

Arab League

Topic 1: Education and Human Capital Flight

Integral to the welfare of any developed nation is a well-educated population. For the nations of the Arab League, in which equal opportunity, high-quality education is not always available, educational reform is especially important. Although many Middle Eastern and North African students are able to enroll in primary school, many drop out of school by the time they reach the 8th grade due to the need for children to obtain jobs to support their families.

Over half of the Arab League's population is female -- yet the talents of the female population cannot be fully utilized, as Arab females do not have adequate access to education. For every male that is illiterate in the Middle East, there are two illiterate females. Efforts to close the gender gap in education run much deeper than simple reform. Societal and cultural values promote gender inequality in both the public and private spheres of Arab life. Thus, educational reform for women must be approached in a way that will not upset the social balance that holds the lives of the Arab people in tact.

Having a poorly educated population not only hurts the personal success of individuals and their families, but it also puts the Arab nations at a disadvantage when it comes to global competitiveness. Prompted by the economic prosperity and financial opportunity of the west, vast amounts of Arab citizens are consciously making the decision to leave their home nations permanently in favor of lives in the west. This phenomenon, known as "human capital flight" or "brain drain" is occurring in developing nations all over the world – but it is hitting the nations of the Arab League particularly hard.

The increasingly high unemployment rate and lack of job security in Arab nations provides adequate incentive for educated individuals to leave their home nations. Persisting violence in many areas of the Arab world, in addition to economic strife, leaves little incentive for citizens who can prosper more efficiently in the west to stay in their countries of origin. Iran, for instance, which has been estimated by the International Monetary Fund to have the highest human capital flight rate in the world, loses 150,000 citizens per year to western nations. The educated population of the Arab League is incredibly limited as it is, and the loss of this valuable population to the west makes the League's struggles in educational reform even more difficult.

On average, annual investments by Arab nations in education amount to 5% of GDP. In terms of human capital, educated individuals are incredibly valuable to the economic well-being of the Arab League. For each educated individual to emigrate out of a country, that country loses from \$10,000-\$15,000 and one estimate states that human capital flight results in a net loss of \$2 billion to the Arab League as a whole. Work must be done to ensure that sustained, quality education becomes a reality for the nations of the Arab League.

Questions:

1. By what means should a standard in education quality and curriculum be established? Is it something to be uniform among the Arab League, or should it be left to individual nations to decide?

2. What steps can be taken to bridge the education gap between men and women in the Arab League? What are the social and cultural implications of such an action?
3. What duty, if any, do wealthier nations have to support their less-educated counterparts? Should the Arab League pool its resources to ensure quality education for all member nations? If so, how does one ensure that these resources are fairly distributed?

Resources:

1. <http://www.middleeasteducation.com/>
A portal of published news relating specifically to education in the Middle East
2. http://www.alecso.org.tn/lng/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=39&Itemid=41
The Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization's listing of educational goals within the Arab League
3. <http://www.prb.org/Publications/PolicyBriefs/EmpoweringWomenDevelopingSocietyFemaleEducationintheMiddleEastandNorthAfrica.aspx>
An analysis by the Population Reference Bureau on women's education in the Arab nations
4. <http://www.worldbank.org/education/strategy/MENA-E.pdf>
A very detailed strategy as illustrated by the World Bank for developing education in the Middle East
5. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1567155,00.html>
A *Time* article discussing setbacks Arab women are experiencing in education
6. http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.phpURL_ID=28052&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
A brief history and discussion of education in the Arab World by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
7. <http://www.icforum.org/node/45058>
An article from the International Communications Forum discussing recent gains in education for Arab Women
8. <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/databases/ecwpubs/pub.asp?theme=Education&looka=1>
The United Nations' Database on Gender and the Empowerment of Women in the Arab Region; links to scholarly papers on the subject
9. <http://www.scidev.net/en/news/brain-drain-threatens-future-of-arab-science.html>
Discussion on the adverse effects human capital flight has on the scientific endeavors of Arab Nations
10. <http://www.policyinnovations.org/ideas/briefings/data/000031>
Efforts being taken in the Arab World to reverse the effects of emigration of the educated populace

