

# **THE DOMINO THEORY AND ISLAMIST TERRORISM**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation focuses on the domino theory, which guided US policy makers during the Cold War and its' applicability into Islamist terrorism. The idea of domino theory suggests that political events in a country can spread to adjacent countries and during the Cold War, the US claimed that unless the “domino stone of Communism” was stopped in Vietnam, all of Asia and Pacific would turn towards Communism. The Fall of Kabul to the hands of the Taliban in 2021 led to a comparison of the events in Afghanistan and Vietnam, thus this thesis raises the question of whether domino theory could be applied to the cases of terrorism. Even though this theory was tested for many ideologies besides Communism, the research combining the elements of both domino theory and terrorism have been limited. This thesis aims to find out the rate of domino effect observed between the countries which were affected the most by Islamist terrorism and their neighboring countries. The thesis covers the 40-year period between 1979 and 2019 and it focuses on the 12 countries which were affected the most by it and whether Islamist terrorism indeed fell like dominoes around the region.

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Dedicated to the victims of terrorism, everywhere.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**DRA:** Democratic Republic of Afghanistan

**FSA:** Free Syrian Army

**GIA:** Armed Islamic Group

**GNC:** General National Congress

**GTD:** Global Terrorism Database

**ISI:** Islamic State of Iraq

**ISIL:** Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

**ISIS:** Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

**MENA:** Middle East and North Africa

**NTC:** National Transitional Council

**PDPA:** People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan

**PDYR:** People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

**PLO:** Palestine Liberation Organization

**SADR:** Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

**UAR:** United Arab Republic

**YAR:** Yemen Arab Republic

**YPG:** Popular Protection Unit

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1979, Islamist terrorism spread like wildfire across the globe. In terms of terrorism historiography, this brand new type of terrorism marked the beginning of a new era. According to David C. Rapoport, this was the fourth and current “Religious Wave” of terrorism (Rapoport, 2002, p. 9). During these last four decades, organizations, tactics, leaders, and religious interpretations changed but one thing remained constant, it left thousands of victims behind. This is why for political science, Islamist terrorism has been an important research topic. This thesis aims to explore how Islamist terrorism spreads and in order to research this phenomenon, the thesis uses the domino theory. The domino theory was formulated at the beginning of the Cold War and suggests that political events in a country spread to neighboring countries. The US used this theory to suggest that USSR will spread Communism in Asia step by step using the domino effect.

This dissertation contributes to the terrorism studies literature by examining the domino theory while focusing on Islamist attacks and asks one main question: Can the phenomena of the domino theory be observed in the history of Islamist terrorism using empirical data on the number of terrorist attacks? The empirical data for the Islamist attacks are gathered from Fondapol’s “Islamist terrorist attacks in the world 1979-2019” database. Since the database cover, the 40-year period between 1979 and 2019, the temporal frame of this thesis is also 1979-2019. The countries included in the thesis are the 12 countries which were affected by Islamist terrorism the most according to Fondapol and their neighboring countries. The 12 countries are Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, India, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, The Philippines, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen.

In order to answer the research question, first, a piece of background information is given. The literature review section of this thesis outlines the previous research regarding the applicability of domino theory in the case of terrorism. In the next chapter, the history of Islamist terrorism is



summarized. Islamism as an ideology is defined, the aforementioned critical year of 1979 and what it represents is explained. The year 1979 symbolizes the decline of Arab Nationalism, the Iranian Revolution, and the beginning of the Soviet-Afghan War. and the history of Islamist terrorism is summarized. The chapter starts with Islamism as an ideology and how the theory of Islamism developed. Then, three factors contributing to the start of Islamist terrorism are outlined, these are the decline of Arab nationalism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet-Afghan War (Fondapol, 2019, pp. 6-7). The chapter then divides the history of Islamist terrorism into 3 parts, these are 1979-2001, 2001-2011, and 2011-2019. In the data collection and analysis part, the data on the Islamist terrorist attacks from 1979 to 2019 are presented, and the situation of each of the 12 countries is explained and discussed. In the last part, the research will conclude by answering whether the domino theory can be used to understand the contagion of Islamist terrorism.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

At the beginning of the Cold War, the former US ambassador to Moscow, William Bullitt proposed the "domino theory" in 1947. This theory suggested that ideologies can spread across borders and he claimed that USA's Cold War rival USSR would help Communism spread via China to Southeast Asia (Cohen, 2014). In 1954, US President Eisenhower also used the same term to suggest that a political event in one country could trigger similar events in neighboring countries. This theory was used to justify actions taken in the US foreign policy because the rhetoric used suggested that if Vietnam fell to a Communist government, Southeast Asian countries would become Communist, and spread to all of Asia one country at a time (Oxford Reference, n.d.). This theory led to research being conducted about the domino theory and this research did not just focus on the spread of Communism but other political phenomena as well. Even though there are many studies analyzing the domino theory, there is limited research combining the elements of terrorist attacks and the applicability of the domino theory to the phenomena and within the academic literature, domino theory has been applied to other parts of the world different from Cold War-era Southeastern Asia. The idea of diffusion was used to explain the spread of democracy as well (Elkink, 2011; Linos, 2011; O'Loughlin et al., 1998; Wejnert, 2005, 2014). Also using the term diffusion, In her article, Sara M. T. Polo studied the diffusion of terrorism within ethnic and ethnoreligious organizations, she claimed that previous research tended to focus on domestic factors. She used geospatial analysis and spatial econometric models for the data on terrorism between 1970 and 2009 to claim that diffusion influences the tactics of ethnic and ethnoreligious terrorist groups (Polo, 2020).

In their 1980 article "Why Violence Spreads: The Contagion of International Terrorism" Midlarsky, Crenshaw, and Yoshida examine the spread of terrorism from 1968 to 1974, comparing

two regions of the world, Latin America and Western Europe. And in their research, they introduce the contagion effect. The theory suggests that if terrorism occurs in one country, it can occur in other countries since terrorism has a demonstration effect and this makes it difficult to track the indigenous sources of terrorism. They include the factor of international hierarchy meaning that terrorism occurring in countries with high international status is more likely to be imitated in other countries. The authors also point out that the terrorist organizations in Western Europe borrowed ideology, rhetoric, and methods from the organizations in the third world in what they call the “inverse hierarchy”. Thus claiming that terrorism from Latin America had spread to Western Europe (Midlarsky, Crenshaw, & Yoshida, 1980, p. 295). Heyman and Mickolus respond to Midlarsky, Crenshaw, and Yoshida. Heyman and Mickolus claim that they did not prove that terrorism had spread from Latin America to Western Europe since both regions experienced nearly the same amount of attacks and 60% of the attacks in Western Europe were committed by non-European organizations such as the Black September Organization or the Japanese Red Army (Heyman & Mickolus, 1980, pp. 303-305).

