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NOTHING BUT FAILURE? THE ARAB LEAGUE AND THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL AS MEDIATORS IN MIDDLE EASTERN CONFLICTS

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Introduction

In April 1945 the founding members of the United Nations met in San Francisco to draft the UN Charter and discuss the foundations of the new world order. While the framework of the Charter is primarily global in character, a series of articles included in Chapter VIII encourage the development of 'regional arrangements', one of whose major tasks is to 'achieve pacific settlements of local disputes' (Article 52).

In March 1945, one month before the San Francisco conference was convened, one such 'regional arrangement' received the final endorsement from a group of six founding states (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt). The Arab League, the oldest functioning regional organisation, has been conceived since its foundation as part of a broad and ambitious political project that could have led, at least in the intentions of some of its supporters, to the creation of a single Arab state in the Middle East. As a first step towards this final goal, the member states rejected the 'recourse of force for the settlement of disputes' between them. The Council of the League was from its inception designated as the provider of 'good offices' for mediating disputes that could have led to the use of force, and as the forum in which acts of 'aggressions' should be addressed.

Yet, since 1945 the Middle East has surely not been immune from war and violence. Inter-state and colonial wars from the 1948-49 first Arab-Israeli War to the 1990-91 Gulf War have caused at least 1.5 million casualties (Sarkees 2000). Being one of the most ethnically fragmented regions in the world (Peck 1998: 28), the Middle East has also been plagued by a series of protracted civil wars and ethnic struggles, which have led to the death of at least two million and the displacement of millions more, in particular in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen (Sarkees 2000).

Some authors have suggested that the League represents at least a 'bleak' experience of regional cooperation (Lindholm Schulz and Schulz 2005: 187), or possibly even a 'failed' one. The 'failure' of the League not only to prevent and manage regional conflicts, but also to generate cooperation in the political, military and economic spheres, contributed to the creation in 1981 of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) by the dynastic monarchies of the Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Oman). After the GCC was associated with some limited yet 'surprising' results in mediating local conflicts and in generating joint defence projects, the performance of the League was judged even more severely (Barnett and Solingen 2007). Today the academic discussion on the League is no longer centred on whether or not the League can be considered as a 'failed' organisation, but rather on establishing what accounts for its failure – a 'failure of design' as opposed to having been 'designed to fail' (Barnett and Solingen 2007: 180-1).

This paper suggests that, while the record of the Arab League in mediating regional conflicts is indeed a bleak one, claiming that the Arab League is a 'failed' organisation might overshadow what is, in fact, a more complex picture than the one suggested by the empirical studies of Joseph Nye (1971), Mark Zacher (1979) or Ibrahim Awad (1994). In order to review the empirical base of most contemporary studies on the League and on the GCC, two new, updated datasets will be introduced, based on the Correlates of War data and on research on primary material, and which highlight the performance of these organisations in relation to various types of wars and crises (inter-state wars, civil wars, boundary wars and political crises).

These datasets will show that the League proved hesitant to mediate in civil conflicts when major regional powers were involved, as the 'designed to fail' hypothesis suggests, but also that it failed to mediate in most inter-state wars in the Middle East primarily because one of the major warring parties was not, with few exceptions, a member state. On the other hand, the League intervened repeatedly in minor wars, and succeeded in promoting at least a partial settlement in 40 percent (8 out of 20) of the recorded boundary wars and political crises. They will also show not only that the GCC systematically failed to mediate effectively in major conflicts in the Gulf, but also that little or no evidence seems to exist to suggest that the GCC organs have significantly impacted on the resolution of any of the local conflicts that took place in the Gulf since 1981 – as the successful mediation efforts attributed to the GCC have in fact been undertaken by member states under the informal clout of the Council. On the contrary, the limited successes of the League seem to be associated with specific institutional, political or ideological resources from which the League could draw in its conflict prevention or resolution activity – its long-term role as guarantor of settlements in unstable states, the ideological clout of the Council and the prestige of the Secretary General.

A more nuanced assessment of the contributions of the institutional bodies of the Arab League and of the GCC to regional conflict management, thus, provides a more precise basis not only for assessing the real achievements of regional and sub-regional institutional frameworks in the Middle East, but also for orienting the process of internal reform that both organisations – and the League in particular – urgently need to undertake in order to increase their efficiency and effectiveness in tackling conflicts in the region.

The paper is structured around five sections. After outlining the historical and institutional development of the League and of the GCC, the theoretical debates on the 'failure' of the League and the 'success' of the GCC will be reviewed. The third section will highlight the methodological problems of such approaches and will lay the foundations for a comparative analysis of the performance of the League and of the GCC. The analysis is undertaken in the following two sections. The conclusion will discuss the implications of these findings for the theoretical debate on regional conflict resolution in the Middle East and the prospects for creating a more effective conflict-resolution and management regime in the region in the coming decades.

Regional and sub-regional institutions in the Middle East

The Arab League: institutional framework and political developments
The roots of the Arab League draw on the Pan-Arab projects in the nineteenth century, mainly as a reaction to the decline of Turkish/Ottoman rule over the Arab world (Khadduri 1946: 756). During both World Wars, plans for the creation of a unified Arab state or Arab

federation were actively (although largely instrumentally, as in the case of the 1916 Arab Revolt) supported by the British. In May 1941, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden explicitly declared his support for plans helping Arab countries to achieve 'a greater degree of unity than they now enjoy'. In January 1943, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said made public a project for the creation of a unified Arab state encompassing Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Al-Said's 'Fertile Crescent Scheme' was not greeted with enthusiasm in the region; yet, in September 1944, the representatives of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Egypt agreed to meet in Alexandria to discuss the possibility of establishing some form of political union across the Arab world. The final document of the meeting – known as the 'Alexandria Protocol' – provided the blueprint for a loose confederation of 'independent Arab states', which would have held periodic meetings to 'strengthen the relations between those states' and favoured political co-operation. A modified version of the Alexandria Protocol was signed on 22 March 1945 in Cairo by the delegates of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and became the foundational pact of the League of the Arab States (Elmadjra 1957: 454-6; Hassouna 1975: 399-410). Yemen joined the League two months later in May 1945.

In its initial form, the institutional structure of the League was centred around two core bodies – the Council and the Permanent Secretariat – and a number of permanent committees. All member states have one seat and a single vote in the Council. Ordinary Council sessions are convened twice per year, and its decisions are binding only on members who have voted them. The position of Secretary General, which was covered uninterruptedly by Egyptian nationals until 1979, was initially conceived as a principally administrative position, but rapidly acquired greater prominence than the other League bodies as the real steering force behind the League's regional activism. The Pact also provided for the creation of various specialised committees focused on cultural and economic issues. These committees were supplemented in November 1946 by the Political Committee, whose competences largely overlapped with those of the Council but, also because of its less formalised procedures, gradually acquired significant prominence at the latter.

The duty of the Council to intervene in any regional dispute, as envisaged by the Alexandria Protocol ('the Council will intervene in every dispute which may lead to war between a member state of the League and any other member state or power'), was incorporated in the final Pact ('the Council shall mediate in all differences which threaten to lead to war between two member states, or a member state and a third state'). However, when the modalities and procedures for such interventions as specified by the 1945 Pact are considered, the League seems to have 'lost its teeth' when compared to the spirit of the institutional framework outlined in the Alexandria protocol. While Article 5 of the Pact prohibits the use of force between members and allows arbitration and mediation decisions in regional disputes to be taken by the Council with a majority vote, Article 6 adds that in a case of 'aggression' the Council 'shall by unanimous decision determine the measures' that are deemed necessary to deal with such acts. Also because the text does not provide a clear definition of 'aggression', all regional disputes and conflicts since the foundation of the League have, with a few minor exceptions,[1] been portrayed by member states and approached by the League as 'aggressions', and each resolution had to undergo a lengthy and complex process of consensus building.