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Topic 2: Expanding World Trade Options

Petroleum is a resource that has long been utilized and depended upon by nearly every nation in the global community. But as oil reserves begin to dwindle, oil producers and importers alike are scrambling to find alternative sources of energy. Oil remains the single largest export of the region, making it unceasingly important to Arab economies. Because 66% of the world's oil reserves are controlled exclusively by nations in the Arab League, the issue of oil dependency must readily be addressed. Although the Arab League is able to be sustained by its current supply of oil, member nations must plan accordingly for the future. Should Arab nations continue to be so incredibly dependent upon oil, their economies will undoubtedly collapse when oil reserves are finally depleted. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that Arab League member nations develop markets for other natural resources.

One potential alternative energy resource is natural gas. Iran, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, for instance, rank in the top 5 nations possessing the highest natural gas reserves in the world. In addition, recent developments of the Arab Gas Pipeline, which exports natural gas from Egypt to the rest of the Middle East, holds promise to expand Arab natural gas trade. It is the hope of the Arab nations that the Arab Gas Pipeline can continue to be expanded in the future, allowing gas exports to reach Europe. Expanded economic ties with Europe can potentially open doors to other trade options in the future. It is important that the Arab nations do not merely replace their oil trade with a natural gas trade – for natural gas is a fossil fuel also in limited supply. Economic diversity is the key to prosperous world trade for the Arab League – diversity which focuses primarily on economic resources that can be sustained. Egypt and Jordan, for instance, have of late gone to great lengths to develop their textile and tourism industries – sources of economic prosperity which do not run the risk of being depleted.

Solar energy also has the potential to be harnessed for great economic gain in the Arab League. An enormous amount of the land which makes up the Arab League is vast desert which is currently used for very little in terms of economic utility. According to Arnulf Jaeger-Waldau of the European Commission's Institute for Energy, "it would require the capture of just 0.3% of the light falling on the Sahara and Middle East deserts to meet all of Europe's energy needs". While the sustainable resource which is solar power has the potential to serve as a great benefit to the Arab nations, the establishment of a system through which this energy can be captured and distributed is an issue for which the Arab League has yet to find a sound solution.

Questions:

1. What steps can the Arab League take to ensure a smooth integration of diverse economic resources into their economies? At what rate should the disintegration of oil dependency occur to ensure that Arab economies remain stable?
2. What other resources besides natural gas and solar energy be utilized in order to expand Arab trade?
3. What obligation, if any, do resource-rich nations have to the rest of the Arab League? Should the resources of these nations be pooled for the benefit of the League, or should a policy of economic national sovereignty persist?

Resources:

1. <http://www.einnews.com/middle-east/newsfeed-middle-east-opec>
A portal to published news sources regarding Middle Eastern nations and their involvement in OPEC
2. <http://solarenergy.einnews.com/middle-east/>
A news portal consisting of sources pertaining to Arab solar energy developments
3. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/economics/index.html>
An examination of the Middle East's economic development throughout history
4. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/index.html>
From the US Energy Information Administration; links to natural gas and oil briefs for various nations throughout the world (including Middle Eastern and North African countries)
5. http://www.cfr.org/publication/4464/other_mideast_crisis.html
An opinion piece from the Council on Foreign Relations regarding the economic decline in the Middle East
6. http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/24.htm
A brief history of OPEC
7. http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/tradebyregion_e.htm
Trade statistics for the World Trade Organization for various regions of the world (section 7 links to tables relating specifically to the Middle East)
8. <https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/esfahani/www/MEEA/Conferences/15%20%20Dadkhah,%20Kamran%20-%20Paper.pdf>
An in-depth analysis from Northeastern University on the effect of political instability and its effect on the Arab oil trade
9. <http://www.tradearabia.com/>
Trade Arabia; a portal to news regarding business and trade in the Arab region
10. <http://www.iags.org/futureofoil.html>
A discussion on the future of oil in the Middle East by the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security

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Topic 3: Arab League Standing Among World Powers

Ties between many nations of the Arab League and other world powers are traditionally tense. Political, economic, and historical factors all have a hand in shaping these ties, as well as the way in which the Arab nations are perceived by the rest of the world.

