

# THE RADICALIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD: FROM THE ARAB SPRING TO THE ISLAMIC STATE

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## **ABSTRACT:**

*IN AN ESSAY PUBLISHED IN 1957, RIGHT AFTER THE SUEZ CRISIS, IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE REGION OF THE MIDDLE EAST FINDS ITSELF ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE THANKS TO HER STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE RESULTED FROM A MIXTURE OF " OIL, COMMERCIAL ROUTES, GEOGRAPHIC POSITION, BELIEF/RELIGION AND IDEOLOGY." AFTER MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, THINGS DON'T SEEM TO BE VERY DIFFERENT. THE REGION " SITUATED IN THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD HAS A LOT OF DANGER, FROM TYRANNY, VIOLENCE TO WEAPONS OF MASSE DISTRUCTION AND WAR." THESE AFFECT NOT ONLY THE REGION ITSELF BUT ALSO THE SECURITY OF THE SEAS, AND ESPECIALLY THE SECURITY OF THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT, WHICH LEADS TO PERSISTENCE ON THE EUROPEAN AGENDA REGARDING THE SECURITY OF THE MIDDLE EAST QUESTION. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE PRESENT ARTICLE AIMS TO ANALYZE THE PHENOMENON CALLED THE ARAB SPRING IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE RADICALIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD UNTIL WHAT WE CALL TODAY ISLAMIC STATE.*

**KEY WORDS:** THE ARAB SPRING, THE ISLAMIC STATE, MIDDLE EAST

## **INTRODUCTION**

After the events of september 11, 2001 The Middle East has become a deep concern, especially for the Western world. The fight against the terrorism, the interventions from Afganistan and Irak, the attempts of creating a new security environment are processes that didn't have the expected ending.

The Muslim world, where we include not just the Middle East but also North Africa, burst one more time into what the experts called the Arab Spring. The riots of the people of these states against the governments, of authoritharian nature, created initially illusions because they identified the instability in the region with the undemocratic governements of these states. With a mixture of complaints about the persistence of a huge difference between the rich and the poor ones, the population of these states, mostly the young ones, confronted with a demographic

growth at the same time with an urbanization process<sup>1</sup>, can not be satisfied by a regime change when in fact they need the reduction of the feeling of social injustice, a matter that requires time.

The process seen at the beginning as one of democratization, transformed into one of radicalization, action that attracts more consequences for the security environment. Besides the social, financial and political problems that persist in the region” the revolution is just the beginning of a larger process”<sup>2</sup>, problems that affect directly the European security through what we call refugees, illegal immigrants, appears another problem much more risky. The radicalization of the Muslim world is a sensible problem for the Occident for the simple fact that it expands fast using areas difficult to contradict, like ideological concepts of the Islam and because it finds disciples amongst the Muslim diaspora from the European states.

In fact, the Arab Spring created the context and the pretext for the adoption of a radical position. However, the results of this phenomenon, its main effects in the region are the ones that create the alternative of the radicalization, the ones that support this kind of positioning. The question can be explained by the simple fact that this alternative offers more possibilities, it's closer to a certain system of values that strive to stand against an authority that displeases. It is an alternative that creates the trust that the establishment of a new type of authorities and order will lead to the elimination of the complaints specific to the old order which people want to erase it. This alternative is the continuation of the radicalization and even the support or the affiliation to some groups with visions away from being just simple radical, with extremist visions in relation to their image of the society and the methods used to transform this image in a fact.

Thus, the radicalization of the Muslim's world on the background of the Arab Spring, opens up new alternatives in an environment much more advantageous for the development of some extremist groups and for the success of their vision, considering that the old sources of authority had been eliminated. The extremist groups have the chance to earn their legitimacy on the background of the elimination of these authority sources, coming with a new project of organization and authority, finding their followers in an area where the disappointments caused by what the old regimes offered them are big and the hopes are taking another direction, extremist, but well constructed through religious ideological concepts.

### **THE ARAB SPRING**

In the context of the analysis we are conducting, it is necessary to choose the theory and the model of the radicalization process that will represent a framework through which we will build our argumentation of the research problem. First of all, we will briefly present the phenomenon known as the Arab Spring, one of the major events that have attracted the attention of the whole world in the last years. Arab Spring is a complex phenomenon that includes several states in the Middle East and the north of Africa.