In their 1983 article titled “Dynamics of Terrorism”, Hamilton and Hamilton explore the contagion of terrorism based on their data of terrorist incidents in 16 countries between 1968 and 1978. They provide evidence showing that in less democratic, poorer, and less well-educated societies, the potential spread of terrorism is easily reversed. They also note that open societies face more difficulties responding to terrorism (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1983, p. 39).

In 2007, Alex Braithwaite and Quan Li published an article titled “Transnational Terrorism Hot Spots: Identification and Impact Evaluation”. In this research, the authors focus on the geography of terrorism. They identified transnational terrorism hot spots and the terrorism levels in the countries within the geographical hotspots. They analyzed 112 countries from 1975 to 1997

and found out that the countries with large numbers of incidents are located in the hot spots but not every country in the hotspots experience large numbers of terrorist attacks. And after analyzing the timeline between 1975 and 1997 in periods, they point out that when a country is in a terrorism hotspot, they are more likely to have large numbers of terrorism in the next period (Braithwaite & Li, 2007, p. 294).

In their 2010 article “Galton’s Problem and Contagion in International Terrorism along Civilizational Lines” Neumayer and Plumper explore the Galton’s problem in the contagion of terrorism, meaning that just because a terrorist attack follows another one, it does not mean that they are caused by each other or it does not mean that they are dependent. They base their research on Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” argument since according to Huntington, terrorism is contagious because of civilizational rallying effects. If a terrorist group from one country attacks a country from another civilizational group, terrorist groups from the initial civilizational group are more likely to attack the same target country (Neumayer & Plumper, 2010, p. 308). For example, if terrorist groups from Islamic countries attack Western countries, attacks from Islamic countries on Western countries are more likely to occur (Neumayer & Plumper, 2010, p. 323).

Cliff and First analyzed contagion/diffusion theories in terrorist activity in their 2013 article titled “Testing for Contagion/Diffusion of Terrorism in State Dyads”. In this paper, Cliff and First explore terrorism in three state dyads, in Lebanon-Israel, Peru-Colombia, and India-Pakistan between 1970 and 2007 (Cliff & First, 2013, p. 292). They conclude that diffusion exists in all three dyads with varying levels and they note that further research is required in the field of diffusion in state dyads (Cliff & First, 2013, p. 305).

Whitney Welsh Gibbs suggested that the domino theory can also be applied to Jihadist terrorism in the 21st century since Jihadist attacks have taken place in France, Egypt, the United States, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and Lebanon, and Turkey. Aside from organized terror, lone-wolf attacks (terrorist attacks committed by assailants without an affiliation to a terrorist organization) have also taken place in incidents such as the Boston bombings in 2013 and the Sydney cafe hostage crisis in 2014 (Gibbs, 2015).

In an article titled "Terrorism and the New Domino Theory", Thrall and Goepner explain why the American thinking about terrorism is misguided. The domino theory was a poor guide for international relations, but even though the US had major losses in Vietnam, namely almost 60,000 lives and a strain on the fabric of society, US political leaders continued to subscribe to the Domino theory until the fall of the Soviet Union. An alternative to the domino theory in terrorism emerged after 9/11, this new theory is called the pandemic theory. According to this theory, terrorism spreads as it jumps from person to person, regardless of the distance or national borders. Terrorism has a viral spread, which can occur via interpersonal contact or online through propaganda and chat rooms. Terrorism anywhere in the world is a threat since just like a pandemic, it can reach anywhere (Thrall & Goepner, 2017).

In 2021, the defeat of the Afghan Army by the Taliban led to a discourse comparing the Fall of Kabul to the domino theory. This led to predictions being made claiming that the Taliban's grip on Afghanistan will result in a domino effect of Islamist terrorist attacks abroad. Jennifer Cafarella, a national security fellow at the Institute for the Study of War said "Afghanistan will now morph into an "a durable safe haven for terror groups like Al Qaeda who intend to conduct attacks abroad" (Business Insider, 2021). Peter Neumann, professor of security studies at King's

College London told: "A lot of groups will piggyback on this victory in propaganda terms, if the Taliban can do it, you can do it." (The New York Times, 2021).

Idahosa and Chukwujekwu analyze the domino effect during the Arab Spring, where protests in Tunisia spread to Egypt, then Libya, and so on. They also mention that the instability in Libya caused by the fall of Muammar Gaddafi spread to Mali and Nigeria (Idahosa & Chukwujekwu, 2020).

Gary LaFree, Min Xie, and Alia M. Matanock published "The Contagious Diffusion of Worldwide Terrorism: Is It Less Common Than We Might Think?". They examined the worldwide diffusion of terrorism between 1970 and 2013. They make a distinction between contagious increases (neighbor countries) and non-contagious increases (no borders are shared). The "domino effect" is defined as a particular type of contagious diffusion where high levels of terrorism spread to a neighboring country but also remain high in the host country. Their research points out that, over the 43 years both versions of diffusion (contagious and non-contagious) were rare. They also found out that contagious diffusion is rarer than non-contagious diffusion. When contagious diffusion is present, it is more likely to happen according to the domino effect which means that high levels of terrorism spread but at the same time remain high in the host country (LaFree et al., 2017, p. 262).

### **3. HISTORY OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM**

#### **3.1. Islamism's Ideologues**

Contemporary Islamism emerged out of the theories of various early 20th-century ideologues. Abu Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979) wrote about the ideal fundamentalist Islamic state structure and he founded the Jamaat-e-Islami organization in British India. His writings were concluded by Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) in Egypt, he wrote about the need for a revolution to implement an Islamist government. He was a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood which was formed by Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) in 1928. In Iran, these ideas were implemented for the first time by Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) after the Iranian Revolution. (Kramer, 1996). Islamism as a term entered common usage after the Iranian Revolution, prior to the revolution the term was almost nonexistent in the media (Mozaffari, 2007, p. 18).

#### **3.2. The Decline of Arab Nationalism**

The formation of the Arab League in 1945, the formation of the Baath Party in Syria in 1947, the emergence of the Palestinian question after 1948, the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt after the 1952 Coup, the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR), which was a political union between Syria and Egypt in 1958 and the formation of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 led to secular Arab nationalism having a great influence over the Arab world between the mid-1940s until the late 1960s. But later on, Arab nationalism failed as a result of various factors. The UAR only lasted 3 years with Syria leaving the union in 1961. Arab countries suffered defeats against Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War (fought between Israel against the coalition of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) and the 1973 Yom Kippur War (fought between Israel and the coalition of Egypt and Syria), both the sudden death of Nasser and the Jordan-PLO conflict

in 1970 shocked the Arab world (Manduchi, 2017, pp. 18-20). In 1979, Egypt signed a peace deal with Israel in Camp David, which was a blow to Arab unity. After the peace deal, Egypt was isolated from the Arab World and Arab League moved to Tunisia (Al Jazeera, 2008).

