

---

This is the **published version** of the bachelor thesis:

Cebrián Bote, Júlia; Izquierdo Brichs, Ferran, dir. Arab Spring's impact on jihadist terrorism. 2021. (818 Grau en Ciència Política i Gestió Pública)

---

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/272690>

under the terms of the  license



**Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona**

# **Arab Spring's impact on jihadist terrorism**

**Author:** Júlia Cebrián Bote

**Supervisor:** Ferran Izquierdo Brichs

Degree on Political Science and Public Administration specialized in  
International Relations

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

2021-2022

To Mohammed Bouazizi,  
and all the people who gave up their lives to have a better world.

## INDEX

1. Abstract .....	3
2. Key Words.....	4
3. Acknowledgements.....	5
4. Introduction.....	5
4.1. Motivation.....	6
4.2. Theoretical Framework.....	7
4.3. Hypothesis.....	8
5. Arab Spring: A review.....	8
5.1. Understanding MENA's context: Before the social mobilisations.....	8
6. How is the Arab Spring related to terrorism?.....	12
6.1. The jihadist winter.....	12
7. Case study 1: Libya.....	16
8. Case study 2: Syria.....	18
9. Transnational Dimension: International Implications.....	18
10. Conclusion.....	21
11. Bibliography & References.....	23

## 1. Abstract

“The Arab Spring”, according to Souza & Lipietz (2011), refers to the social movements and popular uprisings that arose at the end of 2010 in Tunisia and which subsequently propagated throughout the MENA (Middle East/North Africa) in the following years (cited by Tammam Omer, 2015). These uprisings and revolts stretched across the Maghreb and Middle East, to reach Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and some of the Gulf States. The following paper will provide an analysis of the relation of power between the elites and the civil society in MENA countries and how the autocracies that governed in the Arab region ended up being the fuel for the population to stand up against their country's elites. This article also aims to address the impact of the Arab Spring on Jihadist terrorism by analysing not only the terrorist attacks, but also by contemplating the implications of the International System and its actors. This investigation will provide its final conclusions by considering all the above mentioned ideas in order to confirm the validity of the hypothesis explained below.

**2. Key words:** Terrorism, Jihadism, MENA, Autocracy, Dictatorship, Sociology of Power, Active minority, Collateral damage, Inequality, Poverty, Instability, Oppressive, Authoritative, Power shift, Political elites, Global Elites, International Impact, Interdependence, Globalization.

### 3. Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the authors of International Relations and analysts of the Arab Spring for inspiring me to do further research on this issue.

Additionally, I would also like to share my gratitude to all the civilians from the Arab region who got hurt or lost a loved one during the uprisings, due to brutal violence from military forces or jihadist attacks. These people not only became a symbol of strength and braveness, but also a huge source of encouragement to all the people who suffer from any kind of unjustness everyday.

My gratitude extends to the Faculty of Political Science and Public Gestion of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, that provided me four full years of knowledge from distinguished professors such as Oriol Costa, Francesc Serra or Esther Barbé, among many others.

I would also like to thank my colleagues from University, for a cherished time spent together in class and other social settings, which together we became each other's support during the degree.

I feel the most grateful for my life-time friends, those who I met before starting school, with whom I share many life experiences. They are the family I chose.

Finally, my biggest appreciation goes to my brother, who's my main source of support and motivation.

## 4. Introduction

### 4.1. Motivation

Quoting Dalia Mogahed, “in 2011 power shifted, from the few to the many, from oval offices to central squares, from carefully guarded airwaves to open-source networks” (2012). The revolts of 2011 in the Middle East North African countries were not caused by unemployment and poverty alone. It was not only caused by a worsening welfare of the region’s society. The uprisings in the Middle East were motivated by a wide range of factors and variables that, despite the horrendous life conditions that society was experiencing, the population still found the energy and strength to stand up against their governments. A single act of defiance from a Tunisian street vendor (Mohammed Bouazizi), who set himself on fire to protest the arbitrary seizing of his vegetable stand by police over failure to obtain a permit (History Encyclopedia, 2020), was the spark that inspired all the MENA region to protest against the autocracies and dictatorship regimes that drove population to misery.

As Dalia Mogahed (2012) mentions in her speech, “the Middle East North African region is very diverse, and each country is unique, with their own culture, religion and ideology. Nonetheless, all these countries, during the revolts, shared a set of common grievances and had similar demands”. This awe-inspiring characteristics of the region are significant reason of encouragement to study the territory, but the political, social, cultural and economic situation of the Middle East in 2011 was the “breeding ground” (Trujillo, 2013, p.1) of terrorism in the region, which sets the basis of a profound research.

What initially inspired this investigation, was to find out whether there were correlated variables between the Arab Spring and the rise of Jihadist movements and attacks in the MENA countries or if they were not related whatsoever. Notwithstanding, what unquestionably motivates this analysis is to provide enough knowledge to help understand how social mobilisations and the role of men and women empowerment in the region became the main ingredient of the revolts, and how these uprisings were

fueled by the desire of starting a process of systemic transformation and set Western rules in their own countries.

