

**LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

US Foreign Policy in the Middle East:  
Authoritarian Stability or Democratic Stability?

By  
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To my biggest blessing, my husband

Mazen Tohme

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# US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Stability or Democracy?

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## Abstract

The Middle East region has long been an area of interest to the United States. In the last two decades, the United States' interventions in the Middle East and North Africa region have been associated with a claimed promotion of democracy and human rights. Other foreign policy goals have claimed regional stability objectives. Despite the dominance of democracy promotion throughout the post-9/11, stability priority advocates remained critical of President Bush's foreign policy agenda. This thesis explores the relationship between democracy promotion and stabilization within the context of U.S. Middle Eastern foreign policy rapprochement. Whether the U.S. foreign policy interest is best served through authoritarian stabilizers or liberal democrats is a primary theme. A comparative analysis between the Bush and Obama's doctrines is undertaken in order to reveal aspects of contentions and reconciliations. Revelations are made that correspond to foreign policy shifts and adaptations toward post-Arab spring states.

Keywords: Democracy promotion, Arab Spring, authoritarian paradigm, democratic paradigm, extremism.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

There is a view that the defining elements of democracy are those of human rights, especially those of political and civil rights such as freedom of expression, association, movement, and equality before law (Carothers, 2004, p. 9). As such, democracy promotion and human rights promotion are believed to be the exact same thing. Many would argue that the US democracy promotion does not reflect promotion of human rights. Further arguments would argue that certain US actions such as the 2003 war in Iraq and its subsequent establishment of detention centers violate human rights in many ways.

In this paper, we will not explore the legitimacy of US democracy promotion. It will be indicated how the US perceives democracy promotion and how it implements it accordingly. The focus will be on US democracy promotion in the Middle East in the period that follows the 9/11 attacks. A brief comparison with US democracy promotion prior to the events of 9/11 will be briefly drawn throughout the chapters. Most importantly, the paper will explore how US democracy promotion is directly linked to US stability concerns in the Middle East. It will be revealed that the continuous US shift between supporting the authoritarian apparatus and backing democracy promotion is a

consequence of US concern over its interests. As a result, US foreign policy formulation in the Middle East is based on the stability of its interests in the region.

Although US democracy promotion goes back in history many years, it started to be specifically noticeable post the attacks of 11 September 2001. Following the terrorist attacks that targeted New York and Washington, the stability paradigm in the Middle East became questionable by many US policymakers. It became questionable whether the long time Arab authoritarian regimes were effective in providing stability. The lack of democracy in the Arab region started to be seen as a main cause behind the rise of violent anti-Western movements. These movements posed a major security problem (Carothers & Ottaway, p. 3). As a result, the talk on democracy promotion was intensified and became perceived as a tool to fight Muslim extremism.

On the other hand, the contradiction between US rhetoric and actions in the Middle East created a backlash. Arab People became resentful at the fact that the US maintained normal relations with Arab dictators. These dictators had been carrying out anti-democratic oppressive practices for years. Arab concerns and demands culminated in what was later known as the Arab Spring. The change of circumstances in the region pushed the US to react internationally. This reaction would provide the foundation of the new US foreign policy for years to come.

## **1.1 Comparative Study: Bush versus Obama's Democracy Promotion:**

### **1.1.1 Democracy Promotion during the Bush Administration**

After the 9/11 attacks, democracy promotion became the main tenet of US foreign policy in the region. President Bush made it very clear in a 2003 speech that his administration would no longer provide unquestionable support for friendly authoritarian Arab regimes (Hawthorne, p. 61). He added that the old policy that had provided stability but failed to protect US national security would be replaced by a “freedom strategy” (Hawthorne, p. 61). In order to eliminate the “roots of terrorism”, the Bush administration undertook several steps aiming at political reform and democratization of the Arab world (Carothers & Ottaway, p. 3). However, many scholars and policymakers questioned the seriousness of these actions in light of continuous US collaboration with Arab authoritarian regimes.

The Bush Doctrine was also criticized for its new policy in the Middle East especially when it came to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Bush's freedom agenda even assumed that democratic transition in Iraq would influence the entire Arab world (Ottaway, 2008, p. 1). It was believed that democracy would spread in the whole Arab world once democracy is instilled in Iraq. Later, with the failure of this mindset, the

Obama administration applied some modifications to its foreign policy in the Middle East.

### **1.1.2 Democracy Promotion during the Obama Administration**

The 2010 United States National Security Strategy of the new Obama administration indicated a shift in US foreign policy. The US National Security Strategy asserted the need to engage with other states combined with a strong commitment to the rule of law (Gray, 2011, p. 35). On his second day at office, Obama issued executive orders to close detention centers on top was the Guantanamo Bay and other CIA secret prisons signaling the end of the use of harsh interrogation techniques (Gray, 2011, p. 35). Moreover, the new President reaffirmed his country's commitment to the 1949 Geneva Convention dedicated to the humanitarian treatment of war and distanced himself from the decision to use force against Iraq in 2003 (Gray, 2011, p. 36). In his June 4 Cairo speech, Obama promised to uphold human and political rights announcing that the United States "will support them everywhere" (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2, 2010, p. 1). These actions indicate a new shift in US foreign policy public displays aiming at carrying out human rights practices in conjunction with its calls for democracy promotion.

Perhaps the most obvious alteration of US foreign policy was seen in the June 4, 2009 Obama Cairo speech. The President's speech marked new priorities in US foreign policy formulation. Although Obama did not give up his unquestioned support for Israel, he expressed a concerned attitude toward the Palestinian rights- an issue that touches almost every Arab individual. In his speech, Obama acknowledged that the US has fallen short of its ideals as in the war in Iraq (The New York Times, 4 June 2009). Obama refocused the war on Al Qaeda instead of the general war on terrorism and expressed a deep connection with the Muslim world (The New York Times, 4 June 2009). Most importantly, he stressed on the need for democracy promotion in Egypt and fulfillment of women's rights (The New York Times, 4 June 2009). The June 4 Cairo speech marks a modification if not a shift in US foreign policy toward the region. More specifically, it dedicates more attention to the issues of democracy promotion, the Arab-Israeli struggle, and the war on Al Qaeda.

Earlier in 2001, the Bush Doctrine signaled the start of the US war with global terrorism. It expressed its intention to act preemptively to prevent the occurrence of threats. It also voiced a broad attention to spread democracy (The Economist, 27 May 2008, p. 1). Later, the Obama Doctrine revealed some modifications that became obvious with the spread of the Arab uprisings. Instead of acting unilaterally, the Obama administration opted for collective action as it did in Libya in the year 2011. The US

approach in Libya consisted of US air power aiding the rebels but there were no US troops on ground (The Guardian, 20 October 2011, p. 2). The Libyan case reflects a more careful US approach to problems in the Middle East. The US no longer chooses to act unilaterally as it did in Iraq. It opted for the collective action operating under the NATO umbrella.

Obama's focus on the conflict in Afghanistan and the killing of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden reveals that the new administration narrowed its target from fighting terrorism to fighting Al Qaeda. This indicates that priorities and modes of operations have altered with the change of US administrations throughout the past decade. The change of circumstances, starting since the 9/11 attacks, has pushed the US to alter its foreign policy priorities toward the region. Throughout the past decade, the US foreign policy was perceived as contradictory, characterized by a strong call for democracy promotion combined with a strong relationship with Arab authoritarian regimes. Later, the rise of the Arab Spring has pushed the US administration to modify its foreign policy priorities. The US became more careful in its direct interference in the Middle Eastern affairs. It also started on calling the Arab leaders for more democratic practices.

### **1.1.3 US Initiatives Aiming at Democracy Promotion:**

Many initiatives aiming at democracy promotion were undertaken during the Bush administration. Among these was the establishment of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). This initiative was established in 2002 with the purpose of leading the US reform agenda in the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2005, p. 32). MEPI aims at funding political, economic, and educational reform programs in the Middle East (Hawthorne, p. 62). Another initiative, the White House's Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative was set up in 2004 (Hawthorne, 2004, p. 62). This Initiative was more ambitious as it was produced by a US and European collaboration and provided a regional forum for dialogue among Arab governments and civil society groups (Hawthorne, 2004, p. 62).

Other initiatives were carried out as well during the Obama administration, such as the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities. The OSRMC aims at bonding directly with Muslims throughout the world for the purpose of creating solutions to challenges they face (Pandith, 2009, p. 1). These challenges include economic development and low quality of education. But most importantly, the OSRMC aims at engaging young people in partnership building as well as creating a cooperative environment with the Muslim community (Pandith, 2009, p. 2).

## **1.2 The Rise of Arab Opposition and the US View:**

The issue of Arab reform and democracy has actually generated more rhetoric than actual actions. Although some Arab authoritarian regimes have undertaken some virtual reforms, they continued to reign with a tyrannical fist. Critics from both the Western and Arab camps criticized the reforms and their shortcomings. But as the years passed by and the authoritarian Arab regimes persisted, angry Arab opposition intensified. The result was the recent Arab Spring that ultimately led to the removal of many of these dictators.

Ben Ali of Tunisia, Mubarak of Egypt, and Saleh of Yemen were all detached after decades of oppressive reigning. Syria has also been experiencing bloodshed for the past couple of years and Assad is still holding onto power utilizing every available ruthless action against any opposition. The change of Arab regimes and the political turbulences in the region directly affect US interests. On top are the security of Israel and the future of its peace processes with countries such as Egypt. For that reason, the US had to continuously adopt foreign policy choices that best serve its interests.

The sudden change of some Arab regimes may have urged the US to undertake concrete stances regarding democracy promotion in the region. The Obama administration threw full US support for Arabs calling for democracy and reform.

Obama even undertook bold stances regarding the transition in Egypt and the removal of the Libyan leader Qaddafi. Obama has recently promised a “new chapter” in US diplomacy. He took the side of the Arab street in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, and even in Bahrain- a longtime US ally (The Guardian, 20 May 2011, p. 1). Obama condemned the mass arrests and brutal actions taking place in Bahrain, he also urged the Syrian President in the year 2011 to leave office or lead a transition (The Guardian, 20 May 2011, p. 2). All these assertive positions indicate at least a rhetorical commitment to human rights and embracement of democracy by the United States’ administration.

President Obama’s position on the Arab Spring may have created a groundbreaking alteration of US foreign policy. In this paper, we will explore whether the recent rhetorical support of democracy was actually accompanied by a concrete US foreign policy shift. This paper aims to explore whether the Arab Spring indicates a variation in US foreign policy from supporting the authoritarian stability toward supporting the democratic paradigm. As have noted, the US rhetoric on its support of democracy contradicted its actual support of Arab authoritarian regimes. This has put the US in a critical position to the extent that Arab commentators have called it hypocritical. The US has always opted for the preservation of its security interests in the region and on top were the security of Israel and its continuous access to Arab oil (Siegman, 1998, p. 2). The US support of Arab dictators came as a result of its security concerns. With

the rise of the Arab opposition, these interests became at risk and its preservation depend on US's adaptation to the new circumstances.

In this paper, it will be explored whether the Arab Spring has pushed the US to adopt a serious shift in its foreign policy choices. Or whether these uprisings may have only pushed the US to apply minor modifications to its rhetoric and foreign policy actions. In all cases, it will be shown that US foreign policy is formulated based on its longstanding interests in the region. The international arena remains highly alerted concerning US actions toward the region in times of forceful calls for democracy.

### **1.3 Critical Readings of American Policy: An Overview**

Anti-American sentiments have been on the rise for the past years. Many argue that these sentiments have even intensified since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Many scholars have also claimed that the US has been facing a central problem concerning its credibility as a promoter of democracy in the Middle East (Ottaway, 2008, p. 174). Arab commentators questioned the US's real intentions behind its calls for democracy. Public opinion studies and surveys have indicated that in the Arab countries, there has been a wide distrust and suspicion about the US motives in the region. This skepticism has been escalating over time (Ottaway, 2008, p. 176).

A critical reason behind the widespread anti-American sentiments may have been the US's continuous support for some Arab authoritarian regimes until lately. Throughout the years, US military and economic assistance to Egypt continued even though Egypt had failed to meet its human rights obligations (Carpenter, 21 August 2008, p. 2). The US has also maintained a close relationship with Saudi Arabia spanning decades and provided the Kingdom with increased purchases of military products (Knights, 13 August 2010, p. 1). Although the US has urged these countries to apply reforms, no groundbreaking transformations were undertaken by these regimes. Many Arab countries preserved their authoritarian character and the US continued its collaboration with these incumbent regimes for years.