For the beginning, explaining the concept of Arab Spring is the first thing that we must do to create a foundation for understanding this phenomenon. Thus, it should be noted first that the term of Arab Spring was made known by the Western press at the beginning of 2011, a moment that illustrated the success of the Tunisian uprising against the ex-leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali,

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<sup>1</sup> Max Boot *The New Arab Revolt* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, 2011) 335.

<sup>2</sup> Boot, *The New Arab Revolt*, 340.

and this fact encouraged anti-government protests, similars to the uprising in Tunisia, which spread in most Arab states<sup>1</sup>.

. On the other hand, the term is associated with the troubles in Eastern Europe that took place in 1989, when the Communist regimes began to crash because of the pressure of popular protests, the most states from the ex-communist block adopting, in a short period of time, politic democratic systems with market economy.<sup>2</sup> But what happened in the Middle East doesn't fit with the events that took place in the European states of the Communist bloc, the direction of the Arab Spring being completely different because "Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen have known an uncertain transition period, Syria and Libya were caught in a civilian conflict, while the Persian Gulf monarchies remained mostly unaffected by the events."<sup>3</sup> These events show a clear distinction in comparison with the fate of the European states in the Communist block, in the area of the Arab states the replacement of the authoritarian systems with the democratic ones didn't lead to the remarkable rise of the living standards but to the political instability and the formation, among others, of some divisions between the Islamists and the secular Arabs.

After a brief overview, the Arab Spring refers on one hand to "a wave of pro-democracy protests and, on the other hand, to riots that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011, provoking some authoritarian regimes deeply rooted in the region. Demonstrators who have expressed their political and economic dissatisfaction have faced violent repression came from the security forces from their countries"<sup>4</sup>. These protests and riots can be presented through the key elements of the analysis of the radicalization process, which include, among other things, the importance of individual factors that lead to dissatisfaction about the political and socio-economic context of the society in which the radicalization occurs, but also the importance of the adherence of a person to a group with radical visions. When these dissatisfaction will grow, at the same time with the ability of a group to promote its radical project, which includes solutions to these discontents, the possibility of the burst of some protests is very high. However, protests can also take place in a manner that does not involve violence. In this case we are talking about a non-violent radicalization. Radicalization turns into a violent one when riots are initiated as a result of the authorities' refuse to take into account what the protesters had on their claims agenda, even initiating retaliations against them..

Besides explaining the term of *Arab Spring* and its definition, we must mention the causes behind the protests of this phenomenon. This is illustrated by the fact that the protests were based on "the expression of the profound resentment of aging of the Arab dictatorships [...], the rage against the brutality of the security, the unemployment, the rise of the prices and the corruption which followed after the privatization of state actives in some countries"<sup>5</sup>. As we have seen in the section attributed to the identification of the theoretical concepts and the models of analysis of the process of radicalization, the causes of such a process are of structural nature, connected to dissatisfactions regarding the political authorities, social and economic conditions. The resistance of such regimes to reformation has contributed, in time, to an increase of

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<sup>1</sup> Primoz Manfreda, „Definition of the Arab Spring“, *Middle East Issues*, February 07, 2018, accessed in May, 10 <http://middleeast.about.com/od/humanrightsdemocracy/a/Definition-Of-The-Arab-Spring.htm>,

<sup>2</sup> „Definition of the Arab Spring“

<sup>3</sup> „Definition of the Arab Spring“

<sup>4</sup> \*\*\*, „Arab Spring Pro-democracy protests“, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2015 accessed in May, 10, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1784922/Arab-Spring>

<sup>5</sup> Primoz Manfreda, „Definition of the Arab Spring“.

dissatisfactions, which turned into the adoption of a radical vision related to how the society should be. The adoption of the radical vision, initially in a non-violent form, happened thanks to the opportunity of individuals to get in touch with another image of the organization of the society. As more and more individuals get in touch with this image correlated with the lack of reformation of the regimes, we have to deal with the increase of the possibility of the violent bursting out of the people.