## 4.2. Theoretical Framework

According to Izquierdo & Etherington (2017) in their “*Poder Global*” work: “individuals, aware of their interests, have the capacity to make decisions about the use of power resources and intervene in power relations. Thus, we can differentiate between two main categories of actors: the elites and the population. This division responds to the interests and the type of relations of power established by each group: the interest of the elites is the differential accumulation of power, and the relationships they establish in this process are circular. Meanwhile, the interest of the population is the improvement of their conditions of life, and relationships are linear” (pp. 16-17).

Bearing in mind that “the dynamics of the system is not determined by nature but the hierarchical nature of the system; it’s not selfishness nor ambition nor the desire for power that leads the elites to compete for more power than the others, but their position in the system. In the same way, what leads the population to mobilize for improvements in their welfare is the unequal nature of the system” (Izquierdo & Etherington, 2017, p. 49).

With that being said, “the Arab Spring should not only be seen as a series of pro-democracy uprisings that enveloped several largely Muslim countries” (History.com, 2018), but also as a turning point in power relationships between the elite and the population, in which the political and social impact of these popular uprisings remains significant today, years after many of them ended.

According to Delacoura, 2012; Gerges, 2014; Lesch 2013; Beck and Huser, 2013; & Ardic 2012 (cited by Idris, 2016), due to public anger and frustration at the lack of jobs, denial of rights, corruption, inequality and so on, fuelled a desire to restore individual and national dignity (cited by Idris, 2016); and given the significant impact of the Arab



Spring throughout northern Africa and the Middle East, “it’s easy to forget the series of large-scale political and social movements arguably began with a single act of defiance” (History.com, 2018).

Bearing in mind the previous context, the theoretical framework of this thesis will have its basis on the sociology of power perspective. The Arab Spring was a revolutionary movement in which individuals started to become aware of their interests in terms of improving their quality of life, and as soon as the breach in the system occurred, the MENA’s population started confronting the elites while generating a turning point in power relationships.

### **4.3. Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this analysis, then, is that the revolution of the Arab society during the Arab Spring provoked a political opportunity for other social movements, such as jihadism, to intervene and prevent the democratic transition in MENA’s countries.

In order to tackle the thesis, this investigation will provide, firstly, a qualitative analysis of the Arab Spring. Therefore, the theoretical approach that would be in preference to investigate the hypothesis, as mentioned earlier, is the Sociology of Power perspective, “as it aims to be a useful tool to systematize the analysis of the power structures that govern any society” (Izquierdo & Etherington, 2017, pp. 15-16). Notwithstanding, this thesis will also include a comparative analysis based on two case studies to demonstrate how the Arab Spring led to jihadist attacks, such as in Libya or Syria.

## **5. Arab Spring: A review**

### **5.1. Understanding MENA's context: Before the social mobilisations.**

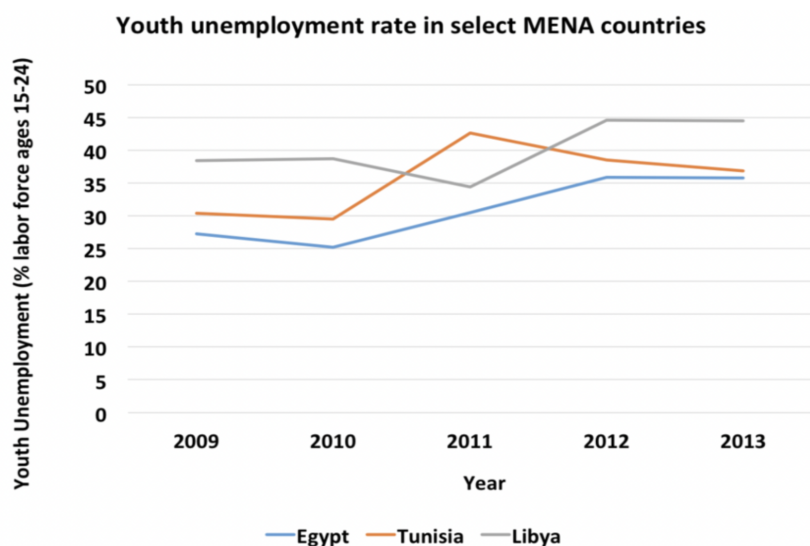
“Hosni Mubarak’s regime fell in February 2011, in Egypt, after decades in power. In Morocco, many protesters took the streets but were repressed by King Mohamed VI. In Libya, millions of people also took to the streets in order to revolt against Muammar Gaddafi, and finally the dictator was assassinated after 42 years in power. In Syria, the population also ended with the tyranny of Bashar Al-Assad, after 15 years in power” (Amnesty International, 2016). All these movements were repeated in various regions of the MENA countries.

All the movements and actions taken by the population did not happen spontaneously. The society of the Middle East North African countries had been suffering many years before the revolutions, and what had the international society in awe was the huge number of International Relation’s analysts and experts that did not expect the Arab Spring. According to El Hassane (2012), “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” (p.2). Indeed, when the self-immolated Tunisian citizen Mohamed El Bouazizi committed his final act of desperate protest on December 17 of 2010, “he was not aware that he was kicking the first domino piece in a long chain of events that is still unfolding today” (El Hassane, 2012, p.2). In this section, what will be discussed is the previous context of these countries and what were the main causes that set the population on fire.

When addressing the analysis of the MENA’s context before the social mobilisations, “if only economic data is taken into account, the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011 should have never happened” a World Bank article from 2015 concluded (cited by Gordon, 2018). Economically speaking, the region managed to, statistically, carry out a moderate economic growth, even after being directly affected by the 2008 worldwide crisis.