### **3.3. Iranian Revolution**

In the 1970s, Mohamed Reza Shah's regime in Iran faces many challenges. The economic difficulties lowered the standard of living, the regime's oppression was increasing, and the opposition was outlawed. Left-wing Tudeh was banned and Khomeini was exiled. Censorship, harassment, and torture at the hands of the secret police SAVAK were common. In such a political climate, in January 1978; the Ettela'at newspaper published an article denouncing Khomeini. This angered many religious school students and they took to the streets. They were joined by thousands of people who were dissatisfied with the Shah regime. The protestors met with violence which only helped them gain more support. Khomeini continued organizing the opposition while still in exile. In January, the Shah left Iran claiming he was going on vacation. This left the regime in an unstable state and in February 1979 Khomeini returned to Iran from France being greeted by millions of his supporters in Tehran and he took power the same day. With overwhelming support, on 1 April 1979 the Iran Islamic Republic was established (Afary, 2022).

The Iranian Revolution had an enormous influence on the Muslim world. The idea of Revolutionary Islam led to uprisings, insurgencies, and the formation of organizations. In 1979, in Saudi Arabia, Sunni fundamentalists seized the Great Mosque in Mecca. President of Egypt Anwar Sadat was assassinated by Islamists in 1981. Muslim Brotherhood led an uprising in Syria in 1982 and the United States embassy was bombed in Lebanon in 1983 (Kramer, 1996).



### 3.4. Soviet-Afghan War

In April 1978, in Afghanistan, Soviet-trained officers and the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) toppled Mohammed Daoud Khan's regime in a coup d'état and established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) (Sidky, 2007, p. 856). The PDPA sought to reform the Afghan society, these reforms had honorable intents, for example, child marriages and the purchase and sale of women became illegal, female education became compulsory and these reforms enraged the Afghan society. In 1978-79, Afghan rebels started to fight against the Communist government. In 1979, the Shiite majority city of Herat had a pro-Khomeini uprising and as a result, the city was destroyed by government forces. This led to Tehran Radio calling for an uprising against the Communists (Hoodbhoy, 2005, 17-19). As a result of this instability, the Afghan government called for help from the Soviet Union and the Soviet Army intervened in Afghanistan in December 1979 on the side of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (Austin, 1979, p.6). This was interpreted as an invasion by the United States. The CIA helped the formation of the rebels' fight as holy war or *Jihad* thus making a reference to an old religious term. The fighters were called *Mujahideen* meaning "those who wage Jihad". Within the context of the Cold War, the rebels were supported by the West, China, and Muslim countries. United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, the Gulf States, Britain, France, and China sponsored the Jihad against the Soviet Union by sending arms to the Mujahideen. Muslims came to Afghanistan from more than 50 countries to join the Mujahideen (Sidky, 2007, pp. 859-863). The Soviet-Afghan War went on for 10 years and in 1989, the Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan (Tripathi, 2011, p.2).

### 3.5. 1979-2001

After the Soviet-Afghan War was over, many Jihadi volunteers returned to their home countries to wage Jihad against their “apostate regimes”. These volunteers are sometimes labeled as “Afghan Arabs”, volunteers started to arrive in Afghanistan in 1986 and Saudi Airlines even had a 75 percent discount on flights to Peshawar for people who were joining the Mujahideen. For Jihadists, Afghanistan “was like a university”. From the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria to Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, whenever an opportunity for an Islamist cause arose, Afghan Arabs could be seen there (Atkins, 2004, p.11). Many Islamist terrorist organizations were formed in the 1980s, influenced by the Iranian Revolution and/or the Soviet-Afghan War. Examples of these organizations include Egyptian Islamic Jihad (1979), Palestinian Islamic Jihad (1981), Hezbollah (1985), Hamas (1985), and Al Qaeda (1988).

The first tactic of Islamist terrorism was to overthrow secular governments in the Muslim world, as Ayman al-Zawahiri of the Al-Qaeda, by referring to the Algerian Civil War fought between the secular regime and Islamists between 1991 and 2002. explained in 1995: “Jerusalem will not be liberated unless the battle for Egypt and Algeria is won and unless Egypt is liberated” (Bacon, 2018, p. 216). Between 1979 and 2000, the top three countries with the most Islamist attacks were Algeria, Lebanon, and Egypt (Fondapol, 2019, p. 14). Jihadist groups changed their strategy in the late 1990s after not being able to topple their local regimes. Then, they turned their focus to their foreign enemy, the United States and Israel (Steinberg, 2008, p. 177). Osama bin Laden declared a Jihad against the United States in 1996 (CNN, 2011), and in 1998 al-Zawahiri made a statement with a different message compared to his statement in 1995: “There is no higher priority, after faith than pushing back the American-Israeli alliance” (Bacon, 2018, p. 216). Thus al-Qaeda’s fight against the United States began. The organization started attacking United States

targets by attacking the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 and the USS Cole in Aden in 2000. On 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda hijacked four planes in the United States, two of them destroyed the World Trade Center towers, one of them crashed into the Pentagon and the last one crashed in Pennsylvania (Reuters, 2011).

### **3.6. 2001-2011: War on Terror**

After the 9/11 attacks, United States President George W. Bush declared a “War on Terror”. On 7 October 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan. The reason behind this decision was that majority of Afghanistan, including the capital city of Kabul, was being ruled by the Taliban. The US claimed that the Taliban were harboring Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda fighters so the US invaded the country to oust the Taliban regime (BBC, 2021). The other major military operation the United States carried out was the Iraq War in 2003. Both wars ended in geopolitical disasters, the US occupation in Iraq eventually led to the rise of ISIS and the war in Afghanistan turned into a 20-year insurgency which ended with a Taliban victory when the US forces pulled out.

### **3.7. 2011-2019: Arab Spring and Beyond**

The Arab Spring was a series of demonstrations, protests and revolutions that shook the Arab world in the early 2010s. At first, these pro-democracy protests met with optimism from anti-authoritarianism supporters and Western governments alike. But, after a few years the optimism and the excitement as echoed by the slogan “The people want the overthrow of the regime!” (*Al-sha’b yurid isqat al-nizam!*) eventually left its’ place to more religious extremism, new dictatorships, civil wars, refugee crises, and destruction. As a result of these influential protests,

the social structure of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was completely changed. Today, according to some commentators and writers, the failure of the Arab Spring led to the region experiencing an Arab Winter (Feldman, 2020, p.5).

