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Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press

UNITED STATES
ARMY WAR COLLEGE
PRESS
Carlisle Barracks, PA   STRENGTH WISDOM

AN ARAB NATO IN THE MAKING?
MIDDLE EASTERN MILITARY COOPERATION SINCE 2011

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Two features have been consistent in the Middle East and North Africa since the era of independence: ongoing violence of all types—and the absence of a collective security structure, which could tackle this violence. Since the end of World War II, the region has seen multiple attempts to organize collective and cooperative security, all of which failed.

Since the so-called Arab Spring, movement has come again into regional security. From joint exercises and combat operations to an attempt to create a joint Arab force, the trend seems to be going toward more collective action in the region. As this study shows, however, challenges remain on the way to a true collective defense or security body; issues of sovereignty and distrust will have to be overcome before Arab states can truly move beyond mere alliances and integrate their forces.

A successful Arab security system needs to address security in a comprehensive manner. First, it would have to cover security challenges that are not only regional and of interstate nature, but also domestic (such as civil wars). Second, it would have to be able to manage aggression not only from outsiders (such as the attack on Egypt in 1956), but also among member states (such as Iraq and Kuwait). "Internal" here, therefore, has two meanings—internal to the member state, and internal to the alliance. These are both dimensions that a classical alliance (e.g., the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]) is not concerned with—although any security system seeks the reduction of the possibility of organized violence both within and between states, but preconditions differ. Alliances, or even collective defense systems, will not be enough for the Arab world because they focus solely on the regional aspect of security. Instead, a more holistic system is necessary, which could

reduce the likelihood of violence altogether—such as a collective security system, which later could become a security community.

The system would have to decide on provisions pertaining to domestic security issues such as unrest or civil war without openly infringing on Arab state sovereignty. When the League's Arab Deterrent Force was sent to Lebanon in 1976, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Peninsula Shield was sent to Bahrain in 2011, these moves were possible only because both states had allegedly invited these missions in full sovereignty.

There are two main challenges for any type of Arab security architecture to overcome: the first is a high-level degree of distrust amongst states; the second is that conventional collective security is chiefly concerned with interstate wars—when most Arab conflicts have been either of an intrastate or at least asymmetric nature. Taken together, circumstances for collective security are infinitely more complex than, for instance, those in Western Europe after World War II.

Security cooperation requires first and foremost a certain level of trust amongst states participating in any such scheme. After all, suspecting one's ally to threaten one's security defies the idea of any form of cooperation in this field. In the Arab world, however, trust has been porous, because regimes have struggled with issues of legitimacy and sovereignty from the outset. States were born with weak institutions, poor popular legitimacy, and a divided polity.

It was not only states that were questioning each other's sovereignty; citizens were questioning regime legitimacy as well. Only in 1964 did the Arab League member states formally put an end to Arab unification efforts, and called on Arab states to cease

their propaganda wars and to recognize the principle of non-interference—in practice, many Arab states continued to meddle with the politics within other states.

The second challenge is that collective security is generally concerned with interstate conflict and its prevention. To date, there is no comprehensive international system to prevent and settle violent internal conflicts. The principle of sovereignty considers this a domain of the state, which forbids external interference. This means that engaging in internal conflict elsewhere requires either an invitation from the government, or a resolution by the United Nations Security Council. Where neither is the case, states have to act outside international law. But more importantly, internal conflicts are difficult to settle generally, and particularly by outsiders. The case of Libya in 2011 was the first instance in which the United Nations mandated an international operation into an ongoing civil war—highlighting the fact that the respect of sovereignty remains a crucial pillar of the international system, but particularly so in the Arab world. Any security system aimed at the management of internal conflicts, ranging from civil war to terrorism, will have to address the somewhat contested issue of sovereignty.

Policy recommendations:

1) Past attempts to build a cooperative or collective Arab security system have excluded one or several key countries, which in turn then actively worked against it. A successful system would have to include all regional players one way or the other. The League of Arab States, as the most comprehensive of the mentioned organizations, would be a suitable starting point if it offered partnership provisions to non-Arab states such as Iran, Turkey, or post-conflict Israel. Announced at the 2010 Sirte Summit, the League's Arab Neighborhood Policy has failed to take hold so far, but would go beyond the existing observer status non-Arab states currently can obtain. Turkey and Iran, albeit neither member nor observer, have already participated in League summits, and regional sub-groupings (such as the Maghreb, the Levant, or the Gulf) could work within the system without jeopardizing the comprehensive approach of the whole.

2) A successful Arab security system needs to address security in a comprehensive manner. First, it would have to cover security challenges that are not only regional and of interstate nature, but also domestic (such as civil wars). Second, it would have to be able to manage aggression not only from outsiders but also among member states (such as Iraq and Kuwait). Therefore, "internal" here has two meanings—internal to the member state, and internal to the alliance. These are both dimensions that a classical alliance (e.g., NATO) is not concerned with—although any security system seeks the reduction of the possibility of organized violence both within and between states, but preconditions differ. Alliances, or even collective defense systems, will not be enough for the Arab world, because they focus solely on the regional aspect of security. Instead, a more holistic system is necessary, which could reduce the likelihood of violence altogether. One example is a collective security system, which later could become a security community.

The system would have to decide on provisions pertaining to domestic security issues such as unrest or civil war without openly infringing on Arab state sovereignty. When the League's Arab Deterrent Force was sent to Lebanon in 1976, and the GCC Peninsula Shield was sent to Bahrain in 2011, this was possible only because both states had allegedly invited these missions in full sovereignty. Any new system needs to establish clear criteria as well as limitations for military intervention, such as in the shape of a United Nations Security Council resolution.

3) Any collective security system needs to be able to enforce its punitive measures, including by political as well as military means. The Arab countries' military forces are in an acceptable state; the room for improvement consists mostly in the establishment of common standards for interoperability. Arab forces have adopted by and large Soviet or Western standards, which are not interoperable. Most importantly, the forces need to match the ambition of the threats and risks identified, which pose a much greater challenge. Finding consensus on a strategic vision is what the region needs most. This is complicated by the fact that only a few Arab states possess national defense strategies. In addition, the armed forces' military purpose is often blurred by social and economic considerations, such as employment provision.

An integrated military structure, such as that of NATO would be advisable, since its benefits go beyond its defense purpose. No other alliance or collective defense organization has established a similar system that promotes cooperation, builds trust, and projects power.

4) The absence of a power center has often been cited as one of the failures in establishing a

collective security system in the Arab world. This need not be an insurmountable obstacle; stable clusters of states, such as the Arab world's sub-regions, can replace a single strong state acting as a centrifuge for collective security. To date, there is no stability in either, but initiatives such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab Maghreb Union point in that direction. Besides, the Arab world does not suffer from the absence of one strong state; rather, it has too many contenders for the center of power. There are positive indications, however, that the desire to move from individual to collective security in the Arab world is clearly there.

Arab collective security seems far away in light of the still unsettled Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ongoing internal conflicts, and the rise of tensions in the Gulf. In a chicken-and-egg logic, peace is a precondition for cooperation in the security area—but then again, cooperation might be a precondition for peace.

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