had welcomed the inevitable succession of the Assad family. When Bashar al-Assad came to power, there was a sense of hope that eventually, the regime would ease down and become

more liberal.\textsuperscript{11} At first, the nation did not need to rebel, or so it seemed. However, over time as he watched the first waves of the Arab Spring crash along the shores of other nations, he began to make it clear that if there were any liberal movements outside of his, they would pay a dire price, and there were. The Syrian population had experienced similar frustrations mentioned earlier, especially the Sunni people, resulting in violent protests despite Assad’s threats. However, the deep factions within Syria that were not necessarily present among other nations were key to Assad’s ability to remain in power. As an Alawite minority ruling in a religiously diverse nation, compared to Tunisia and Egypt, Assad recognized the need to establish a loyal military that would not turn on him in the face of rebellion. He thus formed a military composed of mainly Alawites, Shias, and Christians who would never turn on him out of fear that a Sunni regime would take over and decimate their populations. It was essentially a coup-proof regime.

The Syrian civil war has resulted in a major refugee crisis.\textsuperscript{12} An estimated 11 million Syrians have fled the country since the war’s outbreak and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Most have escaped to neighboring nations, specifically Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq. Others have sought refuge in other parts of the nation itself, while the remaining have fled to Europe, particularly Germany and Sweden.\textsuperscript{13} The conditions these refugees are facing are horrific and condemnable. The need for assistance is no longer a question—it is pure necessity.

\textsuperscript{11} Cleveland, \textit{A History of the Modern Middle East}, 525.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 526.
\textsuperscript{13} Spangler, \textit{Understanding Israel/Palestine Race, Nation, and Human Rights in the Conflict}. 86.
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Furthermore, the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has and continues to suffer from severe water shortages, impacting both the survival of civilians and the ability to grow crops. The region has grown increasingly vulnerable and reliant on importing food supplies, and the water shortage crisis is predicted to only worsen if action is not taken. Some analysts predict that major cities in the region will begin running out of clean water completely by 2080. These harmful predictions will particularly impact displaced citizens and refugees, such as Palestinians and Syrians.  

Addressing Instability in the region: Even in areas dealing with less conflict, there still exists a great fear of instability, including terrorism, economic shocks, nuclear weapon development, plunging oil prices, and questions of identity in today’s changing world dynamic, especially among the youth. Since the 2011 eruption of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, authoritarian order in the Middle East has continued to be shaken and challenged by angry protests against economic stagnation and official abuse. Though the vigorous wave of protests has only recently swept the region, it has been in the works since the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and truly took off under a dangerous mix of preconditions developed in the past few decades. Before the first revolt even took place, nations that would eventually experience the brunt of the Arab Spring were populated by a sudden bulge of youth and other angry citizens, frustrated by the economic instability, unemployment, and unrelieved poverty amid increasingly

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extravagant wealth and authoritarian oppression present in their nation. By the end of 2011, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen all saw the removal of a dictator; in Syria, though the revolts failed to defeat Bashar al-Assad and his regime, we saw the violence of the Arab Spring protract the nation into a civil war in 2012. Thus, when attempting to explain the “why” and “how” of these uprisings, one must look at the complexity of each case, examining the circumstances both shared and unique to each nation. It is also essential to ask why the Arab Spring has not spread to certain Middle Eastern countries in order to grasp what has set them apart. With the makeup of the Middle East transforming rapidly, it is the responsibility of the Arab League to ensure stability within the region, securing basic human rights and safety for all living within the League. This is a complicated but essential challenge that must be addressed now by the members of the League through collaboration and communication.