Also, finding a reasonable solution depends on a number of variables that need to be taken into account, considering a matter of a great importance in this direction: the fact that in the Arab Spring could not be identified a consensus regarding the political and economic model ment to replace the existing systems, the protesters acting differently based on the state and oscillating between the gradual reform of the system, the immediate transition to another form of government, and the overthrow of the president<sup>1</sup>. Anyway, from these things results that the Middle East's space, starting with the Arab Spring, is described through instability on several directions, both economic and especially political.

This lack of unity of the vision about the political model ment to be built in the post-revolt period made the removal of the authoritarian regimes of a secular nature to have, in fact, an opposite result than the wanted one, the instauration of regimes that shall respond to the complains of the population. The new regimes don't have the authority to maintain a unity and they have no means of responding to the various groups, more or less extremist, who have consolidated after the protests and the revolts. Such groups, which are more powerful, besides the fact that they can contradict each other, they tend to challenge the state authority, fact that continues to support the persistence of an instability.

On the other hand, if we look at the causes that led to the beginning of the Arab Spring protests, we can see that these are very different and numerous. In this category of causes we can include the dictatorship or the absolute monarchy, human rights violations, political corruption, economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty<sup>2</sup> and finally but not at least, the discontent about the local governments<sup>3</sup>. With this being said, we must highlight the fact that the Arab Spring was a failure that reflects itself in the state of fact of the states in the region. Thus, I will analyze below, on the one hand, the evolutions that took place within the Iraqi State related to the Islamic State and on the other hand, the expansion of this group in Syria, these steps being necessary in terms of understanding the phenomenon of the Islamic State .

The Arab Spring was the perfect occasion for showing the dissatisfaction about the political, social and economic conditions of some masses of radicalized populations who stood against the existing governments, demanding change and reformation. As a result of these events, there still remained smaller groups in terms of the adherents of their program who have distinct visions and continue to be dissatisfied about the way these societies are built and governed. A first distinction that we have to conclude between radicalization and extremism lies in the fact that the radicalization tends to include masses of people, while the extremism finds its

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<sup>1</sup> „Definition of the Arab Spring“.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Cockburn, „The Tweet and Revolution“, CounterPunch, 2011, accessed in May, 10, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/02/18/the-tweet-and-revolution/>

<sup>3</sup> John Carlo Gil Sadian, „The Arab Spring—One Year Later in The Center for Strategy“, Enterprise & Intelligence Report, 2012, accessed in May, 10, [http://www.scribd.com/doc/90470593/The-CenSEI-Report-Vol-2-No-6-February-13-19-2012#outer\\_page\\_23](http://www.scribd.com/doc/90470593/The-CenSEI-Report-Vol-2-No-6-February-13-19-2012#outer_page_23)

adherents in a limited group of the society. As I have already said, the radicalization is a precondition of the extremism, but the breaking point between the two processes is that the radicalization can go up to mobilization and active engagement, thing illustrated by the series of protests and riots specifics to the Arab Spring, while the extremism moves on to action (violence, terrorism) to promote its vision over the society and the authority.

### **THE FOUNDATION OF THE CREATION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ**

The idea that has governed for a long time in the Western states, that said that improving political, social and economic conditions is a precondition for significant changes in the Arab societies, was first experienced in Iraq. The removal of Saddam Hussein's regime has not automatically led to an increase of the American credibility in the region. This aspect is determined by a relevant factor that shows up that the autocratic regimes from the region were did not want that the American experiment to have success. Such a success could represent a threat to the autocratic leadership of the region, fearing a domino effect in this purpose. Under these circumstances, such regimes supported insurgent groups in Iraq in order to stop the democratic experiment.<sup>1</sup>

The connection between the Arab Spring and the elimination of Saddam Hussein is the starting point for highlighting the context in which the Islamic State had been created. Thus, "in order to see the connection between the Hussein's overthrow in 2003 and the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, we have to go back in 1990 when the Iraqi army entered Kuwait. The first war in the Gulf - where a coalition led by Americans dismissed the army in Iraq - enjoyed the support of the most Arab governments, but not the support of their populations. Kuwait's invasion by Hussein threatened the order that kept authoritarian regimes in power for decades, the Arab leaders being willing to fight in order to restore that order."<sup>2</sup> We can see from all this that a strong opposition was formed against Hussein among the Iraqi population who requested foreign forces to eliminate the dictator. Returning to the connection between the Arab Spring and the fall of Hussein, it should be mentioned that wasn't the last event that led to the protests that started in 2010 and 2011, but the evolutions of the situations in the region.

