The goal of this chapter is to examine the relationship between primary and secondary institutions in regional international societies through an analysis of the relationship between the institution of sovereignty and the League of Arab States. It specifically evaluates the role of the Arab League in relation to the emergence, consolidation, and change of the principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty in the Arab interstate society from its foundation in 1945 to the Arab Spring.

The first part of the chapter aims to integrate two new research programs within the English School: Regional international societies and the
relationship between primary and secondary institutions. I argue that exploring primary and secondary institutions at the regional level of analysis is necessary to understand the regional manifestation of international society and the nature of regional international societies. I also briefly address the role of regional organizations in international society and international order.

The second part discusses the design of the Arab League and the content of its Charter. The founding of the Arab League played an important role in selecting, introducing, expressing, specifying, and legitimizing the principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty in Arab interstate society. The principles of Westphalian sovereignty are embodied and specified in some detail in the Charter including the purpose, membership rules, organizational structure, decision-making process, authority, and power of the Arab League. The Arab League also selected and specified the distinctive meanings and practices of the primary institution of Arab nationalism that are most congruent with the principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty. In other words, the League contributed to the emergence of Westphalian sovereignty and pluralist interstate society in the Arab world.

In the third part, I discuss how changes in the practices of the Arab League after 1967 led to changes in primary institutions, namely, the consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty and the decline of Arab nationalism. The Arab League not only expressed this change but also supported it. First, it provided a regional forum to negotiate and debate regional order. Second, it supported and legitimized weak Arab states whose sovereignty was under threat like Kuwait. Third, the Arab League played a role in legitimizing changes in the meanings and practices of Arab nationalism, adapting its principles and practices to be more compatible with the principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty. In other words, the League contributed to the consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty and pluralist interstate society in the Arab world.

The decline of the primary institution of Arab nationalism also led to other changes in secondary institutions in the Middle East. The decline of Arab identity led to the rise of new sub-regional identities and organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). I also briefly address the policies of the Arab League toward Israel’s sovereignty, Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait in 1990, and the US occupation of Iraq in 2003.

In the final part, I discuss the Arab League and sovereignty during the Arab Spring. The interventionist policies of the Arab League toward the humanitarian crises in Syria and Libya reflected solidarist understandings
of sovereignty (sovereignty as responsibility and Responsibility to Protect). This was the first time in the history of the Arab League that a member state got suspended because of massive human rights violations. In the case of Libya in particular, the Arab League also played an important role in agenda setting, mobilizing international consent and support, and legitimizing United Nations Security Council (UNSC) humanitarian intervention in the country. These policies of the Arab League are incongruent with its traditional principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty. But the Arab League policies toward Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia, and Yemen embodied more continuity than change in the principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty and pluralist interstate society.

The English School, Regional International Society, and Regional Organizations

Exploring primary and secondary institutions across regions is necessary to understand the regional manifestations of international society and the nature of regional international societies. Until Barry Buzan’s (2004, 2009, with Ana Gonzales-Pelaez) call for theoretical and empirical inquiry into regional international societies, the English School had focused on the international level of analysis, overlooking the regional level of analysis. Martin Wight’s Systems of States (1977) and Adam Watson’s The Evolution of International Society (1992) provided comparative analyses of international systems across time, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (1984) studied the Expansion of International Society, and Hedley Bull studied the primary institutions of the contemporary Anarchical Society (2002), but none of the classic English School scholars paid serious attention to regional international societies within contemporary international society (Hurrell 2007, 127).

Overlooking the regional level of analysis of international society is neither helpful nor necessary (Buzan 2009, 28). Even by definition, international society can be regional or sub-regional. Bull and Watson (1984, 1) define international society as “a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behavior of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining such arrangements.” Defining international society as “a group of states” allows for the possibility of regional or even sub-regional international societies.
The regional level of analysis is helpful to explore how primary and secondary institutions of international society are understood and practiced in different regions. Although non-European states formally adopted the norms of international society, they still assign distinctive meanings and practices to these norms (Stivachtis 2015, 332). For example, the history of political change in the Middle East over the last two centuries “has involved the adoption, if also reformulation, of the core Western principles: sovereignty, economic development, national self-determination” (Halliday 2009, 10).

Exploring primary and secondary institutions at the regional level of analysis is also necessary to study the nature of regional international societies. Primary and secondary institutions are the benchmarks against which we assess the similarities and differences between regional international society and global international society (Buzan 2009, 42). They are also useful criteria for assessing the relative maturity and development of regional international societies, their place in global international society, and their role in international order and global governance (Hurrell 2007). Thus, the regional level of analysis of primary and secondary institutions is necessary in order to have a comprehensive understanding of contemporary international society.1

According to Andrew Hurrell (2007, 133), “the history of regional state formation has helped to produce regional international societies that may have elective affinities with their allegedly universal Westphalian original but also have important distinctive features.” In line with this proposition, Barry Buzan, Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez, and their colleagues (2009) have provided an interesting and important analysis of the particularities of regional international society in the Middle East, including its primary and secondary institutions.2

In addition to overlooking the regional level of analysis, the English School also used to downplay the role of international organizations (secondary institutions) in international order and society. As Hedley Bull (2002, 71) explicitly puts it, “[b]y an institution we do not necessarily imply an organization or administrative machinery, but rather a set of habits and practices shaped towards the realization of common goals... These institutions serve to symbolize the existence of an international society that is more than the sum of its members, to give substance and permanence to their collaboration in carrying out the political functions of international society, and to moderate their tendency to lose sight of common interests.”
International organizations are viewed as relevant only to the extent that they reflect and support the working of primary institutions. Bull (2002, xxxiv–xxxv), for example, recognizes that the role of international organizations in international order is “an important one” but added that to find the basic causes of international order “one must look not to the League of Nations, the United Nations and such bodies, but to the institutions of international society that arose before these international organizations were established, and that would continue to operate (albeit in a different mode) even if these organizations did not exist.”

