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## **The failure of the Arab Spring and the growth of extremism in the Arab World**

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### **Abstract**

The roots of extremist movements in the Arab World must be found in the political and social circumstances of Arab countries over a long period of time, such as the sense of humiliation, failure and insecurity, which have led to the radicalization of some sections of Sunni Arab society. In this study, one of these factors is selected, and it is explored whether there is a relationship between the expansion of politico-religious extremism, and particularly the growth of the ISIS presence and activities, on the one hand, and the failure of the Arab Spring, on the other. Hence, the independent variable is the fate of Arab revolutions of 2011 to 2013, and the dependent variable is the extent of ISIS terrorist activities, before and after the Arab Spring. The study shows that there is a significant relationship between the downfall of the Arab Spring and the surge in ISIS power and activities and the influx of young Arabs towards it.

**Keywords:** Arab Spring, ISIS, extremism, terrorism, the Middle East

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## 1. Introduction

Since June 10, 2014, when a Sunni militant group stormed Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has become a significant non-state military and political player in Middle Eastern conflicts and around the world. In the last two years, ISIS has not only controlled a vast swath of land in Iraq and Syria, but has also accepted the responsibility for large scale explosions in Europe and the United States. Hence, there have been many questions regarding the nature, aims, internal organization and its foreign supporters. Among such questions, the most important one is probably about the origins of the group, for which a variety of answers have been put forward, ranging from the cultural and religious roots to socio-political causes and finally, foreign states involvements and conspiracy theories.

In this paper, one of the above-mentioned factors is selected, and it is attempted to see whether a link can be established between that factor and the expansion of politico-religious extremism, and in particular, ISIS. The factor considered in this paper is the failure of Arab uprisings, a peaceful popular movement between 2011 and 2013 that aimed at the overthrow of the old-aged Arab tyrannical regimes and the establishment of democratic governments. As a consequence of this movement, referred to as the Arab Spring, four Arab governments (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen) were toppled, three (Bahrain, Jordan and to some extent Saudi Arabia) faced serious internal difficulties, and two (Syria and Libya) plunged into a civil war. However, the final result in most cases, with the exception of Tunisia, to some extent, was the failure of the uprisings, whether in the form of a return to *the ancient regime* with even harsher constraints on rights and freedoms (like in Egypt), reinforcement of pre-uprising circumstances or total chaos and civil war.

This paper does not aim at a comprehensive study of the emergence and expansion of politico-religious extremism in the Arab world or a study of the Arab uprisings from 2011 to 2013, but has the more modest purpose of exploring whether there has been any relationship between the expansion of extremism, and in particular ISIS, and the Arab Spring. The important question is to what extent the success of peaceful reformist movements aiming at the establishment of democratic political systems congruent with cultural requirements of these societies could have prevented extremism. In this paper, it is argued that the failure of Arab uprisings, i.e., the Arab Spring, was

one of the main factors leading to a surge in political extremism in the Arab world which attracted Arab youth.

For this purpose, first the outcome of the Arab Spring in the countries involved is discussed separately, and then, it is explored whether there has been a link between such outcomes and the extent of terrorist attacks in that country. In the next section, such a link is investigated in the Middle East and North Africa region, taken as a whole. In each case, the numbers of terrorist incidents before and after the failure of the uprising are compared.

## **2. Research Method**

In this research, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has been exploited. To answer the research question, it must be established that there is a relationship between the failure of the Arab Spring and the surge in ISIS' power. The independent variable is "the outcome of the Arab uprisings from 2011 to 2013". The variable can have four levels: "victory of the uprising and the establishment of new regime", "the abatement of the revolutionary movement", "the collapse of the revolutionary regime", and "the transformation of the uprising into a civil war". Such variations are qualitative and attributed to each individual country per events from 2011 to 2014.

The dependent variable is "the extent of ISIS' power", which can be determined by "the number of terrorist incidents", before and after the Arab Spring. The data for the number of terrorist incidents were collected from "Global Terrorism Database-GTD" of Maryland University (START, 2018), which covers terrorist incidents going back to 1970, with considerable details (see LaFree, 2010).

Therefore, if a link between the rise in the number of terrorist incidents, and the failure of the Arab uprisings from 2011 to 2013 is established, and the latter followed the former, it can be argued that there could be a causal relationship between the two variables. This is not to deny that several other factors are also involved, which are not considered in this paper, as it is limited to exploring the relation between the two aforementioned variables.

## **3. The Outcomes of the Arab Spring in Various Countries and Their Relation to the Number of Terrorist Incidents**

The Arab revolutions of 2011 to 2013 magnificently and speedily triumphed (Aras and Falk, 2016, pp. 2252-2253), but very soon they faced challenges

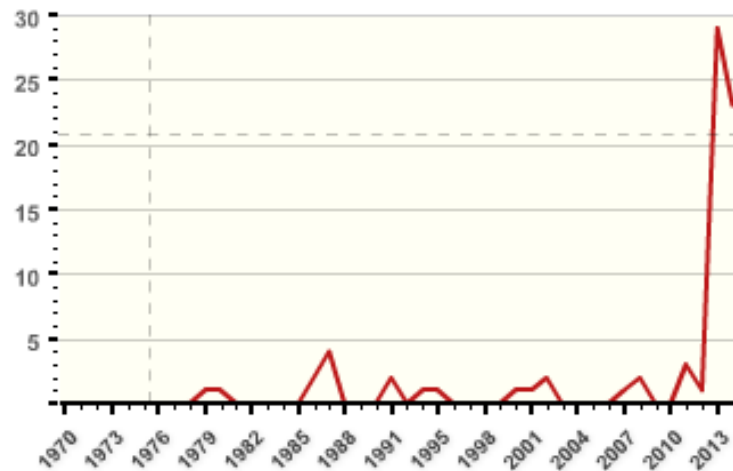
that led to their failure one after another. The post-revolutionary situation in most cases was much worse than before (Falk, 2016, p. 2331). In the following section, the process of occurrence and spread of uprisings are investigated on a country to country basis.

### **3.1. Tunisia**

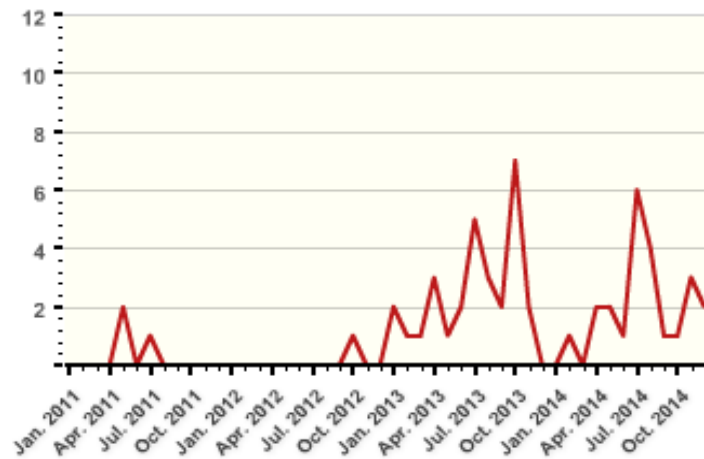
Tunisia was the starting point of the Arab Spring. It was there that Mohamed Bouazizi, a vegetable vendor, set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, and less than a month later, Ben Ali's regime was toppled, on January 14, 2011. In the elections for the Constituent Assembly, on October 23, 2011, the Ennahda Party, a moderate Islamic party banned under Ben Ali and Bourguiba, won 41% of the votes, gaining 90 of 217 seats. The coalition of the Ennahda and secular parties opposing the former regime brought to power Mohamed Moncef Marzouki of the Congress for the Republic and Hamadi Jebali of the Ennahda as respectively the president and prime minister, in December 2011 (Khosrokhavar, 2012, chapter 2).

