

Vihara Anjalee Dharmaratne
Thesis Prospectus
Advisor: Dr. Timothy Nordstrom
Third Reader: Dr. Jacob Kathman

To Shoot or Not to Shoot: Why Some States Used Violence and Why Some Did Not in Response to the Arab Spring Uprisings.

Research Question/ Overview:

Sparked by the self immolation of a frustrated fruit-vendor in Tunisia in December 2010, the Arab spring, a series of political upheavals challenging the traditional authority, started in a number of states across the Middle East and North Africa. Reminiscent of the Springtime of the Peoples in Europe in 1848, the Arab spring has shown different outcomes in different states and it is still ongoing in some states of the Arab world. Tunisian President Ben Ali and the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak were ousted and the people of both countries were able to overthrow their governments as well. Some states such as Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen made either political or economic concessions. While some state governments responded to the popular uprisings of the Arab spring in such a non-violent manner, some governments' responses were rather violent and brutal. In Bahrain, soldiers and the police used armored vehicles and tear gas to drive out hundreds of anti-government protestors a day after emergency rule was imposed in Bahrain.¹ In Syria, where protests are still ongoing, human rights groups report that up to 10,000 people have been arrested and over 1,000 civilians have been killed by the Syrian army and gunmen loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.² Syrian security forces are responsible for opening fire on several demonstrations throughout Syria that claimed many lives of civilians.³ In Morocco, although there were no civilian casualties, civilians were still attacked by the

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/03/16/501364/main20043683.shtml>

² <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2011/0531/1224298143757.html>

³ http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/67/67234_chronologic_timeline_arabian_spring.pdf pp.5

Moroccan police in response to defying a ban on demonstration across Morocco.⁴ Of all Arab states in the Arab spring, the Libyan government has used more violence than any other state in response to popular protests and uprisings in Libya. Before he lost control of Tripoli, the former Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi used mercenaries to kill the protesting civilians. He also ordered armed prisoners to be deployed to clear the streets of demonstrators. Helicopter gunships targeting civilians as well as anti-aircraft missiles targeting rebel forces were used by pro-Gaddafi forces. The violence has turned into a civil war and it has become quite tumultuous to a point where external forces such as NATO have started conducting extensive raids over Tripoli.⁵

My research question is why some governments are using violence in response to Arab spring popular protests in their states and why some governments do not. All the popular uprisings in these Arab states were caused by similar reasons such as government corruption, violations of human rights, poverty, unemployment, authoritarian nature of the states, etc. However, the responses to these uprisings by the respective governments were not necessarily similar. As mentioned earlier, following popular protests some governments conceded, but some governments took violent and systematic measures to respond to the protesting civilians. What puzzles me is different states responding differently to social protest in a geographical area that shares many social and cultural similarities. I propose that there has to be a number of specific dissimilarities among these Arab states that would explain this divergence. Also, I would like to find out if international factors played a bigger role than domestic factors in the type of action each state took in response to the Arab Spring uprisings.

⁴ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/05/22/uk-morocco-protests-idUKTRE74L2YU20110522>

⁵ http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/67/67234_chronologic_timeline_arabian_spring.pdf

Hypotheses:

I will be using four variables for my research in which two of them represent international factors and the other two, domestic factors. For international factors I will be using 1) the strength of the relationship each state has with the United States, and 2) IGO membership of the state. For domestic factors, I will be using 1) leadership tenure, and 2) the value of the natural resources the state has.

The preliminary hypotheses in my research are as follows:

1. The stronger the relationship with the United States, the state is less likely to use violence against its own people.
2. The more IGOs the state is a part of, the state is less likely to use violence against its own people.
3. The longer the leadership tenure of the leader of the state is, the more the state will use violence against its own people.
4. The more valuable natural resources the state possesses, the more the state will use violence against its own people.

Methodology/ Data

The geographical scope of my research is North Africa and the Middle East. I hope to focus more on the states that have experienced the most profound changes. These changes include revolution, governmental change, major protests, sustained civil disorder and civil war. To select the countries which I will be doing case-study research on, I will set a baseline using the death tolls resulted from these uprisings which I hope would correspond with the profoundness of the changes in each state involved in the Arab spring. Then I will do state by state discussions of

significant developments of each state during the Arab spring and the response of each government of the respective states.

Most of the research for my senior thesis will take a case-study approach. In order to study this research topic I will be using news articles as both primary and secondary sources. In order to get a balanced and unbiased perspective on the situation in each state, I will use multiple news sources from around the world as different states have different opinions about the Arab spring. For example, some governments like the Russian government seem ambivalent in their position on Libya. Therefore, it is likely that news sources from such states are different from news sources such as BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera or Reuters. One reason I will be heavily relying on news articles is the recentness of the Arab spring. Since the Arab spring is a very current topic that is in fact still ongoing, scholars have just begun conducting research specifically on this topic. Therefore, the literature I will mainly survey on the Arab spring will not really be on the Arab spring itself, but probably on social movements in other parts of the world, different government types in the Arab world, and on the relationship between the Arab world and the rest of the world. I will also use UN resolutions passed by the Security Council on the situations of several states involved in these uprisings as primary sources. I am also planning on using data from the UCDP (Uppsala Conflict Data Program) once they decode their data on the Arabian spring at the end of 2011 for my research. Data sets from UN Data and Correlates of War will also be used in my research if necessary. To study the relationships between the United States and the states involved in the Arab spring, I will use documents from the Congressional Service Reports as well as press releases from various government agencies.

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