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Federalism and the Arab League: A theoretical synergy

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Abstract. The paper is a theoretical analogy of the Arab league as a regional organization. The paper also discusses the objectives, strengths and weaknesses of the league. By adopting descriptive-historical research from library instrument, findings show that, there is no doubt that the league had recorded some appreciable level of achievements since its inception and there have equally been some challenges along the line. The paper concludes that, the Arab league must find a way to reduce the perpetual tension and violence in Palestine by working towards enthroning a peaceful relationship with Israel while retaining their cultural identity. The paper also recommends that, the Arab league should strengthen their relationship with the non-Arab Nations especially in the face of globalization to reap the benefits therein involved as a league. Arab league must ensure that Arab states stop waging needless wars between and among themselves. The Syria and Yemeni crises among others is a disgrace to the Arab world.

Keywords: Arab league, Theoretical, Synergy, Federalism, Integration.


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1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to discuss regional integration through the instrumentality of the Arab League. To this end, issues of regionalism and integration will expectedly attract a measure of attention in our literature review. In terms of the theoretical framework, federalism theory will be adopted in the explanation of this phenomenon especially in relation to the Arab League. The level of analysis involved in this connection will center around the formation, structure, the achievements and challenges of this regional body. This will form the basis of our conclusion and recommendations to ameliorate the problematic so identified with the present for future improved considerations.

Regionalism is another way of expressing the involvement of nation-states in a given region of the world to work co-operatively together to achieve desired objectives in several spheres of human endeavor. In this perspective, Sheriff (2013:152) had observed that it is another form of economic multilateralism which involves states in a region with shared interest, values, history, geography and by extension, with similar economic goals coming together to actualize their identified aims. The issues of regionalism are itself derivable from and in conformity with the principles of globalization. This is in the sense that no nation under this scenario can afford to operate in isolation. Hence they must necessarily cooperate with others to obtain that which they don't have and to give to others, that which they can produce. It would seem that in the contemporary global economic system this is inevitable and indeed desirable for the interest of all concerned. However, issues

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involved in this process remained contestive and at times, quite complex for easy comprehension as it were. Regional integration has thus been presented in some quarters as a process through which nation states voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with neighbors so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for reducing conflicts among themselves (Haas, 1971). Yet, some scholars like Langenhove & Ginkel (2003), see regional integration simply as a process by which states within a given region increase their level of interaction with respect to economic, security, political or socio-cultural issues.

The emergence of regional integration in the words of Strivastva (1995) became an important element of international relations after the second world war. He attributed the rise of this phenomenon to the growth of a large number of sovereign independent states that lack self-sufficiency. They were consequently compelled to look for co-operation with other states to meet the basic needs of their citizens. Naturally, this led to the formation of a sizeable number of regional organizations. But the term “regionalism” has been used quite loosely and covers all forms of non-universal associations of states like the Arab league for instance. This means that regional organizations are formal associations of independent states with some form of permanent organs, thus implying that they are more than mere alliances.

However, there is perhaps the need to note that regional organizations do not have any definite geographical connotation since all states of a given region need not be members of the regional organization. For example the Arab league which is the concern of this discourse, does not have all the states in the Middle East as members. This is just as some members of the Arab league are not situated in the Middle East. Aja (2002), probably had this in mind when he harped more on the dynamism and resilience of regional groups in attaining whatever binds them together. They are globally wide spread with three for instance in the Arabian Peninsula of which the Arab league is one. In this respect, Langenhove and De Lombaerde (2007), described them as a world-wide phenomenon of territorial systems that increases the interactions between their components and creates new forms of organization co-existing with traditional forms of state led organization at the national level.

Nevertheless, it is important to take note of the fact as expressed by Strivastva (1995), that there is no definite geographical definition of the Middle East since the area has been variously determined at different times. However as he notes, usually, the motley of countries stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to the North West frontier of Indian is known as the Middle East. In this region, the notable states are Turkey, Egypt Palestine, Persia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Jordan. This region is of strategic importance in global affairs. This is to the extent that it is the meeting point of three continents viz Asia, Europe and Africa.

There is no doubt that the subject of regionalism and integration has attracted a lot of literary attention and global reception, especially after the Second World War. The summation of Claude (1995) seem to capture this essence as reflected in his following quotation:

Regionalism is sometimes put forward as an alternative to globalism, a superior substitute for the principle of universality. Emphasis is placed upon the bigness and heterogeneity of the wide world and the conclusion is drawn that only within limited segments of the globe can we find the cultural foundations of common loyalties, the objective similarity of national problems and the potential awareness of common interest which are necessary for the effective functioning of multilateral Institutions (Ake, 1995).

