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Opportunities and Challenges of Regional Integration in the Americas and the Middle East: Comparative Dynamics of the Organization of American States and the League of Arab States

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Abstract

Regionalism, a phenomenon much older than globalization, has long promoted the individual and collective interests of countries. Accordingly, American and Middle Eastern nations have sought to advance their interests within integration frameworks such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the League of Arab States (LAS). In this context, Ernst Haas's neofunctionalist theory provides a useful lens to examine these blocs, focusing on four key categories: supranationality, the shift in elite loyalties, the collective decision-making process, and most importantly, the spillover effect. This study applies the neofunctionalist approach and uses qualitative content analysis to examine collected data from both above-mentioned organizations. By reviewing internal regulations, resolutions, and the contemporary political contexts of member countries, the research compares the OAS and LAS to highlight their similarities and differences. The study finds that while the LAS struggles with foreign interference and internal rivalries among members competing for leadership in Arabism, the OAS is shaped by the hegemonic dominance of the United States and the ideological polarization across the Americas, where conservative and progressive governments alternate in power. The dynamic traps the continent in a vicious cycle that must be broken.

Keywords: Americas, League of Arab States (LAS), Middle East, Organization of American States (OAS), Regionalism

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1. Introduction

Regionalism, as a mechanism to unify diverse countries, has long been a compelling subject of study. It predates globalization, and gained significant momentum after World War II in 1945, when nations became more open to forming regional blocs (Fawcett, 2004). The concept of regionalism and its impacts have consistently attracted the attention of political science scholars. Today, few doubt the importance of regional alliances. In the wake of the destructive nationalism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which intensified protectionism, fueled tensions, and contributed to two world wars, governments recognized that the nation-state alone was insufficient for advancing national interests, particularly regarding economic prosperity and border security. As a result, many turned to regionalism, seeking safety and strength within economic, political, and security blocs, with NATO and the Warsaw Pact serving as prominent examples.

Regionalism can be defined as any policy designed to minimize existing trade barriers among a group of nations (Fanelli, 2005), with the clear goal of promoting economic industrialization and enhancing the prosperity of participating countries. Politically, regionalism may also foster alliances among countries seeking to protect their independence or territorial integrity (Durán Sepúlveda, 1980). For regional integration blocs to function effectively, the presence of regional organizations is essential. These organizations are typically voluntary associations of states, equipped with decision-making and executive bodies, established to advance collective interests (Haas, 1961). They provide a platform for dialogue, cooperation, and rapprochement among member states that often share commonalities such as language, culture, economy, or geographic proximity. Furthermore, regional organizations

pursue various objectives, including the promotion of common security based on the rejection of violence as a conflict-resolution tool, as well as coordinated political, economic, and social cooperation. As such, regional organizations are widely recognized and firmly established concepts in international studies. According to Article 52 of the United Nations Charter:

Nothing in this Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or organizations for the purpose of dealing with matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security and capable of regional action, provided that such arrangements or organizations, and their activities, are compatible with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations (United Nations, n.d.).

The importance of regionalism has grown steadily over time, and even globalization has not halted the progress of regional integration. In fact, many scholars and analysts argue that the rising tensions and rivalries between the US and China, often described as a potential “Cold War II”, could lead to the decline of globalism and the emergence of a world fragmented into regional blocs. This shift would signify a transition from globalization toward greater regionalization (Wang & Sun, 2021).

Integration blocs can help guarantee peace and prevent the use of force among member countries, promote cooperation in commercial sectors to facilitate industrialization, and coordinate joint responses to transnational challenges such as terrorism, climate change, organized crime, migration, and pandemics (Roskin et al., 2008, p. 444). This study focuses on two regional organizations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Arab League, both prominent examples of regionalism in the Americas and the Middle East. Established after World War II,

these organizations provide a compelling context for analyzing the functioning of regional integration across different global regions. The research explores the origins, organizational structures, and objectives of each group, as well as their roles, impacts on member states, and levels of integration. Through comparative analysis of their internal regulations, the study links adopted resolutions to the current realities of member countries to assess how these factors influence organizational effectiveness. Ultimately, this investigation aims to scrutinize the similarities and differences between the OAS and the LAS as regional integration blocs, offering insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by regional integration efforts in both the Americas and the Middle East. Beyond reviewing the history of regional integration in these regions, the study also sheds lights on the unique characteristics and forces shaping their present circumstances. Employing neofunctionalist integration theory, the research seeks to understand where these two regional projects converge and diverge in their paths toward integration.

2. Literature Review

Due to the importance of the topic, the two organizations have been the subject of numerous studies and articles, and several books have been written on the topic. Regarding the League of Arab States (LAS), the book *The League of Arab States: A Study in Dynamics of Regional Organization* by MacDonald (1965) analyzes the founding, organizational structure, and functioning of the League of Arab States since its establishment in 1945. It addresses the League's decision-making mechanisms, regional power dynamics, and the polarization within its membership. The study also examines the League's methods of cooperation with the

United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as its stance on neutralism and nonalignment. Furthermore, it explores the League's efforts toward functional integration across cultural, social, economic, and scientific fields. Key issues such as regional security challenges, peaceful dispute resolution, the impact of the Palestine question, and the boycott of Israel are also discussed in detail. Moreover, *The Arab League in Perspective: The Citadel, Monograph Series, No. 1* written by Flowers Jr (2011) offers a comprehensive overview of the Arab League, examining its history, organizational structure, and role within the Middle East and North Africa. It explores the challenges the League has encountered in recent times, such as the Arab Spring uprisings and ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen. It also analyzes the Arab League's strengths and weaknesses and proposes potential reforms to enhance its effectiveness in serving both its member states and the broader region. More importantly, the book *The Arab League* by Toffolo (2008) stands out, which explores the origins and forces that led the Arab nations to form such an organization. It also mentions the challenges the organization has faced throughout its history.

Regarding the Organization of American States (OAS), Sheinin's book (1996), *The Organization of American States* is particularly noteworthy, as it traces the process that began in the 19th century and culminated in 1948 with the signing of the OAS Charter by 21 American countries. Also significant is *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere* by Langley (1989), which examines the U.S. transition from a regional to a global power and its impact on hemispheric integration. Furthermore, *Organization of American States: Law, Policy, and Governance in the Western Hemisphere* by Lloyd (2023) explores

multiple aspects of the OAS, emphasizing its key institutions responsible for governance, the distribution of powers among its bodies, and the policy outcomes that affect regional stakeholders. Additionally, the primary goal of Lloyd's work is to offer a clear explanation of the OAS, underscoring its commitment to four fundamental pillars: representative democracy, development, human rights, and security.

However, comparative studies between the OAS and the Arab League are notably scarce. The only significant work in this area is Nye's (1971) *Peace in Parts: Integration and Conflict in Regional Organizations*. In Chapter V, Nye compares the OAS, the Arab League, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU)—the predecessor of the current African Union—in terms of their capacity to prevent armed conflict. This study seeks to contribute to the political science literature by addressing the existing gap in comparative analyses of the OAS and the LAS, two organizations representing regions that face profound disunity and cross-border challenges.

3. Theoretical Framework

The discourse on integration remains a central concern in the foreign policy agendas of many countries striving to secure a more equitable position within the global order. This underscores the importance of understanding regional integration from a theoretical perspective, particularly through the lens of neofunctionalism. This approach draws on the experience of the European Union, which, despite its challenges and fluctuations, has succeeded in significantly reducing political and economic barriers and tensions among its member states.