After street protests provoked by some political assassinations and economic instabilities, Ali Laarayedh of the Ennahda on March 14, 2013 was appointed as prime minister to be replaced by Mehdi Jomaa, who had no partisan affiliation, on January 29, 2014. In the parliamentary elections of October 2014 and presidential elections of December 2014, the secular Nidaa party comprising officials of the former regime came to power, Beji Caid Essebsi as president and Habib Essid as prime minister. The latter was replaced by Youssef Chahed in 2016.

It can be argued that in Tunisia, and only in Tunisia, the Arab Spring was relatively successful, despite the fact that figures affiliated to the old regime have returned to power. This is because their return was carried out through a democratic process and under a new party name, with slogans in line with the 2011 revolution (Falk, 2016, p. 2322). It may be for this reason that, with the exception of individual acts of terror, such as the assassination of political activists by unknown extremist groups, the Bardo Museum attack of March 18, 2015 and the Sousse attack of June 26, 2015, there has not been a significant extremist movement such as ISIS operating inside the country. Although the number of terrorist incidents sharply increased since the mid 2011 up to 2012 and 2014, such a rise in general, and compared to other states involved in failed uprisings, was not significant.



**Graph 1.** The number of terrorist incidents in Tunisia between 1970 and 2014 (START)



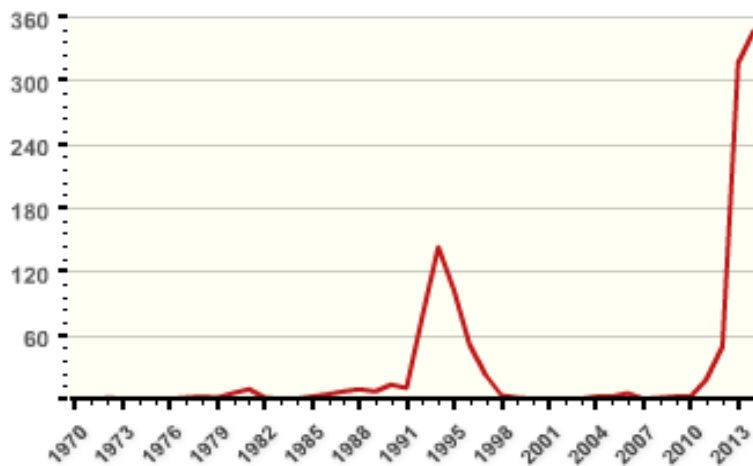
**Graph 2.** The number of terrorist incidents in Tunisia between 2011 and 2014 (START)

### 3.2. Egypt

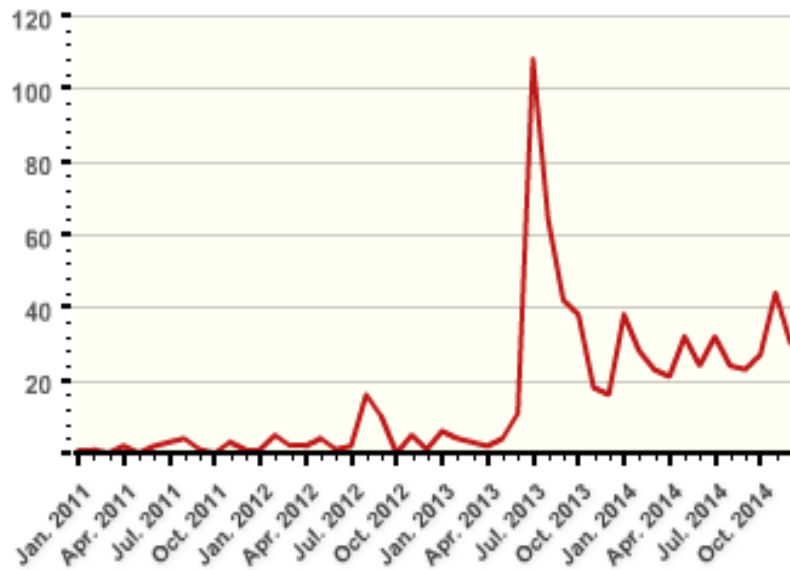
The Arab Spring echoed in Egypt more than any other Arab country. Only eighteen days after the start of mass demonstration on January 25, 2011, Hosni Mubarak resigned on February 11, 2011 and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) replaced him (Khosrokhavar, 2012, chapter 3).

Due to the persistence of demonstrations and strikes, the Council was several times forced to change the cabinet. The Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated group won various elections for the constitutional assembly and parliament, and their candidate, Mohamed Morsi, was elected as president in June 2012. However, the challenge among various groups, and particularly secular and Islamists politicians, continued in the country. Meanwhile Salafi forces organized and grew their power throughout the country, as attacks on the Copts and Coptic churches and other minorities were on the rise.

The tension between secular political groups and Morsi's government intensified in June 2013, when mass protests swept the country once more, leading to Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's military coup on July 3, 2013 (Falk, 2016, p. 2326). Morsi was deposed from office and sent to jail. Al-Sisi's coup should be considered as the turning point in the Arab Spring history. The coup d'état not only suppressed the peaceful revolution in Egypt, but also was a fatal blow to the Arab Spring at large, bringing it to a halt throughout the Arab world. It was after Morsi's overthrow that an erstwhile small militant movement in the Sinai grew into a large-scale rebellion engaged in daily combat actions. On November 10, 2014, the group Ansar Bait al-Maqdis pledged allegiance to ISIS, calling itself the Sinai province (vilayat) branch of the ISIS caliphate. The following line graphs show the number of terrorist incidents in Egypt between 1970 and 2014, and it can be seen that there was an increase in their number after July 2013.



**Graph 3.** The number of terrorist incidents in Egypt between 1970 and 2014 (START)



**Graph 4.** The number of terrorist incidents in Egypt between 2011 and 2014 (START)

### 3.3. Libya

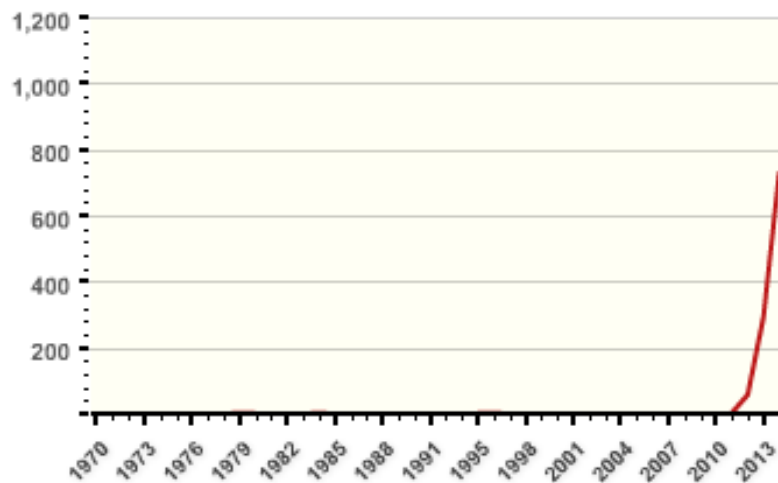
The Arab Spring spread to Libya on February 16, 2011, which faced Gaddafi's heavy-handed reaction towards the protests, and brought about a full-scaled struggle leading to foreign intervention in the form of NATO's bombing of government forces in Tripoli (Sadiki, 2012, pp. 298-299). In August 21, 2011, opposition forces captured the capital, Tripoli, and killed Gaddafi in October 20, 2011 (Arab Spring: Libya's Timeline of Conflict, 2011).

