



# Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Egypt: The Role of External Actors

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## Abstract

In 2013, Egypt's first democratically elected president Mohammed Morsi was overthrown by a military coup. Since then the country has undergone serious setbacks in terms of democracy, individual freedoms, and social justice. Egypt's failed revolution and the military coup could not be thought independently from the role of external actors - either directly or indirectly involved in this process. Despite their political rhetoric emphasizing democracy promotion and political reforms, both the US and the EU failed to pursue consistent and contributory policies in promoting democratic transition in Egypt out of fear that the electoral victory of Islamist groups would harm their interests in the region. On the other hand, the Gulf Monarchies played a pivotal role in the entrenchment of the military rule by providing financial and political support to the military-backed government as a shield against the democratically elected government in Egypt. This article investigates how the policies adopted by Egypt's key allies, the European Union, the US and the Gulf Monarchies, impacted the trajectory of Egypt's political transition in the face of the January 25 revolution and 2013 military coup. The main thesis of the article is that the policies pursued by external actors created a political environment unfavorable for democratic change in Egypt.

**Keywords:** Egypt, External Actors, Political Transition, Authoritarianism, Military Regime

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# Mısır’da Devrim ve Karşı Devrim: Dış Aktörlerin Rolü

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## Öz

Mısır’ın demokratik yollarla seçilen ilk Cumhurbaşkanı Muhammed Mursi 2013’te askeri darbe sonucu devrildi. O tarihten bu yana, ülkede demokrasi, bireysel özgürlükler ve sosyal adalet alanlarında ciddi gerileme yaşandı. Mısır’ın siyasi geçiş süreci ve ülkede gerçekleşen askeri darbe doğrudan veya dolaylı bir şekilde bu süreçte yer alan dış aktörlerin rolünden bağımsız olarak düşünülemez. Demokrasi ve siyasi reformlara vurgu yapan söylemlerine karşın, hem ABD hem de Avrupa Birliği İslamcı grupların bölgedeki çıkarlarına zarar vereceği korkusuyla, Mısır’da demokrasiye geçişin teşvik edilmesi konusunda tutarlı ve katkı sağlayıcı politikalar izleyemedi. Diğer yandan, Körfez monarşileri Mısır’da demokratik bir şekilde seçilmiş rejime karşı bir kalkan olarak askeri rejime finansal ve siyasi destek vererek askeri yönetimin güçlendirilmesinde önemli rol oynamıştır. Bu makale Mısır’ın müttefiklerinin, diğer bir deyişle, Avrupa Birliği, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Körfez monarşilerinin 25 Ocak Devrimi ve 2013 askeri darbe karşısında izledikleri politikaların Mısır’ın siyasi geçiş sürecini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Makalenin ana tezi, dış aktörlerin izledikleri politikaların Mısır’da demokratik değişime olanak tanımayan siyasi bir ortam oluşturduğudur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mısır, Dış Aktörler, Siyasi Geçiş, Otoriterizm, Askeri Rejim

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## **1. Introduction**

Global politics are increasingly marked by interdependence among states and international socialization and so is democratic transition. In the third wave of democracy, democratic diffusion was prevalent among the countries that shared geographical proximity as well as political and cultural ties. The change in politics towards political liberalization and in economy towards free market in several parts of the developing world clearly illustrates that transitioning countries were both influenced by their neighboring states as well as the Western countries, which set an important example to them. Global and regional political forces and economic powers along with international organizations do play a critical role in enabling or precluding a smooth democratic transition. Particularly from 1980s onwards, the successful transitions experience of Eastern European states drew much attention to the role of external actors and external-internal linkages of democratization as an explanatory variable in the transition of the post-authoritarian states. As domestic developments could not be separated from external factors, a thorough understanding of democratic transition or democratic regression in a certain country requires an analysis of the role that external actors play in facilitating or hindering democratization.

Most of the literature on external influence on democratization has focused on how leverage and linkage contributed to the democratic transition of post-communist states in Eastern Europe and their successful integration into Western-dominated institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, the recent wave of uprisings and regime changes in the MENA region is contrary to the examples presented in the existing literature. In the MENA region, states that have undergone regime change in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings neither benefited from the so-called “democracy promotion” of the United States (US) nor from the conditionality often used by the EU as an attempt to bring democratic change in its Eastern borders. Egypt is particularly important in that regard as external actors played a role in overturning short-lived democratic experience in the country. The prospects of democratic transition in Egypt apparently came to an end in 2013 with the military positioning itself as the only decisive political force. Despite divergence in their interests, the EU, the US and the Gulf Monarchies either remained

silent in the face of the removal of an elected president or openly backed the military regime in their political rhetoric and policies. This political stance proved that their foreign policy interests prioritized security and stability rather than democracy in the region, which led to bitter sentiments among Egyptians towards the West, and raised suspicions in the Egyptian society about the legitimacy of those actors promoting democracy.