Primary institutions, not international organizations, have become the cornerstone of the English School. Buzan (2004, 181) defines primary institutions as “durable and recognized patterns of shared practices rooted in values held commonly by members of interstate societies, and embodying a mix of norms, rules, and principles... Although durable, primary institutions are neither permanent nor fixed. They will typically undergo a historical pattern of rise, evolution and decline.” Primary institutions can experience two main types of change: Change in the constitutive principles that are inherent in primary institutions (change of a primary institution) and changes in the social practices that reproduce and maintain the constitutive principles (change in a primary institution) (Knudsen 2016; Chap. 2 in this volume).

Despite their role in expressing, specifying, reproducing, supporting, and even changing the constitutive principles and practices of primary institutions, international organizations received scant attention by English School scholars. But the lack of debate between the English School and rational institutionalism is unhelpful and unnecessary. As Buzan (2009, 43–44) puts it:

[A]cademic division of labour...between primary and secondary institutional study has been clear. But this division of labour has gone too far, with neither English school writers nor liberal institutionalists and regime theorists bothering to think about how the level of institutions that they study related to the other. Secondary institutions do not define international societies, but they do matter, not least as expression of, and possibly benchmarks for, primary institutions.

International organizations play various important roles in contemporary international society. They embody and express primary institutions. They are one of the main practices that reproduce and maintain primary institutions. They also specify the principles and practices of primary
institutions, and thereby they affect their constitutive and institutionalizing processes (Spandler 2015; Navari 2016; Chap. 3 in this volume). Furthermore, international organizations are teachers of international norms, and they socialize states into the values of international society (Finnemore 1993). International organizations also play a role in changing the practices of primary institutions (Knudsen, Chap. 2 in this volume). The United Nations (UN) even played a role in the expansion of international society. According to Michael Barnett (2009, 49), “a principal purpose of the United Nations was to facilitate the transition from the era of empires to the era of sovereignty—to globalize and universalize sovereignty as the basis of relations between states.”

Engaging in the practices of international institutional design and working through international organizations are some of the sovereignty-constituting practices in contemporary international society (Wendt 2001, 1034). International organizations and primary institutions are mutually constitutive. While primary institutions make international organizations possible, international organizations also reproduce and maintain the practices and principles of primary institutions (Knudsen, Chap. 2).

Regional organizations also play an important role in contemporary international society. Besides having the same properties as international organizations, they have distinctive power and a role as regional actors. Regional organizations specify international norms in more detail and adjust them to be more compatible with regional norms and practices. Regional organizations are what John Vincent called the “local carriers of global message” (cited in Hurrell 2007, 142). They also play a role in localizing international norms. Localization is “active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices” (Acharya 2004, 245). Regional organizations also help in the process of norm subsidiary, which is a process whereby local actors create rules with a view to preserve their autonomy from dominance, neglect, violation, or abuse by more powerful central actors (Acharya 2011, 97). Regional primary and secondary institutions, for example, can be means to protect states from great power intervention. Regional organizations also play an important role in legitimizing international society and maintaining international order and global governance. “The legitimacy of regional organizations comes from the role that they play (or at least are intended to play) in the broader structure of global governance” (Hurrell 2007, 132).
Regional organizations also reflect the variations in the meanings and practices of primary institutions across regions. They also embody the nature of regional international societies, and play a role in the relations between regional interstate societies (inter-regionalism), and the relations between regional interstate societies and global international society.

This chapter aims to combine these two newly emerging research programs in the English School: Regional international societies and the relationship between primary and secondary institutions. I examine the relationship between primary and secondary institutions in the Arab interstate society. More particularly, I study the relationship between the primary institution of sovereignty and the League of Arab States. The Arab League is the oldest regional organization in the world, created in 1945. The original members of the Arab League were seven states, but its membership expanded to 22 member states over the past decades (Pinfari 2016).

Sovereignty is a social institution of supreme authority. It is the most fundamental institution in contemporary international society (Wight 1977, 135). Sovereignty is not a fixed or timeless institution. Rather, its content is socially constructed (Philpott 2001; Biersteker and Weber 1996). Sovereignty may experience two types of change: Changes in the constitutive principles or changes in the practices of sovereignty. “Sovereignty may stay constant as the key constitutive institution, but the practices that it legitimises are under continuous renegotiation” (Buzan 2004, 178).