Nevertheless, the victorious forces could not reach a consensus among themselves, and a period of rivalry among them began, causing political instability, as power changed hands among various groups.

In 2014, the country plunged into a new phase of internal conflicts. In February, General Khalifa Haftar, a former dissident army General in the Gaddafi army, staged a military coup, which was not completely successful. In May 2014, he began a military campaign to dislocate Islamist groups that controlled the government and the congress in Tripoli and Benghazi. In June of the same year, parliamentary elections were held, in which only 18 per-

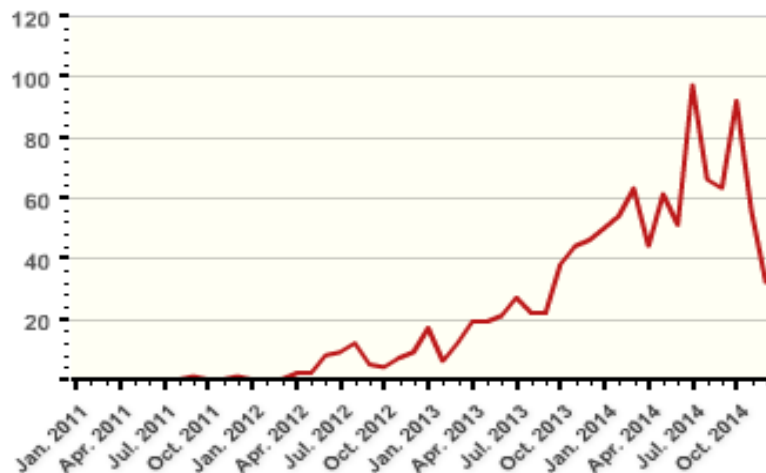
cent of the eligible people voted. The Islamist parties including the Muslim Brotherhood, which lost the election, took the control of Tripoli in July and replace the government. As a result, the government supported by Haftar was relocated to Tabrook. This was the end of the Arab Spring in Libya. Therefore, the outcome of uprisings in Libya was a civil war that has divided the country. In November 13, 2014, the Libyan branch of ISIS announced its existence and pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. ISIS later announced that the Libyan part of the caliphate has formed three Velayats in Libya, namely, Tripoli (the capital), Fezzan (the southern Sahara) and Barqah (in the east).

The following line graphs show the number of terrorist incidents in Libya between 1970 and 2014. While before 2011 no terrorist act was reported, such incidents began with Gaddafi's resistance to popular protests in August and September 2011 and ended with his fall. However, due to lack of a stable and legitimate government, political tension rose in the country once again. Following uprising in the city Bani Walid in January 2012, terrorist actions gradually spread throughout the country. With the beginning of the second civil war in mid-2014 and particularly June, which was a definite end to the Arab Spring in Libya, the number of terrorist incidents reached its peak, and finally led to the creation of the Libyan branch of ISIS.



**Graph 5.** The number of terrorist incidents in Libya between 1970 and 2014 (START)





**Graph 6.** the number of terrorist incidents in Libya between 2011 and 2014 (START)

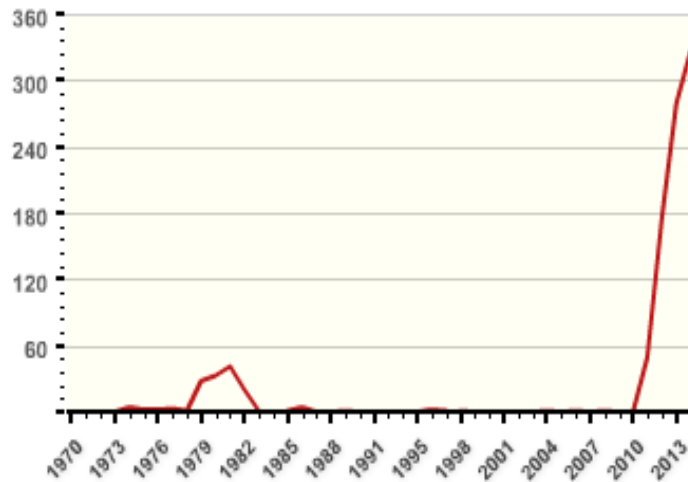
### 3.4. Syria

Protests began in Syria on March 19, 2011 in the southern city of Deraa and then spread to other cities (Falk, 2016, p. 2327). Initially, Bashar al-Assad tried to make minor concessions and freed some political prisoners, lifted 48-year long emergency law, and replaced the cabinet. However, such concessions did not have any impact on the expanding protests. In May 2011, the army confronted protesters in Daraa, Homs, Baniyas and Damascus' suburbs (Syria profile–Timeline, 2015). The confrontations became more violent to the extent that in June 2011, the government announced that 120 members of the military were killed by “armed bands” in Jisr Al Shoughor, and besieged the city. As a consequence, more than 10000 people of the city's population fled to Turkey. Assad called for “national dialogue”. In October, his opponents formed a new council comprising exiled and internal opposition groups. In November, Syria's membership in the Arab League was suspended, because of what was called the regime's non-compliance with the peace process. Suicide attacks against government targets began in December 2011 (Syria profile – Timeline, 2015). By then the Arab Spring turned into a fall in Syria.

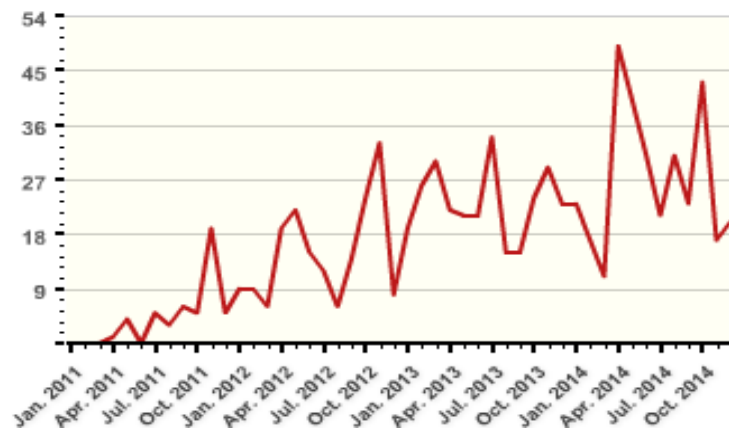
In January 2012, Al-Nusra Front as was first formed as the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, and later as that of the Islamic State in Iraq, which itself had been established as the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda in 2004 under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In February 2012, the organization of the

Islamic State in Iraq declared the sectarian war against the Shi'a all over the Middle East. In September and December of the same year, respectively the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front and the Syrian Islamic Front were established (Blanchard et al., 2015, p. 6). In June, the UN authorities for the first time used the term "civil war" to describe the situation in Syria (Beck, 2015). After March 2013, the Islamic State in Iraq gradually became involved in the Syrian conflict, and in April 2013, the formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was announced. Despite the call by the Al Qaeda leader, Ayman al Zawahiri, to leave operation in Syria to Al-Nusra, ISIS remained there (Blanchard et al., 2015, p. 6) to the extent that it became the most powerful opposition force in the country. The conflict has continued ever since, as it was reported by the UN in August 2015, that 240,381 people, of whom 71,781 were civilians and 11,964 were children, were killed in the Syrian civil war ('Syrian conflict' has killed quarter of a million people, 2015). British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has recently announced that a least 511,000 people had been killed in Syria war since March 2011 (Specia, 2018).