The political will by the external actors to use leverage or linkage in their relationship to states in transition should be taken as an important variable in analyzing how external influence could facilitate or inhibit democratic change. To this end, this article investigates the policies adopted by the EU, the US and the Gulf States vis-à-vis Egypt both prior to and following the January 25 uprisings and argues that external influence beclouded Egypt's path to democratization. The article is divided into three sections. The following section offers a theoretical debate on the external influence on democratic transition, and provides insight into the lessons learned from former democratic transition experiences. The third section analyzes the shift in US foreign policy towards the MENA region since the office of President Bush, and investigates the impact of US and EU foreign policy making on Egypt's transition following the January 25 uprisings. Finally, the fourth section examines the relationship between the Gulf Monarchies and Egypt under Mubarak and its aftermath, and looks at how the financial and political support provided by the Gulf Monarchies -Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates- to counter-revolutionary forces in Egypt enabled the restoration of authoritarianism, and undermined Egyptians' aspirations for freedom and democracy. The last section concludes with a brief summary of the impact of external influence on the trajectory of Egypt's political transition.

## **2. External Influence on Democratic Transition**

External influence on democratic transition often takes place in two ways; (1) leverage emerges when a state or a group of states use(s) political, economic or military power to foster or reverse democratic transition in a country, (2) linkage exists when civil society actors, political movements and institutions in a country are tied to those of democratic countries or

Western led multilateral institutions.<sup>1</sup> Leverage can be exerted in several ways such as democratic conditionality, military intervention, diplomatic pressure and economic integrations or sanctions. Individual states or regional or international organizations could impose conditionality to facilitate democratic transition of post-authoritarian states by offering them “carrots” in exchange for their protection of democracy such as free trade or market access and membership in regional or international organizations. On the other hand, this conditionality also includes “sticks” to a country in transition in the case of non-compliance to desired progress in building democratic institutions such as the threat of sanctions, terminating membership to international institutions or financial support.

Based on rational calculations of costs and benefits, states transitioning from authoritarianism determine their positions, and often comply with the demands of the international community. The rather smooth and speedy transition of former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe to democracy and market economy was thanks to the conditionality imposed by the EU. Almost three decades in retrospect, it became evident that these states successfully became members of the EU after having made progress in building democratic institutions in line with its requirements upon which they were granted several tangible benefits. In addition to this top-down approach, international actors might choose to bypass the government in office and change the domestic equilibrium in favor of democratic reformists by increasing the bargaining power of certain domestic actors vis a vis their non-democratic opposition and government. Democracy assistance programs and democracy promotion aid by the West aiming to empower non-governmental organizations represent a bottom-up approach. In both cases conditionality is shaped by a logic of consequence based on the magnitude of costs and rewards as well as the deterrence of threats and the credibility of promises.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Levitsky, and Lucan A. Way, “International Linkage and Democratization,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (July 2005): 21-23. doi:10.1353/jod.2005.0048.

<sup>2</sup> Michael McFaul, Amichai Magen, and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, “Evaluating International Influences on Democratic Transitions,” Concept Paper, *Stanford University Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law* (2008): 8-9. [https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/res/Evaluating\\_International\\_Influences\\_-\\_Transitions\\_-\\_Concept\\_Paper.pdf](https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/res/Evaluating_International_Influences_-_Transitions_-_Concept_Paper.pdf).

Linkage between external agents and domestic actors also largely influence the trajectory of transition to democracy. The interconnectedness between states through economic, social, cultural, religious and geopolitical ties as well as transnational organizations is an important form of external influence. Stronger ties between a country in transition and democratic states are hypothesized to contribute to democratic transition whereas weak political, economic, and institutional ties with democratic states are assumed to limit prospects for a democratic outcome. In that regard, those countries that are geographically close to the West and share political and economic ties have managed to integrate into political, economic and security communities created by Western states. On the other hand, countries that have geographical proximity and closer political, economic, social and security ties to authoritarian regimes are more likely to revert to some form of authoritarianism.