More so, regional integration appears in different patterns. This is admittedly so as they are set up for divergent purposes, which are why Sheriff & Nwokedi (2016) held that, integration could be formed to attain political gains, economic advantage, environmental agreement, cultural affiliations educational and humanitarian support. This, they maintained, have given rise to the formation of economic and monetary unions, Economic unions, customs and monetary unions, common markets, customs unions and multilateral free trade areas.

2. Theoretical framework

In the views of some Scholars, the theory of international integration attempts to explain why states choose supra-nationalism, which challenges once more, the foundations of realism (state sovereignty and territorial integrity). Peve & Goldstein (2010), posit that international integration refers to the process by which supranational Institutions replace national ones - the gradual shifting upward of sovereignty from states to regional or global structures. Thus, the theoretical framework for this discourse is Federalism Theory. This theory, for the purpose of this article will be discussed especially in relation to the Arab league, which is the instrumentality of analysis in our discussion.

The theory of Federalism emphasizes the creation of a supranational entity shared between the supranational entity and the states within a region. Some of the proponents of Federalist Theory are Daniel Elazar, Michael Burgess, McKay, Riker, Spinelli, King, K.C Wheare and others. This theory is not without its due limitations. As Dosenrode (2010) pointed out, despite its clear advantages and potentials, Federalism is not “enough” to cover all regional integration processes. To do so he says, one has to add Neo-functionalism, which is able to explain an “organic” or slowly developing regional integration. But, he equally admitted that whether for economic or political consideration, integration process is not automatic or irreversible as integration processes are made by man, and can be destroyed or stopped by man.

The Arab league exemplifies a regional cooperative organization. Hence Federalist theory can be meaningfully utilized to examine this body. The name “federation” is derived from *latinfoedus* meaning pact, alliance, covenant, an arrangement entered into voluntarily and implying a degree of mutual trust and duration. The formation of the Arab League fits into this mould in the sense that its soul lies in a pact which embodies its aims and objectives. The establishment of the Arab League itself as seen by Strivastva (1995) is a symbol of regionalism in the Middle East. This may have gained prominence he says, during the second world war but concretely shaped in March 1945, when its pact was signed by the following founding members -Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. Membership is voluntary and Withdrawal could even be effected after a year notice by the member who so desires to that effect. The pact of the league aimed at closer collaboration between member states to safeguard their independence and sovereignty. But this could only be operated in an atmosphere of mutual trust as envisaged by the Federalist theory.

Federal principles according to Elazar (1987), are concerned with combination of “self-rule and shared rule”. Again, this is clearly reflected in the Arab league where there are two levels of governments. There is the supranational aspect which reflects the members of the league that surrender some aspects of their sovereignty to the Arab league, while at the same time, member’s national sovereignty respected by all in their independence or domestic rights. For instance, one of the objectives of the Arab League as stated in its pact is that of the coordination of the members’ policies in order to achieve co-operation among them and to safeguard their independence and sovereignty. Another objective of the Arab League in this instance is that members of the league are expected to respect the systems of governments established in other member-states and to pledge not to make any attempt to change the established system of governments.

As an aspect of the Federalist Theory, Burgess (2000) states that Federation is a specific organizational form which includes structures, institutions, procedures and techniques. Hence his summation that it is a tangible institutional reality that can be distinguished from other forms of states relatively clearly. The Arab League as an integrative regional organization in the Middle East reflects exactly this expectation. It has structures and institutions, with their operational procedures and

techniques as encapsulated in the league's pact. For Instance there is the council of the Arab League which is the principal and supreme organ comprising all the members that enjoys equal voting rights on all decisions that binds only those that have exercised their voting rights on a decision (Krammer, 1993).

The council in conformity with the rules of the league is expected to sit as a General Assembly twice in a year. But it can have an extra ordinary session at the request of at least two of the council members wherever circumstances dictate. This council appoints the Secretary General of the league whose tenure is four years with each member having one vote. Additionally, there is the Joint Defence Council, the economic and social council, the committee, as well as the General Secretariat. As would be observed in the following section of this chapter that dwells on the formation, structures, institutions, achievements and challenges of the Arab league, it tends to lend itself to the Federalist Theoretical frame work of analysis as i have attempted to explain above.