The reasons behind the rise of anti-US sentiments are numerous and vary from one scholar to another. Some scholars have argued that the US intervention in Iraq has been particularly classified as one of the main reasons behind the rise of Arab anti-US sentiments (Carothers, T. & Ottaway, M., 2005, p. 4). Others agree that the US blind support of Israel and its "disregard of Palestinians' rights" had been another major element for the rise of anti-US views (Carothers, T. & Ottaway, M., 2005 p. 180). A comparison between US spending on the war in Iraq versus its spending on democracy programs as through MEPI leads to further questioning of US intentions by many Arab commentators. *"The US has allowed \$29 million for (MEPI), while the supposed war*

*against Iraq will be costing it \$100 billion dollars...*" (Carothers, T. & Ottaway, M., 2005 p. 183).

The recent Arab Spring may have revealed an important cause of anti-US sentiments. For years, the US has maintained excellent relationships with many of the Arab dictators. The US did not push for concrete reform in these countries. In many instances, the US restricted itself to rhetorical calls for democracy in its public speeches and announcements. Accordingly, the US longstanding support of Arab regimes may have been a major reason for the rise of anti-US sentiments.

#### **1.4 Research Question and Map of the Thesis:**

The main research question of this thesis will be as follows: Did the US support of democracy during the recent Arab uprisings mark a shift in US foreign policy in the Middle East? In order to tackle this question, the nature of the US-Arab relationship must be explored. The shift between US support of authoritarian regimes versus its support of democracy should be understood in association with US interests. Moreover, a comparative analysis between the Bush Doctrine and the Obama Doctrine would clarify how the change of circumstances pushes the US to alter its foreign policy choices. These foreign policy choices change in order to meet US interests and stability concerns in the Middle East.

In order to tackle the above research question and the dynamics of the US-Arab relationship, the thesis will be divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1: The first chapter has provided an introduction to the topic and a map of the thesis. It gave a description of US democracy promotion and its linkage to US interests in the region. It focused the attention on the US foreign policy during the presidencies of Bush and Obama. It also provided a comparison of US foreign policy priorities between the two administrations. Tools and programs used for the purpose of democracy promotion after the attacks of 9/11 were listed briefly and will continuously occur throughout the study. Finally, a brief comparison between the US support for the Arab authoritarian paradigm versus its support for the democratic paradigm is highlighted. These subjects will be explored extensively throughout the upcoming chapters leading to a conclusion that tackles the research question.

Chapter 2: This chapter will provide a literature review on two models. The first model suggesting that democracy would lead to stability. The second model proposing that democracy would lead to instability. This chapter will reflect on a study conducted by the United States Institute of Peace that concludes that in the long run, the most adequate type of stability would be democratic stability. Another report published in 2005 by the

Council on Foreign Relations tackles the issue of US support of democracy versus US support of authoritarianism. This report tackles the issue of the rise of anti-Americanism especially when US actions do not reflect its rhetoric.

Scholars such as Richard Haas and Steven Cook have discussed US democracy promotion especially after the attacks of 9/11. They both discuss the topics of Arab authoritarianism and its link to stability and continuity of US interests. Most importantly, they reflect on the issue of anti-Americanism and the main reasons behind its escalation. Studies and analyses by other scholars will be discussed in chapter two especially when it concerns anti-Americanism and the reasons behind its existence.

Chapter 3: This chapter will be dedicated to the discussion on authoritarian Arab regimes and their long-term relationship with the US. It will also tackle the Islamist question and the Bush democracy promotion in a more detailed manner. Chapter 3 will provide a brief history on Arab authoritarianism and the US. It will tackle the issue of democracy deficit in the Arab world, the socioeconomic situation of the region and the oil factor. It will also discuss the strategies to transform semi-authoritarian regimes into democracies. As for the Islamist question, it will provide a brief overview on Islamism and identity politics in the Arab world. It will also tackle the issue of popularity of Islamists in the region and their impact on US democracy promotion. Finally, this

chapter will discuss comprehensively the Bush democracy promotion amidst the authoritarian Arab region and the Islamist threat. It will provide two documents, the US National Security Strategy of the year 2002 and that of the year 2006. These two documents summarize the Bush doctrine and provide material for comparison.

Chapter 4: This Chapter will tackle the Obama doctrine summarized by the US National Security Strategy of the year 2010. It will draw some comparison with the Bush doctrine. It will discuss the most recent US foreign policy toward the region with the rise of the Arab Spring. It will be shown how the US foreign policy started to adapt and support openly the Arab street demands for reform and democracy. A major argument behind this adaptation is that the US is currently supporting the democratic stability paradigm for the purpose of maintaining its interests and restoring its credibility as a promoter of democracy. As a result, the Obama administration marks a major modification in US foreign policy in the Middle East after decades of US support of Arab dictators.

Chapter 5: This chapter briefly tackles the issue of the rise of another extremist threat ISIL and how the US is currently dealing with it. The final chapter represents the

conclusion for the previous chapters. It tackles the answer to the research question and the findings of this study.

# **Chapter Two**

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the United States foreign policy toward the Middle East for the past decade. It will deal with the issue of the rise of extremism and the events of 9/11 that led to a new approach in US democracy promotion. It will discuss some of the initiatives undertaken in the name of democracy promotion. This chapter will also provide a literature review on Arab anti-American sentiments, its causes, and the reasons behind its escalation recently. In addition, a literature review on two models of US foreign policy will be provided. The first model suggests that if the US supports the democracy paradigm, then this would lead to stability in the long-term. The second model suggests that if the US supports the authoritarian paradigm, then this would lead to instability in the long run. A comparative study between the Bush Doctrine and the Obama doctrine will be highlighted. A clear shift of US policy from the authoritarian paradigm to the democracy paradigm will be detected, especially after the eruption of the Arab uprisings.

This chapter will reflect on a study conducted by the United States Institute of Peace that concludes that in the long run, the most adequate type of stability would be democratic stability. A report published in 2005 by the Council on Foreign Relations discusses the issue of US support of democracy versus US support of authoritarianism. This report tackles the issue of the rise of anti-Americanism in the Arab world, especially when US actions do not reflect its rhetoric. Scholars such as Richard Haas and Steven Cook have discussed US democracy promotion especially after the attacks of 9/11. They both discuss the issues of Arab authoritarianism and its link to stability and continuity of US interests. Most importantly, they reflect on the issue of anti-Americanism and the main reasons behind its escalation. Marina Ottaway, in particular, discusses the issue of Arab anti-US sentiments and tackles the reasons behind its escalation especially after the events of 9/11. It will be shown that the aspects of US support of democracy or its support of authoritarian stability are directly linked to the rise of anti-US sentiments. For this reason, the following chapter will review the two models of stability/instability as well as the issue of Arab anti-US sentiments.

## **2.2 US Democracy Promotion: An Understanding**

Democracy promotion has been a long-standing tenet of US foreign policy. However, in recent years, democracy promotion became a key element of US foreign policy. Most recently, as noted in the 2006 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism,

the George W. Bush administration saw democracy promotion as a long-term answer for winning the ‘War on Terror’ (CRS Report for Congress, 26 December 2007, p. 7). More specifically, and after the attacks of 9/11, the Bush administration Middle East policy rested on two approaches. The first was a forceful pursuit of recognized terrorists and the regimes that support them. The second approach was causing a democratic transformation in Middle Eastern governments (Stewart, 2005, p. 400).

The lack of a clear definition of democracy has created multiple problems for US policy makers. This has complicated the formulation of democracy promotion policy, the coordination of democracy promotion activities and the assessment of US activities and funding (CRS Report for Congress, 26 December 2007, p. 3). However, to clarify the concept of democracy itself, Richard Haas former state Department official and President of the Council on Foreign Relations provides an adequate understanding. He explains that *“democracy is more than elections; it is a diffusion of power where no group within a society is excluded from full participation in political life. Democracy requires checks and balances within the government, among various levels of government (national, state and local), and between government and society”* (CRS Report for Congress, 26 December 2007, p. 3). He continues explaining that some of these elements include independent media, unions, and political parties. He also acknowledges the importance of individual rights and the presence of opposition groups.

Another scholar, Laurence Whitehead discusses the attempts at defining democracy and explains, “*democratization is best understood as a complex, long-term, dynamic, and open-ended process. It consists of progress toward a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics*” (CRS Report for Congress, 26 December 2007, p. 5). On the other hand, the Senate Appropriations Committee Report for Fiscal Year 2007 asserts, “*to ensure a common understanding of democracy programs among United States Government agencies, the Committee defines in the act ‘the promotion of democracy’ to include programs that support good governance, human rights, independent media, and the rule of law, and otherwise strengthen the capacity of democratic political parties, NGOs, and citizens to support the development of democratic states, institutions and practices that are responsible and accountable to citizens* (CRS Report for Congress, 26 December 2007, p. 6).

In this chapter and throughout the paper the definition of democracy promotion will not be tackled intensely. The history of democracy promotion will not be reflected on. This paper will mainly deal with democracy promotion processes since the attacks of 9/11 and during the administration of George W. Bush as well as during the Obama administration. The next part will reveal the common issues under study.

## **2.3 9/11, the Rise of Extremism, and the Initiation of US Democracy Promotion**

This study will focus on US democracy promotion since the year 2001, after the attacks of 9/11. The timeline is very important because 9/11 marks the start of a new US foreign policy orientation toward the Middle East. During that time, the United State's highest foreign policy priority has become to promote democracy in the Arab states. President Bush announced the new orientation in a November 6, 2003 speech at the National Endowment for Democracy. In that speech, he called for a "*forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East*" (Rubin, 2006, p. 124). Moreover, in another 2003 public speech at the Whitehall Palace in London, Bush made a "*commitment to the global expansion of democracy*" (Rubin, 2006, p. 125). The enlargement of democracy, the containment of aggression via force, and working with other responsible governments were the new foundation of the US foreign policy strategy (Rubin, 2006, p. 125). However, one question stands: Did the Arab dictatorial governments represent "responsible governments" the US could cooperate with for the purpose of democracy expansion? This question is very important as will be shown later on. The US collaboration with many Arab authoritarian regimes has created a backlash in the form of anti-US views.

### **2.3.1 Democracy Promotion and US interests in the Arab World**

While the Bush administration was pursuing an agenda of democracy promotion amidst an authoritarian environment, other foreign policy calculations were taken into consideration. The US had to carry out its new policy while at the same time to preserve its vital interests in the region. On top of these interests are the security of Israel and the US continuous access to oil (Siegman, 1998, p. 2). For that purpose, the US had to resume its collaboration with the authoritarian regime of Saudi Arabia for instance. Pressure for democratic reform on the kingdom was little because the US depends on Saudi oil and on the Saudi regime to stabilize oil prices (Ottaway, 2005, p. 155). The US also had to sustain its cooperation with the Egyptian repressive regime that had previously concluded a peace agreement with Israel. Later, it will be seen that the change of circumstances in the Arab world would push the US to adapt to a new foreign policy orientation.

Steven Cook makes a clear distinction between US democracy promotion before and after 9/11. He argues that the toppling of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon has shifted the US Middle East policy drastically (Cook, 2005, p. 91). Before the attacks, the United States' promotion of reform was quiet and soft. Throughout the past years, the US followed three paths in its dealing with the Arab world. The US punished its enemies by diplomatic isolation, sanctions, and even

invasion. Second, it focused its attention on reinforcing civil society. And third, it promoted economic development in friendly states. The second and third tactics were believed to softly and quietly drive political liberalization (Cook, 2005, p. 92). For that purpose, the US has funded good-governance programs in Egypt and promoted industrial zones in Jordan (Cook, 2005, p. 92). The US also provided various forms of economic assistance for Yemen and the Palestinian authority. (Cook, 2005, p. 92). After the attacks of 9/11, Washington had to do more to promote Arab democratization (Cook, 2005, p. 91). As such, 9/11 marks the turning point whereby the US shifted to becoming more vocal about its support for the democratic paradigm.