Notwithstanding, according to the World Bank indicators, “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). Ordinary people were frustrated by their deteriorating standards of living, reflected in a shortage of quality jobs in the formal sector, poor quality public services, and the lack of government accountability.<sup>1</sup>

Many social and political indicators have been used in order to have better knowledge on the causes of the MENA uprisings. Youth unemployment is probably one of the most important factors in order to tackle the economic causes of the conflict. “Just prior to 2010, the International Labor Organization (ILO) published data indicating that the highest unemployment data was among the Arab youth” (World Economic Forum, 2018). One of the main reasons that provoked this situation, according to many experts, was the fact that “most of the unemployed youth were educated, and generally young people appeared less motivated to accept unattractive jobs that do not match their studies or skills. This academic-labor breach, in which young people have relatively high levels of education but huge difficulties to find a workplace, helped create a continuous instability” (Sami Naïr, 2013, pp. 46-47).



*Source: International Labor Organization, ILOSTAT database.*

<sup>1</sup> World Bank: Economic Indicators Failed to Predict Arab Uprisings.  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/10/21/economic-indicators-failed-to-predict-arab-uprisings>

Apart from the unemployment indicator and a factor of cause of the revolts, there are also other short-term indicators considered by analysts and policymakers that provide a better sense of the context before the Arab Spring (World Economic Forum, 2018). It must be said that International Institutions and NGOs statistics and analysis of data provide crucial analysis facts, but by only taking them into account, we are leaving out other accurate portraying indicators such as a society's well-being. According to a published article by the World Economic Forum (2018), "figures such as GDP growth, GDP per capita, measures of inequality, and development indicators provide a structure for viewing a country's global/macro trends, which become apparent over years and decades". What is needed, therefore, are short-term indicators that analysts and policymakers can view to get a better sense of instability (World Economic Forum, 2018). Indicators such as food prices or opinion surveys give some sense of the population's well-being and satisfaction, which can provide a level of diagnosticity, given their timeliness (as in the case of food prices), or relatively up-to-date public perceptions that provide insight not to be gleaned from crude data (Gordon, 2018).

According to a World Bank study (2011), "more than 50% of the food consumed in the MENA region is imported, making it the largest food-importing region in the world. Thus, this dependence on food imports makes the MENA region highly vulnerable to changes in global food prices. With regard to data from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and with the basis on the Food Price Index (which measures monthly changes in international prices of a basket of food commodities) experienced an awe growth between 2005 and 2010 (it rose 41% during these five years), and continued to rise throughout 2011" (World Bank, 2015). According to the previously mentioned World Bank Study (2011), (cited by World Economic Forum, 2018), "this growth in food prices provoked a spike in other basic needs, which overall, a process of inflation started to become apparent in MENA countries. The sudden unshocking and rapid rise of their food expenditures over a short period of time and the general instability experienced before the uprisings, endangered even more the livelihoods of citizens".

In order to address the MENA's society welfare, this article will also evaluate public opinion surveys as an indicator, and according to the World Economic Forum (2018), "they show rising levels of dissatisfaction with their quality of life". As explained previously, the Arab Spring was economically unexpected because the deterioration in life satisfaction was not captured either in macroeconomic data, household financial surveys or in standard indicators of inequality (Gordon, 2018). Bearing this in mind, it is essential to take into account value surveys as a means of understanding public perception.

Before the uprisings and social mobilisations, and with regard to the 2018 Gordon's article, the dissatisfaction from MENA's population in many areas that are crucial to a better quality of life, was experiencing a significant rise. Nonetheless, not only dissatisfaction was spreading within the population but also the sense of unhappiness among society was high, which was directly associated with deteriorating government services, corruption acts and attitudes from the elite (which includes the governments of the countries) and a continuous lack of fairness (Gordon, 2018).

All the above mentioned ideas collided in the same place at the same time, which provoked a political breach in the MENA region. The purpose of the revolts and the uprisings was to achieve a change in the dictatorship governments that ruled for decades the Middle East North African region, defeat these political elites and put a start on a democratic transition within the region. In Tunisia, even though after the street demonstrations ended up ousting the longtime president Ben Ali, it eventually led to a thorough democratization of the country and to free and democratic elections (Wikipedia, 2022). Meanwhile, in other countries such as Libya or Syria, a wave of destruction began, in which the mobilization's outcomes were met with undesirable situations.

Overall, the previous information shows that rather than inequality itself, what may have played a central role during the increasing conflicts in the MENA region was, indeed, the lack of equality between ethnic groups, as unfairness alone does not cause civil wars,

but it incentivizes people to start fighting, specifically and specially if ethnic conflicts are used to gain public support (Mogahed, 2012). With that being said, this investigation will tackle in the following section the hypothesis of the analysis, together with the relation link that unites the Arab Spring with the jihadist terrorism and its impact.