The meanings and practices of sovereignty vary depending on the nature or type of international society. The meanings and practices of sovereignty in pluralist international society are different from the meanings and practice of sovereignty in solidarist international society. Pluralist international society is based on Westphalian sovereignty, which disallows intervention in the internal affairs of the state. “Sovereignty as responsibility”—which is reflected in the norm and practice of the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P)—is more compatible with solidarist international society. It is important to keep in mind that solidarism and pluralism are not mutually exclusive perceptions of international society. Rather, they are two sets of principles that can be mixed and combined in various ways in international society (Knudsen 2016, 106).

In this chapter, I discuss the role of the Arab League in introducing, reproducing, legitimizing, consolidating, and even changing the principles and/or practices of Westphalian sovereignty in Arab interstate society. Westphalian sovereignty refers to the constitutive principles and practices of state-territorial sovereignty and non-intervention. Of course, multiple
actors—local, regional, and international—played a role in constituting Westphalian sovereignty in the Middle East. But the purpose of this chapter is to focus specifically on one actor: The League of Arab States.

**The Arab League Charter and Sovereignty**

International relations theory usually assumes or takes for granted the primary institutions of international society, particularly the norms of sovereignty. The negotiations over the formation and design of the League of Arab States in 1945, however, took place at a time when the primary institution of sovereignty was seriously contested in the Arab interstate society. In fact, the institution of sovereignty was far from the theoretical ideal type of a set of shared meanings, principles, and practices defining legitimate behavior and interaction. The majority of the Arab countries were still under some type of foreign control by western powers, and the sovereignty of the newly independent Arab states had not reached the level of consolidation. Arab states and societies were also engaged in conflict over the legitimate meanings and practices of Arab nationalism. While Arab states and societies shared Arab identity, they competed with each other regarding the legitimate practices of Arab nationalism (Barnett 1995, 1998).

Both sovereignty and Arab nationalism, two primary institutions, were debated and contested during the negotiations over the Arab League. The negotiations on the Arab League were part of a broader debate on the ordering principle that should replace foreign empires. Should the regional order be based on the principle of territorial sovereignty of the newly independent states? Or should regional order be based on Arab nationalism and the calls for a state-to-nation balance in the Middle East with strong congruence between the “Arab state” and the “Arab nation”? (Valbjorn 2016, 253; Miller 2006).

Some Arab states pursued a foreign policy that threatened the sovereignty and independence of neighboring countries. The Hashemite in particular pursued regional projects that aimed to impose their sovereignty on neighboring Arab countries. King Faisal of Iraq proposed the “Fertile Crescent Unity” plan, and Amir Abdullah of Transjordan pursued a “Greater Syria” plan that aimed to impose his sovereignty over Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. The Hashemite also sought to impose their sovereignty over Saudi Arabia (Maddy-Weitzman 1992; Porath 1986; Seale 1987). Iraq and Transjordan legitimized their right of sovereignty over
Greater Syria and Saudi Arabia by Pan-Arabism and dynastic principles—the members of the Hashemite were the kings of Syria and Saudi Arabia. They were rulers of these two countries until the French Mandate expelled King Faisal from Syria in July 1920, and the House of Saud expelled the Hashemite from Hijaz in 1926 (Porath 1986, 2). This is the regional normative context within which the negotiation over the Arab League took place. Egypt hosted several conferences, attended by representatives of Arab states that eventually led to the formation of the League of Arab States on 22 March 1945.

Content analysis of the Charter of the Arab League reveals that the new regional organization selected the constitutive principles of Westphalian sovereignty (state-territorial sovereignty and non-intervention) as the primary institution of Arab interstate society. According to Owen (2004, 60), the word “state,” in its territorial sense, appears 48 times in the 20 articles of the Arab League Charter. The Charter also selected particular meanings and practices of Arab nationalism that were more congruent with Westphalian sovereignty. The main purpose of the League was to strengthen the relations among Arab states and to achieve the welfare of all Arab states “on the basis of respect for the independence and sovereignty of these states” (Charter of the League of Arab States). The Charter pursues the values of solidarity, cooperation, and collaboration among Arab states, which are compatible with Westphalian sovereignty.

The primary institution of Westphalian sovereignty is also embodied, expressed, and specified in the membership rules, the scope of issues, the centralization of tasks, and the authority of the organization (Koremenos et al. 2001). Regarding membership rules, the Charter restricted membership to independent Arab states only, excluding Arab countries that were under foreign rule. Only sovereign Arab states that have achieved independence can be full members of the Arab League. Arab identity is reflected in the membership rules too. The Charter excludes non-Arab states in the Middle East such as Turkey, Iran, and Israel. Although they are Middle Eastern countries and even regional powers, they are not allowed to be members of the Arab League simply because of their non-Arab identity. The combination of sovereignty and Arab identity constituted a particular regional organization and distinctive regional interstate society whose membership is based on identity rather than geography.

Despite the popularity of Arab nationalism, the Charter explicitly states that the goal of the League is the protection of the sovereignty and independence of member states. As Article 2 states the “purpose of the League
is to draw closer the relations between member States and co-ordinate their political activities with the aim of realizing a close collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries” (emphasis added).

The Charter also specifies the principle of non-intervention: “Every member State of the League shall respect the form of government obtaining in the other States of the League, and shall recognize the form of government obtaining as one of the rights of those States, and shall pledge itself not to take any action tending to change that form” (Article 8). Domestic politics are outside the authority and scope of activities of the organization, which is a further confirmation of Westphalian sovereignty and non-intervention.