To understand the origins of the Islamic State, we must take into account the current stage of the al-Qaeda, which is no longer a unitary and centralized group. This is rather an idea surrounded by several groups in the Middle East, but also in Africa. As these groups proliferated, after 2001, the center of this group, in Afghanistan / Pakistan confronted with the difficulty of maintaining an active influence in the jihadist world. In such a context, in 2003, al-Qaeda developed in Iraq, as a result of the American invasion and of a large number of jihadist fighters engaged in this struggle. In 2006, the group in Iraq suffers a transformation, adopting the name ISI, according to its fundamentalist perceptions, the instauration of a caliphate governed by the *Sharia* law.<sup>3</sup>

A relevant moment regarding these events, which we omitted earlier, consists in the September 11, 2001 attacks, after which "the Arab governments used the war against terror in order to stop the internal dissent. Secondly, as a result of the war against terror, the Islamists

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<sup>1</sup> Allan Orr "Spring' ex machina: Catalytic Warfare, Iraq Syndrome and the 'Arab Spring'" in *Defence Studies*, vol. 13 (2013): 222.

<sup>2</sup> Kanan Makiya, „The Arab Spring started in Irak“, *New York Times*, 2013, accessed in May, 12, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/opinion/sunday/the-arab-spring-started-in-iraq.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/opinion/sunday/the-arab-spring-started-in-iraq.html?_r=0)

<sup>3</sup> Colin Tucker "The Islamic State Origins, Goals, and Future Implications" *Eurasia Center*, (2014): 2.



continued to fail in obtaining political functions, and the widespread corruption and the nepotism of the regimes from Tunisia, Libya and Egypt sank deeper and deeper, taking into account the USA support for the Arab dictatorships.”<sup>1</sup> The moment of the attacks from 2001 lead to the initiation of the war against terror, which represented the guaranty of the rise of the USA influence in Iraq, together with the displacement of the military troupes in the territory.

After years of supporting the war on terror, the USA ended it under Barack Obama's administration, the most important thing in this context being the withdrawal of the american troops from Iraq in 2011. This event was seen as a mistake by the Americans, just like was also seen the Iraq invasion of 2003. The withdrawal of the USA troops from Iraq is, in fact, the main cause of the formation of the Islamic State, correlated with the weak political structure of Iraq and the Prime Minister Maliki's sectarian politics of separation.<sup>2</sup> This withdrawal was considered being too early and attracting negative consequences with a strong negative impact both on the states in the region but also on the attention of the international community, as President Obama's predecessor George W. Bush said: "To begin the withdrawal before the agreement of our commanders, would be dangerous for Iraq, for the region and for the United States. This would mean handing over the future of Iraq to Al Qaeda. That would mean we would risk mass murder on a horrible scale. This would mean that we will let the terrorists to have a safe place in Iraq to replace the losted one from Afganistan. This would mean that will increase the possibility of the american troupes to be constrained to return to an ulterior date and to confront a much more dangerous ennemy.”<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that the idea of transporting democracy into an Islamic state was not well conceived from the beginning, and the idea of withdrawing the American troops included the risk of forming the Islamic State<sup>4</sup>.