The 'disastrous' (Seabury 1949: 640) failure of the League members to agree on the membership of the newly-created Palestine government based in Gaza and the military and

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[1] In 1949, for instance, Saudi Arabia and Egypt acted as arbitrators in an extradition dispute between Syria and Lebanon (Macdonald 1965: 241).

diplomatic debacle of the Arab states in the 1948-49 Arab/Israeli war partially downsized these expectations and inaugurated a gradual process of formal and informal adaptation of the League's legal features and internal procedures. In 1950, the Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation Treaty (usually known as the 'Arab Collective Security Pact') was signed to ensure a higher level of cooperation against external threats. The Secretary General also assumed an increasingly active role in representing the interests of the Arab world in post-colonial negotiations − such as in the British-Italian negotiations over Libya (Elmadjra 1957: 278-83) –, in mediating inter-Arab disputes, and in coordinating the policies of Arab states in the UN Security Council.

After a mixed performance in the 1950s and early 1960s, during which the League played an active role in ensuring the independence of Kuwait but was incapable of influencing the course of the first Lebanese Civil War, a further informal component of the League's operational structure was added by President Nasser, who inaugurated in 1964 the practice of 'summit conferences' of the Arab heads of state. These summits, held every one or two years, created a new forum for policy coordination in the Arab world, but also further marginalised the role of the main institutional bodies of the League.

The age of 'sub-regionalism': the Gulf Cooperation Council
The expansion of the membership of the League with the accession of Libya, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait and Algeria (and, in the 1970s, of the Gulf emirates, Oman, Mauritania, Somalia, Palestine and Djibouti), the failure of the Arab Collective Security Pact to generate anything close to 'collective security' during the 1967 Six Days war and the absence of prospects for economic cooperation in the region encouraged the development of closer sub-regional ties at the expense of pan-Arab projects. In 1970, the future UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, called for the Arab League to encourage the formation of four functional sub-regional units: the Fertile Crescent, the Arab Gulf, the Maghreb and the so-called 'Northeastern Triangle' of Libya, Egypt and Sudan (Boutros-Ghali 1970, in Moore 1987: 30). A decade later, the foundation of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 constituted the first formal step towards the creation of a constellation of sub-regional institutional fora, to be followed in 1989 by the Arab Maghrebi Union and by the Arab Cooperation Council.

The process which led to the creation of the GCC is in many respects poles apart from the conditions that brought about the Arab League at the end of World War II. Common strategic and ideological worries, rather than a long-term project of unification, brought the oil-rich dynastic kingdoms of the Gulf together in the mid-1970s, when they began fearing the regional ambitions of Iran and Iraq after they (temporarily) settled their dispute on the Shatt-el-Arab (Ramazani 1988: 4). As the leaders of the 1979-80 Islamic Revolution in Iran called for the spread of the revolution in the region, these plans received a drastic acceleration (Tripp 1995: 293), which resulted in the signing of the GCC Charter in Abu Dhabi on 26 May 1981 by the heads of state of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Oman.

If the highly articulated institutional structure of the Arab League reflects its original aspiration to operate as the centre of an Arab confederation, the GCC was initially conceived as little more than a forum for policy coordination. Its institutional structure bears strong resemblances with the European Union (Guazzone 1988: 134). Its core organs are two inter-governmental bodies – the 'Supreme Council' (which comprises the six heads of state and is convened once a year) and the 'Ministerial Council' (reminiscent of the EU's Council of Ministers, which comprises the six foreign ministers and meets every three months) – and are

supplemented by a Secretariat, based in Riyadh, which coordinates these activities and oversees the implementation of the GCC policies (Guazzone 1988: 147).

This institutional structure also reveals that the GCC has been conceived as an inherently functionalist cooperation project. The Charter refers to 'economic and financial affairs' as the first area of cooperation but fails to mention coordination of security, defence and foreign policies. These omissions most probably reflected the perception by the local rulers that 'the legitimacy of the GCC for the Gulf people rests on its being instrumental to the fundamental goal of development' (Guazzone 1988: 134); however, security and strategic matters have attracted most of the attention of the GCC since its inception. The Abu Dhabi conference was held when renewed hostilities between Iraq and Iran, which continued until 1988 in arguably the most severe war in the recent history of the Middle East, had already begun. No later than in December 1981 Bahrain authorities arrested 'saboteurs' allegedly trained in Iran, in what was perceived as a proof of Iranian determination to spread the Islamic Revolution in the region.

The GCC devised various institutional instruments for tackling sub-regional internal and inter-state conflicts. Article 10 of the Charter gives the Supreme Council the possibility to establish, when necessary, a 'Commission for the Settlement of Dispute'. Even though no definition of 'dispute' is provided by the document, the area of action of such Commission is commonly believed to include territorial and military, as well as economic, disputes between member states. As early as in May 1981, a Military Committee was also established within the GCC Secretariat, which helped organise joint military exercises in 1983 and 1984, and to establish a 2,500-strong joint rapid deployment force ('Peninsula Shield') in 1985. The Council is also deemed to have contributed to the resolution of a range of local conflicts, including the boundary clashes between Oman and South Yemen in 1982 and between Qatar and Bahrain in 1986-87 (Tow 1990: 50; Ramazani 1988: 123-7), and the 1990 Gulf War (Barnett and Gause III 1998: 180).

Table 1 – The Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Synopsis

	Arab League	Gulf Cooperation Council
Year of foundation	1945	1981
Member states (* founders)	22 [*Egypt, *Iraq, (*Trans)Jordan, *Lebanon, *Saudi Arabia, *Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait, Algeria, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Mauritania, Somalia, Palestine, Djibuti, Comoros]	6 [*Bahrain, *Qatar, *Kuwait, *Oman, *Saudi Arabia, *UAE]
Maximum distance between capitals	7,700km [Mascat-Nouakchott]	1,230 [Mascat-Kuwait City]
Maximum GDP per capita ratio[1]	1:30 [Yemen / Qatar]	1:2.1 [Oman / Qatar]
Mandate to mediate in disputes	Article 5 ('disputes') and 6 ('aggressions')	Article 10 ('Commission for the Settlement of Disputes')

[1] *Source: UNDP 2008*

Regional conflict resolution in the Middle East: the theoretical debate

The 'failure' of the Arab League

There seems to be no doubt among analysts that the main institutional framework in the Middle East – the Arab League – has proven to be at best a 'bleak' experience of regional cooperation (Lindholm Schulz and Schulz 2005: 187), and at worst the single least effective major regional organisation in generating political and military cooperation to prevent and manage regional conflicts (Evans 1993: 30-31; Barnett and Solingen 2007: 214; Solingen 2008: 283). The empirical foundations of the latter claim lay mainly in the comparative studies of Joseph Nye (1971) and Mark Zacher (1979). Nye compares the work of three 'macro-regional political organisations' – the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) and the Arab League – in managing nineteen conflicts between 1948 and 1970. He concludes that the average weighted success rate of the Arab League (263) lags well behind those of the OAS (856) and of the OAU (418). Zacher considers 116 conflicts that occurred worldwide between 1946 and 1977 and suggests that the Arab League successfully mediated in 12 percent of the conflicts which took place in its region – a figure lower than the 19 percent success rate achieved by the OAU and the 37 percent of the OAS, although higher than the 9 percent achieved worldwide by the United Nations. Figures provided by Ibrahim Awad and Solingenalso confirm these trends by suggesting that, overall, 'the league met with success in only six of seventy-seven conflictual situations it attempted to settle between 1945 and 1981' (Awad 1994: 153, cited in Barnett and Solingen 2007: 214; Solingen 2008: 283).

The proximate causes of the under-performance of the League are apparent. It boasts ambitious goals and a powerful symbolic association to a widespread transnational ideology; and yet, as the hands of its crucial organs are tied by the unanimity rule, its agenda 'is little more than the lowest common denominator of the desires of its member states' (Seabury 1949: 636; also Pease 2008:157). The gradual shrinking of the League's prerogatives in the process that led to the final pact testifies how its member states showed early on great reluctance to assign substantial powers to a supra-national institution. The League, in other

words, seems to incarnate the ambiguities of the pan-Arab project at its height, trapped between 'the quest for Arab unity and the centrifugal forces favouring Arab separatism' (Zacher 1979: 161).