Functionalist theories, initially developed by British scholar Mitrany, rest on the assumption that nation-states are institutionally incapable of addressing fundamental global problems. This is because the international system is divided into national units based on territorial boundaries, while human needs increasingly transcend those borders and concern broader global or regional communities (Manzano, 1996). In 1958, Haas published *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950–1957*, coinciding with the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC), and began developing neofunctionalist theory through a detailed study of the European Coal and Steel Community's experience. According to Haas (1958), once countries identify areas of common interest, such as technical or socio-economic issues, that allow for joint action, the next step in neofunctionalism is to initiate international cooperation through intergovernmental management of these shared concerns. In other words, addressing problems that cannot be effectively resolved within the confines of traditional territorial sovereignty will lead to the creation of international organizations or supranational bodies organized by function rather than territory, facilitating collective solutions to common needs (Manzano, 1996).

Haas posits that power is inseparable from well-being and examines the process of political integration, which he defines as “the process by which political actors in several distinct national frameworks are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities toward a new center, whose institutions possess or claim jurisdiction over pre-existing national states” (Haas, 1958, p. 16). This represents the ideal goal of political integration, where the roles of elites and transnational bureaucracies become crucial in advancing international cooperation. Accordingly, Haas emphasizes the importance of analyzing the attitudes of political

parties, business associations, and labor unions toward integration, reflecting one of the central ‘neofunctionalist’ concepts: the spillover effect (Vieira Posada, 2005, p. 252).

In the context of European integration, it became evident that cooperation in the steel and coal sectors could not reach its full potential without integrating related areas such as transportation. This experience showed that progress in one cooperative sector could extend to others, gradually accumulating benefits and deepening integration. This process illustrates the ‘spillover’ effect, or the ‘expansionary logic of integration’. As Haas explains, problems in one area often require solutions that involve multiple sectors due to the interconnected nature of regional political economies (Haas, 1964).

Therefore, neofunctionalism is an appropriate theory for comparing and analyzing the Organization of American States (OAS) and the League of Arab States (LAS), as it explains regional integration as a dynamic, incremental process driven by functional needs and political changes outside of the nation-state. The theory shows how integration in one sector creates pressure for further integration in related areas (spillover effect). It is useful to understand how, despite differences in their regional contexts, both OAS and LAS expand their cooperation across multiple policy fields over time. Moreover, neofunctionalism also emphasizes the gradual transfer of political loyalties from national governments to supranational institutions, which helps to understand how these organizations gain some legitimacy and authority as platforms for regional governance, even when member states are relatively cautious about their sovereignty.

Additionally, neofunctionalism includes the complex interactions of multiple actors such as governments, interest

groups, and supranational officials, and how their interactions can lead to regional integration. It recognizes that actors often do not integrate in a linear trajectory, but rather through crisis-driven cycles, where actors consider their continuing commitments to regional institutions, leading either to integration expansion (spillover) or integration recession (spill-back). Consequently, this understanding of cyclical and flexible regional integration is meaningful for comparing OAS and LAS, since regional integration institutions in both organizations have experienced political and security crises that have imposed constraints on integration. In sum, this paper will adopt neofunctionalist concepts to scrutinize the similarities and differences between the OAS and the LAS. This integration theory, developed by Ernst Haas, will be used to analyze the functions of the OAS and LAS based on four variables: supranationality, the shift in elite loyalties, the collective decision-making process, and, most importantly, the spillover effect.

4. Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis based on information gathered through bibliographic research. Bibliographic research systematically collects, reviews, and synthesizes information from existing literature such as books, academic articles, reports, and other scholarly sources. This approach provides a comprehensive theoretical framework and situates the study within the wider academic context. Using established and reliable sources in the field, bibliographic research ensures that the investigation is grounded in credible evidence and benefits from the works of previous scholars. This method is useful for exploring complex topics where direct empirical data collection may be

impractical or unnecessary (Ocaña-Fernandez & Fuster-Guillén, 2021). Accordingly, this research first collects existing studies on regionalism, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the League of Arab States (LAS) from various academic databases.

With the relevant literature collected, the study utilizes qualitative content analysis to interpret and analyze the textual data. This technique involves examining the texts to identify and distinguish key patterns, themes, and meanings from the text, as they relate to the research questions proposed by researcher. In this study, qualitative content analysis is used to explore the bibliographic sources through variables relevant to regionalism. This method provides a systemic but flexible framework for interpreting qualitative information that allows the researcher to deeply understand the subject, and provides a more detailed analysis that other quantitative methods might miss due to the nature and style of their research (Mayring, 2014). Specifically, the study first introduces the origins, organizational structures, and objectives of the OAS and LAS, and their roles, impacts on member states, and levels of integration. It then examines important variables such as supranationality (the extent of power beyond member states), shifts in elite loyalties, collective decision-making processes, and, most importantly, the spillover effect, i.e. how cooperation in one area can lead to further cooperation in others. By focusing on these aspects, the study aims to provide a detailed and clear understanding of regional organizations based on the existing literature.

5. OAS and LAS: Origins and Histories

The struggle for Latin American integration began in the 19th century, even before the independence movements fully took shape

(Almeida, 2018; O'Neil, 2012). Simón Bolívar, one of the foremost liberators of Latin America, called for a united front against European colonial powers (Carredano, 2006, p. 625), culminating in the Congress of Panama in 1826. This congress proposed collective defense and the establishment of a parliamentary assembly to address the challenges facing the newly independent Latin American nations. However, the diverse interests and vast differences among the republics soon hindered true unity. Meanwhile, the United States took full advantage of these discrepancies to expand its influence in the hemisphere, applying the Monroe Doctrine¹ to replace the European powers as the dominant force in the Americas (Foster, 1951, p. 256). The pursuit of regional solidarity and cooperation reemerged toward the end of the 19th century at the First International Conference of American States in 1889–1890. Eighteen nations gathered in Washington, D.C., where they resolved to establish the International Union of American Republics, supported by a permanent secretariat initially called the Commercial Bureau of the American Republics (later renamed the International Commercial Bureau at the Second International Conference in 1901–1902). These institutions, which came into existence on April 14, 1890, mark the foundational roots from which the Organization of American States (OAS) later evolved. As such, the Organization of American States (OAS) emerged from Washington's initiative in 1948 (Dreier, 1962), aiming to promote integration, peace, and cooperation among 21 countries, as set forth in its Charter signed in Bogotá that year (Charter of the Organization of American States, 1948). Yet, U.S. unilateralism led the OAS into controversies involving coups, military interventions, and economic coercion (Cañedo, 2019),

1. "America for the Americans"

prompting comparisons to the Warsaw Pact's Soviet dominance over Eastern Europe (Jones, 2010). The Cold War mindset dominated global geopolitics, and many critics dismissed the OAS as a puppet serving U.S. imperialist interests (Langley, 1989). To this day, political divergence and polarization in Latin America continue to obstruct regional integration, reinforcing the view that "political unity has never been anything more than a myth" (Mace, 1988, p. 406).

The Arab League was established in 1945, three years before the Organization of American States, amid Arab nations' fears of foreign invasion after centuries of occupation (Benumeya, 1975). Given their strategic location, geopolitical significance, and abundant natural resources, these concerns were reasonable. The League's foundation reflected Arab aspirations for sovereignty (Barakat, 2010), but it was also influenced by the United Kingdom, which sought to counter Nazi Germany's advances and safeguard its Middle Eastern interests through a friendly Arab bloc (Barakat, 2010). Thus, two main factors shaped the formation of the Arab League: First, Britain's World War II strategy aimed to mobilize Arab support against the Axis powers and maintain British dominance in the region. Second, Arab nationalist leaders sought unity and identity consolidation following British and French colonial mandates imposed after World War I. Indeed, the League's creation was more a response to the immediate political and regional circumstances of its time than an institutional effort to regulate and manage a cohesive regional project for Arab integration (Barakat, 2010). Indeed, its formation was marked by foreign influences, particularly British manipulation (Benumeya, 1975; Rizq, 1999).