### **2.3.2 Terrorism and its Effect on US Democracy Promotion**

Before 9/11, the policy that the US has adopted for the purpose of democratic transformation in the Middle East has failed to materialize. For that reason, after the attacks of 9/11, the administration adopted a stricter policy (Cook, 2005 p. 92). Promoting the rise of liberal democratic political systems in the Arab world became the method by which to reduce terrorist attacks on the US (Cook, 2005 p. 92). According to the Bush administration, it wasn't enough anymore to rely on the autocratic leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other countries to protect US's vital interests. In a 2003 speech, President Bush declared that the policy of unquestionable support of Arab regimes had brought stability but failed to protect US national security (Hawthorne,

2005, p. 61). However, later US actions have showed that the Arab authoritarian regimes continued to represent an indispensable component for US policy-makers.

There is a common belief among scholars that the attacks of 9/11 had brought widespread attention to the issue of the rise of extremism in the Middle East. Many scholars as well as policy-makers have explained how discontent in the Arab world has been leading people to join extremist groups. Ottaway argues that discontent pushes people to embrace nondemocratic populist leaders and causes people to turn into violence (Ottaway, 2005, p. 167). More specifically, the unfavorable conditions in the Arab world and the widespread socioeconomic problems could create support for socialism and eventually push people to join Islamist organizations (Ottaway, 2005, p. 168).

Bush's new orientation and democracy promotion initiative came as a tool to fight extremism in the region. Later, it will be shown that this new foreign policy orientation has created a backlash and many critics. The Bush policy has especially created criticism because of its contradictory and inconsistent actions. The contradiction in Bush's foreign policy choices came mainly from its support of democracy promotion but at the same time its continued collaboration with undemocratic authoritarian Arab regimes.

Scholars such as Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway have argued that post 11 September 2001; a new US outlook toward the Middle East has emerged. This outlook was seeing that the lack of democracy in the Middle East was one of the main causes for the rise of violent, anti-Western Islamic radicalism which posed a major security threat (Carothers and Ottaway, 2005, p. 3). As a result, promoting political reform and democratization became a policy priority for the US for eliminating the “roots of terrorism” (Carothers and Ottaway, 2005, p. 3). Thus, democracy promotion was not driven by a trend toward reform in the region, but by the security concerns of the West (Carothers and Ottaway, 2005, p. 3). Here, democracy promotion has become a vital US interest.

### **2.3.3 The Democracy Deficit and Bush’s Democratic Reform in the Middle East**

The Bush administration employed a method of carrots and sticks in order to push both friendly and unfriendly Arab regimes to carry out political reforms. Besides, the US had other important security interests that pushed it to maintain close ties with many authoritarian regimes in the region. The US was especially careful of sudden or quick political change in the region (Carothers & Ottaway, 2005, p. 5). Major US interests include cooperation on antiterrorism enforcement actions and securing access to oil (Carothers & Ottaway, 2005, p. 3). The initiation of MEPI and the G8 summit

were the most talked about initiatives undertaken for the purpose of reform. Widening free trade between Arab countries such as concluding free trade agreements with Bahrain and Morocco was another step undertaken by the Bush administration (Carothers & Ottaway, 2005, p. 3).

In a similar manner, Fuller asserts that September 11 has shifted US policy under the Bush administration by “*placing the war on terrorism at the center of US foreign policy*” (Fuller, 2005, p. 53). This new policy has focused the attention on the Muslim world where the majority of radical terrorist movements reside (Fuller, 2005, p. 53). Amy Hawthorne also argues that since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the issue of Arab reform became highly linked to the fight against al Qaeda. Since then, the issue of “democracy deficit” in the Arab world has become a main subject of discussion in Western media. Commentators, especially in the US, attributed the rise of Islamist fundamentalist movements to political repression and economic stagnation in the Arab countries. As such, the Bush administration adopted democracy promotion as the tool to fight terrorism. Democracy promotion became the main tenet of US Middle East policy for the first time (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 60).

Hawthorne contends that the Bush November 2003 speech on the freedom agenda marks a shift in US policy toward the Middle East. This shift indicates the

abandonment of US policy of unquestioning support for friendly authoritarian Arab regimes and the adoption of a “forward strategy of freedom” in the region (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 61). But again, subsequent US actions, such as continued support of Arab authoritarian regimes, would indicate that the US did not throw full support for the democratic paradigm at that time. The reason was the existence of other major US security concerns that included access to oil and security of Israel. Such other interests have restrained the US from curbing relationships with certain Arab autocratic regimes. As a conclusion, post 9/11, the US has rhetorically shifted its support from the authoritarian paradigm to the democratic paradigm. However, in actual practice, this was not the case.

## **2.4 US Programs to Promote Democracy and the Reactions toward them**

During the Bush administration, many programs were initiated for the purpose of democracy promotion. Among these were MEPI, USAID, OSRMC, and the Millennium Challenge Account. The Middle East Partnership Initiative, a new Middle East policy mechanism was established in 2002 with the purpose of leading the US reform agenda in the region (Albright, M., K., & Weber, V., & Cook, S., A., 2005, p. 32). MEPI rested on four main pillars. First, engaging with private and public sectors in order to curb the job gap. Second, making partnerships with community leaders in order to strengthen civil

society and political participation. Third, working with parents and educators in order to achieve better education. And finally, creating “*economic, political, and educational systems where women enjoy full and equal opportunities*” (Stewart, 2005, p. 406). MEPI received plenty of criticism because the administration’s commitment to the program seemed more rhetorical than substantive (Stewart, 2005, p. 406). It was often criticized for underfunding. In terms of budget, MEPI was initially funded with \$29 million with a promise of increase in funding (Stewart, 2005, p. 406). Moreover, MEPI was criticized for failing to tackle the issue of ‘democracy deficit’ that was highlighted by the administration at that time.

Another example is the Group of Eight Summit that produced the Broader Middle East Initiative in June 2004. This initiative aimed at promoting reform in the Middle East (Albright, M., K. & Weber, V. & Cook, S. A., 2005, p. 34). The GMEI came out as a tool for justifying the war in Iraq setting up a future plan for spreading democracy in the Middle East (Stewart, 2005, p. 409). In his article, ‘Arab Intellectuals and the Bush Administration’s Campaign for Democracy’, Baroudi illustrates how many Middle Easterners have developed hostile US sentiments and discusses the example of the Middle East Initiative. He explains that Arab intellectuals perceive a great gap between US rhetoric and US actions in the sense that the ideals the US promote for actually contradict its interests (Baroudi, 2007, p. 391). Baroudi discusses the case of the

Middle East Initiative that has created much criticism and controversy among Arab intellectuals. This case of the GMEI reflects how US ideals and interests contradict and how this affects the broader public of Arab intellectuals and governments. This subsequently affects the views of the wider Arab population on the United States.

Another initiative, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) was established in 2003 by the Bush administration. This initiative aims to reward poor countries with increased aid in case they meet 16 various standards. Among these standards are good governance, the rule of law, public education, health care, and economic transparency (Cook, 2005, p. 99). Cook argues that this initiative had the potential to become a suitable tool for promoting democracy in the Middle East. However, in this part of the world, only Jordan was given an amount of \$25 million. Yemen was considered ineligible for assistance after failing to meet certain criteria (Sharp, p. 14, 2009).

The highest initiatives undertaken for the purpose of promoting democracy came during the presidency of Obama. The Obama administration has requested a budget of \$1.54 billion for the year 2010 (twice the amount requested for 2009) for the purpose of democracy and governance assistance to the Middle East (Brumber, D. & Diamond, L. & Fukuyama, F., 2010, p. 21). As mentioned in Chapter 1, President Obama expressed a deep commitment to the issue of democracy promotion since he came to office. His 4<sup>th</sup>

of June 2009 Cairo speech highlighted the issues of democracy promotion, the Arab-Israeli struggle, and the war on Al Qaeda. In later chapters, it will be shown that during the Arab uprisings, Obama completely abandons supporting the Arab authoritarian paradigm. Instead, he throws full support for the Arab street demanding reform and democracy.

## **2.5 Critical Readings of American Policy**

Many scholars argue that anti-Americanism has been on the rise since the initiation of ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom.’ Scholars such as Richard Haas, Steven Cook, and Marina Ottaway have argued that the US Iraqi invasion has failed to meet its goals and has led to a backlash. The Bush administration previously believed that intervention in Iraq would lead to a process of democratic transformation throughout the Middle East (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 1). Instilling democracy in Iraq was believed to create an example to all Arab countries that would apply similar democratic reforms later on. Not only did this intervention fail, Ottaway asserts that the US rhetoric for democracy promotion and reform has failed to materialize as well (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 1).

According to Ottaway, the call for democracy has provoked three contradictory reactions. The first reaction was anger toward US interference in the Arab affairs. The second reaction was anger as a result of US support of authoritarian regimes in the past.

This was especially because the US was not doing much to support reform and change. The third reaction was a resentful recognition that change is really needed in the Arab world (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 2).

Given that the Bush administration would be pleased by modest and even cosmetic reforms, authoritarian regimes did not undertake groundbreaking forms of reforms. As long as the power of these regimes was not weakened, slight reforms were undertaken. For example, in Bahrain, a partial election of one parliamentary chamber was allowed, given that the opposition would remain a minority (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 2). What helped Arab regimes curb real reforms has been the presence of Islamist political parties and movements. Regimes used the presence of Islamists as an excuse to preserve their immense power and diffuse US pressures for reform (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 3).

A contradictory behavior of the Bush administration has been noticed throughout the past years. Perhaps, this has intensified anti-US sentiments. When increased political participation was viewed as unfavorable by the US, the administration would retreat its democracy encouragement (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 3). Here two instances of democratic processes could be retrieved. In the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, Hamas defeated Fatah. The US immediate reaction was denouncing the Hamas government as

legitimate followed by imposing sanctions (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 3). In the 2005 parliamentary elections of Egypt, 88 members of the Muslim Brotherhood won parliamentary seats. Since this incident did not threaten the stability of the Egyptian pro-US regime, Washington did not react dramatically. However, and since then, the US had put an end to its reform pressures on the Egyptian government until the outburst of the Arab Spring (Ottaway, May 2008, p. 3).

As a result, past incidents have shown that when democratic practices do not threaten US vital interests in the Middle East, the US throws its full support for democratic reform and change. However, when these democratic practices oppose US interests, the US would react forcefully to restore its interests. Moreover, in countries where the US does not have vital interests, outside pressure for reform appears to be more coherent (Ottaway, 2005, p. 155). This was the case until the eruption of the notorious Arab uprisings.

In his article, *The New Middle East*, Richard Haas discusses many issues related to US foreign policy in the region. The issues discussed concern different aspects of US-Arab relations. Most importantly, Haas deals with the rise of anti-Americanism and explores the reasons behind their escalation. First and foremost, he attributes the 2003 war in Iraq to the rise of terrorism and Sunni-Shiite tensions (Haas, 2006, p. 4). He

asserts that the war in Iraq has ultimately and indirectly led to the rise of anti-Americanism.

Haas explains that many reasons stand behind the rise of the phenomenon of anti-Americanism. Among these are the destruction in Iraq triggered by the United States, the mistreatment of Iraqis and Muslim prisoners, as well the continuous sufferings in Gaza (Haas, 2006, p. 5). The intensity and hardships of these issues were revealed on media as on televisions, the Internet, and radio stations. As a result, Arab people watching everyday sufferings of their fellow citizens have developed greater anti-US sentiments. Thus, globalization, which created an Arab “regional village”, has made it easier for Arabs to see the destruction scenes. This in turn has exacerbated anti-US sentiments (Haas, 2006, p. 5). Subsequently, Haas acknowledges the power of the media, especially in shaping Arab views and anti-US sentiments.

Haas also indicates that the actions of US authoritarian allies in the Middle East play a very important role in alienating Arab people from the US. For example, although Egypt has introduced some positive economic reforms, it sustained its policy of repression (Haas, 2006, p. 8). The Egyptian regime has continuously kept on repressing the liberals. The Egyptian regime has also kept on limiting the Egyptian people with only two choices: the people would either support the traditional authoritarianism or the

extreme Muslim Brotherhood (Haas, 2006, p. 8). As for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, royal elites used and continue to use the large energy earnings as a means to prohibit demands to change (Haas, 2006, p. 8). Moreover, Haas argues that the US has lost its reliability as a negotiator concerning the Arab-Israeli struggle. Israel's settlement expansion and continued road building has made it very complicated to sustain diplomacy (Haas, 2006, p. 6). The sum of these reasons has led to the exacerbation of anti-American sentiments.