However, how exactly such ambiguities impacted on the allegedly disastrous performance of the League in dealing with regional conflicts is still contentious. The traditional realist argument interprets this 'failure' as the consequence either of the influence of hegemons, mainly Nasser's Egypt (Hasou 1985), which monopolised the work of the League, or of the presence of a range of opposing coalitions and interests in the region. Zacher's analysis shows in detail the empirical basis for claiming that 'more than any other region, the Arab world has been characterised by shifting patterns of dissension and competition' (Zacher 1979: 167). Between 1946 and 1977, it witnessed at least nine different configurations of opposing blocs, typically generated by local strategic and dynastic quarrels (in particular the Hashemite/anti-Hashemite divide), the development of the 'nonaligned movement' and Cold War rivalries.

This state-centric analytical approach has been recently contested by Michael Barnett and Etel Solingen (2007; also Solingen 2008). Tackling the issue from a social constructivist perspective, they suggested that the debacle of the Arab League was not the consequence of a paralysis or 'failure of design', but rather that the League was deliberately 'designed to fail'. They argue that:

> 'the politics of Arab nationalism and a shared identity led Arab states to embrace the rhetoric of Arab unity in order to legitimize their regimes, and to fear Arab unity in practice because it would impose greater restrictions on their sovereignty.'
> (Barnett and Solingen 2007: 181)

In this sense, the ambiguous approach of Arab countries towards the role of the League in the region would reflect a deeper ambiguity in the bases for the legitimacy of Arab countries, which draw their strength both from local 'civic nationalisms' (*wataniya*) and from claiming allegiance to the wider Arab identity in the form of a 'trans-national nationalism' (*qawmiya*).

The (relative) success of the Gulf Cooperation Council
The 'bleak' record of the Arab League is often contrasted, directly or indirectly, with the performance of the politically homogeneous Gulf Cooperation Council, which is regularly mentioned as the most accomplished among the sub-regional institutional frameworks attempted in the Middle East after 1945 (Lawson 1999: 7; Tripp 1995: 293). It has been credited with 'successes that surprised even its members' (Barnett and Solingen 2007: 209) in a variety of issue-areas. According to Joseph Wright Twinam, such success:

> 'reflects the cautious and sensible way in which member states eased towards cooperation, carefully establishing a consensus and putting some important building blocks of joint economic ventures in place before the council's creation.'
> (Twinam 1991: 108)

Twinam's words seem to suggest that the GCC founders had 'learned the lesson' of the Arab League in opting for a gradual, functionalist process of regime building, which initially relied on economic and security cooperation but which has also laid 'a fragile foundation for a greater degree of unity among its six member states' (Lawson 1999: 7).

However, if we attempt to understand in which specific issue-areas the GCC has generated cooperation, and how it compares with similar organisations, the picture looks rather confused. There is agreement on the fact that the GCC did generate relevant policy coordination in the field of internal security co-operation; however, as Charles Tripp observes, 'this appeared to be the area in which formal commitments and accords correspond most closely with effective, informal patterns of behaviour'. In the economic and military realms, Tripp continues, 'co-operation was less effective and, indeed, practically non-existent' (Tripp 1995: 293): trade between Gulf countries still remains at bay; the security force established under the ambitious denomination of 'Peninsula Shield' was in fact 'largely symbolic' and obviously failed to prevent the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Nor can we be sure of how the GCC fares relative to similar organisations. Tow's analysis shows that world-wide comparisons between sub-regional organisations are hard to structure because of the significant degree of diversity between their mandates.

Yet, even in the absence of clear empirical data and structured comparisons, the GCC is still on balance perceived as a relatively successful organisation in dealing with regional conflicts. Guazzone (1988: 196) noted that 'the traditional territorial and dynastic quarrels have found in the GCC Commission for the Settlement of Disputes an effective mediation instrument at both intra-GCC and regional levels'. Barnett and Gause (1998: 176) suggested that the role of the GCC in the 1980s hinted towards the development of 'a set of norms and procedures for dealing with internal disputes and coordinating policies towards external actors that took [GCC states] beyond the parameters of a modest alliance and pushed them toward a more binding framework'. While acknowledging that the GCC may need to 'establish more efficient conflict avoidance and resolution mechanism', Tow (1990: 78) stresses that, in contrast with other sub-regional organisations such as ASEAN, 'the GCC states have been moving fairly rapidly and efficiently toward creating diplomatic and legal mechanisms for the adjudication of their own territorial differences' and that the GCC also initiated 'substantial diplomatic efforts to end the Iran-Iraq war, the Arab-Israeli conflict […], and other regional conflicts' (Tow 1990: 49).

Back to the data: re-interpreting regional conflict resolution in the Middle East

Assessing the literature
The interpretative paradigms discussed in the previous section reflect the overwhelming consensus in the discourse on regionalism and sub-regionalism in the Middle East. However, at a closer look, the empirical bases of these claims are surprisingly weak.

Even the most recent literature on the Arab League draws almost exclusively on the comparative works of Joseph Nye and Mark Zacher (Barnett and Solingen 2007: 214; Solingen 2008: 283). The most recent conflicts analysed by these studies ended, respectively, in 1967 (Second Yemen Civil War) and in 1977 (Libya-Egypt border war). Nye's work in fact looks at only three interventions of the Arab League (1958 First Lebanese civil war; 1961-63 Iraq/Kuwait war on Kuwait's independence; 1975-90 Second Yemeni Civil War) and finds that the League was decisive in providing a settlement for the Kuwait crisis and contributed to the conflict-resolution process in the Lebanonese civil war. Yet, while these data suggest that the rate of success of the League in settling regional conflicts (2 out of 3, or 67 percent) would be significantly higher than those of OAS (30 percent) and OAU (20 percent), Nye bases his conclusions on a 'weighted' rate of success (created by attributing

scores to the complexity and intensity of each dispute), which allegedly show that the League was in fact less effective than the other two organisations.

Zacher considers a relatively wider, yet still partial set of conflicts (17) whose selection criteria are unspecified. He adds that at least nine of these conflicts 'were not even brought to the Arab League' (Zacher 1979: 195), and in various cases the League's neglect appears to be related to the fact that they were relatively minor internal unrests (e.g. Jordan's 'civil strifes' in 1957 and 1966). Other major crises in which the League was heavily involved have been omitted from the analysis – including the crisis over Jordan's annexation of the West Bank in 1950 and Syria's secession from the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1961.

A quote from Ibrahim Awad's 1994 piece on regional and sub-regional organisations in the Middle East – 'the league met with success in only six of seventy-seven conflictual situations it attempted to settle between 1945 and 1981' – is also often used to compensate for the absence of recent comparative studies (Barnett and Solingen 2007: 214; Solingen 2008: 283). However, Awad does not provide any reference, table or detailed discussion to substantiate his claim, being satisfied to mention this figure 'without elaborating' (Awad 1994: 153).

Research on the Gulf Cooperation Council is even more erratic. No comparative or systematic study of the effectiveness of the GCC in tackling regional conflicts has been undertaken to date. Most of the literature dealing with the GCC was in fact produced within the first ten years of life of the organisation (Harb 1986; Peterson 1988; Ramazani 1988; Guazzone 1988; Tow 1990; Twinam 1991) when the interest in sub-regionalism in the Gulf region was high, partly as a consequence of the Iran-Iraq War and the 1990 Gulf War. The only systematic attempts to track the role of the GCC in mediating regional conflicts have arguably been Joffé (1997) and Schofield (1997), which trace the evolution of territorial disputes in the Gulf until the late 1990s and the role of the GCC in mediating between the disputants. No research is available for the period after 1997, and no source has so far analysed systematically how the GCC has approached major conflicts in the region that were not related to boundary demarcation.