Linkage could occur either through deliberate decision-making by the country's government and political elite, based on cost-benefit calculation or through processes of social learning and embedded rationalism, or what constructivists refer to as "international socialization".<sup>3</sup> International socialization concerns the diffusion of ideas and movements across societies, which facilitate developing democratic behavior in a society. Once the society and the elites view democratic states as legitimate actors and sympathize with those states, the idea of democracy is more likely to be embraced by the society and democracy as a form of governance is more likely to diffuse among transitioning states. Negative linkage occurs when economic, political, institutional and social ties between a country and external actors or integration into some international or regional organizations stifle democratic transition. For instance, the Soviet Union dominated economic and security institutions such as the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, which helped to consolidate authoritarian tendencies in Communist satellite regimes of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In the light of these theoretical debates, the following two sections investigate how Egypt's key political and economic allies influenced the trajectory of Egypt's political transition, and helped to reinforce the rule of counter-revolutionary forces linked to the *ancien regime* in Egypt.

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<sup>3</sup> McFaul et al., "Evaluating International Influences," 9.

### **3. Western Actors' Response to Egyptian Uprisings and its Aftermath**

Egypt is a pivotal Arab state for both the EU and the US given its geopolitical location, great demographics, military strength and political influence in the MENA region. It neighbors Israel and controls the Rafah gate, which makes Egypt a critical actor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Egypt is also the controller of the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. In addition, historically, it has acted as an agent for mobilization of Arab societies with its leading role in promoting several social and religious movements such as Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, the trajectory of Egypt's political transition has been of utmost significance to external actors given that the developments taking place in Egypt are likely to have diffusion effect in the region.

The US stands as Egypt's long-standing ally in political, economic and military terms. For many decades, the American-Egyptian alliance was based on providing security and stability in the region. The US has various interests in maintaining this alliance such as retaining the Arab-Israeli peace, cooperation with Egypt against Islamic militancy and instability, particularly on the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, which have been critical areas of cooperation for Israeli security. The military and financial aid to Egypt was justified by successive US administrations as an investment to regional stability, and aimed primarily at cooperating with the military and maintaining the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.<sup>4</sup>

The post-Cold War order led to a new understanding of US foreign policy makers, who began to view that democracy promotion would be key to ensuring American security interests as well as economic growth. The fall of the Soviet Union and the communist regimes in Eastern Europe offered the US a wide range of opportunities in terms of ideological penetration and expansion of free market economies. Thus, the US foreign policy conduct was mainly based on three pillars; democracy promotion, support for free market economy, and national security cooperation. In line with this understanding, the US institutionalized its democracy promotion

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "Egypt: Background and US Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, September 2, 2009, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>.

mechanisms, and created a democracy promotion budget to fund several programs such as USAID, the Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The US National Strategy of 1995 stated:

*Our national security strategy is based on enlarging the community of market democracies... The more that democracy and political and economic liberalization take hold in the world, particularly in countries of strategic importance to us, the safer our nation is likely to be and the more our people are likely to prosper.<sup>5</sup>*

This new thinking in US foreign policy under the Clinton administration (1992-2000) gained a new momentum when George Bush came into power. In the post-9/11 attacks, American democracy promotion efforts and the Western emphasis on political reform intensified particularly in the Arab world. The threat of global terrorism shifted Western actors' stance to authoritarian backlash in the region. Following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush regime came up with a democracy promotion agenda given the understanding that the growth of terrorism stemmed from unfavorable conditions accompanied with authoritarian rule and poor economic policies. Thus, any struggle to fight against terrorism would require promoting democracy, political freedoms, and coping with economic and social challenges that arise from poverty, inequality and injustice.<sup>6</sup> Former President George W. Bush called for a counter-terrorism strategy that would foster progress in economic, social and political fields across the region. In 2003, Bush stated that "As long as freedom and democracy do not flourish in the Middle East, that region will remain stagnant, resentful and violent – and serve as an exporter of violence and terror to free nations."<sup>7</sup> In line with the democracy promotion agenda, the US initiated

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<sup>5</sup> The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington DC.: The White House, 1995), 2, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/research/nss.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Philippe Droz Vincent, "The Security Sector in Egypt: Management, Coercion and External Alliance Under the Dynamics of Change," in *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization, The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East*, ed. Laura Guazzone, and Daniela Pioppi (UK: Ithaca Press, 2009), 241-242.; Marina Ottoway, and Julia Choucair-Vizoso, *Beyond Façade: Political Reform in the Arab World* (Washington DC: United Book Press, 2008), 1-5.

<sup>7</sup> The White House (Office of the Press Secretary), "Fact Sheet: President Bush Calls for a Forward Strategy of Freedom to Promote Democracy in the Middle East," November 6, 2013, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-11.html>.



various programs that aimed at building bilateral cooperation with Egypt, empowering the Egyptian civil society, and promoting democracy such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI).