## **6. How is the Arab Spring related to terrorism?**

### **6.1. The jihadist winter**

To start with, and in light of the above mentioned information, the uprisings could not be categorized in a certain social class or social movement. What the elite was facing was a continuous wave of revolutions that did not come from a certain social category, such as communists or islamists, that could help the elite take action on the areas that involved that social class. Instead, it was fighting against an enemy that had no name or identity. What the autocracies did know was that all these movements started with the youth of the region, considered an active minority, involving either these young people who made it to access education thanks to the education system, and those who came from a middle social class emerged from the early independence processes, that find themselves in a position of stuckness (Naïr, 2013, pp. 46-47). Moreover, this active minority was not involved in any political party or political institution, which leads also to having no ideology *per se*. What this movement has is its main objective or purpose: “put an end to a closed system. Not only do they put themselves in a position of advantage because of not categorizing themselves in a social class or institution, but also they benefit from a highly powerful modern weapon: the mass media” (Naïr, 2013, pp. 47-48).

The “collective organizers” (Naïr, 2013, p. 47) are the Internet, social media such as Facebook or Twitter, SMS etc. They have the advantage of communicating among revoltors with all these new communication techniques that are uncontrollable. What is more, the physical and coercive repression that the youth started facing at the beginning of the uprisings provoked a global call for everyone who has faced or was facing other kinds of repression themselves (involving economy, dignity, etc). The

MENA population started spreading a sense of “fighting together against the elites”, which regrouped plenty of social classes from other sociocultural environments. Thus, the Arab Spring constituted the first political revolution incentivised by the Internet and the mass media, leading to the assumption of the first revolution linked to globalization (Naïr, 2013, p. 47).

Notwithstanding, and citing author Sami Naïr in his 2013's work, “this huge and powerful weapon constitutes not only a strength for the social mobilisations, but also a weakness, as it calls for other actors to intervene in the conflict”. Naïr (2013) explains that “from the fall of the dictatorships, the political and social scene turned to a classical perspective, meaning that the first steps and movements from the active minority became weaker, which provoked society to turn back to its origins by having different interests, and they started to be abandoned by the new political forces from the democratic Spring” (pp. 49-50). The activists and supporters of the previous regime started to reorganize the situation, and they figured out that they had a political opportunity in front of the disarray and chaos. In this situation of decomposition of the system, they present themselves with virtues and strengths, and even as a resource to tackle the disorder. That is when the activists and supporters of the previous regime started to show up, in order to prevent the democratic transition of the MENA region. In this very moment, terrorist movements take place in the Arab Spring, turning it to a jihadist winter.

Although jihadism has been an important part of the political and religious landscape in Arab countries and elsewhere for several decades, this phenomenon was indirectly strengthened by the uprisings in the early 2010s (Adraoui, 2021).

According to a study from the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, written by Trujillo (2013), “the Arab Spring was the breeding ground of jihadism, and an ideal argument that proves this affirmation is the Syria's scenario, where a bleeding Civil War broke out, which it seemed to have become the first objective of the jihadist community” (pp. 2-3), as this investigation will identify in an ulterior section of the analysis (Case Study 2).

## 7. Case Study 1: Libya

The wave of popular protests started in the Middle East and North Africa in early 2011. Although the protests had peaceful means and basis, the uprisings in Libya against Muammar Gaddafi (the four-decade dictatorship) led to a civil war and international military intervention. Within the framework of the different processes of instability caused in the Middle East North African region, Libya has probably experienced one of the most dramatic and more lasting consequences for the stability of the region. This revolution was also known as the 17th February Revolution, and according to the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies (2013), “the assassination of the Ambassador of USA Christopher Stevens and other members of the diplomatic corpse in the Libyan city of Benghazi responded to a clearly organized terrorist action and not to a takeover of the Consulate by a fervent mass” (p.9). This particular action demonstrates the first indications of forthcoming terrorist events.

In general perspective, the changes in the systemic regimes provoke a huge instability period that is highly used by those who find themselves in a position of political opportunity. With accord to Britannica’s encyclopedia article (2022) on the Libyan Civil War, “the conflict can roughly be divided into two periods: before and after external military intervention authorized by United Nations Security Council Resolution of 1973, which froze the assets of Gaddafi and ten members of his inner circle and restricted their mobilization on a world scale. The resolution also referred the actions of the government to the International Criminal Court for investigation, and an arrest warrant for Gaddafi”. According to the previously mentioned article (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2022), the conflict in Libya was, then, a fight between forces which were loyal to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and rebel groups that were seeking to oust his government. The precedents of the war come from the revolts and uprisings started by the Arab Spring movement, preceded by protests in Zawiya on 8 August 2009 and finally ignited by protests in Benghazi beginning on Tuesday, 15 February 2011, which led to clashes with security forces that fired on the crowd (Wikipedia, 2022). The protests escalated



into a rebellion that spread across the country, with the forces opposing Gaddafi establishing an interim governing body: the National Transitional Council.

The rebel forces involved in the conflict included not only civilians, but also deserted police officers and professional soldiers. What is more, according to a Wikipedia source (2022) of dates and facts, “the rebel movement was also empowered by many Islamists in Libya. In Benghazi “the February 17 Brigade” was a powerful Islamist group composed of 12 different brigades. The Libya Shield was based out of Misrata and Zaria. There was also the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group<sup>2</sup> which had been held responsible for the assassination of top rebel commander General Abdul Fatah Younis<sup>3</sup>”. The conflict started to become internationalized by the intervention of worldwide actors such as the United States, the Emirates, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, also France and, significantly, Russia.