Therefore, the origins of both organizations share similarities

and differences. Both the Arab League and the Organization of American States (OAS) are regional integration blocs formed shortly after World War II with the aim of promoting unity and alliances against foreign aggression, comprising 22 Arab countries and 32 American countries, respectively (Toffolo, 2008). The Arab League is founded on a shared culture and the Arabic language, which fostered a nationalist identity during Ottoman and colonial rule, distinguishing Arabs from their occupiers, the so-called 'Arabness' (Benumeya, 1975). This linguistic unity, however, limited the League's regional scope by excluding non-Arab neighbors. This is somewhat analogous to the concept of 'Hispanicness' in Latin America, though the OAS's community is broader and politically oriented. Geography plays a central role in the OAS, uniting countries across the Americas regardless of language, unlike the Arab League, which is based primarily on cultural and linguistic ties.

The formation of the Arab League was influenced both by British intervention and Arab efforts toward unity and identity consolidation. Similarly, the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS) reflected external influences. Although regional integration had been envisioned by early 19th-century independence heroes such as Miranda and Bolívar (Keller, 2013), the rise of the United States and its Monroe Doctrine shaped the integration process (Manifest Destiny, 2010). The First International Conference of American States, initiated by Washington in the late 19th century, revealed the power imbalance, favoring the United States (Morgenfeld, 2019). As the U.S. grew economically and militarily, the inter-American system adapted to its strategic interests (Link & Maggor, 2020). Furthermore, the foundation of OAS in 1948 coincided with the Cold War, a global

ideological confrontation between the U.S.-led Western bloc and the Soviet-led communist bloc. While the Arab League also felt the impact of these tensions, the OAS became more paralyzed, often serving as a platform to legitimize U.S. hemispheric anti-communist policies (Faúndez, 1969). Thus, political divergence and polarization have characterized the OAS's evolution, marking a different trajectory from the Arab League's increasing internal divisions.

Unlike the OAS, which includes powerful NATO and G7 member countries, the Arab League's membership consists entirely of developing nations with less pronounced disparities in power. This composition has afforded the Arab League greater independence from superpower influence, compared to the OAS, which has been heavily shaped by U.S. national security policies. However, the internal differences within the Arab League have proven difficult to resolve, limiting its ability to promote regional integration effectively (Hanan Faleh, 2017). Indeed, based on their historical records, both the Arab League and the OAS have struggled to prevent military aggression among their members, foster political or economic cooperation, or coordinate foreign policies effectively within their respective blocs.

Overall, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the League of Arab States (LAS) both emerged in the mid-20th century, shaped by internal aspirations for unity as well as external geopolitical pressures. Founded in 1948, the OAS was largely driven by U.S. influence, functioning as an instrument of American interests and often undermined by economic and political disparities among its 32 geographically diverse member states. In contrast, the Arab League, established three years earlier in 1945, was grounded in a shared Arab cultural and linguistic identity. This

foundation provided symbolic cohesion among its 22 member states, but also constrained its inclusivity and regional reach. Despite these distinct origins, one rooted in geography and external dominance, the other in cultural unity and post-colonial sovereignty, both organizations have struggled to achieve effective political and economic integration, hindered by internal divisions and the enduring impact of superpower involvement. These experiences underscore how the foundational bases and historical contexts of regional integration profoundly influence both the successes and limitations of such endeavors. Consequently, while both institutions share the overarching goal of regional cooperation, their divergent historical trajectories, member compositions, and external influences have shaped distinct challenges and paths in their integration processes.

6. OAS and LAS: Organizational Structure

Both the Organization of American States and the Arab League, according to their respective charters, provide their members with a forum for political cooperation aimed at goals such as improving diplomatic relations, strengthening peace, and safeguarding the independence and sovereignty of member states. The organizational structures of both entities are defined in their respective charters (Berenson, 2002; Charter of the Organization of American States, 1948; Charter of the League of Arab States¹, 2009; Charter of the Arab League, 2012).

The Arab League consists of several key bodies: the Council of the League, the Economic and Social Council, the Specialized

1 . Mīthāq Jāmi‘at ad-Duwal al-‘Arabiyya

Ministerial Councils, the General Secretariat, the Permanent Technical Committees, and the Summits of Heads of State. In addition, numerous specialized organizations work in close cooperation with the League. The Council of the League serves as the supreme and highest authority within the organization. It convenes twice a year, generally at the level of heads of state or foreign ministers, and may also hold special sessions as needed. The Council acts as the governing body of the Arab League, responsible for making decisions and setting overall policy directions (Barakat, 2010).

Decisions in the Arab League are adopted by a two-thirds majority of member states. However, an analysis of the Charter reveals that the League lacks any mechanism to enforce compliance with its resolutions. Resolutions are binding only on the countries that have voted in favor, a structural flaw that has undermined the bloc's effectiveness. Furthermore, the League is not an autonomous authority, capable of formulating policies or setting its own agenda; it acts solely through representatives of its member states. This structural weakness places the League far below a supranational body and limits its role in advancing political and economic integration, especially during times of crisis among Arab states (Barakat, 2010).

Similarly, the Organization of American States (OAS) comprises various councils, special committees, agencies, and subsidiary entities. According to its Charter, three main bodies are responsible for establishing and implementing the OAS agenda: the General Assembly, the Permanent Council, and the General Secretariat. The General Assembly, comparable to the Arab League's Council, is the 'supreme body' of the organization. Its headquarters are located in Washington, D.C., with branches in

member countries. The General Assembly meets once a year and may also convene special sessions when necessary (Berenson, 2002).

The OAS General Assembly adopts most decisions by an affirmative vote of an absolute majority of member states. However, certain decisions, such as adopting the agenda and approving budgetary matters, require the affirmative votes of two-thirds of the member states. Similar to the Arab League, the OAS lacks independent bodies that set its overall strategy and action plans and enforce binding commitments on member states. In fact, there is ambiguity within its Charter regarding the binding nature of resolutions issued by the Assembly or the Permanent Council; it does not clearly specify whether these resolutions are mandatory or merely recommendatory. Consequently, each member state retains the right to uphold its own sovereignty, independent judicial authority, and legislative powers vis-à-vis the OAS bodies.

In short, the Arab League and the Organization of American States face fundamental structural obstacles that hinder effective regional integration. Although both organizations provide forums for cooperation on political agendas such as peace, sovereignty, and diplomacy, their charters contain inherent vulnerabilities. The Arab League's highest decision-making body, the Council, requires a two-thirds majority to pass resolutions, yet those resolutions bind only the states that endorse them and lack enforcement mechanisms. This limitation, coupled with the Council's reliance on state representatives rather than autonomous policymaking authority, curtails the League's capacity for decisive action, especially during crises. Lacking a supranational authority to set and enforce agendas, the League remains largely consultative and unable to manage conflicts or foster deeper integration.