Until 2005, the Bush administration pressured the Mubarak regime for political reforms and transparent elections. The American pressure for individual freedoms and democracy in Egypt was influential in forcing the Mubarak regime to initiate some political openings to respond to the Bush administration's urge for change. With US support for reforms in Egypt, a new public space emerged that enabled Egyptian civil society and opposition groups to flourish. To this end, the Mubarak regime took some steps such as establishing the National Council for Human Rights abrogating state security courts and initiating dialogue with opponents.<sup>8</sup> In 2005, Mubarak amended Article 76 of the constitution and for the first time multicandidate presidential elections were held in Egypt. Although the constitutional amendments consolidated the NDP's monopoly over politics, political liberalization in this period led to an unprecedented level of civic activism as well as to the emergence of opposition movements such as the Kefaya and April 6 Movements.

At times, the Bush administration did not refrain from resorting to negative conditionality, and threatened the Egyptian government when it repressed opposition forces. For instance, in 2002, President Bush threatened to block 130 million US dollars of economic aid to Egypt unless a liberal opponent, the American-Egyptian sociologist Saad Edin Ibrahim, who had been jailed after his involvement in independent monitoring of the elections in 2000 was released. Similarly, in 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice cancelled her planned visit to Cairo after the arrest of Ayman Nour, a widely reputed liberal opponent.

While on the state level, Egypt remained committed to its strategic alliance with the US, there existed a huge gap between the regime and the society. The Egyptian-American alliance lacked any broad-based public support but rather depended on elite bargain in Egypt. The Egyptian society deeply resented the Mubarak regime's subservience to US interests and security

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<sup>8</sup> Gamal Selim, *The International Dimensions of Democratization in Egypt* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 85.

agenda in the region. Particularly, after 9/11, the American agenda of the “global war on terror” and the invasion of Iraq led many intellectuals and the society at large to criticize the regime’s inability to draw its course of action independently from the US, and base it instead on Egyptian national interests in the region.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, the Mubarak regime’s policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its closing of the Rafah gate, and the regime’s lack of cooperation with the Hamas government were problematic to most Egyptians, particularly to Islamist groups, who considered these policies to be against Egyptian sovereignty. To this end, numerous demonstrations were held to manifest public opposition against the Egyptian regime’s submission to US pressure.

On the other hand, in their political rhetoric both the US and the EU called for the Mubarak regime to implement some political reforms that would improve human rights and individual freedoms in Egypt. Nevertheless, while retaining emphasis on democratic reforms, they failed to pursue consistent and tangible policies in promoting democratization in Egypt. In that respect, it is important to note that a number of regional developments in the years leading to the uprisings were critical in prompting rethinking for US foreign policy makers.

From 2005 onwards, the US gradually abandoned its democracy-promotion agenda in the MENA region, which could be accounted for by a number of political developments. In Egypt, political reforms and judicial supervision over parliamentary elections gave an unprecedented power to the Muslim Brotherhood in the parliament after the 2005 legislative elections. Similarly, the democracy promotion agenda of the Bush regime gave power to Shiites backed by militias in the Iraqi parliament and political Islamists in local elections in Saudi Arabia in 2005. In Lebanon, the 2005 general elections were an electoral momentum for Hezbollah, while Hamas gained electoral victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections.<sup>10</sup> More recently, in 2012, a year after the ouster of longtime dictator Moammar Qaddafi, the US diplomatic

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<sup>9</sup> Vincent, “The Security Sector in Egypt,” 236.

<sup>10</sup> When Hamas was elected to power in one of the freest elections the region, the US didn’t recognize the result. Thus, it reflected a democracy-Islamist dilemma in which the US deviated from its democracy rhetoric when Islamist groups rose to power. Emiliano Allesandri, Oz Hassan, and Ted Reinert, “US Democracy Promotion from Bush to Obama,” *EUSpring*, Working Paper 1 (April 2015), [http://aei.pitt.edu/64170/1/us\\_dem\\_promo\\_tti\\_on\\_april15.pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/64170/1/us_dem_promo_tti_on_april15.pdf); Vincent, “The Security Sector in Egypt,” 242.

mission was attacked by members of the Islamist militant group Ansar Al-Sharia in Benghazi, resulting in the death of four Americans including the US ambassador to Libya.<sup>11</sup> These developments marked a significant turning point in the American democracy promotion and freedom agenda. The Western policy orientation in the Middle East confronted a democracy-stability dilemma; while the former was supposed to promote Western values and bring about more predictable governments with broad-public support, and the latter was regarded as a more direct and likely outcome of supporting the existing military-backed autocrats in the region.