A new dataset of regional mediation attempts: a methodological overview
A first step forward from the published research on regional conflict resolution in the Middle East is therefore to 'go back to the data' and provide an updated, comprehensive review of conflict resolution attempts by the League and the GCC since their foundation. To do this, I have considered conflicts included in the Correlates of War (COW) Inter-, Extra- and Intra-State War datasets (version 3.0, see Sarkees 2000), which provide a reliable list of regional conflicts for the Middle East divided per 'type'. For analysing the record of the Arab League I have updated these datasets to 2008 by using primary data (mostly gathered through LexisNews) and added a series of low-intensity conflicts or crises (i.e. which caused less than 1,000 deaths) that are mentioned in the works of five scholars (see Annex D). A similar list of major wars and regional crises as suggested by relevant secondary literature has been considered in relation to the Gulf Cooperation Council, which however posed a major methodological problem – related to the selection of the appropriate 'sub-region' in which the GCC is expected to operate. For this purpose, I have analysed conflicts that involve the GCC members and the two other major Gulf states that are not members of the organisation – Iran and Iraq.

Another major conceptual and methodological hurdle has been to identify episodes of mediation and define the criteria that would make us classify such interventions as

'successful'. In this paper I use Marieke Kleiboer's inclusive definition of 'international mediation' as 'a form of conflict management in which a third party assists two or more contending parties to find a solution without resorting to force' (Kleiboer 1996: 360). While the term 'assist' might leave room for contrasting interpretations, simply discussing a regional crisis in the collective bodies of an organisation clearly does not amount to mediation, even if such discussions result in the adoption of a resolution. Between 1945 and 1955 alone, the Arab League Council approved 993 resolutions, including some dealing with extra-regional conflicts in Cyprus, Spain and Kashmir (Elmandjra 1957: 250). For the purposes of this analysis, an episode of mediation amounts to a political decision by the organs of the organisation (including the approval of a resolution), followed by recognisable mediation activity aimed at implementing the decision. Such activities will be considered as the *primary causes* of the resolution of a conflict if the evidence suggests that they have directly impacted on the resolution of a conflict or dispute, and that such impact is distinct from the mediation efforts or interventions of other third parties; they will be considered as having *contributed to success* if their impact is not fully distinguishable from those of other mediation efforts or other external events (e.g. coups or military interventions by third parties).

Re-assessing the evidence (I): the Arab League

The evidence provided by Annex A shows that the League mediated in 19 out of 56 conflicts or crises that developed in the region between 1945 and 2008 (34 percent), achieving full success on five occasions (9 percent). However, on closer look the picture provided by the data is mixed, for at least two reasons. The proportion of 'direct contributions' identified by these data essentially coincides with the figure suggested by Awad (8 percent); yet, if also cases in which it has 'contributed to success' are included, the rate of success would appear substantially higher (21 percent), and possibly higher than the rate of success attributed to other organisations like the OAU (19 percent, according to Zacher). This comparison, however, cannot be fully developed in the absence of homogeneous data on other regional organisations.

More interestingly, the table seems to reveal that the performance of the League differs significantly when specific types of conflicts or crises are considered, and that this might impact significantly on how the performance of the League compares to that of other regional organisations.

A failed regional organisation: internalising the uti possidetis *rule in civil wars*
The conflict resolution record of the League is extremely disappointing in particular in relation to civil wars. Created also to guarantee, as the Pact dictates, the 'respect for the independence and sovereignty' of Arab states, the League has often hesitated to become involved in internal strifes, even when they evolved into sub-regional conflicts with the intervention of neighbouring states. In fact, it intervened as mediator in only five of the 22 major civil wars that occurred in the Middle East since 1945.

When looking at the specific pattern of intervention on the occasion of the major civil wars that plagued the region, what emerges is a significant indecisiveness of the League's formal and informal bodies, in particular in the early stages of their development. The Council, for instance, approved unanimously a draft resolution on 4 April 1958 to address the crisis that generated the first Lebanese civil war, and yet failed to develop a formal resolution because the Lebanese delegation withdrew its support two days later. Cross-country rivalries made the

January and September 1964 summit meetings on the Yemen civil war similarly inconclusive, and prevented the creation of consensus on the upgrade of the fact-finding mission that the League had dispatched to Yemen in October 1963. The silence of the League in October 1975, when the second Lebanese civil war erupted, was even more telling: while the Council expressed 'its profound distress at the succession of incidents in Lebanon', it could agree only on calling on all the parties 'to exercise wisdom and restraint'. The League did not express itself on the crisis until June 1976, by which time it had already developed into a major civil war.

While such indecisiveness seems to be largely due to internal vetoes, the 'failure of design' model proposed by Zacher does not explain convincingly much of the variation shown by these cases. The model predicts not only the absence of interventions in the presence of vetoes from regional powers (in what Zacher calls 'intercoalition conflicts'), but also increased likelihood of intervention when a nonaligned country is affected (Zacher 1979: 192-4). In practice, however, what we see is a persistent pattern of non-intervention in almost all major civil wars, which seems to reflect a shared interest by most Arab League members to reassert the *uti possidetis* rule and the inviolability of their boundaries from external interference.

Also, narrative accounts suggest not only that the League activity was obstructed in practice because of such pressures, but also that it had 'internalised' its role as a secondary actor when strong power political interests were involved. In commenting on the role of the League in the Yemen civil war, the then Secretary General Hussain Hassouna candidly admitted that the absence of League's interventions after 1963:

> 'reflected the League's viewpoint that, once bilateral talks between the parties concerned had been initiated during the League summit conference and further promoted by the personal mediation of some Heads of Member States, these endeavours had a better chance than a re-intervention by the League.' (Hassouna 1975: 199)

In this sense, the League's organs seem to have fully accepted as early as in the 1960s that their organisation was little more than a 'forum of collective legitimation' (Barnett and Solingen 2007: 197) for Arab states and had little or no power as soon as major state interests were involved.

A 'special' regional organisation: collective security and inter-state wars
The most striking thing that emerges from Annex A is that the League became involved in only a few major inter-state wars, civil wars and extra-systemic disputes – in fact, in less than a fifth of the wars that caused more than 1,000 deaths in the region since 1945 (7 out of 36). Such a trend seems to be particularly affected by the reluctance of the League to become involved in inter-state wars and extra-systemic disputes, with only two interventions overall.

The data suggests that the behaviour of the League in major inter-state conflicts arguably affects more than anything else our perception of the League as a 'failed' regional organisation. Yet, while formally these results might be considered as 'failures', there are reasons to suggest that the performance of the League in mediating in inter-state conflicts is hardly comparable with that of other regional organisations.

The most apparent reason for this is that the League is at the same time a regional institution committed to conflict resolution among its members, and a collective security organisation which has had, in particular after the signing of the 1950 Arab Collective Security Pact, the duty to coordinate the Arab response to external threats. In fact, the League *did* intervene in most of the inter-state wars and extra-systemic conflicts listed in the COW datasets, but not as mediator – rather, to rally the support of other Arab countries against, typically, the state of Israel. The League intervened as mediator, though, in the two Iraq wars – the only inter-state wars that saw two members of the League on opposing sides. Also, while both mediation attempts met with failure, there is no doubt that the League made greater effort in tackling the first Iraq crisis – originally an inter-Arab crisis which began with an open aggression against the territorial integrity of a League's member – than it did with the 2003 Iraq war.[2]

The presence of these potentially conflicting mandates is one of the consequences of the fact that the League does not define its membership on the basis of geographical features but on ethnic ones, in contrast with other major 'macro-regional political organisations' (Nye 1971: 129), such as the OAS or the OAU. While the geographical boundaries of the Middle East are themselves contested (indeed, early studies on regionalism do not even consider the Middle East as a 'region', see Russett 1967), the Arab League is at the same time a 'sub-regional' (although largely inclusive) and a 'supra-regional' organisation. It excludes from its membership a crucial regional player lying in the heart of the Middle East – the state of Israel; it also excludes two other 'regional powers' (Baram and Rubin 1994) namely Iran and Turkey, which are often considered as parts of the 'wider Middle East' (Chalk 2003; Everts 2004); and it includes as members a wide range of extra-regional states, such as Somalia, Mauritania and the Comoros, which identify themselves as part of the 'Arab' world.

Employing the geographical boundaries of the Middle East as drawn, for instance, by the Correlates of War project to help us identify exactly the range of conflicts in which the Arab League can be expected to mediate is, therefore, not entirely correct. Those boundaries represent the best approximation of the area in which the League operates and allow clear-cut comparisons with other regional organisations; however, the collective security duties of the League and its membership criteria make comparisons of its pattern of intervention in inter-state conflicts not fully homogeneous.