Similarly, the OAS has struggled with internal divisions, superpower influence, and ambiguous mandates, which have impeded its ability to unify its member states politically and economically. In fact, the OAS faces comparable structural weaknesses and struggles to unite its members or produce binding policies. Its principal bodies, the General Assembly, the Permanent Council, and the General Secretariat, operate under ambiguous mandates regarding the binding nature of their resolutions. Although the General Assembly functions as the highest decision-making body and adopts most decisions by majority vote, the Charter does not clearly specify whether these decisions are obligatory or merely recommendatory. This ambiguity preserves member states' sovereignty and limits the OAS's capacity to enforce collective decisions. Furthermore, the OAS's headquarters in Washington, D.C., and the strong influence of the United States increase political complexity that restricts its autonomy. Both the OAS and the Arab League lack independent strategic bodies with enforcement power, resulting in ineffectiveness when addressing internal conflicts, foreign invasions, or regional tensions. These structural limitations explain why neither organization has succeeded in becoming a truly integrative or authoritative regional institution.

7. OAS and LAS: Objectives and Achievements

The charters of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the League of Arab States (LAS) outline the objectives of these regional entities. In the case of the pan-Arab organization, its charter emphasizes national independence and sovereignty as primary goals, while also highlighting the importance of cooperation and coordination among member states in all areas to

achieve the common good and safeguard the interests of all Arab countries (Charter of the Arab League, 2012). The history of the Arab nations reveals that the League's purposes have consistently reflected Arab leaders' desire for independence following a prolonged period of external domination. Consequently, the charter emphasizes sovereignty over unity (Barakat, 2010). The concept of Arabism, supported widely by the Arab masses, also played a significant role in shaping the League's foundation. As a result, the Arab League represents a hybrid or compromise between the pragmatic aspiration for independence and the idealistic vision of pan-Arab identity. To better protect the interests of the Arab world, the League has established numerous agencies and committees that use economic and social policies to promote collective action and equip member countries with tools for cooperative development, security, liberation, and economic integration.

On the other hand, like the Arab League, the OAS serves as a forum for political cooperation, carrying out diplomatic and representative functions. It was established with the stated objective of functioning as a multilateral body to promote integration throughout the Americas, strengthen peace, protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member countries, and advance democracy and cooperation in addressing common challenges (Charter of the Organization of American States, 1948). It is evident that maintaining peace and safeguarding the independence of member states are central priorities for both organizations.

The world had barely recovered from two devastating world wars when the Arab League and the Organization of American States (OAS) were established. However, a strong emphasis on national sovereignty later undermined the effectiveness of both

blocs in collective decision-making and policymaking. Both the Arab League and the OAS have a complex history marked by mixed achievements. Among the Arab League's accomplishments is its leading role in the independence movements of Arab countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, as well as North African nations including Morocco, Libya, and Algeria. The League also supported the liberation struggles of colonized countries like Indonesia and Namibia, and stood against apartheid. Nevertheless, the Arab League has been entangled in controversies. Despite its commitments to uphold the sovereignty and independence of member states, Arab countries have frequently violated each other's sovereignty. Although the use of force is prohibited, member states have often resorted to military action at the expense of each other's interests (Moilhi & Debes, 2021-2022; Nabi, 2014-2015). For example, Egypt intervened in Yemen during the 1960s; Syria occupied Lebanon from 1976 to 2005; Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990; and Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania engaged in armed conflict over the Western Sahara dispute since 1975. In many instances, the Arab League's response was limited to condemning attacks between member states. Furthermore, in wars involving foreign powers, such as the US-Iraq conflicts in 1991 and 2003, the League failed to coordinate a unified policy.

The Arab League also emerged as a relatively ineffective actor during and after the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Western countries conducted military operations in Libya, Syria, and Yemen without seeking consent or approval from the League. Although initiatives were launched to resolve the crises in Syria and Yemen, they ultimately failed (Mohamed Abdel Karim, 2018). The Arab world has faced numerous other crises in recent decades, including Israel's expansion of illegal settlements at the expense of the Palestinians, civil wars in Sudan between 1983 and 2003, Israel's

2006 attack on Lebanon, and the protracted Syrian civil war that began in 2011. Additionally, the region has grappled with social unrest, human rights abuses, and the rise of terrorism. Over time, the Arab League has lost much of its capacity to act as an active and influential regional player in the affairs of its member states.

The failure of the Arab League as a regional integration bloc and the decline of its influence stem from a long series of challenges, ranging from the League's internal decision-making processes to the emergence of competing political interests among member states. After the 1990s, different axes began to form among Arab countries: the Persian Gulf monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and aligned closely with Washington, and Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon inclined toward alliances with emerging Iran or Russia. These divisions further weakened the League's ability to present a unified regional front.

Disunity and dysfunction have significantly affected Arab public opinion. Interviews conducted by *Al Jazeera* in 2009 highlighted widespread frustration with the Arab League. A 22-year-old Syrian, for example, remarked, "If we are going to measure competence in terms of results and achievements, then the Arab League is not competent simply because it has not achieved anything" (Al Jazeera, 2009). Even the League's Secretary-General at the time, Nabil el-Arabi, echoed these criticisms in September 2011, following the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, describing the organization as 'impotent' (Alexander & Krause-Jackson, 2011).

To address this failure, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf revived the Gulf Cooperation Council as an alternative to the Arab League. However, the wealthy monarchies have yet to develop an effective governance model to replace the Arab League. As a result, the Arab population remains without a strong, active, and

modern regional political organization to represent them and guide them toward greater integration and development.

Similarly, the OAS, like the Arab League, has a disappointing track record. To properly assess its achievements, its history must be divided into two distinct periods: during the Cold War and after its end in 1991.

During the Cold War, the OAS successfully helped prevent several interstate and intrastate conflicts. Notable examples include the disputes between Costa Rica and Nicaragua from 1948 to 1979, the Football War between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969, and the border conflict between Belize and Guatemala in 2000. However, such successes were not consistently repeated. At that time, the organization was heavily influenced by the East-West ideological confrontation. Within the Americas, a region under North American influence according to the Monroe Doctrine, the containment of the ideological threat of international communism was the core of the security strategy designed by the United States and imposed on most countries in the hemisphere. These unilateral policies from Washington undermined the OAS's ability to function as a genuine regional integration organization.

The OAS's record also includes troubling episodes. In 1954, Guatemala became the first victim of a U.S.-backed coup d'état orchestrated by the CIA and endorsed by the OAS. Then, in 1959, the victory of the Cuban Revolution heightened Washington's ideological paranoia, intensifying its anti-communist efforts to safeguard its political and economic interests. Throughout the ensuing U.S.-Cuba confrontation, which nearly escalated to a nuclear war in 1962 following the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles to the Caribbean Island, the OAS functioned primarily as a platform to endorse Washington's coercive measures and isolate

Cuba, citing the supposed threat of communist expansion in the Western Hemisphere (Cañedo, 2019). In fact, Washington's priority was to prevent the spread of revolutionary movements, which in turn weakened the OAS's commitment to democracy. This is evidenced by the numerous coups d'état and the rise of right-wing military dictatorships across Latin America during the Cold War.

Amid these disruptions to democratic order, the OAS remained largely silent. A particularly controversial episode in the organization's history occurred in 1965, when it approved a U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic aimed at preventing the establishment of a leftist government (Heller, 2018). This constituted a blatant violation of international law. In doing so, the OAS disregarded the principles of its own Charter concerning non-intervention and the sovereignty of member states, acting instead to protect U.S. imperial interests (Cañedo, 2019).