With the rise of Islamist movements on the political stage from 2005 onwards, the US administration began to diminish its support for democratization significantly, and avoided making reference to derailing human rights and democracy in Egypt. In a similar vein, the European Union avoided any mention of constitutional amendments that marked regression in terms of individual rights and civil liberties in its Action Plan adopted in 2007.<sup>12</sup> Hence, democracy promotion has been rather cosmetrical in US and EU foreign policy agendas, which prioritized maintaining stability in the secular pro-Western Arab authoritarian regimes instead of a genuine desire for democratic change.

Western governments found their security interests in advancing their relationships with secular-minded autocrats aligned with the West due to their vested interests in the region. These interests included ensuring the security of oil supplies and energy corridors containing Islamic fundamentalism and Israel's security. In line with this rationale, the US and the EU supported the Mubarak regime for decades as they were concerned with security issues linked to the Islamic empowerment in Egypt. Fearing an Islamist takeover, they gave precedence to relations with the ruling

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<sup>11</sup> Anup Kaphle, "Timeline: How the Benghazi Attacks Played out," *Washington Post*, June 17, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/timeline-how-the-benghazi-attack-played-out/2014/06/17/a5c34e90-f62c-11e3-a3a5-42be35962a52\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/timeline-how-the-benghazi-attack-played-out/2014/06/17/a5c34e90-f62c-11e3-a3a5-42be35962a52_story.html)

<sup>12</sup> The European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan for Egypt mentioned only the need to "strengthen participation in political life including the promotion of public awareness and participation in elections" and "to exchange experience in the field of elections and jointly develop cooperation in areas of shared interest including through providing assistance on registering electors and capacity building". See European Union External Action Service, "European Neighborhood Policy- EU/Egypt Action Plan," 2007, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/egypt\\_enp\\_ap\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/egypt_enp_ap_final_en.pdf).

authoritarian elite rather than non-state actors to promote civic activism and democracy.

The Mubarak regime served the security interests of the US and Israel in many ways. First, the dominant role of the military and the successive presidents with a military background blocked all channels for Islamist groups to take an active role in politics. US policymakers relied on the presence of a secular and military-backed government in Egypt for the security interests of Israel. To this end, maintaining the Mubarak regime was particularly important for the US to ensure the Egyptian regime's compliance to the Camp David Treaty. To illustrate, in 2005 Egypt and Israel agreed on deploying Egyptian border guards along the border with Israel as it withdrew from the territory. Thus, with the agreement Egypt was held accountable for the border security and prevention of arms supplies to the Gaza Strip. In addition, Egypt imposed an economic blockade on the Gaza Strip in an attempt to topple the Hamas-led government, which would evidently serve Israeli security and political interests. Second, the Mubarak regime aligned itself with the US position on the global war on terrorism. The two countries cooperated extensively in military operations and intelligence gathering, which was vital to American military interventions across the region. Third, through its cooperation with the military-backed regimes, the US would ensure its naval access to the Suez Canal for its wider geopolitical interests in the region.<sup>13</sup>

To preserve those vested interests, the US administration set aside its freedom agenda and instead of promoting democratic reforms it gave precedence to closer cooperation with the Mubarak regime and other pro-Western Arab autocrats in the region. From 2005 elections onwards, though the US officially condemned some selected cases of human rights violations, the Bush regime maintained its silence in the face of the Mubarak regime's suppression of activists and opposition groups. Likewise, Egypt's 2007 constitutional amendments, which severely restricted political freedoms in the country did not receive much reaction from the Bush administration. Sean McCornack, the then-US State Department spokesman, claimed that the general trend was positive while referring to the substance of the amendments as a domestic political event that the US government should

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<sup>13</sup> Brad Plummer, "The U.S. gives Egypt \$1.5 Billion a year in Aid. Here is What it Does," *Washington Post*, July 9, 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/07/09/the-u-s-gives-egypt-1-5-billion-a-year-in-aid-heres-what-it-does/>.

not engage in.<sup>14</sup> By early 2007, as Thomas Carothers put it, the American democracy promotion agenda in the Middle East was effectively over giving its way to accepting and embracing useful autocrats.<sup>15</sup>

