

# **OMUN V**



## **The Arab League (Dec. 2011)**



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## Chair Letter

Delegates,

On behalf of the Dais, we'd like to welcome you to The Arab League at OMUN V! We are thrilled to be your Chairs this year.

Bassem is a Year 12 student at Upper Canada College and the Vice-President of UCC's MUN club. This OMUN is his 15th conference and he's attended conferences in North America, Europe, and Asia, including Harvard MUN, THIMUN the Hague, and THIMUN Singapore. Having grown up living in 6 cities, 5 countries, and 4 continents, Bassem has found Model UN to be his connection to much of his past as well as the rest of the world. Bassem intends to study History and International Relations in the future, much of which involves studying the Arab world.

This year at OMUN, we are thrilled to be accompanied by our Vice Chairs, Daniel Botros and Serina Woo.

Daniel is a Year 11 student at UCC who has participated in Model UN for several years. As someone of Egyptian background, he has always had an interest in the discussions of the Arab League. It often seems as if the conflict in the Middle East will never cease. However, as someone who has personally witnessed the impact of the events that we will be discussing, he eagerly awaits to hear your stance and solutions. He fondly recalls participating as a delegate in OMUN and hopes that you will soon be able to share a similar experience.

Serina is a Grade 11 student at Havergal College who has been a part of Havergal's Model UN since Grade 9. She enjoys MUN a lot because it is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about global affairs. She says that, as she discovers more about MUN and different countries, it not only helps shape her personal interest but her academic interest as well. Although compared to other delegates, she does not have as much experience in Model UN conferences, she truly hopes that this year's OMUN will be an enriching conference for everyone in attendance.

**This is a historic committee which takes place in December 2011. We encourage all delegates to do further research on both topics, and thoroughly showcase their research in the position papers, which are due on April 1st.**

We look forward to seeing you all engage in some lively debate. See you in April!

Bassem Sandeela  
Head Chair



## General Overview of the Committee

### What is Arab League<sup>1</sup>?

The League of Arab States, or Arab League, is a voluntary association of countries whose peoples are mainly Arabic speaking or where Arabic is an official language. Its stated aims are to strengthen ties among member states, coordinate their policies and direct them towards a common good. It has 22 members including Palestine, which the League regards as an independent state. The idea of the Arab League was mooted in 1942 by the British, who wanted to rally Arab countries against the Axis powers. However, the league did not take off until March 1945, just before the end of the Second World War.



The highest body of the league is the Council, composed of representatives of member states, usually foreign ministers, their representatives or permanent delegates. Each member state has one vote, irrespective of its size. The council meets twice a year, in March and September, and may convene a special session at the request of two members. Day-to-day, the league is run by the general secretariat. Headed by a secretary-general, it is the administrative body of the league and the executive body of the council and the specialized ministerial councils.

The Arab League was forced to adapt to sudden changes in the Arab world when popular protests known as the Arab Spring broke out in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa in late 2010 and early 2011. In February 2011 the Arab League suspended Libya's participation in the league amid its regime's violent response to the Libya Revolt, and in March it supported the imposition of a no-fly zone to protect opponents of Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi from air attacks by loyalist forces. Libya's participation in the Arab League was reinstated in August under the representation of the Transitional National Council (TNC) after Qaddafi was overthrown. Meanwhile, as the 2011 uprising in Syria grew increasingly violent, the Arab League reached an agreement with the Syrian government in November to end its bloody 10-month campaign against peaceful protesters in Syria. Less than two weeks later, amid reports that the Syrian forces had continued to kill protesters in spite of the agreement, the Arab League voted to suspend Syria's participation.

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<sup>1</sup> "Profile: Arab League," BBC News (BBC, August 24, 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15747941>

<sup>2</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Arab League," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 5, 2020), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arab-League>



# Topic 1:

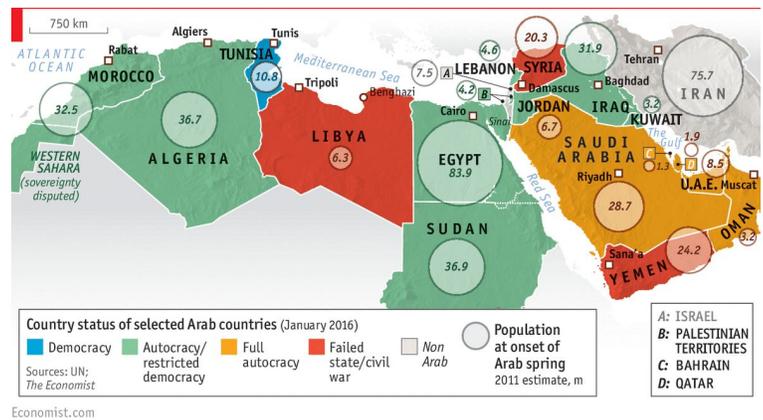
## The Arab Spring

### A Brief Overview

The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy uprisings that enveloped several places in the Middle East and North Africa<sup>3</sup>.