The following line graphs show the number of terrorist incidents in Syria between 1970 and 2014. The graphs indicate that terrorist acts started in March 2011 to be intensified in June and November, and escalated afterward. October 2012 and July 2013 (when Al-Sisi staged his coup in Egypt) are two dates when the number of the incidences increased sharply.



**Graph 7.** the number of terrorist incidents in Syria between 1970 and 2014 (START)



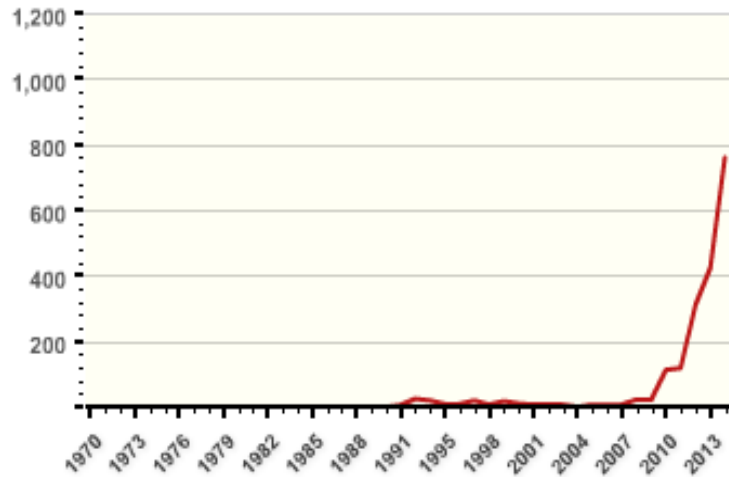
**Graph 8.** The number of terrorist incidents in Syria between 2011 and 2014 (START)

### 3.5. Yemen

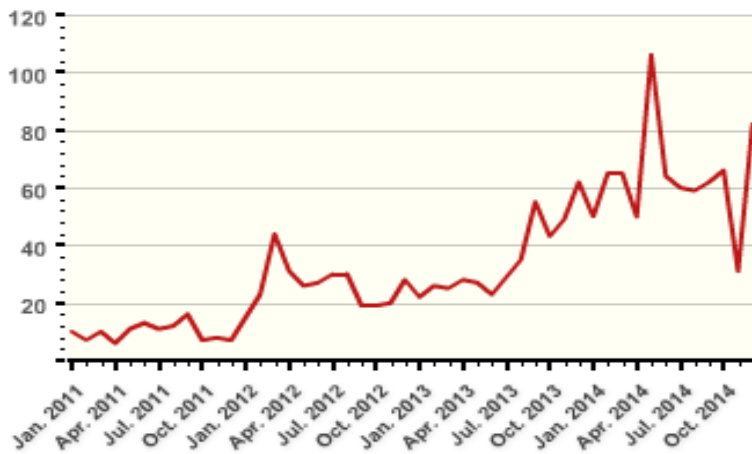
Yemen is one of those countries that was heavily affected by the Arab Spring. Ali Abdullah Saleh's long and ineffective dictatorship caused Yemenis to welcome the Arab Spring in January 2011. His struggle to keep his grip on power caused a long period of conflict and violence, leading to his resignation and departure on February 27, 2012, after mediation by the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council. Based on a compromise deal between Saleh and the revolutionary forces, his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, came to power, but his weak and incompetent government was not able to enforce its authority over rival groups competing for influence, plunging the country in a civil war. On September 18, 2014, Sana'a, the capital, was captured by the Houthis, who later seized Aden, triggering the intervention of the Arab Coalition led by Saudi Arabia in February 2014 (Falk, 2016, p. 2330). This was the undisputed end of the Arab Spring in Yemen.

Since 1990, when the two parts of Yemen were united, the country has not been free from violence and terrorist actions. Yemeni Al-Qaeda, known as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was founded in 2000, and claimed responsibility for attacks on American targets, including the one on the USS Cole on October 12, 2000. In January 2010, a year before the Arab Spring, the Yemeni government declared war on al-Qaeda, which later, in the turbulence caused by Arab uprisings, used the opportunity to take some marginal areas under its control. The rise in the number of terrorist incidents after 2011 up to the end of Saleh's rule was due to this factor. Al-Qaeda's attacks

continued after Saleh, but with the beginning of the civil war, al-Qaeda waged a war against the Houthis. As can be seen in the below line graphs, with the beginning of the civil war and the disappearance of the last signs of the Arab Spring, the number of terrorist incidents in the country rose to a new high, in the mid 2014. Since the late 2014, ISIS joined the conflict in Yemen, attacking both parties to the dispute, as in March 2015 it bombed a Houthi mosque in Sana'a and later attacked targets in Adan, controlled by Mansour Hadi's forces.



**Graph 9.** The number of terrorist incidents in Yemen between 1970 and 2014 (START)



**Graph 10.** The number of terrorist incidents in Yemen between 2011 and 2014 (START)

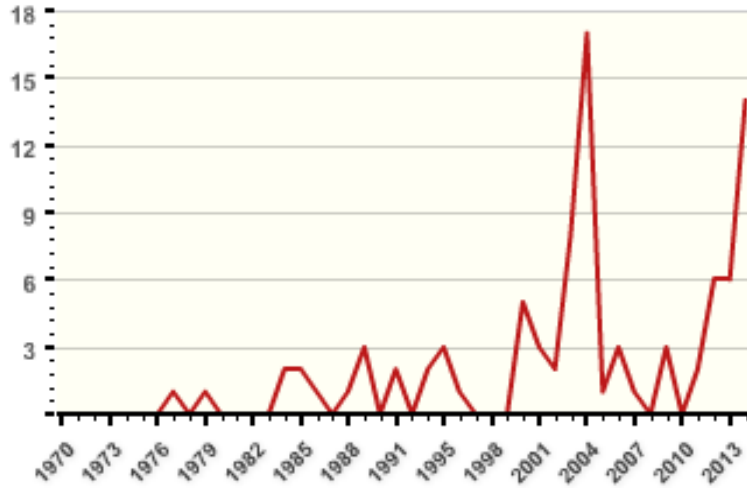
In the five above-mentioned countries, the tides of the Arab Spring uprisings were stronger than in other Arab states. Except for its relative success in Tunisia, in the other four countries the mass movement either was stopped and retreated or led to a situation worse than before, such as the civil war in Libya, Syria and Yemen. As the statistics show, there is a strong relationship between the failure of the uprisings and the rise in the number of terrorist incidents in these countries. In the countries less involved in the Arab Spring (or where the uprising did not go far, due to financial incentives granted to the population by the rentier governments), the number of terrorist incidents rose, but to a lesser extent. In the following section, the relation between uprisings and the number of terrorist incidents in the latter group is discussed. Before that, however, we should remember three important dates: July 2013 (the coup in Egypt and the overthrow of Morsi's government), October 2012 (the beginning of the civil war in Syria) and July 2014 (the intensification of civil war in Libya and the division of the country into the conflicting groups' turfs). The time sequence between the failure of the Arab uprisings and the expansion of terrorist acts committed by extremist politico-religious groups, and more specifically ISIS, are to be found, while keeping these three dates in mind.