The principles of absolute sovereignty (no supreme authority above the state) and sovereign equality are also expressed in the organizational structure of the League. The Arab League is composed of the General Secretariat and the Council. The General Secretariat lacks any meaningful autonomy or independence from member states. There is no transfer of sovereign authority from member states to the League. The decision-making process in the Council also reflects the principle of sovereign equality. According to Article 7, “The decisions of the Council taken by a unanimous vote shall be binding on all the member States of the League; those that are reached by a majority vote shall bind only those that accept them. In both cases the decisions of the Council shall be executed in each State in accordance with the fundamental structure of that State.” Each member state has only one vote regardless of its relative power. The Council also has no enforcement mechanisms to enforce its resolutions on member states.

Although it is not included in the Charter, the League informally adopted a new practice, summits of heads of Arab states, which started in 1964 and became the most important practice of the Arab League. The summits were formally institutionalized to be the supreme decision-making mechanism of the Arab League in 1999, marginalizing the original bodies of the organization (the Council and General Secretariat) (Valbjorn 2016, 258; Mohamedou 2016, 1223). The summit practice reflects the principle of sovereign equality among Arab states regardless of relative power and regime type. It also reflects the authoritarian nature of the ruling regimes and their “objection to an inter-Arab central authority that might erode their own individual sovereignty” (Sela 1998, 23). Finally, the summit is consistent with the perception of foreign policy as “the exclusive privilege of heads of state” (Sela 1998, 23).
The above discussion shows that the Arab League does not enjoy autonomy, independence, centralization of authority, and enforcement power. Instead, the rules of the League reflect principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty. The European Union, on the other hand, enjoys more autonomy, independence, centralization, and enforcement powers than the Arab League. The differences in the rules and structures of the Arab League and European Union reflect different meanings and practices of sovereignty in these two regional interstate societies.

Unlike the UN Security Council, whose rules and practices embody the institution of great power management, the Arab League does not embody or reflect the institution of regional great power management. Regional powers in the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have no special rights and responsibilities in the decision-making process of the Arab League. Instead, the League is clearly founded on the principle of sovereign equality.

To conclude this section, the Charter of the Arab League contributed to the emergence of Westphalian sovereignty in the region in the following ways. First, to engage in the design of the Arab League is to engage in a practice of sovereignty. In contemporary international society, “engaging in practices of international institutional design” is one of the “sovereignty-constituting practices” (Wendt 2001, 1034). After its formation, the Arab League also provided the member states with a new regional arena to practice the principles of sovereignty. The Arab League enabled Arab states to practice sovereignty not only through bilateral diplomacy but also through regional multilateral diplomacy, meaning a regional organization.

Second, the Charter of the Arab League introduced, embodied, and specified the principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty and non-intervention. Thereby it contributed to the constituting, institutionalization, and consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty in the Arab interstate society. The League, or more accurately the designers of the Arab League, selected Westphalian sovereignty among and over the alternative constitutive principles and practices promoted by Transjordan, Iraq, and other Pan-Arabism forces.

Third, the Charter of the Arab League selected a particular meaning of Arab nationalism that is more congruent with Westphalian sovereignty. It selected a principle of Arab nationalism that calls for the practices of cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity, rather than the integration and unity, of Arab states. Even in this modified meaning, Arab identity was still constitutive of the membership rules and the purpose of the Arab League. The existence of an Arab regional organization also reproduced the sense of a common Arab identity and a shared Arab interest.
Fourth, by designing an Arab international organization, the ruling regimes sought to legitimize the new sovereign Arab states in the eyes of Arab society; they aimed to legitimize Arab interstate society in the eyes of Arab world society or *interhuman* society in the vocabulary of Buzan (2009).

The way sovereignty and Arab nationalism were institutionalized in the Charter of the Arab League clearly shows that “the Charter in fact represented a victory for sovereignty” (Barnett and Solingen, 190). The Arab League Charter also embodied pluralist international society rather than solidarist international society. The Arab League “introduced a ‘Westphalian order’ in the Arab Middle East based on the principle of a decentralized system of equal sovereign states” (Sela 1998, 12). The practices of the Arab League reproduced and reiterated the constitutive principles of Westphalian sovereignty in Arab interstate society. While sovereignty constituted the properties of the Arab League, the latter reproduced the norms and practices of sovereignty through its Charter and practices. Sovereignty and the Arab league mutually constituted each other.

**THE ARAB LEAGUE, SOVEREIGNTY, AND ARAB NATIONALISM**

Despite the institutionalization of sovereignty in the Arab League, Arab nationalism continued to influence regional politics in the Middle East. The conflict between sovereignty and Arab nationalism, two primary institutions, caused regional disorder as they presented Arab states with conflicting behavioral expectations (Barnett 1993, 1995). In other words, the Arab interstate society was structured by conflicting rather than compatible primary institutions. While sovereignty called for mutual recognition, non-intervention, and respect of international borders in the Middle East, Arab nationalism, rejected the territorial division of the Arab nation, called for the eradication of international borders among Arab states and for bringing the “Arab state” and “Arab nation” into congruence and balance (Barnett 1995, 480; Miller 2006).