Patterns of success: evidence from conflict prevention and resolution
Moreover, the idea that the League has been overall a 'failed' organisation contrasts with some circumscribed, yet relevant patterns of success. The evidence provided in Table 2 suggests, in fact, that the League operated as mediator in 60 percent (12 out of 20) of the 'minor' conflicts (i.e. which resulted in less than 1,000 deaths) or political crises that involved at least one League member, at least contributing to the resolution of the conflict or dispute in 45 percent of them (9 out of 20) and being the primary cause of their resolution in five instances (25 percent). The data goes some way to proving that the League has actually been a relatively active player in abating and managing local crises, preventing their escalation into major wars. Four non-mutually exclusive factors seem to be associated with the occasional successes of the League (see Annex B).[3]

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[2] The mediation mission of Mokhtar Lamani in 2006, which ended with the Lamani's resignation in early 2007, constituted an ill-prepared and largely symbolic attempt to show the League's activism in the middle of the Iraqi civil strife which followed the American invasion of 2003.

[3] The analysis proposed in the following paragraphs is an exploratory set-theoretic review of the successes of the League highlighting potential necessary, but non-sufficient and non-mutually exclusive causal patterns. For a

1. Action in the 'core' area

All of the League's interventions, with the exception of the mediation during the Algeria/Morocco Tindouf war in 1963, have taken place in conflicts in which at least one of the states that attended the 1944 Alexandria conference was involved; 19 of them (79 percent) involved either Lebanon, Yemen or Iraq. These figures suggest that, despite its formal reach beyond the boundaries of the Middle East, all through its history the League has focused on mediating conflicts in a 'core' area of Arab countries in the Fertile Crescent and in the Arabian peninsula.

Various factors account for the focus on this core sub-region. One of them is arguably the fact that the League has been gradually perceived since the 1970s as the guarantor of previous agreements, given the recurrence of crises in Lebanon and Yemen almost at regular intervals since the late 1940s. This 'continuity' factor helps to explain the involvement and success of the League during the North-South Yemen war in 1979, when it succeeded in reaffirming the League-supervised agreement that ended the previous border war in 1972. The role played by the League in devising the new balance of power among the Lebanese communities outlined by the 1989 Taif Agreement also favoured the League's direct (and successful) involvement when a new crisis within the Lebanese political system erupted in 2007.

Another form of inter-temporal 'continuity'– this time in honouring the League's pledge to safeguard the independence of smaller Arab states – explains, in conjunction with power politics, the efforts of the League to defend the independence and integrity of Kuwait against Iraq. The success of the 1962 peace-enforcement military intervention, helped diplomatically and militarily by the United Kingdom, reinforced the perception of the League as guarantor of the integrity of the smaller states in the region, and created the ground for successive (although only partially effective) involvement in the 1973 and 1990 crises.

2. Ideological disputes

The League was also heavily involved, at least on two occasions, in crises that were deeply intertwined with two ideological pillars of pan-Arabism: the struggle for the independence of Palestine and the plans for the creation of a single Arab state. When Jordan formally annexed the West Bank on 24 April 1950, the League's political committee helped hammer out a formal (and largely symbolic) compromise with the Jordanian authorities, who would rule the West Bank but only 'until a final settlement of the Palestine question was reached' (Hassouna 1975: 40).

The League also succeeded in brokering a transitory agreement during the 1961-62 dispute over the secession of Syria from the United Arab Republic, although it failed in mediating between the parties when the dispute resurfaced in 1962. On this occasion, however, the parties initially accepted the League's mediation and even requested (rather unusually for what were formally classified as 'conciliation' talks) to hold the meetings in open session, so that they could be followed by Arab media (Hassouna 1975: 169). The involvement of the League in these crises shows that it has been viewed in a few instances as a natural forum for referring some relevant inter-Arab disputes that might have evolved (in particular in the case of the secession of Syria) into local conflicts, and provided good offices for the conciliation processes and a forum for facilitating interactions and problem-solving interventions at a pan-Arab level.

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review of this methodology see Ragin 2008.

3. Cooperation with UN and regional IGOs: the League as last resort
An analysis of the instances of intervention listed in Annex B shows that the League has been more successful in handling minor conflicts and crises in which the UN and other IGOs were not directly involved, or failed to intervene. Contrary to the practice suggested by Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, most Middle Eastern conflicts are referred contemporarily to various international bodies, including the UN Security Council, the Arab League Council and, at least on one occasion (the Tindouf War), the OAU. This practice is in contrast with the suggestion that an international 'division of labour' exists between regional and international IGOs (Barnett 1995: 426), and reinforces Haas' claim that these institutions are often used strategically by local actors looking for the forum that promises to provide them the most direct and efficient response (Haas 1983: 216).

The cases included in our table show that when the League and the OAU have been simultaneously involved in a crisis, they have hardly joined their efforts – explicitly waiting for the outcome of other conflict resolution efforts before becoming fully involved themselves in the process (Hassouna 1975). Moreover, and more interestingly, when the UN is involved the sequencing process that we see in operation in various crises in the 1950s and 1960s is the opposite to what we would expect according to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter: local actors typically chose to 'freeze' the conflict resolution process within the League when they still had reasons to hope for an intervention by foreign powers or by the UN Security Council (e.g. 1958 Lebanese civil war; 1961-63 Iraq/Kuwait dispute). In Lebanon as well as in Kuwait, however, once the UN refused to intervene, the League remained the only potentially effective body to intervene in the conflict.

While this dynamic reinforces the idea that the League has often been perceived as a second tier actor even at a regional level, the practice of referring the same dispute contemporarily to a series of different IGOs explains, at least partially, the 'indecisiveness' of the League in the early stages of civil wars and the reasons why some relatively 'late' interventions of the League had more chances of success – e.g. in Kuwait in 1962 and during the second Lebanese civil war.

4. Mediation techniques: mediation missions and the Secretary General
Finally, the adoption of specific mediation techniques appears to be a necessary, although not sufficient, causal factor for a large portion of the League's successes. With the exception of the two abovementioned 'ideological' crises, whose disputants actively sought to involve the main bodies of the League in Cairo, most instances in which the League obtained at least a partial success witnessed at least the deployment to the site of the conflict of a mediation mission (Tindouf War) often headed by the deputy/assistant Secretary General (Salim al-Yafi in the first North-South Yemen border war; al-Akhdar al-Ibrahimi in the Taif Agremeent negotiations) or by the Secretary General himself (Mahmoud Riad in the 1973 Iraq/Kuwait dispute; Amr Moussa in the 2008 Lebanese presidential crisis). Other forms of active intervention – good offices from the Secretary General or the deployment of peacekeeping operations – account for the other successes during the two Lebanese civil wars and in the dispute on the independence of Kuwait.

Re-assessing the evidence (II): the Gulf Cooperation Council

The severity of one's judgment of the League's activities is also crucially dependent on one's assessment of the activities of other, potentially competing institutional projects in the Middle East (Tripp 1995: 295; Barnett and Solingen 2007: 209).
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Table 2 – Conflicts in the Gulf and Middle East and interventions of the GCC

	Conflict	COW	Other
1	*Israel vs. Palestinians (1967-)*	*CW*	
2	*UAE vs. Iran - Abu Musa and Tunbs (1971-)*		*BO*
3	Iran-Iraq war (1980-88)	IS	
4	***Oman vs. Yemen (1982-1987)**		*BO*
5	***Bahrain vs. Qatar (1982-1995)**		*BO*
6	Iraq vs. Kurds & Shiites (1985-93)	CW	
7	Iraq-Kuwait - Gulf war (1990-91)	IS	
8	***Qatar vs. Saudi Arabia (-1997)**		*BO*
9	Iraq vs. KDP Kurds (1996)	CW	
10	Qatar failed coup (1996)		CR
11	Third Gulf war (2003-)	/IS/	
12	*Iran nuclear facilities crisis*		*CR*
13	**Lebanon presidential crisis (2007-08)*		*CR*

Italics: GCC interventions; *: contributed to success; **: primary cause of success
COW (>1,000 deaths) – IS: Inter-state wars; CW: civil / ethnic wars; Others (<1,000 deaths): BO: boundary demarcation crisis / boundary war; CR: political or diplomatic crisis / low intensity wars.
/xx/: wars with >1,000 deaths not listed in COW

At a general look, the record of the GCC shows that it mediated in an extremely limited number of conflicts and crises, but also that, overall, many of these interventions were successful. Table 2 shows that it intervened in seven regional or sub-regional conflicts or crises since 1981, and that it at least contributed to the success of mediation efforts on four occasions (57 percent). Yet, if analysed in detail, the record of the GCC in mediating regional conflicts and crises in the Middle East and in its sub-region is much less impressive than the data may suggest.