The Arab Spring process began in Tunisia and it spread across the Middle East and North Africa geography from there. On 17 December 2010, a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia lit himself on fire to protest how government officials treated him. This led to mass demonstrations and riots in the country. These protests, in addition to the usage of social media, such as Facebook or Twitter led to the government's overthrow. Tunisia's President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, who has been ruling the country for 23 years fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011 (King, 2020, pp. 2-3). After the revolution in Tunisia, mass uprisings broke out in the region, triggering the Arab Spring. In Egypt, protestors turned National Police Day on 25 January 2011 into the beginning of the Egyptian Revolution. After less than a month since the demonstrations, riots, and strikes began; the outrage against the government led to the collapse of the Mubarak regime. Hosni Mubarak was the president since 1981, after Anwar Sadat's assassination and he stepped down on 11 February 2011 (King, 2020, p. 3). After the revolution, Muslim Brotherhood, which was banned during the previous regime was legalized. Its' candidate Mohamed Morsi won the June 2012 elections. After he came to power, Morsi's Islamist rule led to polarization within the Egyptian society whether it was seculars against Islamists or Muslims against Christians. An example of the controversial decisions during his government was appointing a member of Gamaa Islamiya, the hardline Islamist organization responsible for the 1997 Luxor massacre, as the governor of Luxor (Kingsley, 2013). On 3 July 2013, the Egyptian army led by General Abdul-Fatteh el-Sisi overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood government in a coup d'etat (Kirkpatrick, 2013). After the coup, Muslim Brotherhood was banned again.

In Yemen, protests started on 27 January 2011. The demonstrators demanded the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh who has been ruling Yemen since the country's reunification in 1990. The protests led Saleh to hand over power to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. But after a few years, the instability in the country led to a sectarian civil war. In early 2014, the Houthis (Ansar Allah) started an uprising and then seized control of the north of the country, then captured the Yemeni capital Sanaa in March 2015. The Houthis are a Zaidi Shia Muslim organization backed by Iran. Yemen's neighbor Saudi Arabia was alarmed by the Shia influence and with US, UK, and France they started to support the Yemeni government against the Houthis during the Second Yemeni Civil War (BBC News, 2022).

In Libya, the protests which started in February 2011 against the government of Muammar Gaddafi led to violent clashes between the rebels and security forces. The western supported rebels formed an interim government named National Transitional Council (NTC) and in March 2011, NATO began an air campaign against the Gaddafi government. In October 2011, the civil war ended with Gaddafi's capture and brutal murder in his hometown, Sirte. In August 2012, NTC handed over power to the General National Congress (GNC). The instability after the civil war led to factionalism within the country in addition to the increase in Islamism. On 11 September 2012, which is the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Islamist militants attacked the US consulate in Benghazi, killing the US Ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens. In 2014, the second Libyan Civil War broke out and ISIS captured parts of the country (BBC News, 2021). As of 2022, the civil war is currently in a ceasefire.

As the revolutionary wave spread to Syria, 15 young boys in the southern city of Daraa wrote the slogan of the Arab Spring "the people want the regime to fall" on a high school wall. Because of it, they were arrested and tortured by the security forces of the Bashar al-Assad regime.

In response to this treatment, activists organized a “day of rage” on 15 March 2011 and they called for the end of the Bashar al-Assad regime (King, 2020. Pp. 3-4). As the protests grew, in August 2011, army deserters formed the “Free Syrian Army (FSA)”. FSA formed its bases in Turkey and received support from the West and the Gulf States. The instability during the civil war led to other major rebel groups being formed. Two of them were the Popular Protection Units (YPG) and al-Nusra Front. YPG aimed to create an autonomous Kurdish region in the north of Syria while the al-Nusra Front was the Syrian offshoot of Al-Qaeda (BBC News, 2013a). The Al-Nusra Front split in 2013 as the leader of the Iraqi wing of Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced that ISI is merging with the al-Nusra Front in Syria, thus creating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The organization is also known as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State, or Da'esh, which is the Arabic abbreviation. This merger was denied by the Al-Nusra Front and this event separated ISIS and Al-Qaeda (BBC News, 2013b). While the civil war in Syria was escalating, the withdrawal of the US forces from neighboring Iraq led to a power vacuum in the region which led to the rapid rise and territorial expansion of ISIS, the organization captured Mosul, the second biggest city in Iraq. With this influence, ISIS took the leadership of the worldwide global Jihadism from Al Qaeda (Gerges, 2016, p.1). In 2014, ISIS proclaimed a caliphate and changed its' name from ISIS to the Islamic State. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself as the Caliph. In 2017, ISIS was considered defeated in both Iraq and Syria (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021). The downfall of ISIS was caused by fighting on many fronts in both Syria and Iraq against multiple enemies. And the groups’ terrorist attacks abroad led to international efforts directed against them and these airstrikes from various countries weakened the terrorist organization (Wilson Center, 2019).

After the revolutions of the Arab Spring, Islamism grew in all five countries. In Tunisia, the Islamist political party Ennahda, which was formed in 1981 but remained banned during Ben Ali's rule was legalized after the revolution and it became part of the government in 2011 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood won the first elections after the revolution and Morsi ruled the country until the 2013 coup. In Yemen, sectarianism between Sunni and Shia populations grew after the revolution which led to a civil war. The civil war's sectarian character led the country to be an arena for the Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflicts. In Libya, there have been two civil wars since the revolution. Minor and major Islamist terrorist organizations including Al Qaeda and ISIS have been active in the country since the overthrow of Gaddafi. In Syria, the civil war has a sectarian character similar to Yemen, and just like the latter, the country has been a battleground for Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflicts. President Assad received support and manpower from Shia Islamist organizations including Hezbollah. The rebels became a Sunni front and eventually, Sunni Islamist organizations became stronger than moderate rebels. The country was overrun by Al-Nusra and ISIS. The optimism in the Arab World influenced by the Arab Spring has been lost and the turmoil led to more conflicts, and more instability while democracy and secularism in the region left their place to authoritarianism and Islamism. The Islamist Cold War between Saudi Arabia and Iran led to both sides supporting the Sunni and Shia populations respectively. Also, increasing levels of Islamism damaged the multi-cultural demographics since it led to Christian and Jewish immigration from Arab countries. In the region, attempts to assimilate non-Muslim populations increased and the Yazidi population experienced a genocide committed by ISIS.

## 4. THE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1. The Database

The data for this thesis was gathered from the Fondapol database. Fondapol (Fondation pour l'innovation politique) is a French think tank founded in 2004, the organization aims to research the evolution of French and European societies (Fondapol, 2022). The database covers the period between 27 December 1979 and 31 August 2019. The reason why it starts in 1979 is that; according to the authors, it can be considered the starting date of Islamist terrorism. The year symbolizes Arab nationalism failing against Islamism, the beginning of the USSR's military intervention in Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution, the signing of the Camp David accords, and Islamist fundamentalists seizing Mecca (Fondapol, 2019, pp. 6-7). The database uses three types of sources, these are the results from search engines on the attacks since 1979, the cross-referencing of databases, and academic research. The existing databases on terrorist attacks are incomplete or unevenly documented, the information may be extensive for some regions, countries, or years while being very short for others. This is why Fondapol used the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) of the University of Maryland as the initial source. The database has immense information on attacks and this factor was a challenge for Fondapol since they had to separate the Islamist attacks from 171,787 attacks recorded worldwide from 1979 to 2017. After gathering the data from GTD, Fondapol had to supplement the data with their own information. For example, GTD doesn't provide data for 1993 and since the GTD data was only available until 2017, Fondapol had to supplement the information on attacks for 2018 and 2019. For each Islamist terrorist attack, the database has the information on the date, the location (country, city, and exact location if possible), the number of confirmed deaths and injuries (including attackers), the



perpetrator(s), the type(s) of the target(s), the type(s) of attack(s) in question and the type(s) of weapon(s) used.