**Cause:** The Arab Spring began through Tunisian street vendor, Mohamad Bouazizi. Bouazizi's vegetable stand was repeatedly seized by the police as a result of his failure to obtain a permit. In order to protest the arbitrary seizing of his vegetable stand and loss of his livelihood, Bouazizi committed

suicide by setting himself on fire in front of the government building in protest of an authoritarian regime<sup>4</sup>. Although his suicide may seem like a random act of lunacy to people living in democratic countries, these feelings of despair and frustration against oppressive governments resonated with millions across the Middle East. This man's actions served as the final breaking point in the region, ultimately being the spark that ignited mass protests against government corruption (high food prices, harassment from government officials, and unemployment). In Tunisia, a month after Bouazizi's death, the demonstrations forced the autocratic president of 23 years, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, to flee to Saudi Arabia.<sup>5</sup> Bouazizi was a martyr in the eyes of those suffering at the hands of a corrupt government. Upon seeing the success in Tunisia, similar protests began to occur throughout the Arab region.



### Conflict

Many of these protests aimed to replace oppressive regimes with democratic leadership. Thus, as you would expect, these oppressive regimes often replied with a violent military response. The standoffs between demonstrators and military forces often evolved into armed conflicts caused by excessive use of force and government corruption among the police force.

<sup>3</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2019. "Arab Spring." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. August 23, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring>.

<sup>4</sup>Day, Elizabeth. 2011. "The Slap That Sparked a Revolution." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media. May 14, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/15/arab-spring-tunisia-the-slap>.

<sup>5</sup>Blakemore, Erin. 2019. "What Was the Arab Spring and What Caused It to Happen?" The Arab Spring-Facts and Information. June 14, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/topics/reference/arab-spring-cause/>.



In Syria, the government killed and imprisoned countless protesters, causing a split within the nation. Conflicts arose between citizens who were protesting against the current regime, and citizens who supported the current regime. After several foreign interventions failed to suppress the conflict, it progressed to become the Syrian Civil War (Topic 2), which resulted in the death of over half a million people and displaced more than half of all Syrians.

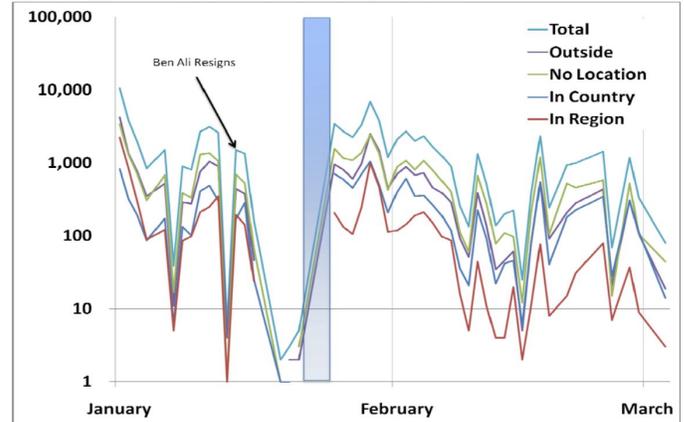
The Egyptian crisis, as protestors began to fill the streets of Cairo, security personnel changed tactics and the protest turned violent. Police attempted to clear the crowds with water cannons and used batons and tear gas on the demonstrators. Estimated by the Human Rights Watch, at least 300 people had been killed over the span of two weeks, most of them due to the excessive use of force by security forces.

The Libyan Civil War, the ongoing conflict between protestors and the police spread to Tripoli and more than 200 people are killed. United Nations secretary General Ban Ki-moon demanded that the conflict end immediately. However, President Moammar Gadhafi vowed to die a martyr rather than step down, which led to the UN Security Council imposing sanctions against Libya. Soon, the Libyan government was ready to negotiate a ceasefire. Among the fightings, a government spokesman said some 1,300 people have been killed and 5,000 have been wounded in 12 hours of fighting between the rebel government and the protestors.