One major factor at play in the Middle East before the spring was the immense growth in population, particularly the youth. In 1950 there were only 78.6 million people in the region compared to the 375 million reported in 2010. Furthermore, more than 50% of the population is reported under the age of 25, with 60% of the region under the age of thirty. This is twice the percentage of North America and puts the number of youth in the Middle East as the second highest in the entire world, behind sub-Saharan Africa. Analysts have argued that this youth bulge in the Arab countries has made nations vulnerable to revolt as a result of their grievances against the government specifically regarding unemployment and income. With such an explosion in

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population, the growth of employment opportunities has not proved to be proportionate. Under the growth rate prior to 2011, a mega 750,000 new jobs would have to be created each year in order to maintain jobs for all those turning the age of employment. Furthermore, many youth composing this mass of unemployed are well-educated, and are frustrated and disillusioned by their inability to find meaningful jobs. Along with the many well-educated unemployed citizens, there are also educated citizens who are unemployable due to the poor education systems within their nation. Methods of rote memorization and a lack of creativity are not preparing students for jobs in the global economy. Either way, the unemployment rate of the Middle East continues to be the highest in the world. Just to provide a glimpse of the circumstances, unemployment for men in this region between the ages of 18-30 is 30% and in nations such as Jordan it is as high as 70%, compared to the world average of 6%. Several scholars refer to this time of unemployment and frustration as “wait hood”, referring to the predicament of Middle Eastern youth as they wait to find a job that would allow them to move forward in life to get married and have a family. The dim reality of these poor conditions has exacerbated anger towards the ruling regimes. Under illiberal regimes, the privatization of enterprise, deregulation, and cutting of public expenditure has contributed to rising inequality, reduced wages, a deteriorating safety net, corruption, and low levels of job creation.  

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17 Lynch, The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East. 62
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Facilitating long-term interstate peace/prosperity: In the past few decades, the Arab World has seen a massive increase in interstate threats, rather than just intrastate, particularly in the form of extremist groups such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, and ISIS. Each group has their own goals, and even within a group these goals have transformed over time. However, the means to achieving them have remained similar across the board and impact the lives of millions of innocent civilians.

The Arab League in the past has taken some steps towards addressing terrorism and insurgency in the region; in 1998 they held the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism and established a Counterterrorism Committee of the League of Arab states. However, the world has yet to see the league actually create a legitimate plan to address the core causes of insurgency that lead to terrorism. Additionally, the League must still explore the connection between insurgencies and civilians and find a way to break this bond that legitimizes the violent acts of extremist organizations. A comprehensive plan would have to address how to dismantle current insurgencies, how to cut off their sources of intelligence, resources, and funding, and how to prevent them from re-forming in the future. Nations in the League must work together to establish a plan that will strengthen systems for the detection of the movement, importation, exportation, stockpiling and use of weapons and any material used in a form of aggression by these groups. They must improve surveillance, enhance protection, particularly of civilians, and focus on tracking the movements of terrorists and their organizations.¹⁸ In addition, they must collectively work together to update databases

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regarding these criminals so that they can exchange information between nations regarding the activities and crimes of terrorist groups. Currently, ISIS is of dire concern among the Arab League. In the midst of the Syrian Civil War, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria came to power. This radical and organized group of extremists have taken control of land in both nations, exacerbating the refugee crisis, and seek to establish a renewed caliphate and to destroy all enemies of Islam. This extremist group has influenced thousands of supporters from around the world to travel to Syria and Iraq to join the battle, and has encouraged ISIS-backed terrorist attacks in other nations. In 2015, they claimed responsibility for the attack in Beirut, Lebanon that killed 40 Shia Muslims, shooting down a Russian plane flying over Egypt that took the lives of 234 innocent people, and for the deadly attack this past November in Paris.