Arab nationalism was a primary institution in both Arab interstate society and Arab “*interhuman*” society (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009). Arab nationalism was very popular among the masses, and it was a significant source of legitimacy of the newly independent Arab states. Arab states, who had juridical sovereignty rather than empirical sovereignty, relied on Arab nationalism to augment their own legitimacy. President Nasser of Egypt also adopted Arab nationalism to pursue...
Egypt’s quest for regional hegemony. Egypt also justified its intervention in the internal affairs of Arab states in the name of Pan-Arabism. During this period, the Arab interstate society suffered from a high frequency of intervention that was partly justified by Pan-Arabism (Owen 2004, 66; Halliday 2009, 15–16; Gause 1992). Other states including Saudi Arabia and Jordan called for regional order based on sovereignty rather than Nasser’s Pan-Arabism.

The conflict between sovereignty and Arab nationalism was embodied and expressed in the agendas of the Arab League. As argued by Valbjorn (2016, 261) “The Arab League became divided as an important arena for the battle between the ‘revolutionary’ and ‘conservative’ Arab camps about how to balance a concern for the sovereignty of the individual states and the ‘common Arab interest.’” The practices of the Arab League reflected this conflict between the primary institutions of sovereignty and Arab nationalism.

Starting in mid-1960s, the Arab interstate society was gradually transformed from a region of disorder structured by conflict between sovereignty and Pan-Arabism to a society of states organized by sovereignty. Multiple forces contributed to this fundamental change including the successful state formation projects that consolidated the power of individual states and their territorial identity, interaction among Arab states that caused differentiation rather than integration among them, the 1967 war with Israel that delegitimized Pan-Arabism and its supporters, the oil boom in 1970s that increased the relative power of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, and the intervention of great powers in the region to support their weak allies such as Lebanon, Kuwait, and Jordan. The norms of international society also protected the sovereignty of weak states or quasi states in the Third World (Gause 1992; Barnett 1995; Jackson 1990).

The Arab League played an important role in consolidating sovereignty as well as reinterpreting the principles and practices of Arab nationalism in ways that made them compatible with the norms sovereignty. The Arab League not only expressed this change in primary institutions, it also supported it.

First, the Arab League provided an institutional forum for Arab states to negotiate regional order including the principles and practices of the primary institutions of sovereignty and Arab nationalism. The Arab League enabled inter-Arab dialogue and negotiation conducted on a state-to-state level.
Second, the summits of the heads of Arab states also played a role in legitimizing the changes in the meanings of Arab nationalism. The summit conference of Arab heads of states served as “a mechanism of collective moral authority” to solve the conflict between sovereignty and Arab nationalism “through reinterpretation of raison de la nation and adjustment to raison d’état” (Sela 1998, 20–21). “By virtue of representing the collective Arab will,” the Arab League summits legitimized “deviation from hitherto sacrosanct core Arab norms and values” and played a “significant role in shaping a ‘normal’ regional system of sovereign states” (Sela 1998, 21).

Third, the Arab League consolidated sovereignty through its policy of legitimizing individual Arab states, especially weak states. For weak Arab states whose survival was at stake, the Arab League “constituted a shield against strong militant regimes threatening their sovereignty” (Sela 1998, 21). For example, when Kuwait became independent on 19 June 1961, it immediately applied to be a member of the Arab League to receive regional legitimacy. Kuwait looked for legitimacy and protection from the Arab League against Iraq, who refused to recognize Kuwait as an independent state. According to Iraq, Kuwait was an Iraqi province which should be under Iraqi sovereignty. However, the Arab League accepted the membership of Kuwait the following day, and it pledged to provide “effective assistance for the preservation of Kuwait’s independence.” The League also authorized a joint Arab military force to protect the independence of Kuwait. Several thousand soldiers of the Arab League force were in fact deployed along the border with Iraq (Pogany 1987, 59).

The gradual changes in the primary institutions of sovereignty and Arab nationalism in mid-1960s are reflected in the agenda of the Arab League summits. Michael Barnett (1995, 506–507) states that the “agendas of Arab summit meetings represent another venue for tracing the rise of sovereignty, the decline of pan-Arabism, and the development of shared norms and relatively stable expectations to organize the relations among states.” The Arab League summit in Sudan after the Six-Day War is commonly referred to as the turning point in the history of political order in the Arab interstate society: “What occurred at Khartoum was the birth of new order...sovereignty was the foundation of the Arab order” (Barnett 1998, 170). While the Arab League conferences before 1967 discussed whether Pan-Arabism or sovereignty should govern inter-Arab politics, the post-1967 agenda did not include such debates. Instead, the principles and practices of sovereignty became more consolidated in the Arab
interstate society. The new meanings of Arab nationalism became sovereignty-friendly norms and practices that contain coexistence, cooperation, solidarity, and consultation but no longer Arab unity and integration (Barnett 1995, 507).

The decline of Arab nationalism and Arab identity also contributed to the rise of new sub-regional identities and organizations such as the Khaliji identity (Gulf Arab) and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The decline of Arab nationalism and Arab identity (primary institutions) made possible the emergence of new sub-regional organizations (secondary institutions), which were unthinkable before (Barnett 1996).