In order to create a complete understanding of the foundation of the Islamic State, it is necessary to include in the analysis both the events that preceded the Arab Spring, but also those in its course. "In the last years, the influence of the political Islam in the global politics has been perceived as developing as a result of the Arab Spring and of the military power of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. However, at the same time, these evolutions may indicate some reconfigurations of the political Islam, which have actually ruined its traditional foundations and therefore, could lead to its decline.”<sup>5</sup>

The motivation of the withdrawal of USA troops at the end of 2011 refers to the fact that "a lot of people in the Obama administration simply do not believe that USA forces would make a difference in the political future of Iraq. Ben Rhodes, President Obama's national security advisor, said that *"there is a risk of overestimating the difference which the USA troops might make in the Iraq's internal politics,"* and that an American military presence *"did not allow the*

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Husain, „Did Iraq War give birth to the Arab Spring?“, *CNN*, 2013, accesed in May, 12, 2015 <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/17/opinion/iraq-war-arab-spring-husain/>

<sup>2</sup> Analyzing the timeline *The Rise of the Islamic State (ISIS)*.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, „How Obama's Arab Spring Created the Islamic State“, 2014, accesed in May, 12, 2015, <http://www.raymondibrahim.com/other-matters/how-obamas-arab-spring-created-the-islamic-state/>

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, „How Obama's Arab“.

<sup>5</sup> Maximilian Lakitsch, „Islamic State, the Arab Spring, and the Disenchantment with Political Islam“, *E-International Relations*, 2014, accesed in May, 12, 2015 <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/09/12/islamic-state-the-arab-spring-and-the-disenchantment-with-political-islam/>

*dictation of the sectarian's alliances.*"<sup>1</sup> But this is not the only reason for the withdrawal of the troops, while there are many Iraqis, particularly Shiites, who have requested the departure of the USA troops from Iraq.

The Islamic state gained an increased attention thanks to the evolutions that took place in it, reaching in 2013 at the occupation of a large part of East Syria, apart from the territory already occupied in the west of the Iraq, and the occupied areas looking like the territory of a new state between Syria and Iraq<sup>2</sup>. This shows that the influence and the impact of the Islamic State is on the rise, and the evolutions from the past years reflect the menacing nature of this group, caused by the activities made by the members of the Islamist group which certainly attract the attention of the whole world.

Also about the Islamic State, we must establish the the significance of this concept in a larger direction. Thus, the Islamic State, together with the Al-Qaeda group, represents "one of the most dangerous jihadist groups, as a result from its earnings in Syria and Iraq. It was formed in April 2013, detaching from Al-Qaeda in Iraq, under the ex-name of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It was unapproved by the Al-Qaeda, becoming one of the main jihadist groups fighting against the government forces in Syria and Iraq. Its exact size is unclear, but it is said that includes thousands of fighters, including foreign jihadists."<sup>3</sup> We can see that this group has a relevant history, being detached from the Al-Qaeda group, and from the point of view of jihadist members who are extremely numerous, it is worth noticing that the religion, the Islam, it is suggestet that it is the base of their actions. As far as it concerns the members of this organization, it should also be mentioned that the fighters do not come entirely from the Middle East, they come from European states such as Great Britain, France, Germany and, last but not least, the USA, Caucasus.

We must also mention the leader of the group that leads and shares the current directions of action, whose name is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, born in Samarra, north of Baghdad in 1971, who joined the insurgency that burst out in Iraq right after the invasion led by the US in 2003<sup>4</sup>. In 2010 he appeared as leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, one of the groups that later became ISIS. Baghdadi is considered to be a fight commander and a tactician. The analysts say about him that he makes his group more attractive to young jihadists than Al Qaeda, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Islamic theologian. The professor Peter Neumann from Kings College London estimates that about 80% of Western fighters in Syria joined the Islamist group."<sup>5</sup>

The most significant issue in terms of the importance of the Islamic State evolutions is the expansion of this group into the Syrian state in a relatively short period of time, and this matter will be developed in the next subchapter. A significant threat comes from the expansion of the group on a global scale, as lieutenant general Vincent Stewart, director of the Defense

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<sup>1</sup> Reihan Salam, „We Never Should Have Left Iraq - A U.S. military presence could have mollified Sunnis and prevented the new civil war“, *Slate*, 2014, accesed in May, 12, 2015 [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2014/06/iraq\\_sunnis\\_and\\_shiites\\_the\\_u\\_s\\_should\\_never\\_have\\_withdrawn\\_its\\_troops\\_in.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2014/06/iraq_sunnis_and_shiites_the_u_s_should_never_have_withdrawn_its_troops_in.html)

<sup>2</sup> Maximilian Lakitsch, „Islamic State“.