### **3.6. Saudi Arabia**

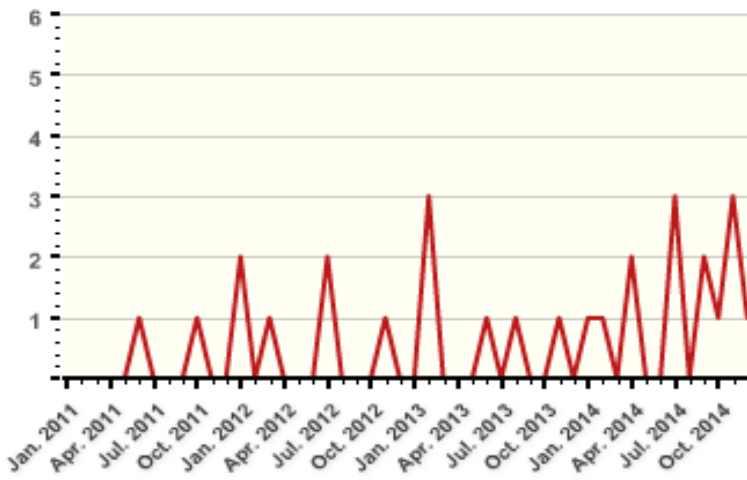
The Arab Spring spilled over into Saudi Arabia to a limited extent, and by the end of January 2012, protests began in both Sunni and Shi'ite areas. However, the government's minor reforms and financial assistance packages for various social groups, and particularly the Shia/Sunni divide that caused not only a lack of coordination, but also mistrust, between the two communities, led to the dwindling of the uprising without any significant achievement.

Limited street protests by the Shi'a, however, continued until 2014. On May 22, 2015, ISIS claimed responsibility for a suicide attack at a Shi'ite mosque in Qatif, and on July 18 the same year, Saudi authorities announced that 431 suspects were arrested on the charge of being ISIS members, who were planning to attack mosques and other places in the country. On September 26, two brothers who claimed to be ISIS members were killed in clash with the police.

The following line graphs indicate that the number of terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia hit its peak in 2004, and rose again after 2012 and particularly by 2013. Nevertheless, the total number of such incidents is not high, compared to those of the countries discussed above.



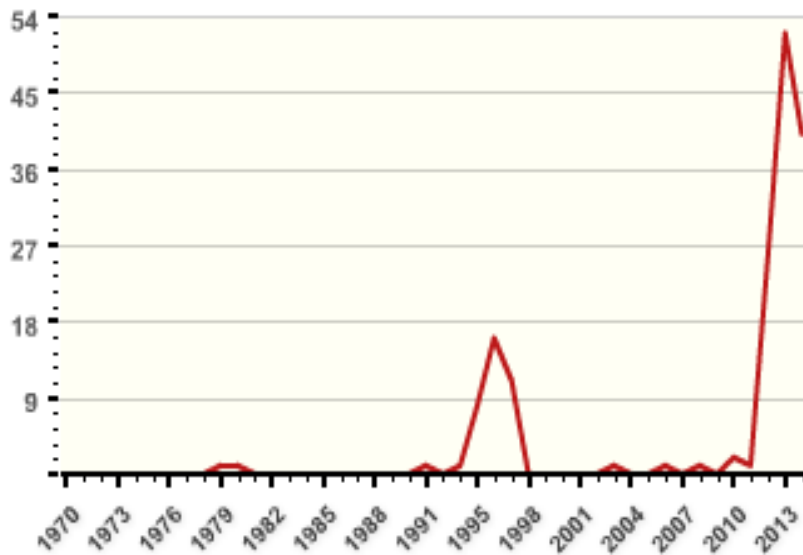
**Graph 11.** The number of terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia between 1970 and 2014 (START)



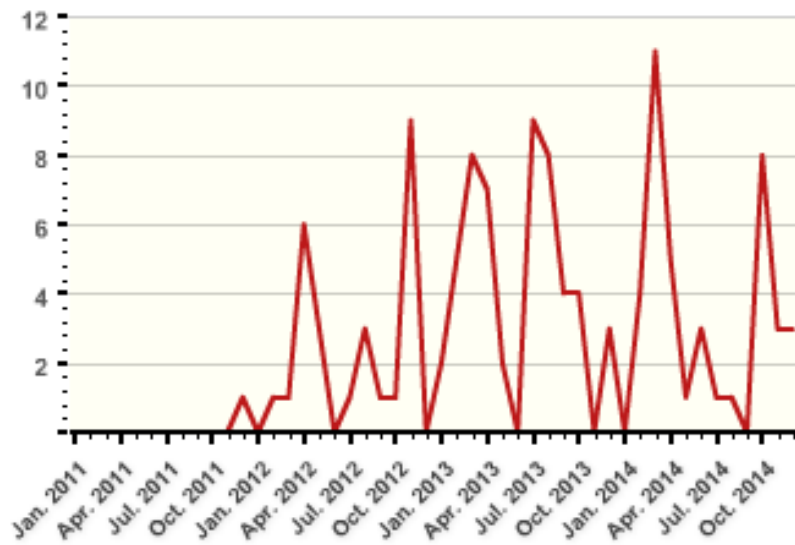
**Graph 12.** the number of terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia between 2011 and 2014 (START)

### 3.7. Bahrain

Mass protests inspired by the Arab Spring began in February 2011, in Bahrain. The Shi'a who were subject to long-standing social and political discriminations spearheaded the demonstrations (Narbone & Lestra, 2015, pp. 33-35). Suppressing the protests led to the death of 30 people. The Al Khalifa government did not show any flexibility to accept the protestors' demands and did not make any concession. On March 14, 2011, 1,500 troops of Peninsula Shield Force from Saudi Arabia and UAE entered Bahrain and crushed the uprising, while martial law and a state of emergency was declared in the country (Arab Spring: A Research & Study Guide, 2015). This was the first case of using foreign troops for crushing Arab Spring inspired uprisings. Hence, in Bahrain, the Arab Spring soon ended up in a failure. Nevertheless, Shi'ite protests have continued until now in limited scale. Following line graphs show that violent incidents in the country have risen since mid 2011, though to a relatively small extent.