Graham Fuller is among the scholars who believed that the al Qaeda attacks of 9/11 has transformed US policy by situating the war on terrorism at the heart of US foreign policy. He affirms that this new purpose has focused all the attention on the Muslim world where the majority of radical terrorist movements exist (Fuller, 2005, p. 53). Fuller lists many reasons that have led to an immense development of anti-US sentiments in the Arab world. Among these are: the invasion of Iraq and its occupation, the spread of US military presence throughout the Muslim world, the new embrace of authoritarian Muslim regimes as allies in the war on terrorism, the continuous deterioration of the situation in Palestine, and the US close identification with the Likud Party's hardline policy toward the occupied territories (Fuller, 2005, p. 53). Similar to Richard Haas, Fuller indicates that globalization, more specifically the independent

satellite television channels, have been affecting the views of the young Arab generation (Fuller, 2005, p. 53).

The study conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations in 2005 asserts that there is a gap between US ideals-freedom, liberty and self-determination- and US actual practices. This gap has resulted in an outrage in the Arab world (Albright, M. K. & Weber, V., & Cook, S. A., 2005, p. 38). The Arab population could not understand why a democratic country as the United States would provide political, economic, and military aid to Arab dictators. As a result, many scholars agree that the US support of dictators highly affects Arab views toward it.

A 2010 USIP study also acknowledges that the US faces a ‘credibility gap.’ The study asserts that many people in the Muslim world see that Washington has not consistently supported democracy and pluralism (Brumber, D. & Diamond, L. & Fukuyama, F. 2010, p. 13). The US public support for political reform and human rights was not reflected in its actions. This has empowered Arab autocrats and weakened democratic activists in the region.

## **2.6 US Support of Authoritarian versus Democratic Paradigm**

A USIP study group report discusses the cases in which the US supported either the authoritarian paradigm or the democratic paradigm. First, this study examines the case whereby democracy would lead to instability (democracy=instability). The study claims that those who support this model assert that democratic change would undermine US security in two ways. First, democratic change would strengthen the influence of Islamist forces that reject cooperation with the US. Second, political reform would undermine the state's unity by intensifying conflicts between Islamists and their rivals and this may result in civil conflict (Brumber, D. & Diamond, L. & Fukuyama, F., 2010, p. 15). This study acknowledges that reform may result in negative outcomes under certain conditions. However, it contends that democracy by nature presents an element of uncertainty that could be best dealt with by applying the adequate reforms (Brumber, D. & Diamond, L. & Fukuyama, F., 2010, p. 16).

The USIP study explains that state-managed political liberalization does provide political security and stability but only for a short period of time. In the long run, this state-managed liberalization would lead to instability. For instance, this type of liberalization does not grant parliaments real authority or accountability. Over time, the gap between society and state would be widened. As a result, state-managed liberalization enables regime survival but at the same time it makes these regimes

vulnerable to internal and regional conflicts (Brumber, D. & Diamond, L. & Fukuyama, F., 2005, p. 17). Thus, in this case, state-managed liberalization would lead to stability in the short run. However, in the long run, state-managed liberalization would lead to instability (state-managed liberalization=instability).

We can relate this case to the cases of the autocratic Arab regimes. Many of these have provided stability and continuity of US interests for a period of time. An example is the case of Egypt that has maintained a peace treaty with Israel since the year 1979. However, in the long run, state repression and Egypt's rejection of the opposition have resulted in internal instability that kept on escalating. This instability was uncontrollable and eventually led to the ousting of President Husni Mubarak. As such, although the Mubarak regime has provided short-term stability, in the long run, its policies have led to its termination.

In sum, the USIP study claims that the 9/11 shock has led to a shift in US rational. Before the attacks, the US believed that Arab autocracies could provide stability by deterring radical states as well as non-state actors. States such as Egypt, KSA, and Jordan have been defending a range of US geo-strategic, military, and economic interests (Brumber, D. & Diamond, L. & Fukuyama, F., 2005, p. 50). These states were termed as 'moderate' by the US policymakers. After the attacks, it became

clear that these ‘moderate’ friendly autocracies had undermined the security of US in the Middle East.

A 2005 study by the Council on Foreign Relations tackles the issue of US collaboration with Middle Eastern nondemocratic leaders. Similar to the USIP study, this study acknowledges that reform and change in the Arab region may present short-term risks to US interests. But the study concludes that the risks are worth taking (Albright, M. K. & Weber, V. & Cook, S. A., 2005, p. 38). The long-term benefits of having a Middle East that is more democratic and economically capable exceeds the potential risks that the US might confront (Albright, M. K. & Weber, V. & Cook, S. A., 2005, p. 38). As such, similar to the USIP study, this study claims that in the long run, supporting the democratic paradigm would lead to stability. Here the equation becomes: in the long term, democracy=stability.

This latter study argues that a democratic Middle East would have four positive effects. First, although extremism will continue to exist, other moderate forces will also have the chance to emerge to the political scene. Second, with time, political, economic, and social reform would reduce recruitments to extremist factions. Third, the “democratic peace theory” would be applied in the Middle East. The development of democracy in the Middle East would reduce the probability of interstate conflict in the

region. Finally, in the long run, the US adamant support of democracy in the region would lead to improvement of US relations with the Arab world (Albright, M. K. & Weber, V. & Cook, S. A., 2005, p. 38).

Steven Cook also discusses the issue of US support of the authoritarian paradigm versus its support for democracy. Cook argues that since 9/11, democratization was introduced in the Middle East. As such two models of US foreign policy appear, one before 9/11 and the other after 9/11. Before 9/11, the US support for Arab authoritarianism has lead to stability. As a result, before 9/11, Arab authoritarianism= stability. However after 9/11, Arab authoritarianism became a threat to stability. In order to contain the rise of extremism, promotion of political liberalization and democracy were essential. Democracy promotion became essential for the protection of US national security policy. As such, post 9/11, political liberalization + democratization = stability (Cook, 2005, p. 91).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, US foreign policy in the Middle East has experienced a major shift since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. It was clear that the Bush administration has realized the fact that its policy of supporting Arab dictators did not really serve US

interests. Prior to the attacks, the model was that authoritarianism leads to stability. The maintenance of US interests in terms of oil, Israel's security and geo-strategic US military presence were all in place for quiet a period of time. The 9/11 events came as a shock to Washington that had to change its foreign policy priorities in the Middle East. This time the administration concluded that authoritarianism actually leads to instability by breeding a generation of extremists willing to target the US. In order to fight terrorism, the spread of democracy was eminent.

The issue of anti-Americanism was suddenly highlighted. But subsequent US actions especially concerning its democracy promotion campaign reveal that the US was hesitant in abandoning its authoritarian Arab allies. Although the Bush administration was publicly promoting democratic transformation, it maintained a close relationship with many Arab autocracies. Later, the Arab Spring presented another shift in US foreign policy formulation. This incident has pushed the US to recommit earnestly to democracy promotion. In all cases, US foreign policy toward the Middle East is formulated in coherence with its interests and security concerns toward the region.

Anti-Americanism has been a major subject of discussion among scholars as has been noticed in this chapter. Anti-US sentiments are directly linked and affected by US practices. The US contradicting behavior has intensified these negative sentiments

among the Arabs. The US collaboration with autocratic repressive leaders has highly affected Arab perceptions toward the US.

## **Chapter Three**

# **Arab Authoritarianism, the Islamist Question, and the Bush Democracy Promotion**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will tackle the issue of Arab authoritarianism, the types of Arab regimes, and the dynamics of state-society relationships. The focus will be on the relationship between the US and its Arab allies, more specifically the dynamics of US aid to the Middle East. The issue of Islamism and its link to authoritarianism and democracy promotion will be highlighted. The case of Islamism has been a continuing dilemma for the authoritarian Arab regimes as well as US policy makers and their democratic reformative plans. The example of Egypt illustrates how Islamists have created a dilemma and how it was handled by both the regime and the US. Although historical examples will be given, the focus will be post 9/11 and during the Presidency of George W. Bush.

Throughout the study, distinctions and similarities between the Bush and the Obama administrations will be drawn. This chapter will focus on the US-Arab relationship during the Presidency of George W. Bush. It will be shown that since 2001,

there has been two US foreign policy shifts. The first was directly after the attacks of 9/11 when Bush announced his ‘war on terrorism’. The second shift was during the recent Arab uprisings. The Obama Doctrine and the Arab Spring will be the subject of Chapter 4.

## **3.2 A Brief History of Arab Authoritarianism and US Democracy Promotion**

### **3.2.1 The Absence of Democracy in the Arab World**

Democracy, according to Larry Diamond, refers to a political system whereby at least three features are present: competition over positions of power, equal political participation among adults via regular elections, and a basic level of civic and political rights. The Middle East is a region lacking these three features and thus lacking democracy (Furtig, 2007, p. 3). The US deals with a region that consists of different regime types. More specifically as will be shown, US democracy promotion is directed toward certain Arab regimes where some kind of political liberalization is present. On the other hand, democracy promotion becomes a harder task when it concerns total autocracies where political and civic rights are almost inexistent.

When talking about US foreign policy toward the Middle East, it would be very essential to tackle the issue of regime type in the region. Directly after the 9/11 attacks, the US undertook two approaches in its foreign policy. The first approach consisted of a soft approach towards dealing with Arab regimes that are friendly to the US. Here the US sought to promote gradual democratic transitions through increased aid and diplomatic tools. The second approach consisted of a hard set of policies. These included policies directed toward Arab hostile regimes. The invasion of Iraq and the ouster of Saddam Hussein were the first step toward achieving a destabilization effect on hostile regimes such as Iran and Syria (Carothers, 2005, p. 193).

US foreign policy toward the Middle East varies from one region to another. The US deals with regimes that are friendly to it such as Egypt and KSA in a certain way. However, it deals with unfriendly regimes such as Iran in a totally different way. US efforts to promote democracy were directed toward certain semi-authoritarian or partially liberalized autocracies. These include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Yemen (Carothers, 2005, p. 195). According to Daniel Brumber, “liberalized autocracies” consist of *“a system of rule that allows for a measure of political openness and competition in the electoral, party, and press arenas, while ultimately ensuring that power rests in the hands of ruling regimes”* (Brumber, D. & Diamond, L. & Fukuyama, F., 2010, p. 58). These countries continuously experience

“the trap of liberalized autocracy” i.e. these regimes experience periodic and limited political liberalization in order to discharge some accumulated political pressure (Carothers, 2005, p. 195).

The reforms that the ‘liberalized autocracies’ undertake are not designed to create democracy. On the contrary, these consist a tool to preserve the authoritarian regime’s hold onto power by stabilizing and neutralizing political pressures. In contrast, in other countries where the political repression is high, the United States is unable to exert much pressure for democratic transitions. These countries include Libya, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates (Carothers, 2005, p. 194).

### **3.2.2 The Socio-Economic Situation of the Region and the Oil Factor**

In this part, it is worth discussing the economic situation of the Arab world and its link to politics as well as its authoritarian character. The Middle East is a region facing various social and economic problems. The population has been growing constantly scoring the fastest rate of growth in the world of 2.7 percent per year (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 70). Population growth has been affecting the economy of the region negatively. Most importantly, overpopulation and unemployment is a common feature of most Middle Eastern countries. According to Pollack, the Middle East scored the highest unemployment rate in the world in the year 2007. The average unemployment rate

reached 12.2 percent across the whole region. Besides that, overpopulation has resulted in urbanization and inadequate urban planning and public spending on housing. Consequently, shantytowns and slums have spread all over the region (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 73). Other common problems include sanitation, medical services, social services that leads to further diseases and unemployment.

The economy of the Arab world is highly affected by its oil wealth. Furthermore, the abundance of oil affects the behaviors of the Arab authoritarian regimes. The outcome is that oil has been a damaging factor on both politics and the economy. Because of the huge oil revenues, the Arab governments do not impose taxes on their citizens in order to pay for security, education, or justice (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 81). The Middle East represents a case of no representation without taxation. The regime here uses oil revenues in order to reward its supporters. Consequently, people try to manipulate this system as a means to get a share of government revenues instead of working hard to get things done. Moreover, this oil problem has created a negative work culture whereby people in oil-rich countries simply do not work. Many people find most jobs inferior and do not accept to work. This leads to massive importation of foreign workers. According to the World Bank, in Gulf countries, two-thirds of the workers are actually expatriates (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 81).

