

ISLAMIST MILITANCY IN POST-2011 MENA

One decade after the MENA 2011 uprisings, there is no good reason to believe promoting democracy contradicts combating terrorism. The EU spent billions of Euros on preemptive measures, but European security is still challenged by militants. Although there is hope that recent EU measures for countering the use of internet by militant groups can result in some reduction of terrorist incidents, as long as there are militant groups, the EU will have to worry about the next possible attack. MENA uprisings triggered a political vacuum and evidently disrupted the security establishment in several post-uprising countries. This led to a clear upsurge in terrorist attacks, in which the culprits had links to MENA.

Jihadists thrive on specific factors including repressive politics. Comparing democracy and terrorism rankings across MENA Arab countries, one can securely see that several of them deteriorated on both scales of democracy and terrorism in 2021, compared to 2011. Plus, no one Arab MENA country ranks within the top 50 or even 60 on GDI. The three 2011 prolonged upheaval countries (Yemen, Syria and Libya) rank worse on democracy in 2021, compared to 2011.

For terrorism, two or more countries are found in the top 10. These commonly include: Yemen, Iraq and/or Syria. From the 2011 uprising countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen), only Yemen got better; all other four worsened in 2021, as compared to 2011.

Meanwhile, poverty is high, unemployment is a long-term challenge and repression is the norm for most MENA countries. Working to mitigate these challenges is a good strategy for the EU to enhance its own security.

In fact, the real challenge to EU decision-makers is to appreciate the interconnectedness between democracy promotion and combating terrorism. They are not separate schemes. In other words, the EU needs to strike a balance between its legitimate concern for its security and using its lever against MENA regimes to push for democratic reform.