#### **4.2. Data Analysis**

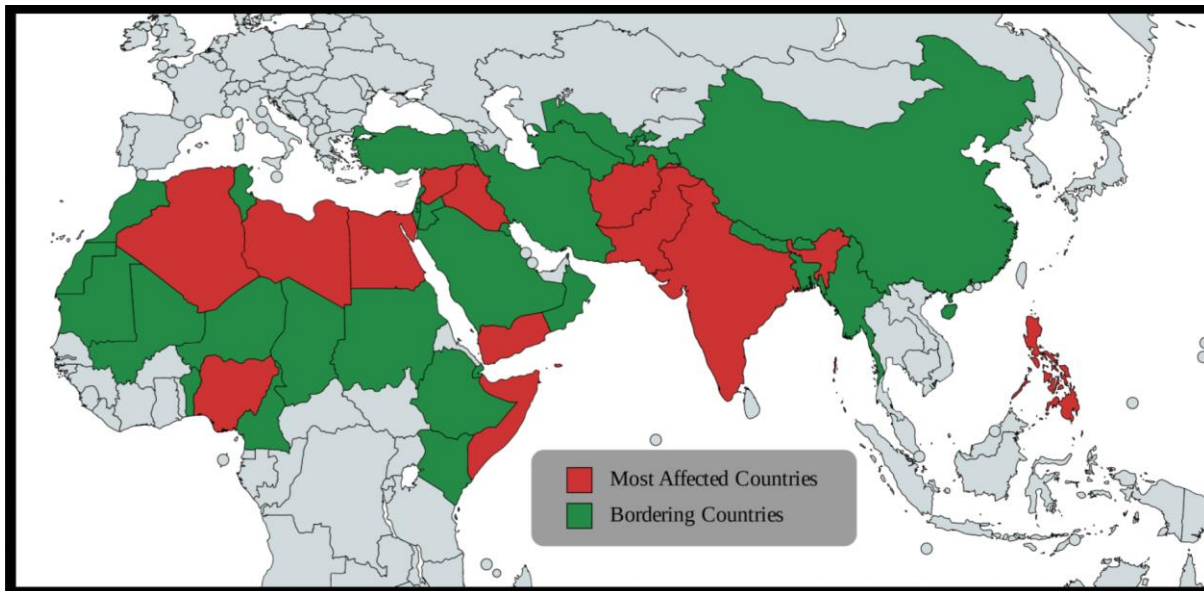
Since there is no consensus on the methodology for testing the domino effect in terrorism, an original methodology will be used which is based on the article of LaFree, et al. In their article, LaFree et al. define the domino effect in terrorism as a specific type of diffusion between countries. There are two types of diffusion: contagious, where a land border is shared and non-contagious diffusion where no borders are being shared (LaFree et al., 2017, p. 262). In order to base the research on the methodology used by the aforementioned authors, the most affected countries according to Fondapol with the most attacks and their neighboring countries are included. In Chapter 5 of the Fondapol report, the countries which were affected the most by Islamist terrorism are titled “most affected countries” (Fondapol, pp. 54-67). In table 1, the numbers of total Islamist terrorist attacks and the terrorism levels in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Algeria, Syria, Yemen, the Philippines, Egypt, India, and Libya are presented.

Rank	Country	Attacks	Level	
1	Afghanistan	8460	Very high	
2	Iraq	6265	Very high	
3	Somalia	3134	High	
4	Nigeria	2260	High	
5	Pakistan	2184	High	
6	Algeria	1390	High	
7	Syria	1340	High	
8	Yemen	1185	High	
9	Philippines	1037	High	
10	Egypt	977	Moderate	
11	India	816	Moderate	
12	Libya	699	Moderate	

***Table 1: Most Affected Countries***

The domino theory is tested by comparing the number of attacks in the neighboring countries of the most affected countries. In this thesis, “neighboring” is defined as having a land border. For example, Afghanistan, which is the country with the most numbers of Islamist terrorist attacks in this 40-year period has a land border with six countries, these are China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. And then, these bordering countries are categorized according to the total number of Islamist terrorist attacks the country experienced. Out of these thirty countries, nine of them border more than one most affected country. These are Chad bordering Libya and Nigeria; China bordering Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan; Iran bordering Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan; Israel bordering Egypt and Syria; Jordan bordering Iraq and Syria; Niger bordering Algeria, Libya, and Nigeria; Saudi Arabia bordering Iraq and Yemen; Sudan

bordering Egypt and Libya; and Turkey bordering Syria and Iraq. In total, there are 30 “bordering countries”. In figure 1, all 42 countries included in the thesis are presented on the world map.



**Figure 1: Map of Countries Included in the Research**

The countries are categorized according to the number of attacks in six levels. Countries with 0 attacks are categorized as “No attacks”, 1-100 as “Very Low”, 101-500 as “Low”, 501 to 1000 as “Moderate”, 1001 to 5000 as “High” and more than 5001 as “Very High”. The colors used to represent these categories are blue (no attacks), dark green (very low), green (low), yellow (moderate), orange (high), and red (very high). The applicability of the domino effect will be based on the terrorism levels between neighbors, if neighbor countries have the same level or one level below/above the terrorism levels, this would mean that a domino effect can be observed between these countries. For example, if country “A” has a *high* level of terrorism, the neighboring country “B” should have *moderate*, *high*, or *very high* levels of terrorism in order for the domino effect to be observed. Since the timeline covers 40 years, the co-occurrence of Islamist attacks in both neighbors can not be attributed to coincidence. For example, Afghanistan’s neighbor Pakistan has a high level of Islamist terrorism while China has a very low level of Islamist terrorism, meaning

it is possible to observe a domino effect between Afghanistan and Pakistan while it is not possible to observe the domino effect between Afghanistan and China.

#### **4.2.1. Afghanistan**

With 8460 attacks since 1979, Afghanistan is the country that had the most Islamist terrorist attacks. The country bordered 4 countries before 1991 but after the dissolution of the USSR, Afghanistan bordered three new independent countries (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). Since USSR was not included in the Fondapol data, 6 countries bordering Afghanistan are included in this research. The number of Islamist terrorist attacks increased rapidly with the start of the war in Afghanistan in 2001. Between 2012 and 2019 was the most violent period and 78% of those who died in Islamist terrorist attacks in Afghanistan were killed between those years. In the South Asia region, out of all the attacks, 72.5% of them were in Afghanistan and 22% of the victims of Islamist terrorism worldwide were killed in Afghanistan. The deadliest organization in the country was the Taliban with the organization being responsible for 89.4% of all deaths. The main target in Afghanistan was the police (32.8% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack is explosions (39.1% of all attacks). Within the country, the most affected region was the Helmand Province (Fondapol, 2019, p. 55).