### **3.2.3 Strategies to Transform Semi-Authoritarian Regimes to Democracies**

Past experiences indicate that there are two ways to transform semi-authoritarian countries to democracies. The first way is a top down gradualist strategy. The second way consist of a harsh downfall of existing dictatorial regimes (Carothers, 2005, p. 196). Western policy makers opt for the gradualist type of transition in order to avoid unexpected political forces that may result from the collapse of Arab governments (Carothers, 2005, p. 197). This type of gradualist promotion of democracy consists of three strategies.

The first strategy focuses on economic reform. For years, the US had been urging many Arab regimes to undertake market reforms such as in Egypt. It specifically advocates for more privatization, fiscal, banking, and tax reform, as well as investment liberalization (Carothers, 2005, p. 198). The second strategy consisted of indirectly promoting democracy such as promoting good governance and state reform, and more powerful civil societies. This approach is undertaken by democracy promotion organizations that operate with US funding such as USAID. The third strategy is to directly promote democracy. This approach consists of directly pressuring Arab regimes to empower and broaden processes of political contestations through elections (Carothers, 2005, p. 203).

It is worth noting here that Arab regimes have been advocating the gradualist strategy in order to discharge pressure and preserve the existing regime rule without jeopardizing their existence. Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan have all allowed the Islamist factions to be active in some aspects of the society if not politics. For instance, in Jordan, the Islamist Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, is allowed to participate in elections. In 2003, the IAF won 22 percent of the parliamentary elections (Sharp, 2006, p. 25). However, their participation would always be limited as a result of the electoral law of one-person one vote system which leads voters to choose candidates from their extended families or tribes over ideological parties (Sharp, 2006, p. 25).

#### **3.2.4 US Special Relationship with Arab Regimes**

The US had a special cooperative relationship with many Arab dictatorial regimes for decades. Among these are the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, and Jordan. Not only was the US close to Saudi Arabia because of its oil wealth, it had also a special relationship with the Al Saud family. Two Arab countries, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, have been of a high importance to the US. Historically, the Al Saud family has supported and maintained US interests in many aspects.

The US alignment with certain Arab countries is the result of many interests and concerns. In return, these countries benefit from the US in many ways. Securing the Saudi oil and the special relationship with the Al Saud Family has been of a longstanding significance for the US. The Al Saud has opposed the Soviet Union and has kept the global oil market stable (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 51). Moreover, the Saudis have been willing throughout the years to finance American proxy wars in countries such as Angola, Ethiopia, Yemen and Nicaragua (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 51). In addition, the Arab states have been one of the major consumers of American industrial products such as cars and weapons (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 51).

Egypt, on the other hand, has been an important country for the US for many reasons. Its population, military power, and its Suez Canal have played a major role in imposing itself as an Arab leader. Egypt rules the Suez Canal, the passage between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p.51). Most importantly, Egypt has been a strategic Arab partner serving national security interests of the US due to its peace agreement with Israel since 1979 (Sharp, J. M., 2006, p.17). As such, Egypt has been an indispensable ally in stabilizing and securing the peace with Israel. For instance, the Clinton administration has managed to use its cooperative relationship with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia in order to pressure the Palestinian authority to undertake peace compromises and avoid war with Israel (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 55).

Most recently, as of 2006, many analysts believed that Egypt's importance has risen significantly when Hamas won power. Egypt was sharing a common interest with both the US and Israel in containing Hamas (Sharp, J. M., 2006, p.17).

### **3.3 The Islamist Question: A Dilemma for Both Authoritarian Arab Regimes and US Democracy Promoters**

#### **3.3.1 A Brief Overview on Islamism and Identity Politics in the Arab World**

Islamism and ethnic politics have emerged in the aftermath of the Arab defeats of 1967 and 1973 when Arab nationalism failed to meet its purposes (Sharp, 2006, p. 2). Different types of Islamists and identities compete for dominance in the Arab world. These can be put into different categories. Radical Islamists use violence and intimidation to cause a fundamental change in the Arab world. These Islamists claim that society should be strictly ruled according to Sharia Law. Al Qaida linked groups constitute a perfect example on radicalism and the use of violence to acquire certain goals. For instance, and most recently, the al-Qaeda-linked group Abdullah Azzam Brigades issued a claim of responsibility for the November 2013 Iranian embassy bombings in Beirut. A member of the group has warned that attacks would continue in Lebanon until Iranian and Hezbollah forces stop fighting alongside Syrian government

forces. He also claimed that the Sunni group's prisoners should be released in Lebanon (BBC News, 1 January 2014, p. 1).

There are other groups of “Moderate Islamists” who seek political and social reform in the sense of creating a society following the general principles of Islamic law (Sharp, 2006, p. 2). An example of a moderate, non-revolutionary Islamist Party is the Islamist Justice and Development party (PJD) in Morocco who has been active in the Moroccan political scene long before the attacks of 9/11. Another example is Hizb Al Wasat in Egypt although not legally recognized as a party. This party was established in 1996 by former Muslim Brotherhood members and consists of young political activists who call for the participation of women and Coptic Christians (Sharp, 2006, p. 20).

Besides Islamists groups, there exist non-Islamist reformers who get their support from secular intellectuals and minority groups. There are also the ruling elites in both military and the private sectors. However, we can generally claim that pressure on the Arab regimes emanated from two main groups of actors. Threats to Arab authoritarian regimes came mainly from Islamists and Democrats (Heydemann, 2007, p. 28). Consequently, these two groups have been continuously suppressed and coerced by authoritarian regimes, although they were allowed some space at other times. As mentioned earlier, political liberalization in the Arab world was always followed by

“deliberalization”. As such, Arab regimes were considered as “liberalized autocracies” that have always persisted (Schlumberger, 2007, p. 6). Egypt here is a primary example of a liberalized autocracy. Post Nasserist Egypt has allowed some political activism and Mubarak has allowed the establishment of a multiparty system (Albrecht, 2007, p. 60). The existence of opposition in Egypt was closely monitored and suppressed at many instances. However, the existence of such an opposition has bolstered and further legitimated the rule of the regime. In this case the Mubarak Egyptian regime can be viewed as a liberal authoritarian regime (Albrecht, 2007, p. 61).

### **3.3.2 The Popularity of Islamists in the Arab World and its Impact on US Democracy Promotion**

In recent decades, the success of Islamists in elections throughout the Arab world has proved their popularity. In January 2006, the Islamist Hamas and its counterparts have won 56 percent of the Palestinian parliamentary seats (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 268). In 2005, a big coalition of Islamists in Iraq including the Da’wa, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and the Sadrist movement has won 45 percent of the Iraqi parliamentary seats allowing it to form the new government (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 268). Also in 2005, in the Egyptian parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 seats that constitute 20 percent of the overall quota (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 268).

The question here to US policymakers was and remains whether Islam is compatible with democracy. Moreover, democracy in itself necessitates the inclusion of these Islamists, at least the moderate ones, in the political and social life of the Arab countries. Here, their popularity and probable election constitute another challenge/threat to both the survival of the Arab authoritarian regimes and the continuity and preservation of US interests. In these cases, the US does not guarantee the stability of its interests in case Islamists come to power especially that many of these groups are highly anti-American (Pollack, K. M., 2008, p. 268). To summarize the Islamist threat, Dr. Martin Kramer, A Middle East expert asserts, “ *All Islamists are fundamentalists who are inherently anti-democratic and anti- Western* (Sharp, 2006, p. 5).” As such, the US fears that in case these factions come to power, anti-democratic practices will become the norm.

### **3.4 Bush Democracy Promotion in the Arab Authoritarian World Amidst the Islamist Threat**

Perhaps the most eligible document that summarizes the Bush Doctrine post the 9/11 attacks is the National Security Strategy of the year 2002. This strategy summarizes the US actions and the Bush rationale of interfering in Afghanistan and Iraq. This strategy was followed by another in the year 2006. The US National Security Strategy of the year 2006 came to explain Bush’s actions more thoroughly. It sheds the light on US success

and what needs to be worked on according to the US administration. It gives more extensive detailed explanations on the issues of self-defense, development, terrorism, Islam, the democracy deficit and globalization. While comparing the NSS 2002 and the NSS 2006, it is noticed that no differences are really present. The NSS 2006 comes as a continuation and an extension of the NSS 2002. It clarifies the US goals and the rationale behind undertaking these goals.

#### **3.4.1 The US National Security Strategy 2002:**

At the beginning of the NSS 2002, the opening letter of the President summarizes the key themes of the National Security Strategy. First and foremost, the Bush letter tackles the issue of terrorism, radicalism, and the emerging danger of technology most importantly the weapons of mass destruction. For global security reasons, Bush explains that the US will act against emerging threats before they occur. He focuses on the fact that terrorism is a shared common interest. He emphasizes the US national interest and explains how weak states such as Afghanistan can pose a great danger to the US as poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks (NSS introductory speech, p. 1).

The NSS 2002 mentions briefly America's goals on the path to progress. These can be summarized by economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect

for human dignity (NSS 2002, p. 1). Furthermore, this article states that expansion of liberty shall be commenced through International institutions, promoting freedom, and rewarding nations moving toward democracy (NSS 2002, p. 4). The US here will be rewarding states heading towards development through the Millennium Challenge Account (NSS 2002, p. 3). Moreover, making freedom and development of democratic institutions key themes in bilateral relations and defending the freedom of religion will be undertaken for the purpose of expanding liberty (NSS 2002, p. 4). The US reconfirms its commitment to the UN, WTO, OAS, and the NATO (NSS 2002, p. 3). The US asserts that as it pursues the terrorists in Afghanistan; it will continue to work with International organizations as the UN (NSS 2002, p. 7).

The NSS 2002 is mostly dedicated to the issue of terrorism. Chapters 3, 5, 7 and 8 enlist the dangers of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, the necessary preemptive act of the US against it, and the allies' role in the battle against terrorism. In this strategy, the US announces that it will disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations by undertaking several steps. First, by assuming actions against terrorist organizations or state sponsors of terrorism attempting to acquire or use WMDs. Second, defending the US by destroying threats before they reach the US borders. And third, preventing sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists (NSS 2002, p. 6). Moreover, it is stated that the US will wage a war of ideas to win the battle against international terrorism

through a series of steps. The US will be working closely with allies and friends, it will be supporting moderate and modern governments especially in the Muslim world, and it will push the International arena to focus on areas that are most prone to terrorism. In addition, the US will be using effective public diplomacy to promote the free flow of information and ideas (NSS 2002, p. 6).

The Bush administration was making headlines during the presidency of Bush as a result of its newly announced preemption policy. The NSS 2002 mentions: *“in an age where the enemies of civilization openly and actively seek the world’s most destructive technologies, the US cannot remain idle while dangers gather”* (NSS 2002, p. 15). As such, in order to prevent hostile acts by adversaries, the US will act preemptively if necessary (NSS 2002, p. 16).

The NSS 2002 tackles the issue of collaboration with friends and allies to deter the terrorist threat. It claims that the presence of US forces overseas symbolizes US commitment to allies and friends. It announces that the US will require bases and stations beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia in order to meet the numerous security challenges (NSS 2002, p. 29). Furthermore, the NSS 2002 states that article V of the self-defense clause of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) recognizes that the attacks of September 11, 2001 were also an attack on NATO itself. To proceed

in the mission, NATO's membership should be expanded to include democratic nations willing to defend common interests. Second, the military forces of NATO nations should meet the appropriate combat contributions. Third, planning processes should be developed. And fourth, technological opportunities and economies of scale should be made use of in the defense spending (NSS 2002, p. 25).

The NSS 2002 clarifies: *“the war on terrorism is not a clash of civilizations. It does, however, reveal a clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world. This is a struggle of ideas and this is an area where America must excel”* (NSS 2002, p. 31). Moreover, this article briefly tackles the Iraqi case. It claims that during the Gulf War period, the US acquired unquestioning proof that Iraq's designs were not limited to the chemical weapons that it used against Iran and its own people, but it also included the acquisition of biological and nuclear weapons (NSS 2002, p. 14). Thus, the US strategy to combat WMDs includes: proactive counter proliferation efforts to deter the threat before it occurs, strengthened nonproliferation efforts to prevent rogue states and terrorists from acquiring the materials necessary for WMDs, and effective consequence management to respond to the effects of WMDs (NSS 2002, p. 14).