'Sub-sub-regionalism' and 'tilted neutrality'
There is no evidence of the GCC having succeeded in mediating in major inter-state conflicts in the Gulf since 1981 (nor, incidentally, any other major inter-state or civil/ethnic war in the region),[4] despite the fact that the three Gulf wars of 1980/88, 1990/91 and 2003 were by far the most dramatic instances of inter-state violence in the Middle East at least since the end of the Arab-Israeli wars in 1973.

As in the case of the Arab League, a large part of the diplomatic and strategic problems faced by the GCC in tackling major inter-state conflicts is clearly due to its mandate and the composition of its membership. Despite explicitly referring to the 'Gulf' in its denomination, the GCC does not include two crucial powers – Iran and Iraq – which occupy a large portion of the Gulf shoreline. As I have mentioned above, the Islamic Revolution in Iran is typically

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[4] The GCC has rarely attempted to operate as a mediator in relevant civil and ethnic war. The only major attempt in this sense – the widely publicised proposal of a plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the early 1980s – was met with immediate hostility by Israel and failed to produce any relevant political outcome.

portrayed as a crucial sparking event for the creation of the GCC; the exclusion of Iraq is largely related to the internal politics of the Arab world, and in particular to ongoing strategic and dynastic rivalries with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Therefore, while 'the problems of war and peace in the Persian Gulf absorbed most of the collective diplomatic efforts of the GCC' (Ramazani 1988: 118), its nature as a 'sub-sub-regional' organisation has in fact hindered these efforts. In the case of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, for instance, the GCC initially sought to maintain some form of neutrality and operate as mediator between the parties to settle the dispute over the ownership and free-passage in the Shatt-el-Arab. The high stakes of Saudi Arabia and of the other Gulf states in the survival of Iraq soon made such neutrality appear at least as 'tilted' (Ramazani 1988: 118) towards Saddam Hussein's military efforts. After the successes of Iranian forces in the spring of 1982, the GCC was explicitly designating the Iranian offensive as acts against the whole 'Arab nation' (Ramazani 1988: 121).

The GCC failed to portray itself as a credible 'neutral' mediator even in minor crises involving member states and Iran. In 1999, Iran rejected the mediation commission proposed by the GCC to solve the dispute over Abu Musa and the Turfts islands after one member of the commission had broken his neutrality by speaking in favour of the UAE. The mediation activity of Qatari diplomacy during the ongoing international crisis over the Iranian nuclear programme, backed by the GCC ministerial meetings in December 2005 and May 2006, was welcomed by Iran's National Security Chief Ali Larijani, but has been largely symbolic and has not helped ease the severity of the crisis.

The defence of Kuwait during the 1990-91 war also brings to the surface once again the potential clashes between conflict resolution and collective security duties for regional or sub-regional organisations that exclude relevant regional actors from their membership. Barnett and Gause (1998: 180) note that 'the GCC stood behind Kuwait from the outset' of the crisis and provided military support through the joint military force 'Peninsula Shield'. If this instance demonstrates that the GCC had succeeded in creating a more effective collective security regime than the Arab League, the fact itself that a major actor in the Gulf such as Iraq had to be treated as an external aggressor testifies to the limitations of the sub-regional conflict resolution powers of the Council (see Annex C).

Conflict resolution: boundary disputes and state diplomacy
The perception of the GCC as a 'successful' organisation in tackling regional conflicts is largely, if not exclusively, dependent on its record in tackling a specific range of local disputes. The GCC has been involved in three boundary disputes in its sub-region – Oman vs. Yemen, Qatar vs. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia vs. Qatar – and it is often recognised as instrumental in preventing their escalation and in favouring the ultimate solution of the crises on all three occasions (Tow 1990: 50; Ramazani 1988: 123-7; Xinhua General News Service, 19 December 1992).

Yet, at a closer look, the effective involvement of the main institutional bodies of the GCC in most of these crises is far from clear. Despite the provisions included in the GCC Charter for the creation of a 'Commission for the Settlement of Disputes', there seems to be 'no evidence to suggest that the commission has ever met to treat territorial disputes between member states' (Schofield 1997: 146). No evidence also seems to exist to suggest that the GCC Secretariat has been directly involved in these negotiation through the creation of mediation missions or delegations, nor have other official bodies of the GCC been involved in

discussing local disputes, as 'member states of the GCC have chosen generally not to refer territorial problems for formal treatment by the council' (Schofield 1997: 146).

Most of the diplomatic activity that is often referred to the GCC as an institution has been, in fact, implemented by member states – typically Saudi Arabia and Qatar – under the informal clout of the GCC. Saudi Arabia intervened directly to stop hostilities between Bahrain and Qatar in 1986 and 1987, and the involvement of the GCC was in fact limited to overseeing the Saudi-brokered agreement which provided for the restoration of the status quo ante. The GCC also 'sponsored' the mediation of Kuwait and the UAE earlier in 1982 in the dispute between Oman and South Yemen (Ramazani 1988: 124), and declared its 'support' for the Qatari diplomacy in its efforts to contribute to the Arab League's successful mediation in the 2007-08 Lebanese presidential crisis (Gulf News, 12 May 2008). GCC diplomacy seemed to have been more directly involved in the Qatar / Saudi Arabia crisis of September 1992: the 'unexpected' visit of the Qatari Emir to Saudi Arabia in December was reportedly prepared by the diplomatic work of the GCC and of other Arab states, in particular Egypt (Xinhua General News Service, 19 December 1992). However, there is no proof that the GCC ministerial meetings, which had been boycotted by Qatar since the inception of the crisis, had any direct impact on the crisis – a fact that confirms Schofield's suggestion about the reluctance of GCC states to refer their disputes even for 'formal treatment by the council' in its political bodies.

Conclusion: asking the right questions

Our review of the activities of the Gulf Cooperation Council illustrate a series of crucial features that also impact on the activity of the Arab League, and that appear to be deeply embedded in the Middle Eastern conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution regime. It highlights, first of all, how heavily the geographical fuzziness of the concept of 'Middle East' and the presence of overlapping layers of ideological, ethnic and dynastic rivalries impact on the membership and mandates of these organisations. The overlap between the conflict resolution and collective security mandates of these organisations is possibly the most apparent consequence of these crisscrossing cleavages.

Our analysis also shows that there is little evidence to suggest that the conflict resolution bodies of these organisations have directly and systematically contributed to conflict resolution efforts. The dispositions included in the Arab League and GCC charters regarding the mandate of these organisation to mediate in regional conflicts have largely remained on paper, and in practice the official bodies of each organisation have often been bypassed by state summits and mediation missions (in the case of the Arab League) or state diplomacy (in the case of the GCC).

Yet overall, the Arab League appears to be the institutional arrangement that has so far contributed most clearly to conflict resolution in the Middle East. The GCC has created the grounds for more active policy coordination between the Gulf dynastic kingdoms; yet no clear evidence seems to exist to suggest that the GCC as an institutional framework has directly contributed to the resolution of conflicts in the Gulf region. By contrast, at least within a 'core zone', the Arab League has gradually imposed itself as guarantor of power sharing and political settlements following the Lebanese and Yemeni civil wars; has successfully mediated political crises connected to the ideological roots of pan-Arabism; and features what is possibly the single most authoritative institutional body in the region – the League's

Secretary General – for brokering agreements between Arab states also in international institutional settings, including the UN Security Council.