The continuous geopolitical conflict that started in 2011 got only worse by time as international actors started to become part of the chaos, and turned the situation in Libya into a game of chess (Frederic Wehrey, 2020), in which the pawns were the civil society, and the War extended as time went on provoking a Second Civil War in 2014. Thus, the Libyan case posed a dilemma without alternatives judging from the regional perspective of the Arab Spring. On the first hand, the powerful government in full crisis of legitimacy positions itself against change and decides to react violently and use coercive tools. On the other hand, even if foreign intervention is executed, it becomes suspicious of its intentions (Tahar Chaouch, 2012, p. 41), provoking a sense of insecurity among civilians and deteriorating the already weak environment of the region.

---

<sup>2</sup> According to Military History in the Libyan Crisis article, “The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) is an armed Islamist group. Militants participated in the 2011 Libyan Civil War as the Libyan Islamic Movement, and were involved in the Libyan Civil War of 2014 as members of the Libya Shield Force” (2022).

<sup>3</sup> According to Military History in the Libyan crisis article, “Abdul Fatah Younis Al-Obeidi was a senior military officer in Libya. He held the rank of Major General and the post of minister of interior, but resigned on 22 February 2011 to defect to the rebel side in what was to become the Libyan civil war. He was considered a key supporter of Muammar Gaddafi or even No. 2 in the Libyan government” (2022).

Although the Libyan conflict gives plenty of research and debate, with the previous information this investigation has its first case study answering the hypothesis, which is that the revolution of the Arab society during the Arab Spring provoked a political opportunity for other social movements (jihadism), to intervene and prevent the democratic transition in MENA's countries. In that case, this thesis can be perfectly exemplified, as Libya was the first country in the MENA region to suffer collateral damage that happened during the uprisings of the Arab Spring, provoking a breach in the system that implied a political opportunity for other social movements coming from militias and jihadist attacks to intervene in the conflict and endanger Libya's population.

## **8. Case study 2: Syria**

As previously seen in the Libya's case, Syria also experienced a terror transition from protests coming from the Arab Spring revolution to a Civil War. What began as a peaceful uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, soon turned into a gruesome civil war, drawing in regional powers, leaving hundreds of thousands dead and pushing millions more to flee (Creedon, 2021). Syria's conflict is conceived as the longest and the bloodiest conflict of the Arab Spring.

As mentioned earlier, inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings in neighboring countries, pro-democracy protests started in some parts of Syria in early 2011 and soon spread across the country in the face of the al-Assad regime's brutal crackdown (Britannica, 2022). Nonetheless, and according to Britannica (2022) "violence quickly escalated and the country was facing a civil war involving the regular army and a large number of rebel groups. Western powers promised to punish the Syrian regime if it used chemical weapons, but they eventually backed down. Instead, Russia and Iran intervened decisively on Assad's side and "turned the tide" in his favor".

The revolt started the same way other countries in the region did, by peaceful manners of demanding changes in the regime and their social, political and economic life conditions. Zuber & Moussa (2018) mention that "the escalation of the conflict followed after the security forces opened fire on demonstrators, killing many of them. Protesters

demanded President Assad's resignation. Both of the mentioned authors (Zuber & Moussa, 2018, p.248) agree that the use of force by the government to disperse the demonstrations only sharpened the determination of the protesters. Violence was escalating and the civil war broke out. The rebel brigades were formed to fight government forces and take control of large cities, towns and villages” (p. 248). In 2012, the battles took over the capital (Damascus) and the second largest city of Syria (Aleppo) (Zuber & Moussa, 2018, p. 248).

As Zuber & Moussa (2018) expose in their work, although Syria had also foreign intervention, in that case its large role only worsened the situation by escalating the conflict and prolonging the ongoing war. As posed in the thesis of Zuber & Moussa (2018), “Syria not only had to face the previous scenario, but also needed international support to fight against the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). In 2015, Russia joined the conflict and became an ally of the regime to fight against the rebel opposition and the Jihadist attacks from the Islamic State. The intervention of the United States was also on the same page of Russia, although further research and information will be explained in the following section of the investigation” (pp. 248-249).

Overall, Syria’s conflict was built over the same basis as Libya’s. Both cases had an autocracy regime which generated dissatisfaction, unfairness and unhappiness to their population, which led to a necessity of protesting against these poor life conditions. The revolts opened doors and windows for other social movements to intervene and participate in the conflict, except their purpose was to end the revolts by hostile and violent means. The above situation demanded international intervention which, instead of resolving the conflict, only worsened the situation as their own interests were also at stake.

In light of the above, the study case of Libya and Syria are both real demonstrations of the fact that the Arab Spring not only originated a meaningful turning point of power relations at the beginning of the uprisings, but also became, as Trujillo (2013) characterises, as the “breeding ground” of the rise of Jihadist attacks against Middle

Eastern and North African population (p.1). The Arab Spring emerged Islamists as newly serious actors in MENA region politics, and while Islamists in the past have always been an influential voice in Arab politics, the Arab Spring allowed them to move from the sidelines to the main stage (Zuber & Moussa, 2018, p. 249). Nonetheless, Libya and Syria are only two of the many countries of the MENA region that had the worst outcomes from the revolution, and although they are being used in this investigation as demonstrators of the hypothesis, there are other territories from the Middle East North African countries - such as Tunisia - that had completely different consequences and outputs from the revolts, to the same degree as the improvement of the living conditions of society, putting them closer to the democratic Western rules, while also maintaining an independent state.