In table 2, the statistics of Islamist terrorism within Afghanistan's neighboring countries are presented. Out of these 6 countries, Pakistan is the country with the highest number of attacks. 4 of Afghanistan's bordering countries, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan had very low levels of attacks while Iran had a low level of attacks. This means that, within Afghanistan's contiguous countries, only Pakistan can be said to prove the domino effect.

Country	Attacks	Level	
China	6	Very low	Dark Green
Iran	113	Low	Light Green
Pakistan	2184	High	Orange
Tajikistan	11	Very low	Dark Green
Turkmenistan	1	Very low	Dark Green
Uzbekistan	5	Very low	Dark Green

*Table 2: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Afghanistan*

#### 4.2.2. Iraq

Before the start of the war in Iraq in 2003, the country almost did not have any Islamist terrorist attacks even though the country had instability during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War and the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The country went through Islamist terrorist attacks during the Second Gulf War between 2003-2011, but especially during the Second Civil War between 2014-2017, the number of attacks and deaths increased at a greater rate. The capital, Baghdad is the city with the most Islamist terrorist attacks worldwide. The city was affected by 1,048 attacks and 7,231 deaths. Out of all the Islamist attacks using vehicles worldwide, 44.2% of them occurred in Iraq. Within the terrorist attacks in the Middle East and North Africa region, more than half of the people were killed in Iraq. The main target in Iraq was civilians (40.7% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack is explosions (67.3% of all attacks). Islamic State was responsible for 82.2% of the deaths in Iraq while the Nineveh Province experienced the most attacks (Fondapol, 2019, p. 56).

As presented in table 3, Iraq borders 6 countries. 3 of them, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have very low levels of Islamist terrorism while 2 of them, Iran and Turkey have low levels of terrorism. Syria, on the other hand, has a high level of Islamist terrorism. Since Iraq has a very

high level of Islamist terrorism, out of all their neighbors, a domino effect can only be observed with Syria.

Country	Attacks	Level	
Iran	113	Low	
Jordan	19	Very low	
Kuwait	19	Very low	
Saudi Arabia	65	Very low	
Syria	1340	High	
Turkey	116	Low	

*Table 3: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Iraq*

#### 4.2.3. Somalia

Islamist terrorist attacks in Somalia increased after 2005. This coincides with the second half of the Somali Civil War which has been ongoing since 1991. 2017 was the year with the deadliest attacks with 506 attacks and 1808 deaths. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 26.2% of the casualties were killed in Somalia. Al-Shabab is the deadliest terrorist group in the country. The organization is responsible for almost all deaths in Islamist terrorist attacks since 97.2% of the deaths were caused by Al-Shabab. The main target in Somalia was the military (46.2% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack is explosions (37.1% of all attacks). The most affected area is the Banaadir Province which includes the capital city of Mogadishu. 34% of Islamist attacks in the country occurred in Mogadishu (Fondapol, 2019, p. 57).

Somalia, located in the Horn of Africa borders 3 countries. The levels of terrorism in Somalia's neighbors are shown in table 4. Two of these countries, Djibouti and Ethiopia have very low levels of Islamist terrorism while Kenya has a low level of Islamist terrorism. Since Somalia

has a high level of Islamist terrorism, the domino effect can't be observed within its' neighboring countries.

Country	Attacks	Level	
Djibouti	1	Very low	
Ethiopia	10	Very low	
Kenya	442	Low	

*Table 4: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Somalia*

#### 4.2.4. Nigeria

Nigeria has been battling two conflicts, first one is the Crisis in the Niger Delta since 2004 and the Boko Haram insurgency since 2009. Before 2008, the country almost did not have any Islamist terrorist attacks. More than half of all Islamist terrorist attack casualties in Sub-Saharan Africa were killed in Nigeria (51.9%). The deadliest group in the country is Boko Haram and they are responsible for almost all deaths caused by Islamist terrorist attacks in Nigeria (99.5%). On average, 4.9 people die per attack worldwide and 5.3 die per attack in Sub-Saharan Africa, but in Boko Haram attacks 8.2 people on average die per attack. The majority of the attacks (64.8%) occurred in the Borno Province. The main target in Nigeria were civilians (46.3% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack was armed assaults (46.5% of all attacks).

The Western African country of Nigeria, borders four countries as shown in table 5. One of them, Benin had no attacks; one of them, Chad had a very low level of Islamist terrorism while the other two countries, Cameroon and Niger had low levels of Islamist terrorism. Thus, since Nigeria has a high level of Islamist terrorism, the domino effect can't be observed among Nigeria's neighbors.

Country	Attacks	Level	
Benin	0	No attack	Blue
Cameroon	272	Low	Red
Chad	43	Very low	Green
Niger	122	Low	Red

*Table 5: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Nigeria*

#### 4.2.5. Pakistan

Islamist terrorist attacks in Pakistan rose greatly with the start of the armed conflict in northwest Pakistan in 2004. In the country, 9.9% of the attacks were suicide attacks and among the victims of Islamist attacks in South Asia, 20.4% died in Pakistan. The terrorist group which was responsible for the most deaths was Tehrik-i Taliban. The organization claimed 58.8% of the lives lost in terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The region which was most affected by attacks was Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The main target in Pakistan was civilians (26.2% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack is explosions (45.9% of all attacks).

As seen in table 6, Pakistan is surrounded by four countries. Within these countries, China has very low, Iran has low, India has moderate and Afghanistan has very high levels of Islamist terrorism. A domino effect can't be observed with Pakistan and China or Iran. A domino effect can be observed in India and as mentioned on page 21 of this research, it can be observed in Afghanistan as well.



Country	Attacks	Level	
Afghanistan	8460	Very high	Red
China	6	Very low	Dark Green
India	816	Moderate	Yellow
Iran	113	Low	Bright Green

*Table 6: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Pakistan*

#### 4.2.6. Algeria

Algeria was affected by two armed conflicts each lasting more than a decade. The first one was the Algerian Civil War between December 1991 and February 2002. During the civil war, the Algerian government fought with the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), and GIA attacks resulted in 30.4% of all Islamist terrorism-related deaths in the country. The civil war was the most violent period in terms of Islamist attacks in the country with 53.2% of all incidents taking place between 1991 and 2002. In the civil war, the most violent year was 1997, within the year 78 attacks took 967 lives. After the civil war ended, in 2003 the Sahel War began and as of 2022, the conflict is still ongoing. The main target in Algeria was civilians (26.6% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack is explosions (39.2% of all attacks). The capital Algiers was the most affected region in the country. 4 of the 5 regions which experienced the most Islamist terrorist attacks are within the mountainous region of Kabylia, which has a Berber population.

As shown in Table 7, the North African country of Algeria has land borders with seven countries. The internationally unrecognized Western Sahara, also known as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) did not experience any Islamist attacks. Three of Algeria's neighbors, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia had very low levels of Islamist terrorism. Mali and Niger had low levels of Islamist terrorism while Libya had a moderate level of Islamist terrorism.