3. Formation, objectives and structure of the Arab League

On the 22nd of March 1945, representatives from Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia Iraq and Yemen met in Cairo, Egypt to establish the Arab league, a regional organization of Arab States in the Middle East. Basically, the Arab league was formed to foster economic growth in the region, resolve disputes between its members and coordinate political and socio cultural aims. These were the Arab States that established what was initially termed "league of Arab state" since then, sixteen more states have joined making it twenty two (22) in all and four additional countries with observer status. These additional sixteen states are Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Sudan, Somalia, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates. The Observer countries are Brazil, Eritrea, India and Venezuela (Doofan, 2016).

Objectives of the Arab League are clearly stated in the pact setting up the league itself. This pact aimed at closer collaboration between the member states and to safeguard the independence and Sovereignty of the Arab States. Membership was limited to the Independent Arab States only. This was why Libya was admitted only in 1953. But a member could withdraw from the League after given one year notice (Strivastva, 1995).

These objectives of the Arab League embedded in its pact are as follows:- Strengthening of relations between the member-states, coordination of their policies in order to achieve co-operation among them and to safe guard their independence and sovereignty. Members are thus expected to cooperate in the following areas: (1) Economic and financial Affairs, including commercial relations, customs, currency and question of agriculture and Industry (2) Cultural affairs, nationality, passport, visas, execution of judgments and extradition of criminals (3) Social affairs (4) Human problems (5) Members are expected to respect the systems of governments established in other member-states and to avoid any attempt to change the established system of governments. Others as captured by Krammer (1993) and related to those above includes the need to ensure cohesion and peace between member states by offering to arbitrate in the event of conflict between two or more states and avoidance of recourse to force. And to ensure the cooperation of member states in respect to education, trade, foreign policy, social, legal, parliamentary, financial, economic and cultural matters. Structurally, the Arab League is operated through the following organs:

(1) There is the council which is the principal organ of the league, otherwise known as the (Majilis). Here, all members have equal representation. It is the highest organ of the league and meets twice in a year. However, extraordinary sessions can be allowed if at least two members so indicates. This Council thus supervises the execution of the multi-lateral agreements entered into by member states. The Council also exercises important powers with respect to the resolution of disputes among member states and the appointment of the Secretary General of

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the League for a term of four years through a two third majority of votes with a nation state having one vote.

(2) The second is the Defence Council that coordinates the collective defence of the member states of the league.

(3) The third organ is the committees which are set up to operate in divergent areas as it relate to the league. For instance, the Council is enabled by a political committee. There are also other permanent committees responsible for securing cooperation in the economic, social and cultural matters among the members of the league.

(4) There is the secretariat which is administered by the Secretary General as the administrative officer of the league. The headquarters of the Arab league is in Cairo, Egypt (Strivastva, 1995).

4. Achievements of the Arab League

As a regional supranational organization established through a pact in Cairo, following the Alexandria protocols of 1945, there is no doubting the fact that it has recorded some achievements since then. Some of these achievements are:

(1) The effort to galvanize the Arab world together to work in unism in the first place is worthy of commendation.

(2) In a world dominated by the imperial forces of Europe, especially during the greater part of the 20th century, the Arab League was to play a decisive role in ensuring the self-determination and sovereignty of its members.

(3) This effort played out in the Liberation of Lebanon as well as the Anglo-Yemeni dispute.

(4) The Anglo-Egyptian agreement of 1954 is largely attributed to the efforts of the Arab League.

(5) The Arab League played a commendable role in the liberation of Libya.

(6) The Arab league was also known to exert a lot of pressure on France to liberate her colonies.

(7) Even the Defence pact entered into by the Arab League to safeguard the collective security of its members was an achievement.

In the socio-cultural and economic spheres, the Arab League has put in a lot of efforts to effect trade and socio-cultural linkages among its members. To this end, the league has ensured that a number of agreements were signed and concluded on trade and economic matters, which are counted as parts of the achievements:

(1) The league ensured the emplacement of a permanent committee on Culture which meets once in a year.

(2) The internationalization of the Palestinian cause was the effort of the Arab league through its encouragement for and establishment of the PLO which it admitted to its fold in 1964 to represent Palestine.

(3) As late as 2015, the Arab league supported the Saudi led forces intervention in Yemen against the Shia Houthis as part of its efforts to normalize the security situation in the region.