## **9. Transnational Dimension: International Implications**

This section of the research discusses how the Arab Spring revolutions impacted on the International System, how world-scale actors intervened in the conflict and what was the aftermath of their responses.

To start with, and as mentioned in a previous section of this paper, the Arab Spring uprisings were the first mobilisations and revolutions that were deeply influenced and incentivised by the internet and mass media. Not only the Arab Spring took international actors by surprise, but also the intervention of the previously mentioned powerful sources put the Middle East and North Africa region in the international eye, as it was affected by new techniques generated from the globalization process which evolved to become a global conflict. Nonetheless, the implication of international actors are perceived as ambiguous, especially in the beginning of the uprisings, as they were in a position of unexpectedness and confusion.

According to a study of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (2013), the European Union and the United States played an active role in the initial months: President Obama (who ruled the US government back then) worked the phones and urged President Mubarak to step down, the EU issued a number of declarations with the

same purpose, and the EU's High Representative Catherine Ashton was quickly dispatched to Tunis and Cairo, after Ben Ali<sup>4</sup> and Mubarak fell, to declare the EU's support (Malmvig & Markus Lassen, 2013). The NATO-led military operation in Libya initiated in March 2011 was largely driven by individual EU Member States, while the United States chose to "lead from behind" (Helle Malmvig & Christina Markus Lassen, 2013).

On the economic perspective, the former actors took action too. Bearing that the United Nations frontlines and pillars are human rights, peace and security, and development, and the situation in the MENA region was coming from a population's necessity to become democratic states, there was a north-atlantic perspective obligation to provide aid to these countries (Negri, 2015, pp. 222-223). In light of the above, and as mentioned in an article of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (2013), "the EU granted emergency funds to Tunisia, as well as they also accelerated the on-going review of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). A series of international measures coming from the EU were also declared, such as a detailed range of different economic and technical measures to assist the countries in transition<sup>5</sup>. The Obama Administration in 2011 also presented its American course of action to the uprisings in the Middle East, which was mainly focused on economic development". Nevertheless, all those Western promises and potential economic aids to the region were never accomplished, as their diplomatic and political role was limited, leaving the Eastern citizens in even more disastrous conditions.

The southern Mediterranean region has always been a powerful territory where either the EU and the US have built strong ties with, mainly to benefit on the basis of their own interests (Negri, 2015, p. 224). From this perspective, and mentioning Negri's work (2015), "the European Union's operating assumption in its relations with the countries of the southern Mediterranean is that there are reciprocal relations between the security and stability of Europe and the situation in the region" (p. 224). According to the

---

<sup>4</sup> Tunisian politician who served as the 2nd president of Tunisia from 1987 to 2011.

<sup>5</sup> A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the southern Mediterranean.  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0200:FIN:en:PDF>

published work Guzansky & Heller (2012), referring to the Shimon Stein section, “the Arab awakening leaves the region in a transition period whose end is not in sight, a period that will include uncertainty about the direction of developments, which will increase instability and will be felt in Europe as well (2012, pp. 27-28).

On the other hand, from the United States perspective, and according to Oded Eran (2012) in the published article of Guzansky & Heller (2012), “the Arab Spring became a relativised issue by time, as America itself (along with the rest of the world), was coming out of a worldwide financial crisis that ended up putting the MENA conflict on second page. This global financial crisis made it hard for the Obama Administration to find and mobilize economic resources for the countries in democratic transition, along with other interest conflicts that were happening in the region (such as Palestina, the Muslim Brotherhood or Israel)” (p.23).

According to Zvi Magen (2012), also in Guzansky & Heller’s work (2012), “Russia, like everyone else, was caught unprepared by the revolution, in the course of which it lost important assets. Since then, it started working, in conditions of uncertainty, to minimize the damage and to adjust to the new situation. With regard to the previously mentioned author, from the start of the upheavals, Russia worked to adapt its policy in order to preserve its prior achievements and even benefit from the new situation. In this context, Russia cooperated with the international community and with the new regimes in the region while turning its back on collapsing authoritarian regimes” (p.29). Yet, this strong-minded actor found itself in a position where many of its interests with the territory were at stake, which demanded for a strategic change, but Russia still considered itself as a crucial player in the Middle Eastern affairs and kept working on its relations with the MENA region (Magen, 2012, p.31).

## 10. Conclusion

In the initial sections of this research, the perspective proposed as the common thread was the sociology of power. According to Izquierdo & Etherington (2017), a new regime of power, without any type of democratic control and increasingly oligarchic power has been transforming the world (p.11). The most important decisions, those that define our present and our future, are being taken by the global elites, which are composed by very few individuals, in their vast majority men, with the capacity to accumulate power and influence on a world-scale (Izquierdo & Etherington, 2017, p.11). The former theoretical framework that led this investigation suggested that only the population as a mass owns enough strength and capacity of social mobilization to confront the ruling of the previously mentioned elites (Izquierdo & Etherington, 2017, p.18), which is why this theoretical approach was ideal to the Arab Spring context, the analysis of the uprisings and its impact on jihadist terrorism.

As formerly seen during this paper, a set of factors that came from decades of authoritarian and oppressive regimes, generated common grievances among all countries of the Middle East and North Africa region, that ended up becoming the fuel of the highly debated and initially peaceful social mobilisations.