### The Role of Technology and Social Media

Social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring. A spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground<sup>6</sup>. Social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders (Figure 1). No one could have predicted that Mohammed Bouazizi would play a role in unleashing a wave of protest for democracy in the Arab world. Yet, after his suicide on December 17, 2010, democratic fervor spread across North Africa and the Middle East. Social media has the unique ability to put a human face on political oppression. Bouazizi's self-immolation was one of several stories told and retold on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in ways that inspired dissidents to organize protests, criticize their governments, and spread ideas about democracy. However, in attempt to suppress the spread of the protests, the Egyptian government blocked the internet service and they experienced a government-ordered communication blackout in selected areas. Until now, most of what we have known about the role of social media in the Arab Spring has been anecdotal. There are Egyptian political websites, Tunisian blogosphere, Tweets about the demonstrations, and many more.

Figure 1: Logged Number of Tweets on #sidbouzid, by Location



Notes: "Outside Country" refers to Twitter profiles that had locations outside both the country and the region, and "No location" refers to profiles that either had no location data or had have been deleted or suspended since archiving began. The blue bar indicates the period in which journalists began reporting that protests had reached the level of "thousands" of participants.

<sup>6</sup>Howard, Duffy, Aiden, Freelon, Deen, Hussain, Mari, Marwa, and Philip N. 2015. "Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?" SSRN. April 17, 2015. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2595096](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2595096).



## Unpredictability of Revolutions

Social media fueled the spread of anti-government demonstrations led to different outbreaks of political dissent in different countries.

- In Bahrain, demonstrators demanded the release of political prisoners and human right reforms.
- In Jordan and Morocco, Arab Spring movements focused on more modest calls for reform.<sup>7</sup>
- In Kuwait, their parliament was dissolved in response to public pressure.
- In Libya, government crackdown on protesters sparked a civil war.
- In Yemen, massive protests sparked a political crisis and forced its president to step down.
- In Egypt, Cairo's Tahrir Square was the site of an 18-day-long protest in which tens of thousands of Egyptians demanded that their president, Hosni Mubarak, to step down.<sup>8</sup>

The problem with these types of revolutions is that they are incredibly unpredictable. When the current regime is overthrown, a power vacuum is created. There is no way of knowing if the next person in power will fulfill their promises of fairness, or continue to repress their people. It is for this reason that the Arab Spring has led to extra political chaos and instability. Since 2011, the goals of many Arab league protesters have been denied as autocratic governments regain power and crack down on civil liberties. Nonetheless, the uprisings have shown the power of mass demonstrations and peaceful protests. However, even if the protests have the ability to overthrow the strongest of leaders, building a constitutional political order is a much longer and harder task.

### Questions to Consider:

1. What role did social media play in the events of the Arab Spring?
2. Does your country prefer to support the current regimes in power, or does it want to strive towards a more democratic system of governing?
3. Is it possible to minimize the violent standoffs between the protesters and military forces? If so, how?
4. Can these demonstrations be sustainable? Is it possible to facilitate the transition to a new government while maintaining political stability?
5. It is undeniable that things changed a lot in the Middle East, but how does the Arab Spring impact governments outside the Middle East?

### Further Readings

[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2595096](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2595096)

<https://www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution>

<https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/arab-spring>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/15/arab-spring-tunisia-the-slap>

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<sup>7</sup>History.com Editors. 2018. "Arab Spring." History.com. A&E Television Networks. January 10, 2018. <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/arab-spring>.

<sup>8</sup> Staff, NPR. 2011. "The Arab Spring: A Year Of Revolution." NPR. NPR. December 17, 2011. <https://www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution>.



<https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring>

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/uncategorized/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-arab-spring/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/egyptian-crisis-how-did-it-happen-1.1072134>



## Topic 2:

### The Syrian Civil War

#### A Brief Overview<sup>9</sup>

While lack of freedoms and economic woes drove resentment of the Syrian government, the harsh crackdown on protesters inflamed public anger.

- In 2011, successful uprisings - that became known as the Arab Spring - toppled Tunisia's and Egypt's presidents. This gave hope to Syrian pro-democracy activists.