Finally, the NSS 2002 dedicates a section to tackle the issue of globalization and the importance of free markets and trade in the new era of global economic growth. It states

that the US should set the aim of doubling the world's poorest economies within a decade and mentions several steps that must be undertaken to achieve such goals. Here, strengthening states is directly linked to decreasing their susceptibility to the dangers of terrorist networks. Thus, strengthening states is a shared common interest for the sake of global security (NSS 2002, p. 20).

#### **3.4.2 The US National Security Strategy 2006:**

The second National Security Strategy released by the Bush administration in the year 2006 came as a result of four years of manifestations and events. The NSS 2006 emerged richer in explanations and justified more thoroughly the roots of terrorism and the US deterrence strategy (NSS 2006, p. 22). The Bush administration in this article recommits itself to promoting democracy and reclaims its right of self-defense. It tackles more specifically the issue of democracy deficit in the Middle East and states that Iran and Syria are the main oppressors and sponsors of terrorism. Again, the NSS 2006 sets general goals and reserves its right to act unilaterally. In contrast, and as will be shown in Chapter 4, the Obama National Security strategy will come out with more narrow, direct, and immediate goals.

Four key themes are continuously mentioned in the NSS 2006: Terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, democracy, and authoritarian rule. These key themes are highly

interconnected and eventually they all affect the American interest as the article states. Again, the article states that the war on terror that the Bush administration has initiated, is a battle of ideas and not that of religion. Islam is exploited by terrorists to serve a violent political vision (NSS 2006, p. 9). As such, empowering the faithful followers of Islam, the very people the terrorists want to exploit, is the strategy to counter the lies behind the terrorists' ideology (NSS 2006, p. 11). Moreover, the US has joined the fight against terrorism everywhere and Muslim allies have become partners in this mission such as Pakistan, KSA, the Afghan troops, and the Iraqi soldiers (NSS 2006, p. 11).

The NSS 2006 further elaborates that terrorism is neither a by-product of poverty nor a result of hostility to US policy in Iraq. Terrorism is neither a result of Israeli – Palestinian issues nor a response of US efforts to prevent terror attacks (NSS 2006, p. 10). Terrorism springs from different factors such as political alienations and subcultures of conspiracy and misinformation. Terrorism also springs from an ideology that justifies murder. The genius of democracy here is that it provides a counter to each of these factors (NSS 2006, p. 11). The advancement of freedom and human dignity through democracy is a long-term solution to the transnational terrorism of today. There are four steps to be taken in the short run. First, prevent attacks by terrorist networks before they occur. Second, deny WMD to rogue states and to terrorist allies who would use them without hesitation. Third, deny terrorist groups the support and sanctuary of rogue states.

And fourth, deny terrorists control of any nation that they would use as a base and launching pad for terror (NSS 2006, p. 12).

The NSS 2006 focuses on Syria and Iran and enlist them as states that harbor terrorists at home and sponsor their activity abroad (NSS 2006, p. 9). As such, the US affirms that it will continue to stand against the misrule of Iran and Syria. As for Iraq, the US will continue to support the Iraqi people in their transition from tyranny to effective democracy (NSS 2006, p. 38). The Bush administration here links the US commitment to the promotion of freedom to its commitment of supporting governments and their people as they make their difficult transition to effective democracy (NSS 2006, p. 7). The US administration here definitely implies to the case of Iraq. It continues to explain that the US will not abandon these people before the transition is secure in order to avoid conflict and exploitation by terrorists as in the case of immature democracies (NSS 2006, p. 7).

In this article, the Bush administration explains the importance of regional conflicts and their consequences on US interests. Regional conflicts affect the national security interests of the US as they do not stay isolated for long and often spread or devolve into humanitarian tragedy or anarchy. Outside parties can exploit them for other purposes, as Al Qaeda exploited the civil war in Afghanistan. So even though the US does not have a

stake in a particular conflict, the US interests are likely to be affected over time (NSS 2006, p. 14). The US administration's strategy for addressing regional conflicts includes three levels of engagement: conflict prevention and resolution; conflict intervention; and post conflict stabilization and reconstruction (NSS 2006, p. 15).

Most importantly, the NSS 2006 specifically mentions that the Middle East has long suffered from democracy deficit as repression has fostered corruption, imbalanced or stagnant economies, political resentments, regional conflicts, and religious extremism. The Bush administration states that it is committed to supporting the reformers in the Middle East. The US will continue to seek Israeli-Palestinian peace. It will continue to support efforts for reform and freedom in the countries of its traditional allies as Egypt and KSA (NSS 2006, p. 37). The article further declares that the United States' interest in promoting effective democracies rests on a historical fact: *"states that are governed well are most inclined to behave well."* The Bush administration here confirms the US belief that democratic states do not go to war against each other.

The US will pursue transformational diplomacy and effective democracy. Transformational diplomacy means working with US's international partners to build and sustain democratic well-governed states. The US will help advance this process through creating external incentives for governments to reform themselves (NSS 2006,

p. 33). The Bush administration here enlists the Millennium Challenge Account program as one of its main programs to achieve development in other countries (NSS 2006, p. 31). The Bush administration further claims that effective economic development advances the US's national security by promoting responsible sovereignty in contrast to permanent dependency. In addition of being a threat to their own people, and a burden on regional economies, weak impoverished states are susceptible to exploitation by terrorists, tyrants, and international criminals (NSS 2006, p. 33).

The national security implications of globalization have been addressed indirectly in the US National Security Strategy 2002. In contrast, there has been a great deal of explanations on how globalization has affected democracy in the US National Security Strategy 2006. The NSS 2006 states *“globalization has helped the advancement of democracy by extending the marketplace of ideas and the ideals of liberty”* (NSS 2006, p. 47). Here, the new flows of trade, investment, information, and technology are transforming the national security (NSS 2006, p. 47). In addition, the US has a priority in reducing its reliance on foreign energy sources. Diversification of energy sources would help decrease the “petroleum curse”- whereby in some oil-producing states oil revenues tend to foster corruption and prevent economic growth and political reform (NSS 2006, p. 29).

Both the NSS 2002 and the NSS 2006 are classified as two important documents that summarize the Bush Doctrine post the 9/11 events. The NSS 2002 mentions broadly the goals of preemption, self-defense, fighting terrorism and inhibiting WMDs, promoting democracy, and extending development. The NSS 2006 by contrast goes more deeply into how the US is going to achieve that. The NSS 2006 tackles the issue of democracy deficit in the Middle East and the effects of globalization on democracy promotion. The NSS 2006 emerged as more detailed and tries to provide more viable explanations for why the US has decided and continue to wage its war on terrorism in both Afghanistan and Iraq. As such, the NSS 2006 comes as an extension of NSS 2002. It does not contradict it or provide different goals. It simply adds on the previous goals and reaffirms the US's decision of acting unilaterally whenever required. It also reserves the US's right for preemption and self-defense.

## **Chapter Four**

# **The Obama Doctrine, a Comparison of the Two Doctrines, and the Arab Spring and the US Democracy Promotion**

### **4.1 The US Democracy Promotion under the Obama Administration**

From the moment President Obama came to office, he promised a new chapter in US leadership. Many of his public speeches indicate a new foreign policy orientation. In his rhetoric, he points out to the instances where the US did not meet its purposes in the past years. He also illustrates how the US will stand up to meet the challenges and face the failures. The US National Security Strategy of the year 2010 summarizes most of the new foreign policy orientation that the Obama administration claimed to adopt at that time. Later, with the eruption of the Arab Spring, it will be seen how the Obama administration managed to handle the surprising immense situation.

#### **4.1.1 The US National Security Strategy 2010 under the Obama Administration**

In his covering letter, President Obama urges that the United States must pursue a strategy of national renewal and global leadership (NSS 2010, p. 11). The new President specifically states, “*America has not succeeded by stepping outside the currents of international cooperation*” (NSS 2010, p. 2). Obama here acknowledges the shortcomings of the unilateral action taken by the US leadership during the Bush administration. The 2010 National Security Strategy asserts the role of collective action in the course of liberty and justice and claims that it should be attained through three important approaches. First, by strengthening the old alliances and modernizing them to meet new challenges. Second, by building new and deeper partnerships. And third, by strengthening international standards and institutions (NSS 2010, p. 2). Furthermore, this article mentions that not only does democracy represent America’s better angels, but also stands in opposition to aggression and injustice (NSS 2010, p. 2).

The Obama administration reasserts, as its predecessors did, that no nation should be better positioned to lead in an era of globalization than America (NSS 2010, p. 2). However, it refutes the notion of instilling fear in other people to attain security. The administration acknowledges that the US cannot act unilaterally. The NSS 2010 mentions, “*our long term security will come not from our ability to instill fear in other*

*people, but through our capacity to speak to their hopes”* (NSS 2010, p. 3). Moreover, the US will continue to underwrite global security. It must recognize that no one nation, no matter how powerful it is, can meet global challenges alone (NSS 2010, p. 3). So here, the Obama administration believes in collective action but with the leadership of the United States.

The reason behind renewing American leadership is for the US to be able to advance its interests more effectively (NSS 2010, p. 1). The US is once again committed to build a stronger foundation for its leadership because of the belief that what takes place internally will determine the US strength externally. The recovery includes a strong infrastructure in the face of terrorist threats and natural disasters. It also focuses on education and science as well as the development of new sources of energy in order to decrease dependence (NSS 2010, p. 2).

Throughout reading the NSS 2010, it has been noticed that the Obama administration rejects many actions done by its predecessor. For that reason, there has been a rejuvenation of US commitment to its values and inhibition of past actions. The article states that the moral leadership of the US is grounded in its own example and not through an effort to impose the US system on other people. However, and over the years, some of the methods undertaken for the sake of America’s security have

compromised the US's fidelity to the values it promotes. For that reason, the Obama administration announces that the US leads on behalf of its values by living them (NSS 2010, p. 10). As such, the US will not seek to impose its values by force. Instead, it will continue to promote universal values abroad by living them at home (NSS 2010, p. 5).

The Obama administration announces the US's commitment to democracy, human rights and rule of law which comprise the essential sources of the US's strength and influence. These, as mentioned, must be cultivated by the US's rejection of certain actions such as torture that are not in line with the US values (NSS 2010, p. 2). As such, the US will close the prison at Guantanamo Bay in order to deny violent extremists one of their most compelling recruitment tools (NSS 2010, p. 22). Brutal methods of interrogation alienate the US from the world and serve as a recruitment and propaganda tool for the terrorists (NSS 2010, p. 35). Moreover, matters of detention and secrecy must be addressed in a manner consistent with the US constitution and laws (NSS 2010, p. 22).

There has been a focus on collective action instead of unilateral action. This collective action should be commenced with the leadership of the US. The NSS 2010 states that the US interests are bound to the interests of those living beyond the US

borders and this will guide America's engagement with other nations and peoples (NSS 2010, p. 3).

The NSS 2010 states that the US will be promoting a just and sustainable international order that recognizes the rights and responsibilities of all nations (NSS 2010, p. 12). The basis for international cooperation has been an architecture of international institutions, organizations, regimes, and standards that establish certain rights and responsibilities for all sovereign nations. In recent years, the United States' frustration with international institutions has pushed it to engage the UN system on an ad hoc basis. The US will need to invest in strengthening the international system. In order for collective action to be mobilized, the polarization that persists across region, race, and religion will need to be replaced by an awakening sense of shared interest (NSS 2010, p. 13).

The US administration lead by Obama sees that supporting a just peace around the world is fundamental to its own interests (NSS 2010, p. 5). The NSS 2010 lists the interests of the US as follows: the security of the US, its citizens, allies, and partners. Then comes a strong innovative and growing US economy. Similar of importance is the respect for universal values abroad and at home. And finally, an international order advanced by US leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity (NSS 2010, p.

7). The US will also be pursuing comprehensive engagement based on mutual interests and mutual respect. First, America will continue its engagement with its closest friends and allies. Second, the US will continue to deepen cooperation with other centers of influence. And third, the US will pursue diplomacy and development that supports the emergence of new and successful partners (NSS 2010, p. 11). Finally, the NSS 2010 concentrates on strengthening the US internally especially the economy, development, and growth in order to be able to confront outside challenges (NSS 2010, ps. 30-35).