**Graph 13.** The number of terrorist incidents in Bahrain between 1970 and 2014 (START)



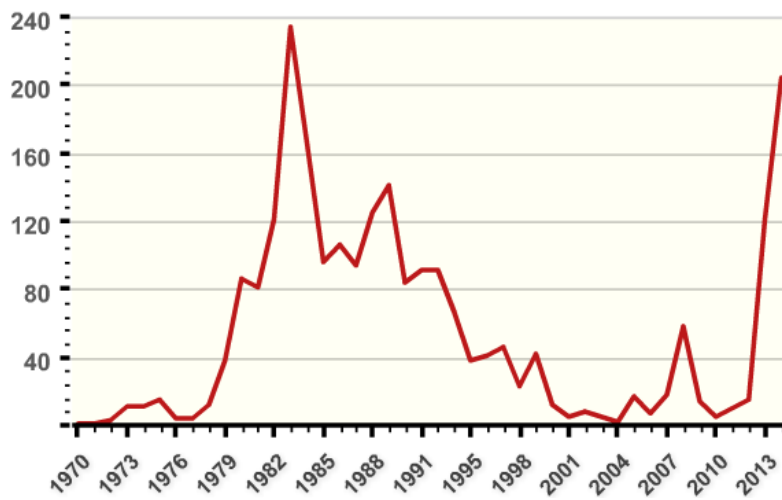
**Graph 14.** The number of terrorist incidents in Bahrain between 2011 and 2014 (START)

### 3.8. Lebanon

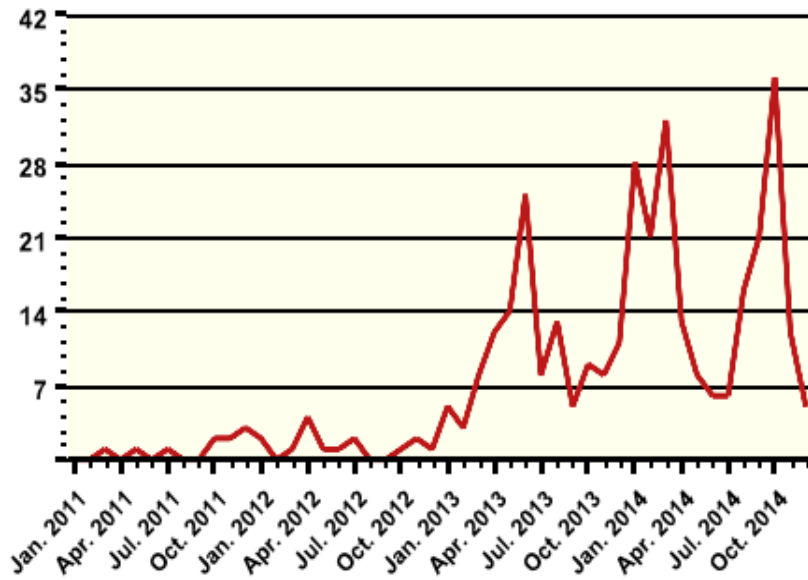
The Arab Spring unfolded in Lebanon in the form of a string of mass protests, during which protestors camped in Beirut’s large squares. However, as the country, unlike Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, was not suffering from a long-standing dictatorship, the protests did not have significant outcomes and a decade old rivalry between two blocks of “March 14” led by Saad al-Hariri and “March 8” spearheaded by Hezbollah continued. On June 13, 2011, Najib Mikati of the latter block replaced Hariri, and on April 6, 2013 he was substituted with Tamam Salam of the former block. Such alterations were mainly caused by a change in power balance between the two blocks and their allies, rather than by the Arab Spring.

As seen in the following line graphs, Lebanon was suffering from terrorism long before 2011 and mainly during the civil war of the 1970s to 1990. However, taking into consideration the three dates of October 2012, July 2013 and July 2014, we can see that the number of terrorist activities after the failure of the Arab Spring rose significantly. Although the wave of the Arab Spring did not have serious impacts on the internal politics in the country, terrorism spilled over to the country from neighboring Syria.





Graph 15. The number of terrorist incidents in Lebanon between 1970 and 2014 (START)



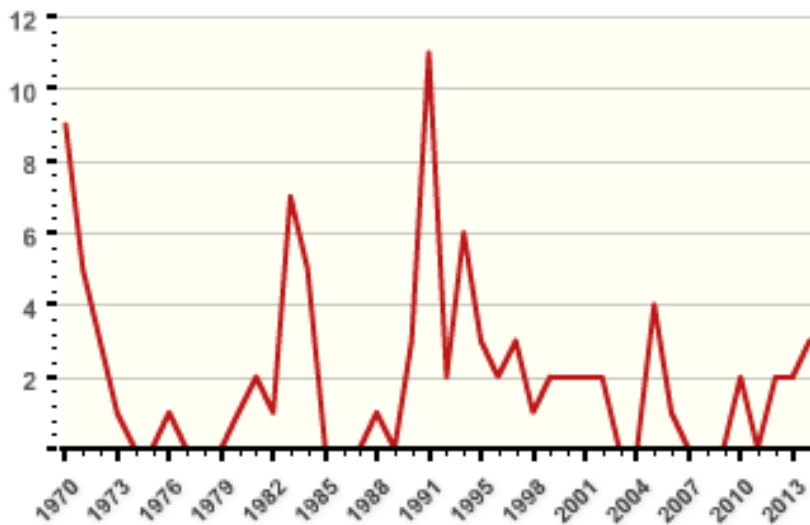
Graph 16. The number of terrorist incidents in Syria between 2011 and 2014 (START)

### 3.9. Jordan

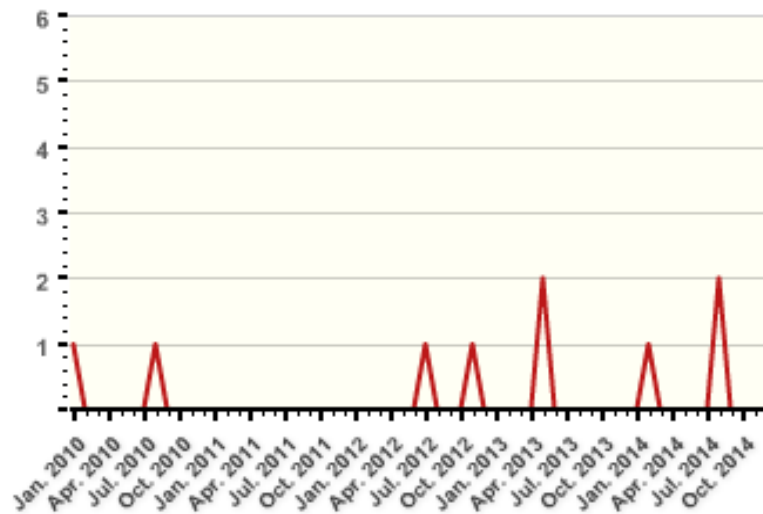
Jordan was one of the first countries to be affected by the Arab Spring as mass protests began on January 14, 2011. However, King Abdullah II of Jordan controlled the situation through a string of political actions (Falk, 2016, p. 2330). During the Arab Spring period, he changed the country's prime minister four times in February 2011, October 2011, April 2012 and October 2012. He also made some minor reforms in the constitution in August 2011, and with the help of Western countries as well as Wealthy Arab states, gave some financial concessions to the population. These measures allowed him to buy enough time to pass the tide of the Arab Spring, and consolidated his grip on power.