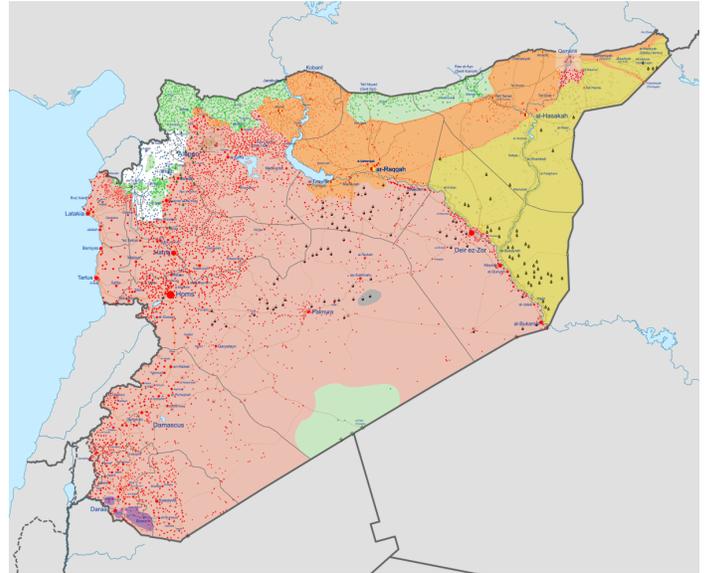
- That March, peaceful protests erupted in Syria as well, after 15 boys were detained and tortured for writing graffiti in support of the Arab Spring. One of the boys, a 13-year-old, was killed after having been brutally tortured.

- The Syrian government, led by President Bashar al-Assad, responded to the protests by killing hundreds of demonstrators and imprisoning many more.

- In July 2011, defectors from the military announced the formation of the Free Syrian Army, a rebel group aiming to overthrow the government, and Syria began to slide into civil war.

- While the protests in 2011 were mostly non-sectarian, the armed conflict surfaced starker sectarian divisions. Most Syrians are Sunni Muslims, but Syria's security establishment has long been dominated by members of the Alawi sect, of which Assad is a member.

- Even global warming is said to have played a role in sparking the 2011 uprising. Severe drought plagued Syria from 2007-10, causing as many as 1.5 million people to migrate from the countryside into cities, exacerbating poverty and social unrest.



#### The Conflict<sup>10</sup>

From early on, the uprising and the regime's response had a sectarian dimension. Many of the protesters belonged to the country's Sunni majority, while the ruling Assad family were members of the country's 'Alawite minority. 'Alawites also dominated the security forces and the irregular militias that carried out some of the worst violence against protesters and suspected opponents of the regime. Sectarian divisions were initially not as rigid as is sometimes supposed, though; the political and economic elite with ties to the regime included members of all of Syria's confessional groups—not just 'Alawites—while many middle- and working-class 'Alawites did not particularly benefit from belonging to the same community as the Assad family and may have shared some of the protesters' socioeconomic grievances.

<sup>9</sup> "Syria's Civil War Explained from the Beginning," Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera Media Network, April 14, 2018), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/syria-civil-war-explained-160505084119966.html>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



As the conflict progressed, however, sectarian divisions hardened. In his public statements, Assad sought to portray the opposition as Sunni Islamic extremists in the mold of al-Qaeda and as participants in foreign conspiracies against Syria. The regime also produced propaganda stoking minorities' fears that the predominantly Sunni opposition would carry out violent reprisals against non-Sunni communities.

As the protests increased in strength and size, the regime responded with heavier force. In some cases this meant encircling

cities or neighbourhoods that had become hubs of protest, such as Bāniyās or Homs, with tanks, artillery, and attack helicopters and cutting off utilities and communications. In response, some groups of protesters began to take up arms against the security forces. In June, Syrian troops and tanks moved into the northern town of Jisr al-Shugūr, sending a stream of thousands of refugees fleeing into Turkey.

Sectarian politics in Syria have fundamentally complicated the problems facing the syrian regime and its opposition. The Assad regime has not seriously considered introducing comprehensive reforms; representative government in Syria would lead to the regime's downfall and the prosecution of the former elite. Given the consequences of losing, the regime is likely to fight to the end.

The scale of unrest in Syria has made it impossible for the regime's security forces to simultaneously garrison all of the country's key terrain. The regime has maintained control over Syria's armed forces, despite limited defections. Therefore, the regime's strategy has been to maneuver elite forces to key centers of unrest and conduct large clearance operations, using selective brutality in an effort to end the crisis.