The threat of terrorism is only growing as their capabilities are increasing at frightening rates. In some regions, the military capabilities of these groups have become stronger than the nations in which they operate. For example, in Lebanon the Shia Islamist militant and political extremist group Hezbollah is considered more powerful than the Lebanese government itself and there has been a popular wave of citizens choosing to back this group despite their terrorist activity due to the belief that Hezbollah provides greater protection and reliability to the citizens. The Shia extremist group Hamas, which has actual seats in the Palestinian parliament currently, also heavily influences the PLO and is supported by many Palestinians. Terrorist groups have improved their ability to escape from a subordinate role in nation-state conflicts

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and are becoming more integrated with other statewide entities, such as criminal organizations and chartered corporations, and are gradually assuming a power and identity with national governments. They are being given actual political power in some nations and are often provided with the funds, resources, and weapons needed to succeed from actual governments that support their particular efforts. For example, it is known that Iran has been a consistent support of Hezbollah in Lebanon and their attacks against Israel.

**Israeli/Palestinian Conflict:** Preventing the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine was one of the first goals of the Arab League following its creation in 1945. After Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, five countries in the newly formed league took up arms against the state. This would become the first of many violent conflicts between the Arab world and Israel that persist today. In 1937, the British published the Peel Commission Report, which recommended a partition plan to resolve what it characterized as an irrepressible conflict. The Peel Commission plan proposed a Jewish home in areas in which there was a clear Jewish majority, divided into two noncontiguous sections: the northern portion extended from Tel Aviv to the current border with Lebanon, and a southern portion, disconnected from the northern one by a British-controlled area that included Jerusalem and extended from south of Jaffa to north of Gaza. The Jews reluctantly accepted the plan, while the Arab world rejected it, demanding that all of Palestine be placed under Arab control and that most of the

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20 D. Kirkpatrick (2015). Libya Asks Arab League Countries to Help Battle Islamic State  
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Jewish population of Palestine be transferred out of the country. Then in 1947, the U.N. Partition Plan was proposed. This plan suggested that there should be two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian, existing side by side. However, even today there is no consensus as to the relative size and precise borders of the two states. This plan was among the first examples of the new self-determination that President Wilson and many other progressives had championed. However, Palestine and the Arab world once again rejected this plan. The Arab League stressed the importance of a Palestinian state and their cause when they established the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Order) in 1964. The liberation of Palestine is considered a duty of all Arabs. The Palestinian conflict is a catalyst for Arab unification and collective action. Today they remain at great odds, as violence persists, and the Arab League maintains boycotts against Israeli companies and goods. Thousands of civilians have been killed in the crossfire and the conflict has fueled the rise of extremism and radical Islam, particularly in the form of Hamas. It will be of the utmost importance for this body to establish a plan when we convene to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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22 Spangler, Understanding Israel/Palestine. 130.
23 Spangler, Understanding Israel/Palestine. 135.
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Questions to Consider

- What is the best way to address the refugee crisis? Who is most responsible for accepting refugees, and what can be done collectively to ease the burden of states dealing with the crisis?
- How can the safety and human rights of refugees be protected? Who is the ultimate protector of refugees, the country they reside in or the international community at large? What is the best strategy for stemming the tide of refugees in Syria?
- How do we address the Islamic State and its affiliates collectively through military, financial, political, and international means?
- How does the League collectively counter the growth of extremist groups, particularly through propaganda and the use of internet/web-based media?
- Is there a way to limit the spread of extremist ideologies without completely censoring the web and all public access to social media?
- What do extremist groups offer to civilians that compel them to join their cause? How is religious doctrine used to encourage participation?
- Why has inter-state crime such as human trafficking and illegal drug trade increasingly developed in the region? What steps can be taken to combat such crime?
- What is the current position in my country on the rights of women, children, and minorities? What role do these individuals have in my education system? In the workplace?
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- Has my government provided sufficient social services to its citizens and my most vulnerable populations? What measures can the Arab League take collectively to ensure necessary social services to these populations?

- What steps can be taken to establish a League-wide economic and communication plan for diversification to wean Arab populations off of oil and mineral dependency?

- What is the best solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? Should we seek a two-state or single state solution? What does each side demand? How has each side acted in past attempts to make peace agreements?

- What role will NGO’s play in protecting the rights of individuals in the region?
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Works Cited