In the light of all of these considerations, the attribution of the erratic pattern of intervention of the Arab League to the fact that it was 'designed to fail' appears at the same time self-evident and spurious. The League is a pan-Arab organisation in a region that is not exclusively Arab; a region also dominated by states consistently suspicious of pan-Arabism or committed to use it as a strategic weapon in a struggle for power. Yet, under certain circumstances and in certain areas, it succeeded in abating local crises and wars. Moreover, a sub-regional organisation such as the GCC, despite being based on radically different institutional and ideological grounds, did not perform better than the League in its own sub-region.

The relevant question, then, may not be whether or not the League was 'designed to fail', but rather what are the chances for Middle Eastern multilateral institutions to bring about more effective regional or sub-regional regimes for conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the area. The development of closer ties among regional institutions and with extra-regional institutions can constitute the first step towards increasing effectiveness of the League and the GCC far from their 'core' areas. The Arab League and the African Union (AU), in particular, are currently engaged in a variety of technical cooperation projects, but still fail to coordinate effectively their political and diplomatic efforts. In cases in which two parties in a conflict perceive the League and the AU respectively as their preferred mediators – as is the case today in southern Somalia – such lack of coordination may strongly impair the effectiveness of their conflict resolution strategies.

A deeper reflection on the geographical horizons of Middle Eastern 'sub-regional' organisations may also be needed. The GCC, in particular, is today called to reconsider its northern boundary and assess the advantages of extending its membership to the post-Saddam Iraq. In May 2003, the GCC Secretary General, Abdul Rahman Al-Ateyah, supported the idea of Iraq joining 'certain offices of the GCC' without being a formal member – a procedure that has also been applied to Yemen (Arabic News, 27 May 2003). Since there is no doubt that on the stability of Iraq depends much of the political and military stability of the Gulf, the choice to support Iraq without allowing it to receive full membership in the GCC 'club' may require a deeper reassessment once an Iraqi government has gained full control of the country.

Finally, even if our analysis has shown that considering the Arab League as a 'failed' organisation might be ungenerous, the League does need to undergo a drastic process of institutional reform. The gulf between the 1945 Pact and the everyday life of the League is widening. The biannual meetings that are now normally described as 'Arab League Summits' are not mentioned in the League Pact, and some crucial dispositions included in the Pact (such as the conflict resolution procedure outlined in Article 5) have never been implemented. While the symbolic and ideological value of the 1945 Pact is undeniable, a reform of the League's institutional structure can and must take place in the near future. Among other things, it should address the functional overlap between bodies such as the Council, the Political Committee and the Summit meetings, and formally reinforce the powers of the Secretariat – which, in particular when the position of Secretary General is held by charismatic and respected figures, has proven to be a dynamic and effective body in mediating regional crises.

Annex A – Conflicts in the Middle East and interventions of the Arab League (1945-2008)

	Conflict	COW	Other
1	*Yemen Arab Republic vs. Yahya Family (1948)*	*CW*	
2	Palestine war (1948-49)	IS	
3	Syria-Iraq (1949)		CR
4	***Jordan – annexation of West Bank (1950)***		*CR*
5	Franco-Tunisian conflict (1952-54)	ES	
6	Saudi Arabia-Oman dispute: Buraimi Oasis (1952-55)		BO
7	Moroccan Independence (1953-56)	ES	
8	Franco-Algerian war (1954-1962)	ES	
9	Baghdad pact crisis (1955)		CR
10	Sinai War (1956)	IS	
11	**Sudan-Egypt dispute: Hala'ib Triangle / Wadi Halfa (1958)*		*BO*
12	**First Lebanese civil war (1958)*	*CW*	
13	Tunisia-UAR crisis: Ben Youssef asylum (1958)		CR
14	Jordan-UAR crisis (1958)		CR
15	*Syria-Iraq: Mosul revolt (1959)*		*CR*
16	Iraq vs. Shammar Tribe & Pro-Western Officers (1959)	CW	
17	***Kuwait-Iraq dispute / Kuwait independence (1961-63)***		*CR*
18	Tunisia-France dispute (1961)		CR
19	**Syria-UAR dispute: UAR dissolution (1961)*		*CR*
20	Iraq vs. Kurds (1961-1963)	CW	
21	Algeria vs. Former Rebel Leaders (1962-63)	CW	
22	**Yemen civil war (1962-1969)*	*CW*	
23	Sudan vs. Anya Nya (1963-72)	CW	
24	**Algeria-Morocco: Tindouf/Sand war (1963-64)*		*BO*
25	Six Day War (1967)	IS	
26	South Yemeni civil strife (1969-72)	/CW/	
27	Israel-Egypt / Attrition war (1969-70)	IS	
28	Jordan vs. Palestinians (1970)	CW	
29	*Oman-South Yemen (Dhofar) war (1970-76)*		*BO*
30	***First North-South Yemen border war (1971-72)***		*BO*
31	**Kuwait-Iraq war (1973)*		*BO*
32	Yom Kippur War (1973)	IS	
33	Iraq vs. Kurds (1974-75)	CW	
34	*Syria-Iraq: Euphrates dispute (1975)*		*BO*
35	**Second Lebanese civil war (1975-90)*	*CW*	
36	Western Saharan conflict (1975-83)	ES	
37	Egypt-Libya – border war (1977)		CR
38	***North-South Yemen border war (1979)***		*BO*
39	Iran-Iraq war (1980-88)	IS	
40	Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982)	IS	
41	Sudan vs. SPLA-Garang Faction (1983)	CW	
42	Iraq vs. Kurds & Shiites (1985-93)	CW	
43	Yemen People's Republic vs. Leftist Factions (1986)	CW	
44	Somalia civil war (1988-)	/CW/	
45	Israel-Palestine: First Intifada (1988-1993)	/CW/	
46	*Iraq-Kuwait - Gulf war (1990-91)*	*IS*	
47	Turkey vs. Kurds (1991)	CW	
48	Algeria vs. Islamic Rebels (1992)	CW	
49	*Yemen vs. South Yemen (1994)*	*CW*	

50	Iraq vs. KDP Kurds (1996)	CW	
51	Comoros crisis (1997)		CR
52	Darfur crisis (2001-)	/CW/	
53	Israel-Palestine: Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2008)	/CW/	
54	*Third Gulf war (2003-)*	*/IS/*	
55	Israel-Lebanon war (2006)	/IS/	
56	***Lebanon presidential crisis (2007-08)**		*CR*

Italics: Arab League's interventions; *: contributed to success / mixed; **: primary cause of success
COW (>1,000 deaths) – IS: Inter-state wars; ES: extra-system wars; CW: civil / ethnic wars.
Others (<1,000 deaths): BO: border wars; CR: political or diplomatic crisis / low intensity wars.
/xx/: wars with >1,000 deaths not listed in COW

Annex B – Interventions of the Arab League (1945-2008)