Most importantly, the NSS 2010 tackles the issue of terrorism. Contrary to the Bush administration, the Obama administration does not proclaim a war on terrorism as in general. The new administration specifically declares war on Al Qaeda and sets up a plan to dismantle and destroy it. The article specifically states, *“We will always seek to delegitimize the use of terrorism and to isolate those who carry it out. Yet this is not a global war against a tactic-terrorism or a religion-Islam. We are at war with a specific network, Al Qaeda, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the US, our allies, and partners”* (NSS 2010, p. 20). As such, the Obama administration follows a more detailed approach of how to deter the Al Qaeda threat. It focuses its strategy of destroying Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and around the world (NSS 2010, p. 19). The US administration lead by Obama rejects the notion that Al Qaeda represents any religious authority. The NSS 2010 states: *“They are not religious leaders, they are*

*killers; and neither Islam nor any other religion condones the slaughter of innocents*”(NSS 2010, p. 22).

The Obama administration in its National Security Strategy focuses on facilitating immediate action on three top priorities. First, the US will be pursuing a comprehensive non-proliferation and nuclear security agenda. Second, the US will disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda and its affiliates. And third, in Iraq, the US will be transitioning to full Iraqi sovereignty and responsibility (removal of troops, strengthening civilian capacity, and a long term partnership with the Iraqi government and people) (NSS 2010, p. 4). As for the issue of autocracy, the NSS generally mentions the issue of autocratic rulers and repression of democratic practices (NSS 2010, p. 35). Later, as will be shown, and with the eruption of the Arab Spring, the Obama administration becomes more vocal on issues of autocratic leaders and practices in the Middle East.

#### **4.1.2 The Obama Administration on Promoting Democracy**

Prior to his Presidency, Obama has traditionally supported democracy assistance as a core principle in US foreign policy. During his 2008 Presidential campaign, Obama stated, “*democracies are our best trading partners, our most valuable allies, and the nations with which we share our deepest values*” (Lappin, R., 2010, p. 1). Obama has also claimed that democratic states are better prepared to combat terrorism, stop the

spread of weapons, and handle public health crises (Lappin, R., 2010, p. 1). During his early career, it was obvious that Obama has continuously endorsed democracy assistance as a key foreign policy strategy. In 2005, he introduced the DRC Relief, Security and Democracy Promotion Act, and he co-sponsored the Advance Democracy Act (Lappin, R., 2010, p. 2). Later in his Presidential career, Obama was faced with the challenge of promoting democracy while securing the United States' key national interests.

With the eruption of the Arab uprisings, the Obama administration did not stand in the way of democratic demands. On November 7, 2011, Secretary of State Clinton voiced the importance of democracy to the US. Clinton stated, *“Democracies make for stronger and stabler partners. They trade more, innovate more, and fight less. They help divided societies to air and hopefully resolve their differences. They hold inept leaders accountable at the polls. They channel people’s energies away from extremism and toward political and civic engagement...so for all these reasons...opening political systems, societies, and economies is not simply a matter of idealism. It is a strategic necessity”* (Keiswetter, A. L., 2012, p. 1). This quote explains why the US did not stand in the face of democracy movements that spread throughout the Middle East. Especially that many of the US's core interests were at stake. For instance, the removal of the authoritarian US-friendly rulers may jeopardize the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. It might also risk their replacement with unfriendly Islamist regimes. Moreover, the oil

factor might be risked. As Kissinger has noted, “*the US conduct during the Arab upheavals has so far avoided making America an obstacle to the revolutionary transformations*” (Kissinger, 2012, p. 4). Prominent figures such as Kissinger conclude that in the end the US approach toward the troubled region will be judged (Kissinger, 2012, p. 4). Indeed, the credibility of US democracy promotion under Obama and US interventionism in the Arab region will always be under scrutiny.

## **4.2 Comparing the Bush and the Obama Doctrines**

### **4.2.1 Bush’s Freedom Agenda vs. Obama’s Democracy Promotion**

Many scholars have argued that the Bush freedom agenda in the Middle East has been a failure. Some would say that it has been an overly militarized approach to promote democratic reform (Katulis, 2005, p. 19). It has been argued that the democratic reforms that were pushed by the US have aimed to stabilize the authoritarian rule in the Middle East by what was known as “liberalized autocracies.” This system of rule was enabling some measure of political openness but leaving the main power with existing ruling regimes (Katulis, 2005, p. 5). That was still the case when Obama came to power in the year 2009. These policy approaches were even described as “upgrading authoritarianism.” In this system some freedom was introduced in a way whereby the

civil society was contained, some selective economic reforms were introduced, and communication technology was somehow controlled (Katulis, 2005, p. 6).

When Obama came to power, he inherited many challenging failures from his predecessor. Bush's democracy promotion was, as many scholars argue, a hypocritical one. By including the war on terrorism in his "freedom agenda" and maintaining close ties with autocratic regimes that were to aid him in his counterterrorism efforts, he created a double standard (Carothers, 2009, p. 1). By associating democracy promotion with the Iraqi war and regime change, Bush created a hypocritical cover for aggressive interventionism serving US security needs (Carothers, 2009, p. 1). The human rights abuses for antiterrorism purposes further tarnished the United States image as a 'global symbol of democracy' (Carothers, 2009, p. 1). As such, with the change of US leadership, the new leadership under Obama was trying to shift away from Bush's foreign policy. The 2010 NSS was constantly asserting the need to engage with other states and trying to renew the American leadership with a stronger commitment to the rule of law (Gray, 2011, p. 35).

In order to distance himself from the Bush Doctrine, and on his second day at office, Obama issued Executive Orders to close the detention center in Cuba in Guantanamo Bay. By closing the CIA torture prisons, Obama was also trying to renew the United

States' image as a democratic symbol (Carothers, 2009, p. 1). He reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to the 1949 Geneva Conventions (Gray, 2011, p. 35). Obama also distanced himself from the decision of using force against Iraq in 2003, and refocused his efforts on the continuous conflict in Afghanistan (Gray, 2011, p. 35). Moreover, his approach toward Iraq, describing it as a US daunting policy challenge provided a new US approach (Carothers 2009, p. 2). President Obama also expressed that the US will be ending combat operations in Iraq and the NSS 2010 announced the implementation of that policy by 31 August 2010 (Gray, 2011, p. 41).

Some scholars argue that Bush hardly made a real push for democracy although he rhetorically supported democracy in the Middle East and established some aid programs and diplomatic initiatives (Carothers, 2009, p. 3). Bush pressed for diplomatic political pressure on some Arab allies. However, there is an argument that explains that Bush's diplomatic pressure was brief and ended after Hamas won elections in 2006 (Carothers, 2009, p. 3). As such, Bush's freedom agenda overstated the US's pursuit of democracy. For that reason, scholars such as Carothers claim that "*Obama's rhetorical style-his unusual ability to meld inspiration with restraint-is exactly the note to strike in crafting a new rhetorical line about the role of democracy promotion in U.S. foreign policy*" (Carothers, 2009, p.7). As such, many of Obama's subsequent speeches in addition to the NSS 2010 indicate that the new President would follow a more careful and measured

approach in his democracy promotion efforts. This new approach was aimed at rebuilding and maintaining a new credible US tactic. Later, with the spurge of the Arab Spring, Obama undertook a careful approach in tackling the upheavals. His tactic included a strong rhetoric appeal for democracy with a minimal collective intervention.

#### **4.2.2 Similarities and Differences between the Bush and the Obama Security Strategy**

Some scholars draw significant continuities between the Obama administration and its predecessors. Similar to the US NSS 2002 and 2006, the NSS 2010 identifies the same threats. The Obama Security Strategy reaffirms that *“there is no greater threat to the American people than WMD, particularly the danger posed by the pursuit of nuclear weapons by violent extremists and their proliferation to additional states”* (Gray, 2011, p. 40). Furthermore, President Obama asserts that the US is still at war. In his covering letter of the 2010 NSS Obama states, *“for nearly a decade, our nation has been at war with a far-reaching network of violence and hatred”* (Gray, 2011, p. 41). In his predecessor’s NSS 2006 covering letter, it was noted, *“America is at war”* (Gray, 2011, p. 41). However, in a speech at West Point, Obama states, *“this is a different kind of war”* (Gray, 2011, p. 43). The war that Obama talks about is one that has no end because even though there has been some success in eliminating Al Qaeda, this network will continue to recruit, plot, and exploit (Gray, 2011, p. 43).

Unlike the President Bush NSS 2006, the NSS 2010 does not draw any link between Iraq, Al Qaeda, and “the war on terror” (Gray, 2011, p. 42). Contrary to spreading American military in Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama refocused the military efforts solely in Afghanistan (Gray, 2011, p. 42). All in all, Obama’s tone in the US NSS 2010 appears to be softer, stressing more on diplomacy and multilateralism. The 2010 NSS aim is to “*re-engage with the international community*” (Gray, 2011, p. 52). There were many references to the renewal of the US leadership. As for the use of force, the NSS 2010 stresses on the fact that it should be the last resort (Gray, 2011, p. 53). But this leaves the notions of self-defense and preemption questionable.

Interestingly, under the Obama administration, especially when he came to power, democracy promotion in the Middle East did not appear as a major regional priority (Slavin, 2010, p. 2). In her February 14 speech in Qatar, Secretary of State Clinton listed promoting human rights as a last priority following the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran, combating extremism and promoting opportunities for the young (Slavin, 2010, p. 2). But on the other hand, programs of the Bush era “Freedom Agenda” has survived and developed under Obama such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) (Slavin, 2010, p. 2).

Another interesting distinction between Obama and Bush has been on the use of force. Technology in this case has modified the issue of the use of force unexpectedly. Surprisingly, Obama has expanded the executive branch ability to carry out high-tech clandestine war (Rohde, 2012, p. 1). The President has embraced and expanded the powers of the CIA. He has also approved more targeted killings than any modern President. Between the years 2009 and 2012, *“the Obama administration has carried out at least 239 covert drone strikes, more than five times the 44 approved under George W. Bush”* (Rhode, 2012, p. 1). Consequently, the mode of the use of force under Obama appeared different. While under the Bush administration the use of force was more like a war kind of aggression, Obama carried out definite and specific targets. Recently, many current and former administration officials have summarized what could be named “Obama Doctrine” on the use of force. It was stated that Obama’s path of multilateralism, drone strikes, and light US military presence in Libya, Pakistan, and Yemen, has proved more successful than the Bush’s go-heavy approach in Iraq and Afghanistan (Rhode, 2012, p. 2). Finally, the Obama Doctrine can be summarized as follows: when America’s direct national interests are threatened, Obama is willing to use unilateral force. That was the case with the Bin Laden raid. However, when the threat is more diffused and has more to do with maintaining global order, Obama opts for working multilaterally within UN resolutions and with the partnership of US allies

(Sanger, D. E., 2012, p. 3). That might well explain why Obama is hesitant to directly interfere in the civil war in Syria. In this case, the US interests are indirect.

### **4.3 The Arab Spring and the US Democracy Promotion**

#### **4.3.1 The Arab Spring: An Overview**

The Arab Spring erupted on December 17, 2010 with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi and then developed into a revolution that overthrew the regime in Tunisia (Kahle, C. H. & Lynch, M., 2013, p. 41). The revolution spread throughout the Arab world and many authoritarian leaders were removed from power. The rule of Moubarak in Egypt was terminated as well as that of Ghaddafi in Libya and Ben Ali in Yemen. Some steps toward reform were undertaken in some countries such as Jordan, Morocco, and Oman (Kahle, C. H. & Lynch, M., 2013, p. 41). While in other places as Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, calls for political change were suppressed by their strict governments (Kahle, C. H. & Lynch, M., 2013, p. 41). On the other hand, the ongoing situation in Syria is different. The conflict in Syria has evolved into a civil war and everyday casualties and human rights abuses are being recorded.

Throughout the years, the United States has prioritized the regional balance of power in the Middle East in order to preserve its own national interests (Kahle, C. H. & Lynch,

M., 2013, p. 48). The US's core security objectives include: preventing any power in the region from emerging as a hegemon; ensuring the free flow of energy resources, and trying to negotiate a durable peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors (Kissinger, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, during the last decade, protecting the US security from the terrorist threats and the weapons of mass destruction became a core national interest. As such, the US has worked to preserve its national security interests.