Iran, Iraq, and Lebanese Hezbollah have supported the Assad regime throughout this crisis with moral, economic, and possibly material assistance. Commercial and military interests in Syria have solidified Russian support for Assad. Turkey, Assad's longtime ally, has reversed its position with a series of measures that have isolated and pressured the regime. The Arab League, led by the Sunni Arab gulf states, has also strongly condemned the Assad regime's violent response to the protest and enacted sanctions. The United States and European Union enacted comprehensive sanctions against individuals, organizations, and Syria as a whole.

After nine months of conflict and despite mounting regional pressure, the Assad regime has not demonstrated its willingness to step down, let alone abandon its offensive security strategy. The regime's violent operations severely limited the possibility of a negotiated settlement. At the end of 2011, as both sides harden their stance and secure regional support, Syria's slide towards civil war may be unavoidable.



## Key International Actors

In response to the crackdown, the US and European Union imposed sanctions against individuals and entities, including travel bans and asset freezes against senior officials in the government and security forces, business officials who benefited from and/or aided government oppression and a host of entities. Both the US and the EU froze the assets of Syrian companies and banks tied to the government or its supporters, and the US government prohibited US entities and citizens from doing business with those companies and banks. In September the EU, which buys 95 percent of Syria's oil exports, prohibited the purchase of Syrian oil and banned EU companies from investing in Syria's oil sector.

A number of Arab states joined together in condemning Syria's crackdown. In August Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Tunisia withdrew their ambassadors from Damascus for consultations. In November the Arab League voted to suspend Syria's membership after Syria failed to implement an agreed-to plan to end to the violence.

Turkey, until recently a close ally and major trade partner, repeatedly condemned the Syrian crackdown and stopped at least two weapons shipments to Syria. It also hosted a number of meetings for Syria's opposition.

In August the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a presidential statement condemning 'the widespread violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities.' However, in October Russia and China, as well as India, Brazil, and South Africa, refused to support a Security Council resolution applying significant pressure on the Syrian government.

In April the UN Human Rights Council "unequivocally condemned the use of lethal violence against peaceful protesters." In August a report from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights "found a pattern of human rights violations ... which may amount to crimes against humanity," and the council again condemned the "grave and systematic human rights violations by the Syrian authorities" and established "an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate all alleged violations since March 2011." The commission was appointed in September and was due to issue its report in late November, but had not been granted access to Syria at this writing. Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner for human rights, recommended in a briefing to the Security Council in August that it refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

## Possible Solutions

This is a historical committee and of course, the Syrian Civil War hasn't been resolved yet. As such, there haven't really been any "successful" solutions to the conflict. But perhaps solutions can be found in taking a different approach to history and taking actions different from our predecessors.

Thus, in order to avoid it escalating into the situation it has today, delegates would need to find an approach that would end the conflict either within the matter of a year or before the conflict would further escalate into a multi-party conflict. This may include immediate intervention (which may, however, backfire) or perhaps further and more drastic international pressure (such as sanctions, human rights abuse reports, or multi-state diplomacy-related meetings) on either the Assad government or the Syrian opposition. With that in mind, the committee is running during the period of the initial insurgency. As such, delegates would also need to consider countries' stances on refugees prior to, during, and after 2011.



## Questions to Consider

1. Is it possible to prevent the armed insurgency from expanding? Is it likewise possible to make the Assad regime concede to some of the insurgency's as well as the international community's demands?
2. Where do the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War intersect? How and why is it important?
3. Why did the Kofi Annan ceasefire attempt of 2012 fail? If you were to coin together a different set of terms for the peace plan and a different approach to peace, how would you go about doing it?
4. What level of involvement should foreign states hold in the civil war? Does it concern other nations?

## Further Readings

<https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/27/world/meast/syria-civil-war-fast-facts/index.html>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>

<https://www.cfr.org/interactive/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/syria-civil-war-explained-160505084119966.html>

[https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-04/Ford\\_The\\_Syrian\\_Civil\\_War.pdf](https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-04/Ford_The_Syrian_Civil_War.pdf)

[https://www.gicj.org/images/2016/pdfs/Final-Report-Syria\\_June-2017.pdf](https://www.gicj.org/images/2016/pdfs/Final-Report-Syria_June-2017.pdf)

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06269?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06269?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)