Additionally, in 1982, Argentina went to war with the United Kingdom over control of the Falkland Islands. This was the only instance in the history of the OAS where the invocation of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and a collective response to a conflict between a member state and a non-continental power could be clearly justified. However, due to its dependence on Washington, the OAS ultimately frustrated Argentina and its longstanding claims (Heller, 2018). Indeed, U.S. interests in NATO, which also includes the United Kingdom, took precedence over solidarity with its southern neighbors.

Another blow to the OAS's credibility came in 1983, when U.S. Marines intervened in Grenada. The organization did not issue a unanimous condemnation. More broadly, the OAS remained largely silent in the face of Operation Condor, numerous coups

d'état, and thousands of disappearances. It showed indifference to the civil wars that ravaged Central America during the 1980s, as well as the ongoing conflict that continues to afflict Colombia to this day.

The end of the Cold War in 1991 marked a new era for the OAS, presenting an opportunity for revitalization. The collapse of the USSR and the socialist bloc ended the external threat from extracontinental powers. Alongside the pacification of Central America, the democratization of many Latin American countries, and the cessation of Cuba's foreign revolutionary activities, these developments relieved the OAS of significant geopolitical pressures and opened the door for a more constructive role in promoting inter-American integration (Malamud & Schenoni, 2015). Unlike previous decades, when civilian governments were frequently overthrown by military coups, a growing consensus emerged in favor of firmly condemning any interruption of the democratic process. Similar to the Arab League, the OAS implemented several reforms to adapt to changing global realities. The hemispheric agenda shifted toward transnational issues that affect the entire region, such as terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, corruption, money laundering, arms trafficking, extreme poverty, social exclusion, uncontrolled migration, and natural disasters.

However, the momentum gained by the OAS after the Cold War gradually dissipated in the following years. In the 2000s, the situation shifted dramatically. Inter-American integration was undermined by the rise of new leftist governments, such as those in Venezuela and Nicaragua, which increasingly clashed with Washington's policies. Political polarization across the continent, marked by the formation of various ideological and regional

alliances, once again weakened the OAS's role. This internal division prevented the organization from presenting a unified response to the worsening political crisis in Venezuela since 2013. The OAS remained largely silent during the 2016 impeachment of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and proved ineffective during the post-election controversies in Honduras in 2017 and Bolivia in 2019, where OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro was accused of encouraging a coup against the progressive government of Evo Morales.

The crisis in Peru is another example. The country has faced political instability since the December 2022 impeachment of leftist President Pedro Castillo by the opposition-controlled Parliament. Since then, dozens have died in anti-government protests, yet the OAS has made no meaningful effort to help resolve the crisis. Similarly, the OAS's lack of effective action in Haiti is deeply concerning. The Caribbean nation has become a failed state. Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, Haiti has been mired in political turmoil as well as severe socioeconomic and humanitarian crises, with criminal gangs controlling large parts of the country.

In comparing the Arab League and the OAS, another important factor is the withdrawal of member states from the OAS, highlighting a more contentious environment within this organization compared to the Arab League. Cuba, whose membership was suspended in 1962, has refused to rejoin the OAS. Meanwhile, two other governments, Venezuela and Nicaragua, have formally exited the bloc, citing what they perceive as Washington's interference. "We will not participate in any of the bodies of that diabolical instrument called the OAS", declared Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada (Villacorta, 2022),

adding later, “We have ignored and continue to ignore this instrument of colonial administration that in no way represents the sovereign union of our Caribbean America” (BBC News Mundo, 2022).

With these defections, the OAS lost its regional representativeness. This perception was reinforced when U.S. President Joe Biden excluded Cuba, along with Venezuela and Nicaragua, from the 9th Summit of the Americas held in Los Angeles in June 2022 (Gutiérrez, 2022). Additionally, the OAS has failed to adequately address threats emanating from the White House during Donald Trump’s second term, including his explicit claims over control of the Panama Canal (Oppmann, 2025) and his use of tariff wars to pressure countries across the continent (Mishra, 2025) and his military activities in the Caribbean aimed at threatening Venezuela with war (Shamim, 2025).

In sum, both the Arab League and the Organization of American States (OAS) share foundational objectives centered on national sovereignty, peace, and cooperation among member states, as articulated in their charters. However, these goals have often been undermined by internal divisions and political realities within each bloc. The Arab League’s emphasis on sovereignty over unity stems from the historical context of Arab nations emerging from colonial rule, where the priority was independence rather than deeper integration. This focus, combined with persistent inter-Arab rivalries and the absence of a strong supranational authority, has limited the League’s effectiveness in conflict resolution and collective action. Although it has had some successes, such as supporting independence movements and anti-colonial efforts, the League has largely failed to prevent violations of member states’ sovereignty, evident in numerous military interventions and

ongoing conflicts. Its inability to respond decisively to crises like the Arab Spring or the Syrian civil war has further weakened its credibility and influence in the region.

Similarly, the OAS's history reveals a fraught relationship between its stated principles and the geopolitical dominance of the United States, which has significantly shaped its trajectory. During the Cold War, the OAS often aligned with Washington's anti-communist agenda, endorsing coups and military dictatorships that conflicted with its commitments to democracy and sovereignty. Although the post-Cold War period presented opportunities to refocus on transnational issues, political polarization and ideological divides among member states have again hindered the OAS's ability to function as a unified regional body. The withdrawal of countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, highlights growing dissatisfaction with perceived U.S. interference and diminished regional representation. Both the Arab League and the OAS demonstrate how external pressures and internal disagreements can obstruct the potential of regional organizations to foster integration. These cases underscore the enduring challenge of balancing sovereignty, cooperation, and external influence in diverse geopolitical contexts. Ultimately, the Arab League's challenges stem largely from inter-Arab rivalries and the absence of democratic governance, while the OAS struggles primarily due to disproportionate U.S. power and influence, which have eroded its credibility.

8. OAS and LAS: Neofunctionalist Analysis

The main argument of this research centers on the similarities and differences between the Organization of American States (OAS)

and the League of Arab States (LAS), using Haas's four neofunctionalist variables: supranationality, elite shifting allegiance, collective decision-making, and the spillover effect. Previous sections have outlined and compared the origins, histories, organizational structures, objectives, and achievements of both organizations. This section will analyze each neofunctionalist variable in relation to the OAS and LAS.

Regarding the first variable, supranationality, Haas defines it as the partial transfer of national sovereignty and powers to a regional institution, where representatives make decisions that are binding on all member states (Canovas, 2002), as exemplified by the European Union. Neither of the integration blocs studied here has adopted a supranational entity. On the contrary, both reinforce national sovereignty and were never designed to operate supranationally.

The Arab League was founded explicitly to safeguard the independence and sovereignty of its member states, as emphasized repeatedly in previous parts. It lacks mechanisms to compel compliance and operates mostly on consensus and voluntary cooperation. Decisions are only binding on those who accept them, enabling quasi-veto powers for each member state. As a result, the Arab League's collective actions are often ineffective or symbolic, with a poor record on implementation and enforcement. The organization has been unable to intervene decisively in member state conflicts due to this strong emphasis on sovereignty and non-intervention, notably demonstrated during the Syrian crisis and other regional conflicts. The Arab League's functional institutions lack legislative authority, and its economic and security pacts lack supranational management, underscoring its intergovernmental nature. Similarly, in Latin America, countries have historically

emphasized sovereignty as a core value, resisting the creation of supranational bodies with enforcement powers. For example, the Pan-American system promoted by the United States was never intended to impose binding decisions on member states, reflecting the primacy of national sovereignty. Additionally, many Latin American countries struggle with weak institutional sovereignty internally, with challenges like populism, ‘caudillismo’ (Carredano, 2006, p. 653), populism and dominant presidential powers that further hinder supranational integration. Therefore, supranationality has not been a driving force for integration in either the Americas or the Middle East. Instead, structural underdevelopment remains the defining characteristic. Both the Arab League and the OAS exhibit these structural flaws, notably the absence of independent bodies capable of defining strategies, enforcing action plans, and compelling member states to comply.