(4) As an organization, the Arab league has no military force of its own but through a 2015 summit in Egypt, the member states have now agreed in principle to form a joint military force. The Arab league may not have succeeded as expected in several areas yet, it has indeed made efforts in most difficult circumstances to advance the course of its member states that cut across the middle East and beyond to Africa and Asia.

5. Challenges of the Arab League

Despite the accomplishments of the Arab League, most commentators view the League to have peculiar challenges. For instance, there is a strong feeling that the Arab League has failed to achieve the most vital objective of its establishment and which is the unification of the Arab world. These critics cannot be easily dismissed in view of the massive terrorism situation largely orchestrated by Arabs against

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Arabs themselves and beyond the Middle East. For example The Syrian debacle is a disgrace to the Arab world and the impotence displayed by the Arab League in nipping it in the bud is worrisome. The endless killings and bombings in Iraq without any foreseeable solution is a blot in the image of the Arab league. In the process, Arab civilization and heritage has been massively destroyed by Arabs themselves with extremist tendencies in the Middle East and Africa. This recourse to destruction and violence at a very slight prodding with extremist religion and ideological views sharply contrast with the expectation of Islamic beliefs and ideas, thus bringing the most binding cultural element of the Arab world into disrepute.

Even as recently as in July 2016, on the eve of the last Eid-el-Fitr and when the Ramadan was being concluded, there was invasion of some sensitive areas in Saudi Arabia, including an attempt on the prophets mosque in Medina. This was not only shocking but alarming to the whole wide world. Palmer & Perkins (1995: 1216) have given what indeed, seems a fair summation of this scenario with respect to the Arab League as captured in the following quotation of theirs.

Too loose an organization too much dominated by the UAR, too sharply divided by political and personal rivalries and too much a hostile coalition against Israel, the Arab League has not been a strong regional arrangement. Nevertheless, it is a symbol of national revival of the Arab world, and it hold a trend towards a large political grouping in a strategically critical areas. By such means as bloc voting and active participation in the United Nations and in the Asian-Africa Group in the UN. It has emphasized the determination of the Arab world to remain free from foreign control and to consider certain common problems on a regional basis. (Palmer, & Perkins, 1995)

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter has attempted to discuss the Arab league in the main as a supranational organization. This was done with the backdrop of regional integration. This has to be so as the Arab league itself is derived from this premise. Majorly, the Arab league is domiciled in the Middle East but with tentacles in Africa, Asia and to some extent, Latin America. A theoretical framework of analysis became imperative to further crystalize the issues discussed in this article. To this end, the Federalism Theory was adopted as it fittingly addressed the level of our discussion with respect to the Arab league. There is no doubt that the league had recorded some appreciable level of achievements since its inception. However, there have equally been some challenges along the line. This is so much so that the league has been cast as not living up to expectations. Thus, to ameliorate the perceived challenges that have been adduced as hampering the effectiveness of the Arab league, the following recommendations have been offered as a way out of the woods:

There is the need for the Arab league to find a common ground for the Palestine and Israel to end their hostility. The Arab league should find a way to effect the unity of the Arab world after the European Union model. The Arab league should drive a process of ensuring that the Arab leaders strive to overcome their internal separatist tendencies to enhance unity of purpose for the sustenance of the Pan-Arab Spirit, accelerate developmental processes of its member states and unite more meaningfully with the rest of the world.

The current security situation in the Middle East has led to mass exodus of the regional citizens to the West and this has cast the league in bad light. Hence the Arab league must galvanize the Arab leaders to work assiduously towards resolving this impasse and stern the exodus by allowing peaceful atmosphere at home.

Arab league should strengthen their relationship with the non-Arab Nations especially in the face of globalization to reap the benefits therein involved as a league. Arab league must ensure that Arab states stop waging needless wars between and among themselves. The Syria and Yemeni crises among others is a disgrace to the Arab world.

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Arab league must find a way to reduce the perpetual tension and violence in Palestine by working towards enthroning a peaceful relationship with Israel while retaining their cultural identity. The seemingly endless wars in Iraq which is self-inflicting must be halted with the aid of the Arab league to give room for meaningful development of the region.

The holy places of Makkah and Medina must be protected at all cost by the league from terrorist activities as these represent enduring symbols of the Arab culture, history, and universal heritage. Arab league must ensure that Arab states unite against terrorism. The recent bomb blast in the holy city of Medina (the prophet mosque) does not present the Arabs as a united people despite shared history, culture and customs.

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