Egypt's strategic position in the Middle East and the vitality of the Camp David Treaty have enabled a guarantee of an annual average of 2 billion dollars in military aid as well as around 450 million dollars economic aid for four decades making Egypt the second largest recipient of US aid after Israel in the region and the third globally.<sup>16</sup> Military aid has come in the form of arms supply and military training for Egyptian officers in US war colleges. Since the late 1970s, US policymakers have argued that military aid served as an important tool to provide stability and promote US interests in the region. Despite rising authoritarianism in Egypt particularly following the 2005 elections, the EU and the US carried on renewing their financial aid without imposing any negative or positive conditionality. Given that the Mubarak regime relied on a single party rule backed by the military, the US aid, mostly benefited the military elite and ruling NDP circles. As aptly put by Larry Diamond, by conferring crucial economic resources and security assistance to Arab autocrats, the US military aid served just like oil, another form of rents authoritarian regimes used for survival.<sup>17</sup>

After Obama took office in 2009, the US foreign policy shifted towards a more realist approach towards the MENA region, specifically in ensuring US interests at the first place, therefore, the US turned to its traditional policy of depending on Arab strongmen.<sup>18</sup> Similar to the Bush administration,

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Exum, and Zack Synder, "Democracy Demotion in Egypt: Is the United States a Willing Accomplice?," *Washington Institute Policy Analysis* 1212, March 23, 2007, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/democracy-demotion-in-egypt-is-the-united-states-a-willing-accomplice>.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Carothers, *US Democracy Promotion During and After Bush* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 7, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/democracy\\_promotion\\_after\\_bush\\_final.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/democracy_promotion_after_bush_final.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "Egypt: The January 25 Revolution and Implications for US Foreign Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, February 11, 2011, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d6f4dc5c.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Diamond, "Why Are There No Arab Democracies?," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (January 2010): 101, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0150>.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "What Became of the Freedom Agenda?," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 10, 2010, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703630404575053710666766720>.

Obama chose to cooperate with Arab autocrats in the war on terrorism at the expense of those regimes' restriction of political freedoms. Though the Obama administration viewed promoting democracy as a prerequisite for the creation of more stable societies, it tended to give precedence to cooperation with dictatorships and short-term US national security interests over fostering democratization. Obama pursued a well-balanced approach. While restraining from any project of a democracy transplanted by the US, he was supportive of opposition movements with democratic ideals in the Middle East. Indeed, a few months prior to the Arab uprisings, in his five-page memorandum called "Political Reform in the Middle East and North Africa," Obama noted that progress toward political reform and openness in the MENA lagged behind other regions and in some cases stalled and highlighted that the US regional and international credibility would be undermined if it was perceived as supporting repressive regimes and neglecting the rights and aspirations of citizens.<sup>19</sup>

Without the US playing a role, the Arab Spring protests which first broke out in Tunisia in late December 2010 ended up with the deposition of President Ben Ali. The US-Tunisian relationship was of a low priority, and it was mainly centered around counter-terrorism and struggling with Islamist extremist movements. Therefore, once protests broke out in Tunisia, the Obama administration chose to remain neutral and urged caution. However, when the protests spread over Egypt, the Obama administration found itself in a position to make a strategic decision; either they would side with the demonstrators and their aspirations for freedom and democracy, or would openly back the old status quo, which would tarnish the US image as well as its regional and international credibility.

The US acted rather cautiously and reactively in response to regime changes in the Arab world. The US administration chose to side with protest movements in the Arab countries, where protests were so massive in size and public pressure was so high that authoritarian regimes would evidently not survive on their own internal dynamics. In other countries, where protest movements did not create a compelling force for the regime to resign or respond harshly or supporting the protest movements would

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<sup>19</sup> Ryan Lizza, "The Consequentialist: How the Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy," *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/02/the-consequentialist>.

endanger alliance with a strategic partner (as was the case with Bahrain), the US chose to remain silent and stay loyal to its strategic allies. The Obama administration supported the regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya while remaining indifferent to the suppression of protest movements in Bahrain along with Saudi Arabia's attempts to quell the revolt in the country.<sup>20</sup> In Morocco, the US response was to support top-down reforms and constitutional referendum promised by King Mohamed VI, a strategic and longtime ally of the US. In retrospect, it became evident that the US response to Arab Spring protests was characterized by pragmatic concerns.