Furthermore, the absence of supranational authority within both organizations limits their capacity to resolve disputes and enforce collective commitments effectively. Without mechanisms that override national vetoes or enable binding enforcement, decisions often remain symbolic or nonbinding, reducing the organizations to forums for dialogue rather than instruments of integration or conflict resolution. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle where member states prioritize short-term national interests over regional cooperation, weakening collective initiatives. In contrast, supranational institutions, by pooling sovereignty, can create incentives for deeper cooperation and compliance through binding rules and shared governance structures. The reluctance of OAS and Arab League members to embrace such structures reflects entrenched historical, political, and institutional challenges that continue to hinder their evolution beyond intergovernmental cooperation toward genuine regional integration.

Regarding the second neofunctionalist concept, the shift in attitudes and loyalties of Arab and Latin American elites from the national to the regional level, a distinct pattern emerges that challenges the theory's expectations. According to Haas, integration requires that political actors across diverse national arenas be persuaded to redirect their loyalties, expectations, and political activities toward a larger center with jurisdiction over nation-states (Haas, 1961, p. 366). This loyalty shift typically follows economic integration, as interest groups begin operating at the regional level and lobby their governments to deepen integration. The process is accelerated when a supranational institution manages integration, devises strategies to strengthen cooperation within sectors, and expands integration to serve common state and non-state interests.

However, this ideal process encounters significant resistance. Historical experience with the Arab League and the OAS reveals persistent elite reluctance to transfer loyalty upward. For example, during the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), Arab League member states prioritized national interests: some supported the coalition against Iraq, others opposed it, exposing divisions and weak elite commitment to the League's authority. Similarly, although the OAS formally promotes democracy and collective security, it often struggled to unify members on crucial issues. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many OAS states condoned military coups aligned with Cold War geopolitics instead of fostering regional solidarity. More recently, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba's withdrawal or suspension from OAS activities illustrates ongoing conflicts of interest and a lack of allegiance to the institution.

These examples underscore that neither the Arab League nor the OAS functions as a true supranational body with binding authority over member states. Without this authority, they fail to represent

sub-state actors or national interest groups effectively. Consequently, political and economic elites maintain loyalty to their national governments to advance their interests, viewing regional organizations as secondary forums rather than central political actors. This dynamic explains why the Arab League and the OAS have not emerged as focal points for elite loyalty, limiting their role to discussion platforms and modest policy coordination at best.

A crucial factor influencing elite shifts in allegiance is the nature of political systems, particularly the presence of democracy and pluralist representation, which can enable loyalties to transfer to regional entities. In democratic contexts, broad-based participation mechanisms create incentives for both elites and citizens to engage with and transfer political loyalty to regional institutions. Conversely, in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, common in many Arab and Latin American countries, power consolidation relies heavily on personalistic rule and cults of personality. These regimes foster loyalty primarily to national leaders and ruling oligarchies rather than to supranational bodies, thereby hindering any meaningful allegiance shift to the regional level. Moreover, external factors further obstruct regional integration, especially in Latin America where superpower interference, notably from the United States, played a significant role. US military interventions and CIA-backed coups installing anti-communist regimes aligned ruling elites more closely with Washington than with regional organizations like the OAS. Consequently, rather than strengthening regional loyalty, these dynamics deepened fragmentation, entrenched nationalistic priorities, and reinforced external dependencies, ultimately obstructing the development of cohesive regional integration across both the Americas and the Arab world.

The third variable is collective decision-making, a critical element in any process of integration. Neofunctionalists highlight the importance of developing collective policies that benefit all parties involved. Central to joint decision-making is the concept of the 'collective interest' (Haas, 1961). A mature decision-making system not only fosters efficient and reasonable cooperation among member states, but also accurately reflects the degree of interdependence and shared interests among them. Post-World War II regional economic integration bodies, such as the European Coal and Steel Community, highlight the effectiveness of collective decision-making. This successful example underscores that the decision-making framework of an integrative organization must fulfill certain criteria. First, it must be capable of mediating the diverse interests of members, harmonizing both state and sub-state priorities into a cohesive regional agenda. Second, the institution must have a well-defined structure with clear responsibilities assigned to each branch. Most importantly, it must possess the authority and power to enforce the implementation of resolutions, transforming policy decisions into tangible political achievements by assuming supranational functions.

The two blocs rarely succeeded in transforming the common interests of member states into unified policies. A major obstacle to collective policymaking is that decisions within these bodies are non-binding, allowing each state to choose whether or not to implement them without facing consequences. In fact, national leaders often manipulate the drafting and execution of these policies to serve domestic agendas. While the OAS and the Arab League theoretically base their decisions on cooperation and negotiation, with respect to national laws, these mechanisms are intended to foster mutual interests and coordinated actions in areas

where collaboration surpasses unilateral measures. However, in practice, these mechanisms operate ineffectively at the regional level. Even in sectors like socioeconomic development or security, where mutual interests are stronger, cooperation remains largely confined to policy frameworks with minimal substantive agreements, as evidenced by the historical experiences of both organizations. Due to weak interdependence among member states and the limited authority of regional coordinating bodies to drive integration, member states prioritize policies that maximize their own benefits and safeguard sovereignty, often at the expense of regional cohesion. Latin American and Arab countries consistently seek to protect their national interests, emphasizing sovereignty preservation over broader regional harmony.

Another important factor to consider is the disproportionate influence of the United States within the OAS. In the absence of genuine multilateralism, defining a common interest among OAS member states becomes challenging. This significant imbalance of power renders legal equality between the US and Latin American countries practically unattainable. Consequently, the dominant position of the largest member fosters absolute hegemony, enabling it to impose unilateral measures that often marginalize non-aligned states, such as the exclusion and isolation of Cuba in 1962. This dynamic explains the reason for which the OAS has frequently been criticized for advancing primarily Washington's interests. Additionally, Latin America's political polarization, with leftist and right-wing governments alternating in power and overturning each other's policies, has hindered effective collective decision-making. Similar rivalries and divisions exist among Arab regimes, further complicating consensus-building. These persistent rivalries, ideological polarization, and the absence of consistent regional

policies have made it difficult for both the Arab League and the OAS to make decisive decisions or present a unified voice.

Overall, collective decision-making is essential for regional integration, as neofunctionalist theory highlights the importance of binding and mutually beneficial policies to deepen cooperation among member states. Effective decision-making should reflect genuine interdependence and shared interests, enabling coordinated joint actions. However, both the OAS and the League of Arab States have struggled to move beyond symbolic commitments to implement concrete, binding policies. Decisions in these organizations are mostly non-binding and rely on voluntary compliance, allowing national leaders to manipulate processes to protect domestic agendas. Respect for sovereignty further weakens enforcement capacity, limiting cooperation to vague frameworks rather than binding actions, even in mutually beneficial areas such as economic cooperation and security. The lack of strong supranational enforcement mechanisms and limited political and economic interdependence leads member states to prioritize national interests and sovereignty, resulting in weak regional cohesion and cooperation in Latin America and the Arab world.