Thus, the uprisings were the consequence of several years of unhappiness and disastrous welfare that, even though they ended up becoming coercive and violent, the initial purpose of the mobilisations carried out by peaceful means was undeniably a turning point on power relations in the MENA region, as Tunisia was the first country to act on the demands from its civilians. Notwithstanding, the pro-democratic wave of mobilisations took not only the regional framework by surprise, but also the international dimension. This scenario of confusion for the elites also provoked a breach in the system, a political opportunity where other movements intervened, such as jihadism, to fight also for their own interests, as it's been analyzed in this research.

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 as previously seen in both Libya and Syria's case, the intervention of other powers only worsened the conflict. This is not the first time we've seen this political scenario, where international actors back up from taking action and intervene in a situation of conflict. An example of this contextualization could be Rwanda's genocide, where pluralists norms ruled over humanitarian concerns, and although there is no consensus that the MENA region suffered from genocide, it did suffer from a Civil War, provoked by not only Jihadist attacks, but also by rebel groups that also manifested against the situation, together with the military forces of the regimes in territories like Libya and Syria, which is why they have been the case study demonstrators of this thesis.

Overall, the former hypothesis was formed on the basis of the fact that the revolution of the Arab society during the Arab Spring provoked a political opportunity for other social movements, such as jihadism, to intervene and prevent the democratic transition in MENA's countries. Consequently, after all the research and information provided, this thesis approves the validity of its hypothesis, and finally concludes by saying that the intervention of the international community should have played a more proactive and solidarist role during the democratic transition in the MENA region during the uprisings, because even though it started off as a regional conflict, the consequences affect worldwide, as nowadays the system is not only based on globalization, but also on interdependence.



## 11. Bibliography & References

Alshantti, Osama. 2022. "Was the Arab Spring in Tunisia Successful?". *Spheres of Influence*. Available in:

<https://spheresofinfluence.ca/was-the-arab-spring-in-tunisia-successful/>

(Consulted 13 April 2022)

Amnistía Internacional. 2016. "The Arab Spring, five years later". Available in: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/campaigns/2016/01/arab-spring-five-years-on/>

(Consulted 7 May 2022)

Bárceñas Medina, Luís Andrés. 2013. *Primavera árabe, un laboratorio de geopolítica*. Estudios de política exterior. Available in:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=actors+internacionales+a+la+primavera+arab&rlz=1C5CHFAenES779ES781&oq=actors+internacionales+a+la+primavera+arab&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i160l2j33i21j33i22i29i30.9828j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

(Consulted 7 May 2022)

Blanco Navarro, José María. 2011. "Primavera Árabe: Protestas y revueltas. Análisis de factores". Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. Available in:

[https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2011/DIEEE052-2011Primaveraarabe.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2011/DIEEE052-2011Primaveraarabe.pdf)

(Consulted 7 May 2022)

Blitz, Daan. 2014. "The Arab Spring: A parsimonious explanation on recent contentious politics". Ph.D.diss. Radboud University Nijmegen. Available in:

[https://theses.uibn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/1120/Blitz%2C\\_Daan\\_1.pdf?sequence=1](https://theses.uibn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/1120/Blitz%2C_Daan_1.pdf?sequence=1)

(Consulted 12 April 2022)

Bustos García de Castro, Rafael. 2004. "The Arab Spring Changes under the Prism of International Relations Theory". *Chapter 2*. Available in:

<https://eprints.ucm.es/id/eprint/50623/1/The%20Arab%20Spring%20under%20International%20Relations%20Theory%20version%20manuscrita%20con%20autorizacion.pdf>

(Consulted 23 April 2022)

European Commission. High representative of the Union for foreign affairs and security policy. 2011. "A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the southern Mediterranean". Available in:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0200:FIN:en:PDF>

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

Espinosa, Javier & G. Prieto, Mónica. 2016. *Síria, el país de las almas rotas. De la Revolución al califato del ISIS*. Barcelona.

First Libyan Civil War. (2022). Inside *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*. Available in:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Libyan\\_Civil\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Libyan_Civil_War)  
(Consulted 11 May 2022)

GIGA focus Middle East. 2016. *The Arab Spring: Misconceptions and Prospects*. German Institute for Global and Area Studies. Available in:  
<https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/the-arab-spring-misconceptions-and-prospects>  
(Consulted 19 March 2022)

Goldstein, Eric. 2012. *The Arab Spring, the unseen Thaw*. Human Rights Watch. Available in:  
<https://www.hrw.org/node/259729>  
(Consulted 9 May 2022)

Guzansky, Y & Heller, M. 2012. *One Year of the Arab Spring: Global and Regional Implications*. The Institute for National Security Studies. Available in:  
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/%28FILE%291330868085.pdf>  
(Consulted 11 May 2022)

History.com Editors. 2018. *Arab Spring*. 2018. Available in:  
[https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/arab-spring#section\\_7](https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/arab-spring#section_7)  
(Consulted 6 March 2022)

Iffat, Idris. 2016. Helpdesk research report. *Analysis of the Arab Spring*. Applied Knowledge Services. Available in: <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/HDQ1350.pdf>  
(Consulted 6 March 2022)

Izquierdo, F & Etherington, J. 2017. *Poder Global, una mirada desde la sociología del poder*. Barcelona.