Protests faded away in early 2012 to restart in September and November with the same demands and slogans, but King Abdullah II and the government of Abdullah Ensour who came to power in October 2012, did not let the situation get out of control. This was the end of the Arab Spring in Jordan; and it was probably influenced by the occurrence of the disastrous civil war in Syria.

As the following line graphs show, in the last decades, there has always been a level of terrorist activities in Jordan, probably because it has been one of main battle grounds for Palestinians to fight for their cause; and the failure of success of the Arab Spring did not have a significant impact on it.



**Graph 17.** The number of terrorist incidents in Jordan between 1970 and 2014 (START)



**Graph 18.** the number of terrorist incidents in Jordan between 2011 and 2014 (START)

### 3.10. Kuwait, Morocco, Oman and Algeria

The situation in Kuwait, Morocco, Oman and Algeria was similar to that of Jordan. After mass demonstrations inspired by the Arab Spring, governments in the above countries made minor concessions in the form of financial assistance packages and superficial reforms that put an end to the protests, in November 2012 in Morocco (Hochman Rand, 2013, p. 2) and in July 2013 in Kuwait. In the early 2011, the waves of the Arab Spring surprisingly reached Oman, a country that after the Dhofar rebellion in January 1976, had not experience any serious political disturbance, and was rated 56 in the Global Peace Index. However, mass protests did not go beyond the end of May 2011, after reshuffling of the cabinet and limited changes of officials and the promise of more job and public benefits. Financial help by GCC countries was crucial (Narbone & Lestra, 2015, p. 39).

In Algeria, the protests began in the last days of 2011 and continued until the end of the next year. However, no significant political change happened, except for lifting the state of emergency rule. The Arab Spring did not have much political impact on that country, perhaps because of the 1990s' suppressions that followed the coup occurring after the victory of moderate Islamic groups, under the banner of the Islamic Salvation Front in parliamentary elections of 1991. The widespread rebellion and government oppression

in that period did not leave any enthusiasm and strength in the society for another confrontation with the government.

The number of terrorist incidents in these four countries, too, does not indicate any relationship with the fate of the Arab Spring.

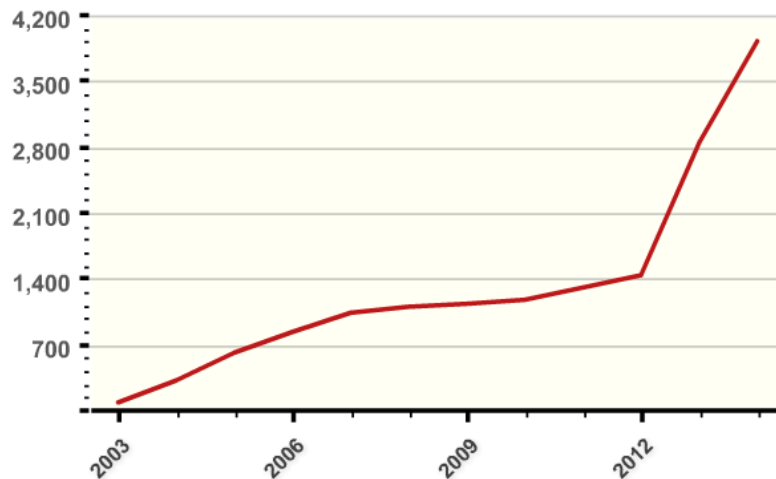
### **3.11. Iraq**

In this study, Iraq is of salience, since although it was not one of the main spots of the Arab Spring, but terrorism caused by the failure of the Arab Spring in other countries was most reflected in that country.

In February 2011, the Arab Spring reached Iraq, and mass protests began in Baghdad, Karbala, Kut and some cities in Kurdistan. Protesters mainly regarded the lack or deficiency in providing security and public services such as electricity and water as well as corruption as their grievances. These issues affected all the ethnic and religious communities, such as the Shi'a, Sunni and Kurds, in the country. However, the situation in Iraq was different from those of other countries where long-standing dictatorships were the target of the revolutionaries. The Iraqi government had come to power through a democratic process, and the continuation of the protests could have deteriorated security much more than before. More importantly, what was happening in Bahrain and the intervention of Saudi forces in the country had a negative impact on the public opinion among the Iraqi Shi'ite. Hence, the protests in Shi'ite majority cities ended, but in the marginal areas where the Sunnis were dominant continued.

By December 2012, Sunni protesters in Ramadi and Fallujah followed the pattern of other protestors in the process of the Arab Spring, and established camps in these two cities. Nouri al-Maliki's disinterest in addressing the protestors' demands created a sense of marginalization among the Sunni community. In December 30, 2013, the al-Maliki government's attempt to remove the camps triggered a revolt in these two cities that led to the expulsion of the police and the army from parts of the city (Zurcher, 2014). ISIS and Sunni tribal forces filled the vacuum. The government's inability to resolve the problem and to reinstate its authority in the two cities emboldened these forces to the extent that they finally captured Iraq's northern cities, from Mosel to Tikrit and northern suburbs of Samarra in June 2014 (Morris and Salim, 2015). Later on, in June 29, 2014, ISIS declared the establishment of its Islamic State, and Abu Bakr Baghdadi as its caliph.

The following line graphs indicate that the number of terrorist incidents in Iraq between 2003 (when the US invaded Iraq) and 2012 was very high (more than 1000 incidents in a year), and gradually rising. However, after December 2012 (a month after the beginning of the civil war in Syria), it started an escalating move upward and rose sharply after August 2013 (a month after al-Sisi's coup in Egypt). If we put these statistics alongside the number of people joining ISIS from Arab countries, it can show that resentments caused by the failure of the Arab Spring found a fertile ground in Iraq, a country without a powerful central government and ridden with famous and powerful terrorist groups, to flourish and expand. Religious and ethnic tensions in the country had ramifications more than those of the Arab Spring. However, the failure of the Arab Spring intensified the long lasting conflict in the country, and brought about a new era in which ISIS played the most important role.