Since Algeria had a high level of Islamist terrorism, it means that a domino effect can be observed between Algeria and Libya.

Country	Attacks	Level	
Libya	699	Moderate	Yellow
Mali	316	Low	Green
Mauritania	12	Very low	Dark Green
Morocco	14	Very low	Dark Green
Niger	122	Low	Green
Tunisia	67	Very low	Dark Green
Western Sahara	0	No attack	Blue

*Table 7: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Algeria*

#### 4.2.7. Syria

Islamist terrorism in Syria began in the early 1980s with a small number of attacks and after 1982, until the start of the Syrian Civil War, terrorist attacks were almost non-existent. After 2011, a devastating civil war broke out and Islamist terrorist attacks spread quickly. The most violent year was 2015 with 318 attacks and 3414 deaths. Compared to the world average, Syria had more than double of deaths per attacks, the world average is 4.9, the Middle East and North Africa average is 5.5 and the Syrian average is 10.8 deaths per attack. 9.9% of all Islamist attacks in the Middle East and North Africa were committed in Syria with the Islamic State being the deadliest group (61.9% of all deaths), Islamic State has also been responsible for 68.8% of all hostage-takings and kidnappings in Syria. After the Islamic State, the Al-Nusra Front had been responsible for 18.4% of all attacks. The main target in Syria were the civilians (38.7% of all attacks) and the main type of attacks were explosions (58.7% of all attacks) while Aleppo is the most affected region in Syria.

As shown in the Table 8, Syria borders five countries. Out of these countries, Jordan had very low, Israel and Turkey had low, Lebanon had moderate and Iraq had very high levels of Islamist terrorism. Since Syria had high levels of terrorism, among Syria’s neighbors, the domino effect can be observed between Iraq, as mentioned on page 23 and Lebanon.

Country	Attacks	Level	
Iraq	6265	Very high	Red
Israel	414	Low	Green
Jordan	19	Very low	Dark Green
Lebanon	506	Moderate	Yellow
Turkey	116	Low	Light Green

*Table 8: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Syria*

#### 4.2.8. Yemen

Before 1990, present-day Yemen was comprised of two countries, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), also known as North Yemen, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDYR), also known as South Yemen (Dunbar, 1992, p. 456). The country had instability both before and after its unification, in January 1986 South Yemen had a civil war and after the unification, two civil wars broke in unified Yemen. The First Yemeni Civil War was between May and July 1994 and the Second Yemeni Civil War broke out in 2015 and it is ongoing as of 2022. After the Yemeni Revolution in 2011, the number of terrorist attacks escalated with 2012 being the most violent year (199 attacks, 964 deaths). 65% of the casualties of Islamist terrorism were killed between 2012 and 2019. The main target in Yemen was the military (44.6% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack was explosions (40.1 % of all attacks). Al-Qaeda, being

responsible for 78.7% of the deaths, is the deadliest organization. Hadramut region is the most affected province in the country.

Yemen, which is located in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula borders two countries: Oman and Saudi Arabia. As presented in the table 9, Oman had zero Islamist terrorist attacks while Saudi Arabia had a very low level of Islamist terrorist attacks. This means that the domino effect can not be observed between Yemen and its neighbors even though Yemen had instability throughout its' modern history.

Country	Attacks	Level	
Oman	0	No attacks	
Saudi Arabia	65	Very low	

**Table 9: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Yemen**

#### 4.2.9. The Philippines

In the Philippines, the Moro insurgency started in the Muslim majority regions in the southern Philippines in 1969 and the conflict ended in 2019. 2000 was the most violent year with 96 attacks and 244 deaths. Within Southeastern Asia, 75.4% of deaths in Islamist attacks were killed in the Philippines. The main target in the country were civilians (30.4% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack was explosions (44.5 % of all attacks). Abu Sayyaf was responsible for 47.1% of the deaths, thus it is the deadliest organization. Basilan region is the most affected province in the country (Fondapol, 2019, 63).

Since the Philippines are comprised of islands in the Western Pacific Ocean, the country does not have a land border with any other country. This is why a domino effect can not be observed in the Philippines.

#### 4.2.10. Egypt

In Egypt, since 2011, there has been an insurgency in the Sinai peninsula and the most terrorist attack-affected region in Egypt is the North Sinai Province. All attacks in North Sinai occurred between 2011 and 2019, Islamic State is responsible for 90.9% of the attacks in the province while the organization was responsible for 63.5% of the deaths in Egypt. Aside from the Islamic State, between 1979 and 2019, 35 attacks have been committed by the Muslim Brotherhood. The main target in Egypt was the police (42.9% of all attacks) and most used type of attack is explosions (38.3% of all attacks).

Egypt borders 4 countries, these are Libya, Sudan, Israel and the Gaza Strip section of Palestine (Table 10). The State of Palestine is referred to as “West Bank and the Gaza Strip” in Fondapol’s database. Out of Egypt’s neighbors, Sudan has very low, Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip) and Israel has low while Libya has moderate levels of Islamist terrorism. Thus, the domino effect from Egypt can be observed with West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel and Libya.

Country	Attacks	Level	
West Bank and the Gaza Strip	320	Low	Green
Israel	414	Low	Green
Libya	699	Moderate	Yellow
Sudan	5	Very low	Dark Green

*Table 10: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Egypt*

#### 4.2.11. India

In India, the Insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir has been ongoing since 1989 and with 665 attacks (81.5% of all Islamist attacks in India), Jammu and Kashmir has been the most

affected region. 2008 was the deadliest year with 51 attacks and 474 deaths. The deadliest group in the country is Lashkar-e-Taiba which is responsible for 38.1% of all Islamist attacks. The most attacked target is the police (29% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack is armed assault (44.7% of all attacks).

As presented on Table 11, India borders six countries. One of these countries, Bhutan had no Islamist terrorist attacks. Three of them, China, Myanmar and Nepal had very low, Bangladesh had low and Pakistan had high level of Islamist terrorism. So, since India had moderate level of Islamist terrorism, as mentioned previously on page 25, the domino effect can be observed with Pakistan.

Country	Attacks	Level	
Bangladesh	192	Low	
Bhutan	0	No attack	
China	6	Very low	
Myanmar	6	Very low	
Nepal	1	Very low	
Pakistan	2184	High	

*Table 11: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of India*

#### 4.2.12. Libya

Islamist terrorist attacks in Libya before the First Libyan Civil War (2011) were almost non-existent. In 2011, after the civil war and the NATO intervention, the long time ruler of Libya Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown. The country experienced instability between 2011 and 2014 and with the start of the Second Libyan Civil War in May 2014, Islamist terrorist attacks in Libya increased rapidly. 15 attacks in Libya targeted diplomatic institutions. 40.5% of the Islamist attacks

were explosions. The most affected region in the country was Sirte with 39.8% of all Islamist terrorist attacks taking place in the province. The deadliest group was the Islamic State and the organization is responsible for 79.6% of all deaths. The main target in Libya was civilians (38.6% of all attacks) and the most used type of attack is explosions (40.5% of all attacks).