#### **4.3.2 Democracy Progress in the Middle East before the eruption of the uprisings**

There have been slight democratic improvements in the Middle East before the eruption of the Arab Spring. Democracy professionals point to some achievements of the US efforts. In 2004, Morocco changed a reactionary family-status law that discriminated against women (Slavin, 2010, p. 4). In Saudi Arabia, a slight progress has been noticed under the leadership of King Abdullah. In 2009, the King named a new cabinet, which for the first time included a female deputy minister (Slavin, 2010, p. 3). In the year 2005, money given by MEPI supported election monitors in Egypt that claimed turnout (23 percent) for Egypt's first nominally contested Presidential election (Slavin, 2010, p. 4). In 2009, four women won election in the Kuwaiti parliament. However, democracy promotion by the US has been criticized on many stances. Scholars such as Brumberg have criticized the mode of operation of the small grants provided by the US such as that of MEPI. Brumberg warned that such grants might actually prolong authoritarian

governments. He claims “*MEPI inadvertently fragments the political space by giving so many grants to such small entities*” (Slavin, 2010, p. 4). As a result, although democracy promotion undertaken by the US empowers small groups, it might also lead to the continuation of the authoritarian systems.

### **4.3.3 US Democracy Promotion during the Arab Spring**

The driving forces behind the eruption of the Arab Spring have been the mobilized masses mostly the youth with the help of technological development (Keiswetter, 2012, p. 3). For these young Arab generations, the US association with Arab authoritarian regimes has been viewed as that of supporting corruption and the misuse of power (Keiswetter, 2012, p. 8). As such, the US’s reaction toward the Arab uprisings was very critical. This might explain why the Obama administration has undertaken a careful standpoint while supporting openly (rhetorically) the fight toward democracy. Although in the near term the Arab region will be experiencing instability, prospects for the long term include a freer Middle East (Keiswetter, 2012, p. 2). “*In the long term, a more democratic, prosperous and accountable Middle East offers the promise of a region with better governance and less abusive of human rights, and thus a net positive outcome for the U.S.*” (Keiswetter, 2012, p. 2). As such, the US would not stand in the face of democratic transitions although the short-term results will definitely be unfavorable.

President Obama's speech at the State Department on May 19, 2011 summarizes the US stance regarding the Arab Spring. In that speech, he acknowledges that following a strategy with the US merely pursuing its interests is not enough. He states that the US support of principles such as opposing the use of violence and oppression, supporting the universal rights, and the right to choose one's own leaders are not that of secondary importance. He stresses that it will be a top priority for the US to promote reform and transitions to democracy throughout the region (The White House, May 19, 2011, p. 1). In this speech, Obama openly and strongly supports the democratic movements in the Middle East. Later, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton expands on Obama's speech in a November 7 statement. She clearly states, "*Fundamentally, there is a right side of history. And we want to be on it...*" (Keiswetter, 2012, p. 4). Clinton here acknowledges the importance of the United States' image of being true to its principles.

The United States has reacted somehow differently as concerns the upheavals. It followed a country-by-country approach. In Egypt and Tunisia, the masses were able to handle the situation alone and authoritarian rulers have been removed. The US has supported rhetorically both movements in both countries without directly interfering. Obama promised a 'new chapter' in US diplomacy (MacAskill, May 20, 2011, p. 1). Referring to the Arab autocracies he claimed, "*the status-quo is not sustainable*"

(MacAskill, May 20, 2011, p. 1). Obama has placed the US on the side of the democratic movements in all countries. However, in Libya, he joined a NATO operation. Obama's approach was to provide US air power in order to support the rebels but not putting US troops on Libyan soil (MacAskill, October 20, 2011, p. 2). Obama also promised US help for Libya in establishing a government and holding election (MacAskill, October 20, 2011, p. 1)

Interestingly, Obama has also supported popular uprisings in Libya- a longtime American ally. However, the support consisted of a short rhetoric. He clearly stated, *"We have insisted publicly and privately that mass arrests and brutal force are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain's citizens, and will not make legitimate calls for reform go away,"* (MacAskill, 20 May 2011, p. 2). Here, the US pressure was soft rhetoric when it concerns US allies as Bahrain. In contrast, when it comes to unfriendly regimes, the rhetoric will sound harsher as in the case of Syria. The United States stance might even escalate to a direct multilateral intervention when it concerns unfriendly regimes as Gaddafi's Libya. On Syria, President Obama commented, *"The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: he can lead that transition, or get out of the way,"* (Macaskill, 20 May 2011, p. 2).

All in all, it is undeniable that the Obama administration openly supports the democratic movements occurring in the Middle East. However, the United States' direct intervention remains selective and different from country to country. The rationale behind multilateral intervention in Libya was not applied in Syria. Perhaps, the US was not ready to burden itself with another conflict zone and promises of reconstruction to the Syrian people. Billions of dollars in debt relief and loans were being injected in post-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia, two longtime US allies (Black, 19 May 2011, p. 11). However, the whole Middle Eastern region seems unstable and probably for a long period of time. The US can intervene softly as rhetorically and by providing small grants and other loans aimed at rebuilding. Nevertheless, it cannot do much especially as new problems and dilemmas occur. The most recent one is the Isil threat that will be tackled briefly in chapter 5. It will be shown how the US is reacting toward the emergence of a new terrorist threat. It will also be highlighted how this new threat affects America's national interest in the region.

## Chapter 5

# ISIL, the United States Reaction, a brief Overview of the Thesis and the Research Question

### 5.1 ISIL

#### 5.1.1 ISIL: Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant known as Isil is now known as the most powerful and successful extreme Jihadi group (Cockburn, 2014). Isil was able to control a considerable territory in western Iraq and northern Syria (Cockburn, 2014). Although the number of the Jihadi movement is not clear; thousands of fighters are currently active. They have been killing Shia Muslims, Christians, and other minority groups. They have been highly effective in instilling fear especially in the surrounding countries of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. *“Isis specializes in using militarily untrained foreign volunteers as suicide bombers either moving on foot wearing suicide vests, or driving vehicles packed with explosives”* (Cockburn, 2014, p. 1). Isil fighters are widely known for their horrific mass killings and unmerciful executions.

### **5.1.2 The US War against ISIL**

In the midsummer of 2014, the US started sending non-operational troops initiating a large-scale air campaign over the region. Recently, Secretary of State John Kerry clearly stated that the United States is "at war" with Islamic State militants (Bendery, 9 December 2014). Barack Obama has authorized the doubling of US troop levels to fight the war against the Islamic State in Iraq. The President has ordered 1,500 troops to Iraq early November to support the performance of Iraqi and Kurdish forces fighting Isil in ground combat (Ackerman, S. & McCarthy T., 8 November 2014). The Pentagon clarified that these new troops will not be used in combat. For the past month, the US has been initiating warplane bombardments on Isil targets from the air. The additional troops are said to provide support for the Iraqi forces across the country. Around 630 of them will launch and staff two new operations planning centers (Ackerman, S. & McCarthy T., 8 November 2014). These US troops will direct and train Iraqi brigades.

US officials claim that Islamic State extremists suffered heavy casualties caused by American air strikes (Borger, 19 December 2014). The officials say air strikes since mid-November have killed prominent leaders as well as about 1,000 fighters, particularly around the fiercely challenged Kurdish town of Kobani lying on the Syrian-Turkish border (Borger, 19 December 2014). The most significant Isil figure identified

as Haji Mutazz, also known as Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, was killed. Turkmani is identified as deputy to the movement's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Moreover, The US is operating Turkish bases for intelligence-gathering purposes (Borger, 19 December 2014). US advisers are working with Iraqi trainers in the Anbar province, assisting in the training and the organization of Sunni tribesmen to confront Isis (Borger, 19 December 2014).

As concerns the fight against Isil, the US is definitely playing its role as a world leader. However, it seems that the US is changing its mode of operation as a result of past experiences as the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The US is approaching this case step by step. Obama is definitely showing strength and being firm in involving the US troops. However, US involvement nowadays is through collective action, selective operations, and rather than committing massive troops, the US is keeping "boots-off the ground."

## **5.2 Main Issues Discussed in This Study**

Chapter 1 introduces the issues to be discussed in this paper. It briefly discusses Bush's versus Obama's democracy promotion. It also numerates some US initiatives aiming at democracy promotion. Chapter 1 also tackles the issue of the rise of Arab opposition against the Arab dictators and the formation of anti-American sentiments. Chapter 1 reveals the research question and the map of the thesis.

Chapter two is mainly composed of the literature review. It provides an understanding of US democracy promotion according to different scholars. It focuses on the issues of the 9/11 attacks, the rise of extremism and their link to US democracy promotion. It discusses the United States stakes in the Arab world. Chapter 2 explains how extremism affects the US democracy promotion processes. It studies the issue of democracy deficit in the Arab world and how Bush undertook the task of reform in the Middle East. This chapter expands on US programs aimed at democracy promotion and tackles profoundly the issue of anti-Americanism according to different writers.

Chapter 3 provides a brief history on Arab authoritarianism and the US democracy promotion. It tackles the socio economic situation of the region and the oil factor. It also explains the strategies aimed at transforming semi-authoritarian regimes into democracies. Chapter 3 provides a background of US relationship with Arab authoritarian regimes. It gives an overview on Islamism and identity politics in the region. It talks about the popularity of these Islamists and how this affects US democracy promotion. This chapter specifically discusses the Bush Democracy Promotion in the Arab Authoritarian World Amidst the Islamist Threat. It provides a close analysis of the US national security strategy of the years 2002 and 2006. The analyses of those strategies provide a deep understanding of the Bush Doctrine.

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the Obama security strategy of the year 2010. It discusses the Obama plan of promoting democracy. This chapter provides a comparative strategy of the Bush and the Obama doctrines. It draws similarities and differences between the Bush 'Freedom Agenda' and the Obama democracy promotion. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the Arab Spring and how democracy promotion was undertaken before and during the eruption of the uprisings.

### **5.3 Answering the Research Question**

The main research question of this thesis is as follows: Did the US support of democracy during the recent Arab uprisings mark a shift in US foreign policy in the Middle East?

As has been shown throughout the study, The US has always acted according to its security interests during the timeline provided in this thesis. Although Bush and Obama have many differences, they both made their foreign policy choices in the region based on their security interests. Bush maintained a close collaboration with Arab authoritarian regimes post the attacks of 9/11. These regimes have helped him in different ways and his push for initiating reform was mostly soft and rhetorical. Obama who also maintained this special relationship followed Bush's path. However, with the eruption of

the Arab uprisings, Obama was faced with a situation whereby he cannot reject the principles that the United States continuously preaches. Obama was also challenged by the credibility problem that was inflicted upon him as a result of his predecessor's past actions. He has the challenge of modifying the United States' image and stand up for the principles his country calls for. Obama has no other choice but to support the Arab uprisings at least rhetorically. He was able to make concrete interventions when the case included a foe (Libya's Gaddafi) and under the umbrella of a multilateral force (the NATO). As for Syria, and the emergence of a new threat the Isil, the calculations are still critical. The Obama administration has initiated war against Isis but is trying not to involve US troops on ground. The burden of involving troops would engage the US in another war zone for years to come, similar to that of Iraq that was held as America's responsibility. Again, the US is trying to involve different countries in fighting the new threat.

All in all, the US supports the authoritarian paradigm whenever the situation is favorable to it. The US shifts to supporting the democracy paradigm whenever the US interests push it to do so. During the Arab Spring, the US was pushed to follow the democratic paradigm. But the US intervention is being more carefully calculated and the US seems to be tackling the situation of rising threats in the Middle East step by step. As such, the US support of democratic stability became more evident during the Arab

uprisings. In the end, although the support of the democracy paradigm may lead to short term instability, in the long run, having a democratic Middle East might be more advantageous for the US. Having a more democratic Middle East might translate into a long-term peace agreement with Israel, a region free of extremist groups, and a more economically capable region.

By comparing the Bush and the Obama periods, we notice that the US has always been consistent in its national interests but only shifts its strategies. The Bush era was characterized by a more aggressive interventionist policy. While the Obama administration seems to pursue a more careful approach in its foreign policy actions. Obama does show-off American superiority and leadership by intervening in world disasters such as the emergence of Isil. Nevertheless, he makes sure not to burden the United States with a new war zone by engaging other countries as well. Obama divides the responsibility among other states but sustains US leadership in all international cases. The shift toward supporting the democracy paradigm during the Arab uprisings seems to serve US image as a leading promoter of human rights and democracy. While the threat of Isil is still humongous, and the deteriorating situation in Syria is still ongoing, it is yet to be seen how the US will act in the upcoming months.

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