These changes in practices reflect the decline and reinterpretation of Arab nationalism but not necessarily its end. The norms of Arab nationalism continued to have some impact especially on the relations with Israel as evidenced in the Arab League response to Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel in 1979. At the Khartoum summit, the Arab League announced the declaration of the “‘Three Nos’: No to peace with Israel; no to the recognition of Israel; and no to the negotiations with Israel” (Mohamedou 2016, 1226). Egypt’s peace with Israel was a violation of this policy. Thus, the Arab League suspended Egypt’s membership and relocated the headquarters of the Arab League from Cairo to Tunis from 1979 until 1990. This was the first time in its history that the League suspended a member state. Even though sovereignty gives Egypt the right to make peace and establish diplomatic relations with Israel or any other country, the Arab League justified its decision by the norms of Arab nationalism.

In 2002, the Arab League adopted the Arab Peace Initiative Plan, which called upon Israel to withdraw from all territories it occupied in 1967, to recognize the sovereignty of the Palestinian state, and to come to a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. In exchange, Arab countries promised to enter into normal relations with Israel within a comprehensive peace agreement. This initiative reflected a significant change from the Khartoum declaration. This plan, however, has been generally ignored by Israel (Mohamedou 2016, 1226). For the purpose of this chapter, the Arab League’s practices of recognition (non-recognition and conditional recognition in this case) of the sovereignty of Israel are different from the practices of recognition of sovereign states in international society. The international society in general recognized Israel without the condition of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before I turn to discuss the Arab League and sovereignty during the Arab Spring, I briefly discuss the role of the League during Iraq’s occupation of
Kuwait in 1990 and the US war against Iraq in 2003. In the two conflicts, a member state of the Arab League lost its sovereignty as a result of external occupation. In response to Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait, the Arab League held an emergency summit of Arab heads of states in Cairo on 10 August 1990. The summit adopted a resolution that legitimized Arab and international actions against Iraq, endorsing the UNSC resolutions against Iraq and backing the GCC’s “right of legitimate defense” including its request of international military support from Western countries. The Arab League also agreed to send Arab forces to support the GCC states in defense of their territory. The League played an important legitimizing role; it provided Arab legitimacy to Arab Gulf states’ invitation of Western military troops for their defense against Iraq. Legitimizing Western military intervention in the region is a challenging task given the history of Western imperialism in the Middle East and the unpopularity and illegitimacy of Western intervention in Arab countries in the eyes of Arab and Muslim societies (Sela 1998, 327).

But the members of the League were divided on how to deal with the crisis. Only 12 Arab states supported the resolution, while Iraq, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and Libya opposed it. Jordan, Sudan, and Mauritania expressed reservations, while Yemen and Algeria abstained, and Tunisia was absent. The league summit was criticized for its failure to provide an “Arab solution” to the conflict. But, according to Sela (1998, 328), “[b]y rejecting the idea of an ‘Arab solution’, referring to international norms and rules and actively following them, the summit made a step towards internalizing those norms and further incorporating Arab states into world order.”

The Arab League also condemned the 2003 US war against Iraq. A few days after the invasion, the League issued a resolution condemning the “aggression” against Iraq and called for immediate withdrawal of the coalition forces (United States and its allies) from the country. All member states supported the resolution except Kuwait, which expressed reservations. The Arab League also refused to recognize the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), a committee of Iraqi leaders that was appointed by the US Coalition Provisional Authority. The Arab League justified its decision not to recognize IGC as the legitimate representative of Iraq by the fact that the Iraqi citizens did not elect the committee. The League was also concerned that its recognition of the IGC could provide Arab legitimacy to American occupation of Iraq (Al-Marashi 2008, 144).

Consequently, the seat of Iraq in the Arab League remained empty after the end of the war in May 2003. But the League changed its policy in
September 2003 due to US and Iraqi pressure, accepting a representative of IGC at the Arab League but it still limited his mandate to one year only. Despite this change, the League refused to open a mission in Baghdad (ibid). The Arab League also opposed a request from IGC to deploy Arab peacekeeping forces in Iraq. During the Arab summit in Tunisia in March 2004, Iraq officially asked for an Arab peacekeeping force to be deployed in the country. But the secretary general of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, opposed the Iraqi request, claiming that the Arab League cannot send peacekeeping forces to Iraq because the request must come from a legitimate government, implying that the IGC is not a legitimate Iraqi authority (ibid).

The above practices of the Arab League regarding Israel’s occupation of Arab territories, Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait, and the US occupation of Iraq, indicate that the League has continued to operate on the basis of a special mix of Westphalian sovereignty and Arab nationalism. Arab nationalism and solidarity have informed the policies toward Israel but with reference to the need to establish a sovereign territorial state for the Palestinian people. Iraq’s occupation and annexation of Kuwait was firmly rejected by reference to the Westphalian principles of territorial sovereignty and non-intervention, and the same was true for the US occupation of Iraq in 2003.

In the next section, I will turn to the relationship between the Arab League and sovereignty during the Arab Spring.

**The Arab League, Sovereignty, and the Arab Spring**

According to Barnett and Solingen (2007, 217), “[a]bstaining from intervention on account of human rights violations was among the few truly consensual principles guiding Arab League members.” The practice of non-intervention in human rights issues embodied the constitutive principles of Westphalian sovereignty and non-intervention. Of course, the Arab League practice of non-intervention in issues of human rights was also driven by the interest of the authoritarian regimes in member states with a dark history of human rights violations.