The fourth neofunctionalist factor for comparing the OAS and the LAS is the concept of spillover, a central analytical element in Haas's neofunctionalism. This doctrine posits that cooperation in one sector creates incentives to extend collaboration into related areas, as the full benefits of integration in one sector often depend on cooperation in others. Thus, cooperation in one domain can spill over into others, driving deeper economic and political integration. In European integration, for example, spillover began with trade agreements and economic interactions that eventually expanded into multiple sectors. However, since neither the OAS nor the Arab

League functions as a free trade bloc, their limited achievements show that consensus in political, security, or cultural spheres rarely extends to trade, and vice versa, indicating a lack of a meaningful spillover effect. Additionally, the specialized agencies in both organizations emerged from specific circumstances rather than as a result of spillover. Spillover is typically accelerated by supranational institutions that discourage unilateral actions and raise the cost of non-compliance. As noted earlier, the reluctance of Arab and Latin American countries to cede sovereignty has hindered the development of such institutions and, consequently, further integration.

For instance, despite early cooperation on political and security issues within the OAS, such as the collective response to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, this did not translate into deeper economic integration or trade liberalization across Latin America. Unlike the European Union, where initial economic agreements expanded into political and social realms, Latin American free trade initiatives, such as MERCOSUR and NAFTA, largely developed outside the OAS framework, highlighting the limited spillover from political to economic domains within the organization. Similarly, the Arab League's cooperation efforts on cultural and political matters, like the establishment of the Joint Arab Economic Action Charter in 1957, failed to generate sustained progress in economic integration or trade facilitation among member states. The creation of specialized agencies, such as the Arab Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank arose more from exigent needs than from a natural spillover of broader integration efforts. Additionally, political factors like the refusal of member states to relinquish sovereign control, evident in the OAS's inability to enforce collective decisions in the case of countries like Cuba or Venezuela, and the Arab League's limited power during conflicts

such as the Persian Gulf War, further illustrate how sovereignty concerns have curtailed the rise of supranational institutions that could have accelerated spillover and deeper regional integration. These examples underscore the distinct contrast between European integration's spillover success and the persistent fragmentation seen in the Americas and the Arab world. Therefore, this absence of spillover reveals a fundamental structural limitation in both regional blocs, illustrating why their integration remains fragmented, sector-specific, and ultimately shallow, compared to more successful regional entities that have embraced supranational governance and the cumulative logic of spillover.

In sum, despite being composed of populations that are relatively coherent in terms of history, culture, and language compared to other regional organizations, Latin American and Arab countries continue to experience frequent disagreements. Most member states of the OAS and the Arab League show little willingness to open their borders to the free movement of people and goods, or to cooperate on regional political issues. When comparing the achievements of both blocs, their levels of integration are clearly insufficient, marked by a history of ineffectiveness in reaching regional or hemispheric goals. This is partly understandable, especially in Latin America, where numerous regional integration forums have emerged as alternatives to the OAS—forums that themselves struggle with credibility. As a result, members of both the Arab League and the OAS tend to favor bilateral initiatives over collective action within these organizations to advance their national interests, as they often find the blocs ineffective in addressing their priorities.

Applying Haas's neofunctionalist variables, supranationality, elite shifting allegiance, collective decision-making, and the

spillover effect, highlight key structural and functional limitations within both the Arab League and the Organization of American States (OAS). Both organizations prioritize national sovereignty over supranational authority, functioning primarily as forums for dialogue without binding governance or enforcement powers. This constrains deeper integration, as elites maintain loyalty to national governments rather than regional institutions. Furthermore, collective decision-making is weakened by non-binding resolutions, ideological divisions, and regional rivalries, with the OAS also influenced by U.S. dominance. The spillover effect, wherein cooperation in one area fosters broader integration, is largely absent, resulting in isolated cooperation that prevents these bodies from developing into cohesive regional entities. As a result, member states often favor bilateral or alternative arrangements, underscoring unresolved political and structural challenges.

9. Concluding Remarks

This research examined the factors behind the formation of two of the oldest regional integration blocs, the League of Arab States and the Organization of American States, each situated in regions distinct in terms of geopolitics and inter- or intrastate conflicts. Among various integration theories and variables affecting Arab and American unity, this study focused on the neofunctionalist theory, developed by American scholar Ernst Haas, and inspired by the successful European integration experience after World War II. The LAS and the OAS were analyzed according to four key variables: first, whether they exhibit supranational characteristics or are advancing toward such functions; second, whether they have managed to shift elite loyalties or change attitudes toward regionalism; third, whether they have succeeded in fostering

collective decision-making; and finally, and most importantly, whether the spillover effect, where cooperation in one sector generates incentives for cooperation in others, has been realized within their integration frameworks.

The Arab League is similar to the Organization of American States in that both primarily pursue political objectives, followed by economic and social goals; each can be seen as a regional counterpart to the United Nations. Both organizations were established to promote the interests of the Arab peoples and the peoples of the Americas, respectively. However, the Arab League's membership is primarily based on shared culture and language, whereas geographic location serves as the main criterion for membership in other regional organizations like the OAS. Additionally, the Arab League differs from the OAS in certain aspects related to values, laws, and political, civil, and human rights. Despite these differences, this research found that the similarities between the two blocs far outweigh their distinctions. Notably, both were founded shortly after World War II, within just three years of each other, and both were strongly influenced by foreign powers. The Arab League was established at the initiative of Great Britain, a European power that, facing Nazi advances in Europe and North Africa in 1941, sought to promote Arab unity to mobilize the Arab nations against the Axis powers and to position itself as a supporter of Arab independence, thereby protecting British interests in the Middle East and North Africa. The dynamics of inter-Arab relations are deeply shaped by this colonial history, as the imperialist legacy significantly influenced regional politics. Even after the end of direct colonial rule, Arab countries found themselves unequal actors within a regional system heavily influenced by the security frameworks designed by the former colonial powers.

The pattern of fragmentation imposed by colonial powers, left Arab countries divided by de facto borders and marked by unequal identities, fostering irredentism and regional disunity. At the regional level, these states found themselves unequal neighbors, where larger and more powerful countries frequently threatened the material and political existence of smaller ones. Rivalries among Arab states and their leaders were driven primarily by conflicting interests, with each country prioritizing its own agenda over the broader collective good. As a result, in a competitive environment marked by struggles for Arab leadership under the banner of Arabism, the League of Arab States often struggled to unify its foreign policies. Furthermore, the shift in the Arab balance of power during the early 1970s, combined with the absence of a successor to Nasser's Egypt as a regional leader, effectively stalled progress toward pan-Arab unity. No single Arab country emerged as a unifying center capable of integrating the region. Moreover, inter-Arab relations have been marked by fluctuations in response to domestic and regional changes. Despite the frequent claims by Arab leaders of a shared identity, history, or interests, these relations lacked coherent strategies based on these commonalities. The relationships have never been stable and remained vulnerable to transnational forces, making it difficult for the Arab League to operate effectively in such an unstable political environment or to advance political integration in the region. Additionally, the reliance of many states on oligarchic and personal interests has further undermined the integration process.

It is to note that experiences from other regions demonstrate that regional or international powers can play a pivotal role in either advancing or undermining integration processes. For instance, Washington significantly contributed to the formation and

development of the European Union during the Cold War. In contrast, great powers have had a detrimental impact on Arab and American integration efforts. During the East-West confrontation, Arab and American states were subjected to polarization and division, driven by superpower rivalries. As a result, the regional environments in both areas were severely hindered in their attempts to unite member states under a common banner. Similarly, the collapse of the socialist bloc in the 1990s did not usher in a more favorable political climate. US administrations have historically opposed, and continue to oppose, any substantial progress in Arab integration, fearing that a united Arab forum would strengthen the Arab position, potentially leading to conflicts with Washington. This opposition aligns with US interests in protecting the flow of hydrocarbons through the Persian Gulf and maintaining Israel's security and regional standing.