Kojoori-Saatchi, Autoosa Elizabeth. 2015. "The Arab Uprisings: An Assessment of the Roots and Implications of Contemporary Mobilization in the Arab World". Ph.D.diss. UNLV University Libraries. Available in:  
<https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3552&context=thesesdissertations>  
(Consulted 28 April 2022)

Libya revolt of 2011. (2022). Inside *Britannica Encyclopedia*. Available in:  
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Libya-Revolt-of-2011>  
(Consulted 11 May 2022)

Libyan crisis (2011-Present). 2022. Inside *Military Encyclopedia*. Available in:  
[https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Libyan\\_Crisis\\_\(2011%E2%80%93present\)](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Libyan_Crisis_(2011%E2%80%93present))  
(Consulted 11 May 2022)

Lieutenant Colonel El Hassane, Aissa. 2012. "The Arab Spring: Causes, Consequences, and Implications". Ph.D.diss. United States Army War College. Available in: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA560779.pdf>

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

Malving, Helle & Tassinari, Fabrizio. "The "Arab Spring" and the External Actor's Role within the Euro-Mediterranean Region". *Euromed Survey: Euro-Mediterranean policies in the light of the Arab Spring*. Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània. Available in: <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-arab-spring-and-the-external-actors-role-within-the-euro-mediterranean-region/?lang=ca>

(Consulted 7 May 2022)

Manfreda, Primoz. 2019. "10 Reasons for the Arab Spring: The Root Causes of the Arab Awakening in 2011". *ThoughtCo*. Available in: <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-reasons-for-the-arab-spring-2353041>

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

Martín de Pozuelo, Eduardo; Bordas, Jordi & Yitzhak, Eduard. 2015. *Objetivo: Califato Universal. Claves para comprender el Yihadismo*. Barcelona.

Naïr, Sami. 2013. *¿Por qué se rebelan? Revoluciones y contrarrevoluciones en el mundo árabe*. Madrid. Clave Intelectual S.L.

Negri, Stefania. 2015. *The Arab Spring and the involvement of external actors in democratization processes*. University of Salerno, Italy. Available in: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300523061\\_The\\_Arab\\_Spring\\_And\\_The\\_Involvement\\_Of\\_External\\_Actors\\_In\\_Democratization\\_Processes/link/570a8bf908aea6608137284c/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300523061_The_Arab_Spring_And_The_Involvement_Of_External_Actors_In_Democratization_Processes/link/570a8bf908aea6608137284c/download)

(Consulted 4 May 2022)

Omer Abdulsattar, Tammam. 2015. "A critical analysis of the Arab Spring: Case studies of Tunisia and Egypt". Ph.D.diss. Middle East Technical University, Northern Cyprus Campus. Available in:

<http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12619524/index.pdf>

(Consulted 28 April 2022)

Robinson, Kali and Merrow, Will. 2020. *The Arab Spring at Ten Years: What's the Legacy of the Uprisings?*. Council on foreign relations. Available in: <https://www.cfr.org/article/arab-spring-ten-years-whats-legacy-uprisings>

(Consulted 6 March 2022)

Safi, Michael; Voce, Antonio; Hulley-Jones, Frank and McMullan, Lydia. 2021. "How the Arab spring engulfed the Middle East and changed the world". *The Guardian*. Available in:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2021/jan/25/how-the-arab-spring-unfolded-a-visualisation>

(Consulted 23 April 2022)

Tahar Chaouch, Malik. 2012. *A propósito de Libia, la primavera árabe y otras rebeliones del mundo. Estado y sociedad*. Available in: <https://cdigital.uv.mx/bitstream/handle/123456789/33468/192012-pag-36-42.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

TEDTalks. Dalia Mogahed. 2012. "The attitudes that sparked the Arab Spring". [Video]. Available in:

<https://youtu.be/RG5QP2EVUVY>

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

The World Bank. 2015 "World Bank. Economic Indicators Failed to Predict Arab Uprisings". Available in:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/10/21/economic-indicators-failed-to-predict-arab-uprisings>

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

Trujillo Fernández, Francisco. 2013. "La primavera árabe: caldo de cultivo para el yihadismo". Ph.D.diss. Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. Available in: [https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_marco/2013/DIEEEM08-2013\\_PrimaverasArabesYihadismo\\_F.Trujillo.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_marco/2013/DIEEEM08-2013_PrimaverasArabesYihadismo_F.Trujillo.pdf)

(Consulted 23 April 2022)

Wehrey, Frederic. (2020). 'Our Hearts Are Dead.' After 9 Years of Civil War, Libyans Are Tired of Being Pawns in a Geopolitical Game of Chess. *Time Magazine*. Available in:

<https://time.com/5779348/war-libya-global-conflict/>

(Consulted 11 May 2022)

World Bank Group. Open Knowledge Repository. 2011. "World development indicators". Available in: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2315>

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

ŻUBER, Marian & Sahel MOUSSA, Samuel. 2018. "Arab Spring as Background of Civil War in Syria". Ph.D.diss. Military University of Land Forces, Wrocław, Poland. Available in: [file:///Users/Julia/Downloads/Arab\\_Spring\\_as\\_a\\_Background\\_of\\_Civil\\_War\\_in\\_Syria.pdf](file:///Users/Julia/Downloads/Arab_Spring_as_a_Background_of_Civil_War_in_Syria.pdf)

(Consulted 9 May 2022)