In Egypt, the first Obama administration watched the course of events as they unfolded and abstained from supporting Mubarak's ouster until it was all but certain. Following the elections in Egypt, despite severe opposition from the US Congress, the Obama administration chose to recognize the Brotherhood as a legitimate political actor while urging the Morsi-led government to respect Egypt's Peace Treaty with Israel and basic democratic norms.<sup>21</sup> Once he became president, Morsi assured that he would abide by the peace treaty with Israel. However, despite this assurance, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power was seen as a threat to many Western actors. Back in 2012 when the Brotherhood won the first free elections in Egypt, it was speculated that the revolutions in the Arab world were hijacked by Islamists, and the electoral success of Islamists in these countries led many scholars to suggest that an Islamist winter replaced the Arab Spring.<sup>22</sup>

For most Western actors, it was not the question of whether the Brotherhood would exclude the seculars from the democratic processes and divert from democracy but whether Egypt under the Brotherhood would pursue foreign policies that would jeopardize Western interests and shift the balance of power in the MENA region. The Brotherhood's political agenda was

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<sup>20</sup> Allesandri et. al., "US Democracy Promotion from Bush to Obama," 15.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Carothers, and Nathan Brown, "Recalibrating U.S. Policy in Egypt," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 2, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/05/02/recalibrating-u.s.-policy-in-egypt-pub-51691>.

<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Totten, David Schenker, and Hussain Abdul-Hussain, "Arab Spring or Islamist Winter? Three Views," *World Affairs* 174, no. 5 (January/ February 2012): 23- 42.; Rabah Ghezali, "Arab Spring, Islamist Winter?," *Huffington Post*, January 18, 2012, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabah-ghezali/arab-spring-islamist-wint\\_b\\_1212794.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabah-ghezali/arab-spring-islamist-wint_b_1212794.html); "Editorial: From Arab Spring to Islamist Winter," *The Washington Times*, October 25, 2011, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/oct/25/from-arab-spring-to-islamist-winter/>.



different from the military-backed Mubarak regime and the Sisi regime in that the group had a distinct conception of Egypt implying that would be independent from the West and be a regional power that could expand its influence beyond the country's borders. In addition, being a transnational organization with offshoots and grassroots support across the Middle East, its political power and domestic policies could have had a diffusion effect and overturned the regional balance of power in favor of Brotherhood branches in the region, which was a central concern to the West and the Gulf Monarchies.

The ideological stance of the Brotherhood as well as its political agenda before the Arab uprisings had been worrisome to most authorities in the West. The group's 2007 platform stated that women and non-Muslims should not be able to run for presidential elections. Besides, the party platform granted a body of religious scholars a formal role to review the draft constitution in accordance with Sharia and to advise the parliament and the president, similar to the system found in the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>23</sup> Although these controversial provisions were dropped in 2011 party platform, Morsi and other senior leaders continually expressed their views opposed to the election of women and non-Muslims to senior posts.<sup>24</sup> Morsi was an ardent supporter of Sharia (or Islamic law), which he evidently referred to in his campaign trails, where he stated "The Koran is our constitution, and Sharia is our guide."<sup>25</sup> In addition, by the time Arab uprisings broke out, the organization had been heavily dominated by conservative senior leaders and the small group of young reformers, who aimed to transform it into a more inclusive and democratic organization, were alienated and expelled from the Brotherhood. On the eve of the uprisings, the organization's senior cadres were made up of the ideologues, who were reluctant to make serious concessions to liberals and non-Muslims groups.

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<sup>23</sup> Khalil Al-Anani, "Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party: To Be or Not to Be Independent," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 1, 2011, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/44324>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> David Kirkpatrick, "In Egypt Race, Battle is joined on Islam's Role," *New York Times*, April 23, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/24/world/middleeast/in-egypt-morsi-escalates-battle-over-islams-role.html>.



Soon after the ouster of Mubarak, Brotherhood leaders promised not to run for presidential elections and not to compete for more than one third of the seats in the parliament. It was at this juncture that the US administration declared that all opposition groups including the Brotherhood would be involved in the dialogue and represented in the new government.<sup>26</sup> Despite its initial pledge, the Brotherhood nominated candidate in the first presidential election and heavily dominated the seats in the parliament. Moreover, after three decades of peace treaty with Israel, Morsi quickly moved to formally establish close ties with Hamas, which was seen as a precarious move by Western actors. The Brotherhood's domination of the seats in the parliament and attempts to shape the new constitution in line with Islamic ideals severely polarized the political scene in Egypt. More importantly, Morsi passed the November Decree to grant himself impunity from potential court appeals against any laws or decrees he declared until the ratification of the new constitution. Such moves were perceived as the Brotherhood's attempt to monopolize power in the new political system. Worse still, under Morsi, Copts were reported to have faced numerous violent attacks on their homes, businesses, and churches, and Morsi was accused of turning a blind eye on the perpetrators.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, the US administration's policy on Egypt could be characterized by impassivity at its best. The US administration underlined the vitality of reaching out to the Muslim Brotherhood and their political engagement, yet it did not have a concrete framework in pushing the Brotherhood towards democratic reforms and improvement in individual liberties. Apart from some symbolic gestures, the Obama administration chose to largely remain silent and indifferent to political unrest in the country, the harassment of Christian Copts as well as secular-revolutionary activists and the jailing of civil society activists. The US administration under Obama also turned a blind eye on the resignation of the secular members from the assembly as a reaction to the fast handled constitution and the wide scale protests immediately after the referendum leading to the new constitution's ratification.