Thus, the Arab League policies toward Libya and Syria during the Arab Spring embodied a major change in its sovereignty practices. On 22 February 2011, the Arab League suspended the membership of Libya in response to massive human rights abuses. This was the first time in the Arab League’s history that a member state was suspended because of massive
human rights violations. On 27 August 2011, the Arab League also turned over Libya’s seat to the National Transitional Council (NTC), recognizing the oppositional body as the legitimate supreme authority in Libya (Aljaghoub et al. 2013, 304). The suspension of a member state and the recognition of the NTC were incongruent with the League’s traditional principle of sovereignty and its practices of non-intervention. The League’s decisions reflected solidarist understandings of sovereignty rather than its more pluralist, traditional approach. In this case, the Arab League (secondary institution) was the driving force of change, introducing new practices of solidarist sovereignty into a pluralist Arab interstate society.

The Arab League also played an important role in agenda setting and in securing international support and legitimizing the UNSC resolutions on Libya. At its summit on 12 March 2011, the Arab League called upon the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) to impose a no-fly zone on Libya. The resolution called upon the UNSC “to bear its responsibilities toward the deteriorating situation in Libya, and to take the necessary measures to impose immediately a no-fly zone on Libyan military aviation, and to establish safe areas in places exposed to shelling as a precautionary measure that allows the protection of the Libyan people and foreign nationals residing in Libya, while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring States.” The resolution also called upon member states and the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the Libyan people (in Aljaghoub et al. 2013, 299).

As an Arab and regional organization, the Arab League’s resolutions were useful to ensure the support of the United States, the European Union, and the UNSC. In his letter to the Senate and House leaders, former president Barack Obama stressed that the American intervention in Libya was “pursuant to a request from the Arab League and authorization by the United Nations Security Council…to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe” (Obama 2011). In addition, the Arab League backing was “critical” for the decision of the European Union (Bronner and Sanger 2011).

The Arab League’s resolutions were also important for the negotiations at the UNSC. The Arab League’s resolutions were used to convince members of the UNSC to support the international intervention in Libya. According to Alex Bellamy (2011, 266), “it was the call for a no-fly zone by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and the League of Arab States (LAS) that proved to be a diplomatic game-changer. Without their support, China and Russia would have certainly vetoed Resolution 1973.” The UNSC resolutions
1970 and 1973 explicitly refer to relevant Arab League resolutions on Libya (United Nations 2011a, b). The Arab League was important to secure the authority and legitimacy of the UNSC intervention in Libya. In this way, “[t]he Arab League has supported the enforcement of RtoP obligations in Libya, among others, by lending legitimacy to NATO’s intervention” (Aljaghoub et al. 2013, 295).

The Arab League adopted similar policies toward Syria. Following the Bashar Assad regime’s massive human rights violations, the Arab League expelled Assad’s Syria from the regional organization on 12 November 2011. In the same resolution, the Arab League called upon its member states to withdraw their ambassadors from Damascus and imposed political and economic sanctions against the Syrian regime. Yemen and Lebanon opposed the resolution, while Iraq abstained. Nonetheless, the Arab League adopted this resolution even though the Charter of the League states that the decision to suspend member states must “be taken by a unanimous vote of all the States except the State referred to” (Article 18). In November 2012, both the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council recognized the Syrian opposition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. In March 2013, the Arab League granted Syria’s seat to the Syrian oppositional coalition. These policies of the Arab League justified by human rights principles embody a solidarist rather than a pluralist conception of sovereignty.

However, the policies of the Arab League toward Syria and Libya only reflect a temporary shift from pluralist to solidarist practices of sovereignty in the Arab interstate society. The Arab League’s application of solidarist principles of sovereignty was inconsistent. The policies of the Arab League toward the rest of the Arab countries that experienced popular uprisings reflected the continuity of pluralist sovereignty and non-intervention. The Arab League, for example, did not adopt specific resolutions to condemn human rights violations in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen during the Arab Spring.

In the case of Egypt, the Arab League did not even condemn the military coup that ousted the democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013. The Secretary General of the Arab League, Nabil el-Arabi, supported the military coup. “I will not call it a military coup… What happened was intervention by the military to respond to the massive demonstration reflecting the desire and determination of the Egyptian people to return to real democracy” (Gavlak 2013). The Arab League held a summit conference in Egypt in March 2015, providing further
regional legitimacy to the new regime in Egypt. On the other hand, the African Union suspended Egypt from all activities after the military coup. Interestingly, two regional organizations reacted very differently to a similar event. The variation in the policies of the African Union and the Arab League indicate different principles and practices of sovereignty with regard to democracy.

The Arab League did also not criticize the ruling regime in Bahrain and Yemen for their human rights violations despite calls by human rights organizations (Mencutek 2014, 97). The ruling monarchy in Bahrain formally requested the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to deploy military forces to help the regime restore order. The GCC’s Peninsula Shield Force, composed mostly of Saudi security forces, was deployed in Bahrain. The Arab League did not criticize this type of intervention, which was explicitly against the popular protests in the country. At the same time, the Arab League supported Saudi Arabia and its allies’ intervention in Yemen to support the ruling regime in its war against the Houthi rebels. The coalition started air strikes in Yemen on 25 March 2015. Three days later, the Arab League announced the formation of a regional military force in its summit in Cairo (Beck 2015, 201).