Libya, which is located in North Africa, borders six countries (Table 12). Out of its' neighbors, three of them, Chad, Sudan, and Tunisia had very low levels of Islamist terrorism. Niger had low, Egypt had moderate and Algeria had high levels of Islamist terrorism. So, as mentioned before the domino effect can be observed in Algeria (page 26) and Egypt (page 30).

Country	Attacks	Level	
Algeria	1390	High	Orange
Chad	43	Very low	Dark Green
Egypt	977	Moderate	Yellow
Niger	122	Low	Bright Green
Sudan	5	Very low	Dark Green
Tunisia	67	Very low	Dark Green

*Table 12: Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the Neighbors of Libya*

### 4.3. Discussion

Within the 40-year period of Islamist terrorism in the world, 12 countries have been affected the most. 2 of those countries had very high, 7 had high and 3 had moderate levels of Islamist terrorism. 7 of these countries are in Asia and 5 of them are in Africa. Within the world's regions, 6 of them are within MENA with 3 of them being located in North Africa and 3 of them being located in the Middle East; 2 of them are located in Sub-Saharan Africa, 3 of them are located

in South Asia and 1 of them is located in East Asia/Pacific. In terms of religious demographics, 10 of them have Muslim majority populations while 2 of them have Muslim minority populations.

Within the 30 neighboring countries of the 12 most-affected countries, in terms of world's regions; 11 of them are located in MENA (8 Middle East and 3 North Africa); 10 are located in Sub-Saharan Africa, 3 are located in South Asia, 3 are located in Central Asia and 1 is located in Europe (trans-continental). In terms of religious demographics, 21 of them have Muslim majority populations, 8 of them have Muslim minority populations and 1 of them has a Muslim plurality population. When the geographical positions of all the countries included in the research are analyzed, it can be seen that the majority of these countries are located in MENA with 11 in Middle East and 6 in North Africa. And when the religious demographics are analyzed, it can be seen that majority of them have Muslim majority populations (29 out of 42).

A total of 48 borders were included in this research. As shown in table 13, as a result of the analysis conducted in Chapter 4, out of these 48 borders, the domino effect was observed between 9 borders. These borders are Afghanistan-Pakistan, Iraq-Syria, Pakistan-India, Algeria-Libya, Syria-Lebanon, Egypt-West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Egypt-Israel, Egypt-Libya and India-Bangladesh. That means that the domino effect was observed in only 18.75% of the borders. Among 5 of these borders, the domino effect occur in both directions, since they are both in the most affected countries list. These borders are, Afghanistan-Pakistan, Iraq-Syria, Pakistan-India, Algeria-Libya, and Egypt-Libya. In 4 of the borders, the domino effect occurs only in one direction since one country is in the most affected countries list and the other ones are not. These are, Syria-Lebanon, Egypt-West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Egypt-Israel and India-Bangladesh.



Most Affected Countries	Bordering Countries	Domino Effect
Afghanistan (very high)	China (Very low), Iran (Low), Pakistan (High), Tajikistan (Very low), Turkmenistan (Very low), Uzbekistan (Very low)	Pakistan
Iraq (Very high)	Iran (Low), Jordan (Very low), Kuwait (Very low), Saudi Arabia (Very low), Syria (High), Turkey (Low)	Syria
Somalia (High)	Djibouti (Very low), Ethiopia (Very low), Kenya (Low)	None
Nigeria (High)	Benin (No attack), Cameroon (Low), Chad (Very low), Niger (Low)	None
Pakistan (High)	Afghanistan (Very high), China (Very low), India (Moderate), Iran (Low)	Afghanistan, India
Algeria (High)	Libya (Moderate), Mali (Low), Mauritania (Very low), Morocco (Very low), Niger (Low), Tunisia (Very low), Western Sahara (No attack)	Libya
Syria (High)	Iraq (Very high), Israel (Low), Jordan (Very low), Lebanon (Moderate), Turkey (Low)	Iraq, Lebanon
Yemen (High)	Oman (No attack), Saudi Arabia (Very low)	None
The Philippines (High)	None	None
Egypt (Moderate)	West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Low)-, Israel (Low), Libya (Moderate), Sudan (Very low)	West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel, Libya
India (Moderate)	Bangladesh (Low), Bhutan (No attack), China (Very low),-Myanmar (Very low), Nepal (Very low), Pakistan (High)	Bangladesh, Pakistan
Libya (Moderate)	Algeria (High), Chad (Very low), Egypt (Moderate), Niger (Low), Sudan (Very low), Tunisia (Very low)	Algeria, Egypt

***Table 13: Summary of the Borders Analyzed in This Research***

## CONCLUSION

This thesis intended to answer one main question: “Can the phenomena of the domino theory be observed in the history of Islamist terrorism using empirical data on the number of terrorist attacks?” To answer this question, the data for the Islamist attacks were gathered from Fondapol’s “Islamist terrorist attacks in the world 1979-2019” database. With 12 main “most affected countries”, 30 “bordering countries” and 48 borders analyzed, it is safe to say that the domino effect, while still observable, was apparent only in a minority of cases. With the statistics gathered, it was possible to observe that in some cases, the numbers of terrorist attacks were radically different. For example, China had only 6 Islamist terrorist attacks even though it borders the country with the most Islamist terrorist attacks, Afghanistan.

This thesis had limitations that could affect the strength of the research. Firstly, only 12 countries were selected as “bases” to observe the domino effect, and further research including more numbers of countries being selected as “bases” would improve and strengthen the results. Secondly, unfortunately, there is no clear methodology to research the applicability of domino theory for the cases of terrorist activities. A lack of previously used methodology available in political science, international relations or terrorism studies literature made it difficult to observe and test the domino theory. An original methodology had to be used, which hopefully could be used and improved on by other researchers trying to research similar topics. Thirdly, even though the historical background of the countries were included in chapter 4, more emphasis on the domestic dynamics of the countries could be given. For example, the cases of Nigeria, India, Sudan, and Kenya deserve more attention since all of these countries had religious divides which could be the source of Islamist terrorism. The country's demographics, economic situation, democracy levels, and other various factors which could trigger Islamist terrorism could be

included. Suggestions for future research include potential solutions to these aforementioned limitations of this research. Better results could be achieved with future research that has more depth to the data included in this dissertation.

In conclusion, the results presented in this thesis contribute to the fields of political science, comparative politics and terrorism studies literature and provides answers to the question of domino theory's applicability in terrorism. The findings based on the data show that the domino theory is perhaps a smaller factor in the case of Islamist terrorism expansion within different countries. Since a domino effect was observed in less than one-fifth of the cases, the findings raise further questions about armed conflicts in the world, cross-border terrorism diffusion, and religious extremism.

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