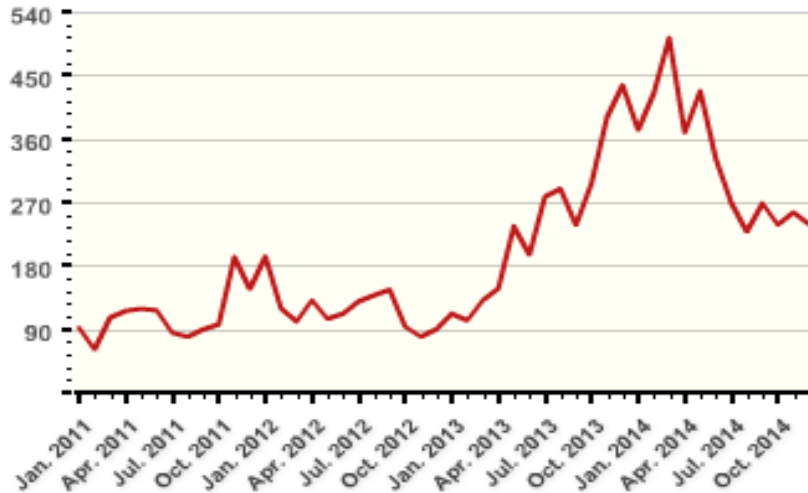


**Graph 19.** The number of terrorist incidents in Iraq between 2003 and 2014 (START)

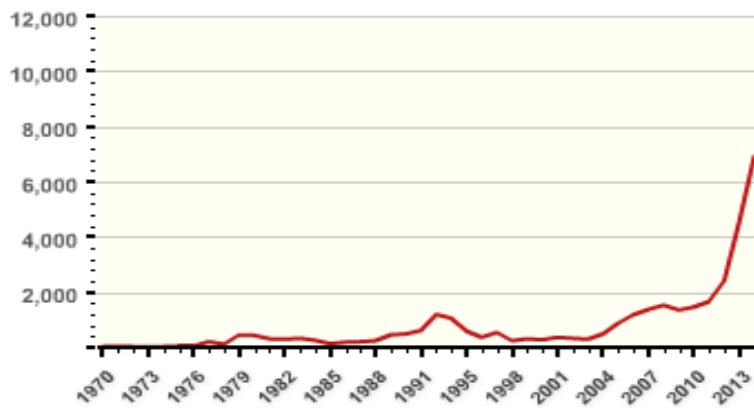
### 3.12. The Middle East and North Africa Region

The following three line graphs, whose scale of intervals is consecutively reduced, indicate that until 2012, the number of terrorist incidents in the Middle East and North Africa was relatively constant. In that period, the reduction or increase in the number of terrorist activities was affected by factors such as the Palestinian issue or the US invasion of Iraq. In the last five years before 2011, there was a rise in the number of terrorist incidents,

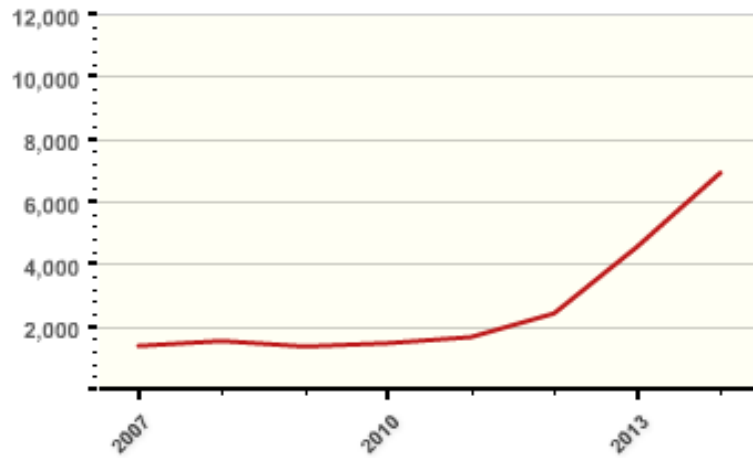
but with a moderate upward slope. However, by the end of 2012 and in mid 2013 and 2014, there has been an escalating trend that followed aforementioned three important dates, viz., October 2012, July 2013 and July 2014. These line graphs prove that there is a close relationship between the failure of the Arab Spring and the intensification of violence enacted by extremist groups and in particular, ISIS.



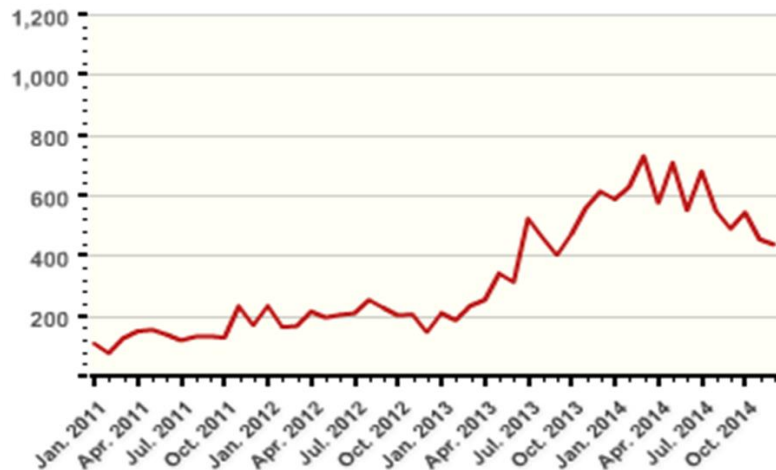
**Graph 20.** The number of terrorist incidents in Iraq between 2011 and 2014 (START)



**Graph 21.** The number of terrorist incidents in the Middle East and North Africa between 1970 and 2014 (START)



**Graph 22.** The number of terrorist incidents in the Middle East and North Africa between 2007 and 2014 (START)



**Graph 23.** The number of terrorist incidents in the Middle East and North Africa between 2011 and 2014 (START)

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, it is attempted to examine whether there was any relationship between the failure of the Arab Spring (i.e., the wave of peaceful revolu-

tions with democratic and Islamic demands that swept across the Arab world between 2011 and 2013) and the expansion of politico-religious extremism, and extremist groups, particularly ISIS. The expansion of extremism is measured by the number of terrorist activities. The study shows that there is a significant relationship between the failure of the uprisings and the increase in the number of terrorist actions, in four of the five countries extensively affected by the uprisings, namely, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen. In the fifth country, Tunisia, where there has been a relative success for the revolution, and also in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, there was an increase in terrorist activities after the failure of the Arab Spring, but it was not considerable. In other Arab countries, such a relationship cannot be established. However, Lebanon and Iraq, two countries in which the Arab Spring did not have much direct impact, provided a fertile ground for the spillover of the resentments caused by the failure of the Arab Spring in other countries, to the extent that the number of terrorist acts in these two countries, and particularly Iraq, hiked to an unprecedented high.

If we extend the scope of our study to the Middle East and North Africa at large, the relationship between the failure of Arab uprisings (in three key dates of October 2012, July 2013 and July 2014) and a rise in terrorist incidents can be seen more clearly. These findings prove this study's thesis. This does not, however, mean that the failure of the Arab Spring was the sole cause of the current politico-religious extremism, and particularly the appearance and expansion of ISIS. The failure was a mediatory cause, and the main causes should be found in the long-standing dictatorships, foreign domination and influence, and social and economic turbulence prevalent in the region.

The Arab Spring brought about the isolation of extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda. However, the failure of these uprisings created resentment and disappointment with political reformist movements in the Arab world. When the Arab youth realized that their aims to establish democratic political systems cannot be achieved through peaceful movements, they turned to violence. It has been said that nothing helped the cause of extremist groups, such as ISIS, more than violent measures used to suppress the Arab Spring. Abu Hafs al-Mauritani, a former al-Qaeda mufti, argues that the West's support for Israel and "Arab corrupt regimes", and its antagonism towards the Arab revolutions in the process of the Arab Spring was the main cause of the expansion of extremist armed groups (Former al-Qaeda Mufti, 2015). Wherever the political process was failed, ISIS gained more ground, as it



can be seen in Syria, Yemen, Egypt and Libya. ISIS exploited the social and political crisis in these countries, and provided people affected with a sense of social identity as well as spiritual and physical refuge. The group provided resentful Arab communities with a sense of identity and belonging that Arab states and other political groups were not able to provide. Then, religion was employed to justify ISIS's wide and unprecedented use of violence (Kfir, 2015, p. 234). It can be concluded that if the Arab Spring were succeeded, it could have prevented the expansion of extremism and particularly ISIS.

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