To sum up, while the Arab League policies toward Syria and Libya reflect new solidarist understandings of sovereignty, the League’s policy toward Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, and Yemen reflects continuity in the meanings and practices of its traditional pluralist understandings of sovereignty. The Arab League’s human rights policy since 2011 also continues to reproduce more pluralist rather than solidarist conceptions of sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

The League of Arab States played an important role in the emergence, reproduction, and consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty in the Arab interstate society. The Charter of the Arab League introduced and institutionalized the principles and practices of Westphalian sovereignty in the Arab interstate society. After its foundation in 1945, the practices of the Arab League contributed to the consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty and pluralist interstate society. The changes in the practices of the Arab League after 1967 also reflected and expressed the consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty and the decline of Pan-Arabism. However, the League not only expressed the consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty, it also supported it. The role of secondary institutions goes beyond reflect-
ing and embodying primary institutions. They also support and legitimize primary institutions, and they can induce changes in primary institutions. The contribution of the Arab League to the consolidation of Westphalian sovereignty and the reinterpretation of Arab nationalism illustrate the role of secondary institutions in changing primary institutions.

During the Arab Spring, the League adopted new practices of solidarist sovereignty that were unthinkable in the Arab interstate society before 2011. The League justified these new practices by referring to global international society norms like the Responsibility to Protect and human rights. The League introduced new policies of solidarist sovereignty into a pluralist interstate society. In the case of the humanitarian crisis in Libya, the League also played an important role in international society, helping to achieve international support and lending legitimacy to UNSC policies toward Libya. But at the same time, the League policies toward Bahrain, Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia during the Arab Spring reflected a more pluralist conception of sovereignty. During the Arab Spring, the policies of the Arab League embodied both pluralist and solidarist principles and practices of sovereignty.

The experience of the Arab League illustrates the importance of taking into account the interests of domestic regimes and their relationship to primary and secondary institutions. We cannot fully understand the relationship between the Arab League and sovereignty without taking into account the authoritarian nature and interest of the ruling regimes in member states. The ruling regimes of the Arab states constituted a weak regional organization, and Westphalian sovereignty fits with their survival interest. The Arab Spring also illustrates how domestic uprisings can cause changes in primary and secondary institutions in international society. However, the English School has so far overlooked the central role of revolutions in shaping modern international society (Halliday 2009, 22).

The decisions of the Arab League during the uprisings also show that sovereignty is not the only factor driving the policies of the League. Regime interest, regional distribution of power, regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, regional and local identities, international society, great powers, and the war on terrorism have also impacted the policies of the Arab League. One must not reduce secondary institutions to primary institutions alone and vice versa. The Arab League is only one actor, among many, that are engaging in sovereignty-constituting practices in the Middle East.
The Arab League contributed to the consolidation of pluralist sovereignty in Arab interstate society. “To the extent the League was designed to enhance state sovereignty, it has certainly succeeded in doing so” (Barnett and Solingen 2007, 180). However, regime interest and absolute sovereignty limited the power of the Arab League. It is one of the weakest international organizations in the world, and it has a very low success rate in conflict resolution (Nye 1971; Zacher 1979; Marco Pinfari 2009). The League must adopt serious reforms in order to deal with new challenges to sovereignty in Arab interstate society such as civil wars, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, external intervention, and fragile states, among others.

Sovereignty is an ongoing accomplishment, and the struggle over its legitimate meanings and practices is never over. While the Arab League was able to support pluralist sovereignty in Arab interstate society, the League cannot seriously support solidarist sovereignty in the future without adopting serious reforms in its constitutive principles, practices, and organizational structure.

Finally, this chapter also illustrates the importance of regional organizations to international order and international society. Exploring regional international societies and the regional level of analysis of primary and secondary institutions is also necessary in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the nature of contemporary international society and its manifestation across regions.

**Notes**

1. Needless to say, the existence or non-existence of regional interstate society within contemporary international society, the relationship between global and regional interstate societies, the relationship among various regional interstate societies, the differences and similarities between regional and international societies, and the maturity of regional international societies are empirical, not theoretical, questions that require vigorous empirical investigations.

2. See also Yannis Stivachtis and his colleagues’ (2015) contributions to the special issue on regional international societies in *Global Discourse* 5:3.


6. Arab nationalism is a primary institution in both Arab interstate society and Arab world society (Arab interhuman society). See Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez (2009).


8. An appendix to the Charter states that non-member Arab countries can participate in the committees of the League. But they have no right to vote in the League Council. Another appendix, which specifically deals with the issue of Palestine, states that the “Council of the League should designate an Arab delegate from Palestine to participate in its work until this country enjoys actual independence” (Charter of the League of Arab States).

9. This is different from the membership rules of the African Union and the Organization of American States, which are based on geography rather than national identity.

10. For the purpose of this chapter, I use “Arab nationalism” and “Pan-Arabism” interchangeably.

11. Only in June 2005 did the Arab League and IGC reach an agreement on opening a permanent office of the League in Baghdad (Al-Marashi, 146).

12. Egypt resumed its activity at the African Union a year after the membership was frozen.

REFERENCES