During the formation of the Organization of American States (OAS), it was the United States, not Great Britain, that played the leading role. After decades of applying the “big stick” policy, rooted in the Monroe Doctrine and characterized by expansionist actions within its sphere of influence or backyard, Washington was compelled to rethink this overtly imperialist approach in the early 20th century. The goal was to win the favor of Latin American leaders, prevent their alignment with other foreign powers, and suppress popular uprisings against U.S. political and economic dominance. To achieve this, the U.S. disguised its unilateral hemispheric strategy behind a regional coalition aimed at legitimizing interventionist policies and deflecting international criticism. Consequently, in 1948, the OAS was established following the signing of its Charter in Bogotá. While the organization as a whole mediated and helped prevent several regional conflicts, it also became complicit in controversial U.S.

policies that prioritized halting the spread of “international communism” within the hemisphere under the guise of US national security concerns. Notable examples of OAS-endorsed actions include the 1954 coup against Guatemala’s democratically elected president, Jacobo Árbenz; the 1962 blockade, isolation, and expulsion of Cuba due to its Soviet affiliations; the U.S.-led military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965; and the OAS’s tacit support or inaction amid numerous military coups, repression, disappearances, the operations of Plan Condor, and its inefficacy in responding to the conflicts in Central America during the 1980s.

Later, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the socialist bloc, and the disappearance of the perceived threat of international communism in 1991 failed to restore the OAS to its former role as an effective organization promoting integration and shared interests among its members. The unilateral and hegemonic policies pursued by the United States deeply damaged the OAS's reputation that, even 75 years after its founding, it has yet to fully recover. Some countries consider the OAS little more than a puppet serving imperialist agendas. Thus, while the Arab League has struggled to achieve integration due to various factors, including disagreements and rivalries among Arab nations, the OAS has been similarly hampered, largely because of the unilateralism and interference of one dominant member, the United States, which has emerged as a global military and economic superpower.

In terms of their functions and organizational structures, many similarities can be observed between the OAS and the Arab League. Both serve primarily as forums for discussion and dialogue, lacking effective mechanisms to enforce compliance with their resolutions. One of the most notable similarities is their non-

neofunctionalist character. Neither organization is supranational, nor was it intended to be. These organizations were established to safeguard the sovereignty and independence of member states, essentially the opposite of a powerful supranational entity. Unlike blocs where member states cede some sovereignty, enabling the institution to propose initiatives, oversee policy implementation, and regulate member behavior while preventing unilateral actions, the OAS and Arab League instead prioritize national autonomy. This contrasts sharply with the European model, which has shown how supranational structures can function effectively.

Moreover, the OAS and the Arab League have struggled to earn the loyalty of their members' elites and sub-state actors because they lack the capacity to advance their interests through supranational functions. In contrast to organizations like the European Union, which continues to expand, with more countries seeking membership despite setbacks like Brexit, both the OAS and the Arab League have failed to achieve comparable regional cohesion. As a result, the Middle East remains burdened by frequent interstate wars and persistent diplomatic tensions among neighboring countries. Similarly, in the Americas, political polarization endures, and governments continue to act disjointedly when facing challenges such as foreign interference, illegal migration, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and other issues that cannot be effectively addressed unilaterally.

Another important variable in the neofunctionalist perspective on integration is the collective decision-making process. Within any integrative institution, decision-making plays a crucial role. A well-developed decision-making system not only fosters efficient and rational cooperation among member states, but also accurately reflects their levels of interdependence and shared interests.

However, as discussed, neither the OAS nor the League of Nations embodies true supranationality. Their decisions are non-binding, meaning that member states retain the final authority over important issues rather than deferring to the regional organizations. National leaders control the drafting and implementation of the organizations' policies. This dynamic is particularly problematic for the OAS, where unilateralism and the dominant influence of its largest member, the United States, as well as the ideological polarization across the continent, further complicate cooperation.

Accordingly, these shared weaknesses in both the OAS and the League have made it nearly impossible to trigger the spillover effect, the process by which cooperation in one sector encourages collaboration in others, ultimately leading to deeper integration, as seen in the European experience. Crucially, neither the OAS nor the League functioned as free trade agreements; as a result there was no initial beneficial treaty to catalyze spillover into political, cultural, or diplomatic realms. Although both organizations established numerous specialized agencies, these developments were driven by temporary circumstances rather than a genuine spillover process.

In total, the Arab League has imposed a limitation on itself by including only Arabic-speaking nations, regardless of their geographic location. This restriction has excluded neighboring non-Arabic-speaking countries, potentially undermining its regionalist goals. In contrast, the OAS integrates all countries in the Western Hemisphere, regardless of language or culture. However, the OAS is characterized by a highly hierarchical structure, where a dominant power sits alongside much smaller partners. This significant imbalance has turned the OAS into a platform primarily for advancing Washington's hemispheric interests and policies

(Cañedo, 2019). In the case of the Arab League, internal rivalries among member states have damaged its reputation as an effective regional integration bloc. Additionally, both the Arab League and the OAS suffer from structural flaws that limit their effectiveness. Today, neither Arab nor Latin American countries view their respective blocs as major actors in their cooperation agendas. As a result, there are several alternatives to these organizations, and many countries are increasingly pursuing their foreign policy objectives through bilateral intergovernmental frameworks.

Ultimately, applying Haas's neofunctionalist variables, supranationality, elite shifting allegiance, collective decision-making, and the spillover effect, reveals significant structural and functional weaknesses in both the Arab League and the Organization of American States (OAS). Both prioritize national sovereignty over supranational authority, operating mainly as forums for dialogue without binding governance or enforcement powers. This limits their capacity for deeper integration, as member states retain full control over policies and elites remain loyal to national governments rather than regional institutions. Furthermore, decision-making is largely non-binding and hampered by ideological divisions, regional rivalries, and, in the case of the OAS, the disproportionate influence of the United States, which undermines collective action. The spillover effect, whereby cooperation in one area sparks broader integration, is largely missing, resulting in isolated efforts and preventing these organizations from evolving into unified regional entities.

Building on this analysis, it is evident that the challenges faced by both the Arab League and the OAS are deeply rooted in their historical backgrounds, structural designs, and geopolitical contexts. Their failure to establish supranational authority reflects

enduring political cultures focused on sovereignty and nationalism, as well as legacies of external interference, by Great Britain in the case of the Arab League and the United States in the OAS, that have impeded effective regional integration. Overcoming these obstacles and fulfilling the promises of both organizations requires significant political will and structural reforms aimed at fostering regional solidarity and prioritizing collective interests over narrow national agendas. For the OAS, regaining legitimacy necessitates addressing widespread perceptions of U.S. dominance, while the Arab League must confront and manage the deep differences among its members. In an increasingly multipolar world, both organizations have a genuine opportunity to strengthen their roles in international affairs, but only if they commit to transforming themselves into effective platforms for political unity and socio-economic development.

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All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization of the article and writing of the original and subsequent drafts. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Declaration of the Use of AI and AI Assisted Technologies

This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

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The authors certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs affecting authors' objectivity) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Ethical Considerations Statement

The authors avoided data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, double publication/submission and any form of misconduct against publication ethics. Authors have properly cited all sources of ideas, words, and materials including pictures, charts, tables and statistics used in their paper.

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