No		Conflict or crisis (Cf. Annex A)		Intervention	Type	Result	Comments
1	1	Yemen Arab Republic vs. Yahya Family (1948)	CW	Fact-finding committee	Mission	Failure	One-sided victory; a conciliatory meeting planned in Jeddah is cancelled
2	4	Jordan – annexation of West Bank (1950)	CR	Resolutions followed by informal conciliation	Council / Committee	Primary cause of success	
3	11	Sudan-Egypt dispute: Hala'ib Triangle / Wadi Halfa (1958)	BO	Attempt of mediation requested by Sudan (20/2/1958)	SG	?	Immediately after the referral the dispute is frozen because of Sudanese elections
4	12	First Lebanese civil war (1958)	CW	Elaboration of an Arab resolution at UN General Assembly (21/8/1958) after failure of Council to agree on resolution (4/6/1958)	SG	Contributed to success	Failure of resolution, but success of good offices
5	15	Syria-Iraq: Mosul revolt (1959)	CR	Attempt of mediation (5/4/1959)	Committee	Failure	No delegation submitted proposal to solve the crisis
6	17	Kuwait-Iraq dispute / Kuwait independence (1961-63)	BO	Council resolution (20/7/1961) followed by peacekeeping operation (10/9/1961-19/2/1962)	Committee / Council / Peacekeeping	Primary cause of success	The crisis is solved, although the dislocation of British troops also played a significant role in it.
7	19	Syria-UAR dispute: UAR dissolution (1961)	CR	Agreement on repatriation of armed forces (2/11/1961)	SG	Primary cause of success	The agreement (although a partial one) is struck, crisis freezed
8	19	Syria-UAR dispute: UAR dissolution (1961)	CR	Mediation on claims of UAR interference (July 1962)	Council	Failure	Crisis solved only by new coup in Syria (8/3/1963)
9	22	Yemen civil war (1962-1969)	CW	Council resolution (19/9/1963) and fact-finding mission (25/9-Oct 1963)	Council / SG	Contributed to success	Crisis frozen, but AL largely bypassed by crucial discussions, and hostilities re-start in December 1964 - after that, the AL made no intervention
10	24	Algeria-Morocco: Tindouf/Sand war (1963-64)	BO	Council resolution (20/10/1963) and mediation mission (22-27/10/1963)	Mission	Contributed to success	Bamako agreement signed (30/10/1963) but at OAU meeting and with Haile Selassie's mediation
11	30	First North-South Yemen border war (1971-72)	BO	Council resolution (4/10/1972) and mediation	Committee / SG	?	
12	30	First North-South Yemen border war (1971-72)	BO	Mediation mission (4-13/10/1972)	Mission	Primary cause of success	Cease-fire and agreement to negotiate agreement at AL headquarters; agreement struck

13	29	Oman-South Yemen (Dhofar) war (1970-76)	BO	Attempt of conciliation (May 1974)	Mission / SG	Failure	PDRY refuses to receive it claiming that it was not involved in the dispute
14	31	Kuwait-Iraq war (1973)	BO	Mediation mission (22/3/1973)	Mission / SG	Contributed to success	Iraq withdraws, but main causal factors were the pressure and threats by Saudi Arabia
15	34	Syria-Iraq: Euphrates dispute (1975)	CR	Attempt of conciliation (26/4/1975)	Committee	Failure	
16	35	Second Lebanese civil war (1975-90)	CW	Council resolution (9/6/1976); mediation mission; symbolic 'Arab Security Force'	Council / Committee / SG	Failure	The ceasefire (16/4/1976) does not hold; the symbolic force had no power to intervene
17	35	Second Lebanese civil war (1975-90)	CW	Upgrade of the 'Symbolic Arab Security Force' to 'Arab Deterrent Force' (18/10/1976-9/9/1982)	Peacekeeping	Contributed to success	Syria downscales military activities, and short term successes in harvesting weapons; yet ineffective in countering the escalation in the south
18	38	North-South Yemen border war (1979)	BO	Kuwait agreement (29/3/1979)	Mission	Primary cause of success	Lasting commitment to implement 1972 agreement, also resulting in unification talks
19	35	Second Lebanese civil war (1975-90)	CW	Peace plan proposal (26/4/1989) and mediation mission	Mission	Failure	The ceasefire holds for few days, then is re-affirmed (11/5) but almost immediately fails
20	35	Second Lebanese civil war (1975-90)	CW	Taif agreement (23/10/1989)	Summit / Mission	Primary cause of success	A lasting agreement is reached
21	46	Iraq-Kuwait - Gulf war (1990-91)	IS	Cairo resolution (6/8/1990); military force sent to Saudi Arabia	Council / Peacekeeping	Failure	Largely a symbolic move; failure to tackle the issue
22	49	Yemen vs. South Yemen (1994)	CW	Mediation mission (13/5/1994)	Mission	Failure	No impact on the war, which finishes with the military recapture of Aden
23	54	Third Gulf war (2003-)	IS	Mediation mission (27/4/2006-4/2/2007)	Mission	Failure	Appointed mediator Lamani resigns in February 2007
24	56	Lebanon presidential crisis (2007-08)	CR	Mediation plan (6/1/2008)	Council / Mission	Primary cause of success	Michel Suleiman is elected; the crisis ends

Annex C – Interventions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (1981-2008)

No		Conflict or crisis (cf. Table 2)		Intervention	Type	Outcome	Comments
1	1	Israel/Palestine (1948-)	CW	Fahd Plan (1982)	Proposal of agreement	Failure	Rejected by Israel, after having been endorsed also by AL ('Fez initiative')
2	4	Oman/Yemen dispute (1982-1987)	BO	Mediation by Kuwait and UAE (1982)	Diplomatic mediation	Primary cause of success	Dispute solved and countries exchange ambassadors
3	5	Bahrain/Qatar dispute (1982-1995)	BO	Mediation by Saudi Arabia on Diwal shoal skirmish (1986)	Diplomatic mediation / proposal of agreement	Primary cause of success	Withdrawal and re-establishment of the status quo ante
4	5	Bahrain/Qatar dispute (1982-1995)	BO	Mediation by Saudi Arabia on Harwar Island dispute (1987)	Diplomatic mediation	Primary cause of success	Agreement to refer dispute to ICJ; re-establishment of diplomatic relations in 1997
5	8	Qatar/Saudi Arabia dispute (-1997)	BO	Mediation by GCC (1992)	Diplomatic mediation	Primary cause of success	Helped avoid an escalation after a minor border clash
6	2	UAE/Iran dispute - Abu Musa (1971-)	BO	Creation of a tripartite commission (1999)	Commission	Failure	Failure: rejected by Iran
7	12	Iran nuclear facilities crisis	CR	Mediation by Qatar approved by GCC (March 2006)	Diplomatic mediation	?	Largely symbolic move, Iran accepts but no direct impact on the negotiation process
8	13	Lebanon presidential crisis (2007-08)	CR	Mediation by Qatar approved by GCC (2008)	Diplomatic mediation	Contributed to success	An agreement is reached, but with a strong contribution from the Arab League

	Nye (1971)	Hassouna (1975)	Zacher (1979)	Haas (1983)	Bercovitch (1999)	*Primary sources*
Yemen civil strife (1948)		X				
Arab-Israeli conflict (1948-)		X				
Syria-Iraq (1949)			X			
Jordan – annexation of West Bank (1950)		X		X		
Saudi Arabia-Oman dispute: Buraimi Oasis (1952-55)				X		
Baghdad pact crisis (1955)				X		
[Jordan civil strife (1957)]			X			
Sudan-Egypt dispute: Hala'ib Triangle / Wadi Halfa (1958)		X	X	X		
Lebanon-UAR dispute / first Lebanese civil war (1958)	X	X	X	X	X	
Tunisia-UAR crisis: Ben Youssef asylum (1958)				X		
Jordan-UAR crisis (1958)				X		
Syria-Iraq: Mosul revolt (1959)				X	X	
Kuwait-Iraq dispute / Kuwait independence (1961-63)	X	X	X	X		
Tunisia-France dispute (1961)		X				
Syria-UAR dispute: UAR dissolution (1961)		X		X		
Yemen civil war (1962-67)	X	X	X	X		
Algeria-Morocco: Tindouf/Sand war (1963-64)	X	X	X	X	X	
[Jordan civil strife (1966)]			X			
South Yemeni civil strife (1969-1972)			X			
PLO-Jordan coup attempt (1970-71)			X		X	
Oman-South Yemen (Dhofar) war (1970-76)			X	X	X	
Sudan coup (1971)				X		
North-South Yemen war (1971-72)		X	X		X	
Kuwait-Iraq war (1973)			X			
Second Lebanese civil war (1975-1992)			X		X	
Syria-Iraq: Euphrates dispute (1975)				X	X	
Western Sahara war (1975-1991)				X		
Moroccan civil strife (1976-77)			X			
Mauritanian civil strife			X			
Egypt-Libya – border war (1977)			X	X	X	
North-South Yemen border war (1979-1980)					X	
Somalia civil war (1988-)					X	
Second Gulf war (1990-91)						*X*
Yemen civil war (1993-94)					X	
Comoros crisis (1997)						*X*
Darfur crisis (2001-)						*X*
Israel-Palestine: Al-Aqsa Intifada (2001-)						*X*
Third Gulf war (2003-)						*X*
Lebanon presidential crisis (2007-08)						*X*

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