Recent conflicts in the Middle East have taken their toll on the reputation of the Arab League nations among other world powers. The establishment of Israel in 1948 by Great Britain – occurring in the wake of relinquished European colonial control over several Arab countries – marked a time of great turmoil in the Arab world. The Arab-Israeli conflict has taken its toll on the relationship between many Arab nations (in particular Syria and Jordan, as well as the Palestine Liberation Organization, an Arab League observer party) and pro-Israel western powers. Another political factor playing a direct role in shaping Arab ties with foreign powers is the current presence of the United States in Iraq.

An issue directly influencing the image of the Arab nations in the eyes of the global community is the continuing presence of terrorist organizations in the Middle East. Terrorist activity has directly affected both western nations and Israel, and even occurs within the borders of Arab nations themselves. Oftentimes, the ideals and values of these organizations do not necessarily coincide with the values of the governments of the nations in which they exist. In some instances, however, legitimate ruling parties of particular Arab nations are perceived as terrorist threats to the rest of the world. Hezbollah, for instance, exists in Lebanon as a legitimate political organization which has worked to achieve great social gains in the country. Many western nations, however, perceive Hezbollah as nothing but a terrorist organization existing under the guard of Lebanon's government.

The way in which the Arab League is perceived by the rest of the world plays an important economic role in international relationships. The recent nuclear endeavors of Iran, for example, have resulted in strained ties between the country and the UN Security Council. Certain Security Council powers, such as the United States and China, have even gone so far as imposing economic sanctions on Iranian resources. Thus, world perception of the Middle East is demonstrating its ability to take an economic as well as political toll upon the Arab League.

Questions:

1. How can the nations of the Arab League build ties with western powers, despite the conflicts they may be having with other nations? How should Arab countries balance their domestic and global interests with the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular?
2. In what way should the Arab nations address the threat of terrorism in the modern world, especially if “terrorist organizations” exists within their own borders?
3. How can the nations of the Arab League balance their own economic and political interests with their need to develop ties with the western world? As is the case with the Iranian nuclear question, do certain economic endeavors need to be abandoned or maintained to attain a positive world standing?

Resources:

1. <http://www.nps.edu/library/research/subjectguides/specialtopics/terroristprofile/terroristgroupprofiles.html>
Profiles of perceived terrorist organizations and their countries of operation, as compiled by the Naval Postgraduate School
2. <http://www.mideastweb.org/briefhistory.htm>
A brief outline of the origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict
3. <http://brneurosci.org/israel-terrorism.html>
A brief history of terrorism in the Middle East
4. <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/103/middle-east>
Discussion of political, economic and social issues of the Middle East which can contribute to conflict
5. <http://english.aljazeera.net/archive/2004/11/20084916223953869.html>
Analysis of the factors contributing to a “poor” perception of the Arab nations in the eyes of the western world
6. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/opinion/28karsh.html?pagewanted=all>
A *New York Times* opinion piece analyzing the way in which the Arab world is perceived by the west
7. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/08/gender-equality-middle-east>
An article discussing women’s rights in the Middle East, and how this can contribute to international perception
8. <http://harowo.com/2006/02/12/arab-countries-to-spend-225m-on-improving-their-image/>
Provides insight as to the current actions Arab nations are taking to “improve their image” in the modern world
9. <http://www.world-newspapers.com/east.html>
A portal to news publications directly from the Middle East
10. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7367475.stm
A *BBC* article discussing nuclear developments in Iran and other Arab nations