<sup>3</sup> \*\*\*, „Syria Iraq: The Islamic State militant group“, BBC, 2014, accesed in May, 12, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24179084>.

<sup>4</sup> Maximilian Lakitsch, „Islamic State“.

<sup>5</sup> „Islamic State“.

Information Agency says: *With affiliates in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, the group is beginning to form a growing international fingerprint.*<sup>1</sup>

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE EXPANSION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IN SYRIA

First of all, we will present a brief description of the Arab Spring in the Syrian state, in this pace taking place the beginning of the protests in March 2011. "Despite the suffering of the dictatorship for more than 40 years and the confrontation with economic and social challenges that have determined rebellion somewhere else, the Syrians supported their president, Bashar al-Assad, who cultivated an image of an anti-Western populist modernist."<sup>2</sup> However, these characteristics of the situation in Syria were valid until the protests began in the southern city, Deraa, the turning point being the direct response of Bashar's security forces to the protesters' request for reforms, and then the resignation of the president. The motivation of the regime that was the foundation of the use of the security forces lies in the creation of a plot that spread the idea that the protests were led by armed gangs that were intended to incite to sectarian divisions among the heterogeneous population of Syria<sup>3</sup>.

In 2012 took place the referendum initiated by the President Bashar al-Assad which approved a new constitution, that contains an article regarding the Baas Party with the status of a unique *leader of the state and the society*, but the opposition denounced it as a fake.<sup>4</sup> These facts can not be called reforms at the regime's level because the President pursues his own interest, trying at the same time to impose his dictatorship. In this direction, the fact that the government forces launched major offensives in 2013 to recover the territory and to strengthen the control over the southern and western population centers, remains significant.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of the Arab Spring specific riots, ISI has seen a very good opportunity in Syria to fulfill its old wish to create the Islamic State.<sup>6</sup> Even if in 2013, Syria's situation was uncertain, "there is the possibility that Syria may become a failed state blocked in a prolonged bloody civil war, with a growing presence of the extremist Islamic elements"<sup>7</sup> the 2013 also represents the year of the expansion of the influence of the Islamic State in Syria. This is the result of the takeover of the Syrian city of Raqqa, being the first province under the control of the rebels, and one year after this event the Islamic State has gained significant amounts from the oil fields it controls in eastern Syria<sup>8</sup>. After these actions made by the Islamic State, it appears that the group itself enjoys a considerable military success, its support by more and more members which direct the influence they have over the expansion of new territories.

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, „How Islamic State is expanding its empire of terror“, *The Guardian*, 2015, accessed in May, 12, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/21/islamic-state-empire-al-qaida-isis>

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Phillips, „Syria's Bloody Arab Spring“, 37, accessed in May, 16, 2015, [http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR011/FINAL\\_LSE\\_IDEAS\\_\\_SyriasBloodyArabSpring\\_Philips.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR011/FINAL_LSE_IDEAS__SyriasBloodyArabSpring_Philips.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> „Syria's Bloody Arab Spring“.

<sup>4</sup> \*\*\*, „Arab uprising: Country by country – Syria“, BBC, 2013, accessed in May, 16, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-12482309>

<sup>5</sup> „Arab uprising: Country by country“

<sup>6</sup> Colin Tucker „The Islamic State Origins“.

<sup>7</sup> David W. Lesch „The unknown future of Syria“ *Mediterranean Politics*, 18 (2013): 105.

<sup>8</sup> \*\*\*, „Syria Iraq: The Islamic State militant group“, BBC, 2014.



The formation of the Islamic State was finally announced: "The brutal extremist group, which claims to have fighters from all around the world, announced the establishment of a *Caliphate* - an Islamic state - in areas of Iraq and Syria, forcing many minority communities from their homes"<sup>1</sup>. The Syrian anti-government revolt has turned into a civil war, the Islamic State ending up supporting the opposition in Syria by setting up the Nusra military front and sending money and fighters. The brutal tactics of the group were condemned by the rebels, Al-Qaeda rejecting it, and ISI renaming ISIL (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant). Meanwhile, the USA troops withdrew from Iraq, which led to the increase in violence by ISIS.

