



**Universitat Autònoma
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Faculty of Political Science and Sociology

Bachelor's Dissertation Executive Summary

Arab Spring's Impact on Jihadist Terrorism

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On January 4th 2011, a tragedy took place in Tunisia. Mohammed Bouazizi, a street vendor of fruits and vegetables, decided to set himself on fire after the police confiscated his goods and decided to fine him. Not only this act of defiance became a symbol of protest in the region, but it also became the flame that sparked the fire of the uprisings in the Middle East and North African (MENA) territory in the following months. These revolts were baptized as the Arab Spring, and although the revolutions started off by peaceful means, a sudden change of dynamics was carried out. The military forces started to act violently against civilians, and rebel groups were becoming the center of the revolts. All the chaos and disturbance set the ground for other movements to intervene: Jihadist attacks. The aim of this project is, thus, to shed light on the contextualisation of the region before the uprisings began and understand how this breach in the system became the “breeding ground” (Trujillo, 2013 : 1) of Jihadist terrorism.

In previous literature, the Arab Spring was regionally and internationally considered unexpected, as economic data indicators had shown improvement and growth. Nonetheless, “the latest MENA Economic Monitor finds that the Arab Spring revolutions were triggered by the continuous and developing shared dissatisfaction with the quality of life” (World Bank, 2015). Thus, “these revolutions were the consequence of decades of oppressive and authoritarian political systems, failed economic policies, and socially alienated and disaffected populations, mainly the young people” (El Hassane, 2012 : 2).

The purpose of these revolutions was to generate a turning point in power relationships between the population and the elite of these countries, which was the initial scenario where “power shifted, from the few to the many, from oval offices to central squares, from carefully guarded airwaves to open-source networks” (Mogahed, 2012); and the main objective was to start a democratic transition to abolish the autocracies that governed the Middle East & North Africa countries for decades. According to the previous information, the theoretical framework of this investigation set its basis on the sociology of power perspective.

Moreover, what has also been dug out is that the uprisings, initially, could not be categorized in a certain social class or social movement that could help the elite take action on the areas that involved that social class, as the demands of the population were common grievances. Instead, the autocratic regimes were fighting against an enemy that had no name or identity, which meant that the movement presented advantages during the first mobilisations. Nonetheless, the “collective organizers” (Nair, 2013, p. 47) were the mass media, which presented itself as a strength at the beginning, but it turned out to be a weakness for the protests.

In light of the above, although international actors had their initial intention to provide aid to those endangered countries, other transnational situations and interests were at stake, as the MENA region has plenty of geopolitical resources, and the intervention of other powers only worsened the conflict (such in the cases of Libya and Syria, the case studies demonstrators of this thesis).

Overall, the impact of the Arab Spring was a highly potential causing factor on Jihadist terrorism attacks during the revolutions, as it became an alternative of the dictatorship and autocratic repression of the elites. What is more, the unexpectedness of the uprisings was the political window that led to disruption and instability, which generated a breach in the system used by Jihadism to prevent the pro-democratic transition. Moreover, due to the indecisiveness response plan from international actors, the situation only got worse, and Jihadist attacks increased.

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