In 2014, ISIS gained significant gains in several parts of the Iraqi state, and after the Caliphate declaration, or the Islamic State, in territories in Iraq and Syria, it was renamed the Islamic State. As far as the Islamic State is concerned, it should be noticed that during the Syrian civil war there appeared two major rebel factions: Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), which was developed in 2012 by Abu Mohammed al-Jowlani, and The Islamic State of Iraq and Ash Sham (ISIS), who shared the ideology of Al-Qaeda<sup>2</sup>. „In April 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of Islamic State of Iraq (ISI-umbrella front of Al-Qaeda in Iraq), proposed that JN and ISI to merge. He announced the formation of a new Islamic political system, ISIS, which included territories in Iraq and Syria (ash-Sham). Baghdadi argued that Jabhat al-Nusra was initially set up with financial support and labor by ISI and therefore JN focused in Syria was a simple *expansion* of the organization in Iraq. Jowlani, however, rejected Baghdadi's proposal to combine their efforts saying that he was not consulted. After that, he renewed the bay'ah of JN (commitment of loyalty) to Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of Al-Qaeda Central.”<sup>3</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The radicalization of the Islamic world as a critical point reached in the context of the Arab Spring has been in fact the starting point for the manifestation of some extremist forces, such as the Islamic State. Even if the context which allowed to the Islamic State to manifest itself is firstly in Iraq and it is directly related to the withdrawal of the American troops, the Arab Spring and the riots, as well as the transformation of such revolts into civil war, as is the case of Syria has clearly become a favorable context for the manifestation, exportation and expansion of the extremist ideology of the Islamic State. If, in the case of Iraq, we can argue that the context is related to the Sunnit-Siit conflict that existed before the USA withdrawal, in the case of the Islamic State's expansion into Syria we must mention the favorable context, the civil war and the chaos, the loss of authority by the government, but also a radicalized population which chose to fight in a civil war in order to break the government.

At the same time, we have been able to see that there is a distinction, a point of separation between the radicalization and the radical vision, and the extremism and the extremist action. The distinction starts from the predisposition of a radical person to not have violent acts such as terrorism and the predisposition of an extremist to commit such acts in order to achieve their

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<sup>1</sup> \*\*\*, „The rise of Islamic State“, BBC, 2014, accesed in May, 16, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28116033>

<sup>2</sup> Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, ”The Dawnof the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham” *Current trends in islamist ideology*, 16, 5

<sup>3</sup> ”The Dawnof the Islamic State“, 5.

goals. The radicalization of the Arab Spring was manifested by the desire of the rebels to change or to reform their regimes, instead, the aim of the Islamic State, by its involvement in the civil war in Syria, was the elimination of even the regime idea that existed until then and the establishment of an authority based on the Islamic law, removing this way any form of secular authority. The fact that the Arab revolt in Syria turned into a civil war was a favorable context for the Islamic State, which knew that it has the possibility to use this mass of radicalized people, joining their struggle against the regime, in order to obtain their support.

The evolution of the Islamic State in Iraq and its extension to Syria in the context of the Arab Spring can not be generalized to the radicalization of the Arab world in this context and the adoption of an extremist vision of a proportion of the radicalized ones. The fundamentals are different for each of the two states, even though the Arab Spring is an almost perfect pretext, at least for the expansion in Syria. In Iraq, the evolution and the expansion of Islamic State extremism is related to the perpetuation of the conflict between the Shiiti and the Sunniti, especially in the context where the American occupation period led to a political marginalization of the Sunniti, creating even more frustrations that exploded with the American withdrawal. The expansion to Iraq being firstly connected to the weakness of the forces that remained after the USA withdrawal to stand against ISI's pressures, and the defeat of these forces was the confirmation of the force by the Islamic State. In this way reactivates the idea of pursuing the fundamental mission of the group, that of the Caliphate. For this it is necessary to extend the controlled territory in order to form a nucleus strong enough to establish the Muslim caliphate. The easiest target at the moment was Syria, both in terms of geographic proximity, of the Sunniti group that could support ISI, but especially in terms of the existing intern context. Having succeeded in gaining popular support, the ISI eventually managed to take advantage of the radicalization of the Arab world in order to expand into Syria and thus to declare the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate.

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