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<sup>26</sup> "Clinton Cautiously Welcomes Muslim Brotherhood Talks," *The Economic Times*, February 6, 2011, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/clinton-cautiously-welcomes-muslim-brotherhood-talks/articleshow/7437374.cms>.

<sup>27</sup> Anne R. Pierce, "US Partnership with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its Effect on Civil Society and Human Rights," *Society* 51, no. 1 (2014): 68-86.

The Obama administration prioritized US-Egyptian relations on the economic and security front, and focused more on the economic situation in Egypt and the regional security. As it had been the case for several decades, the US favored regional stability over change in the region. To this end, the US did not provide financial leverage to Egypt contingent on the transition to a civilian government and the drafting of a democratic constitution in Egypt as it was the case during the Eastern European states' transition after the fall of communism. Instead, in 2012 when the Egyptian government was in urgent need of massive financial aid, the US administration linked financial support to cooperation with the International Monetary Fund rather than with progress in democratization.<sup>28</sup>

In 2012, Egypt's political forces mostly consisting of the FJP and al-Nour party members demanded that the Egyptian government should revise the Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty and Israel's onslaught in the Gaza Strip.<sup>29</sup> Another political move in this direction was made by former President Morsi's advisor Mohamed Esmat Seif al-Dawla, who repeatedly pleaded for the amendment of some articles of the Camp David Treaty arguing that they limited Egypt's freedoms and sovereignty over the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>30</sup> These political moves were perceived as alarming developments by the US administration whose real concern was to maintain the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. Hence, on the eve of the political crisis in the months leading to the coup in Egypt, the American position was shaped by a security-first approach. While on the surface, the US seemed to support democracy and the elected government in Egypt, its main priority was indeed to bring the pro-US old regime forces back to the political stage and win back its sphere of influence in Egypt. In the light of a review of dozens of US federal government documents, an Aljazeera report revealed that the US government had funded senior Egyptian opposition figures and activists, who instigated unrest and demanded the toppling of the freely elected president.<sup>31</sup> The report further stated:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmed Eleiba, "Egypt's Political Forces Call on Morsi to Freeze all relations with Israel," *Ahram Online*, November 17, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/58366/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-political-forces-call-on-Morsi-to-freeze-al.aspx>.

<sup>30</sup> "Egypt's Morsi's Advisor Repeats Calls for Camp David Amendment," *Ahram Online*, October 4, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/54836/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-Morsis-advisor-repeats-calls-for-Camp-David.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> Emad Makey, "Exclusive: US Bankrolled Anti-Morsi Activists," *Aljazeera*, July 10, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/07/2013710113522489801.html>.

*Activists bankrolled by the programme include an exiled Egyptian police officer who plotted the violent overthrow of the Morsi government, an anti-Islamist politician who advocated closing mosques and dragging preachers out by force, as well as a coterie of opposition politicians who pushed for the ouster of the country's first democratically elected leader; government documents show.<sup>32</sup>*

When Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood government were deposed by the military coup in 2013, the US administration avoided using the term “coup” to describe the events that left around a thousand people dead and more than a thousand wounded. This was particularly essential for the US to be able to carry on providing military and economic aid to Egypt since the Foreign Assistance Act passed in 1961 clearly stated that no financial assistance could be made to any country whose elected head of government is overthrown by a military coup or decree.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the US administration made a strategic decision while condemning the bloody crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood yet refraining from designating the military's forced removal of Morsi as a military coup. The deposition of Morsi and the rise of the military regime addressed the US political and security interests considerably given that the military with its pro-Western agenda has proved to be a reliable strategic ally for several decades.

The US administration decided to suspend military aid to Egypt and the delivery of major weapon systems several months after the coup albeit reluctantly. It adopted a cautious wait-and-see approach and found a rupture with the military risky for US security interests.<sup>34</sup> The decision to suspend military aid came only after Egyptian security forces killed more than 800 people on a single day while dispersing a sit-in protesting Morsi's removal from power at the Raba'a Square in Cairo in August 2013. The Raba'a massacre has been one of the world's largest one-day killings in recent history. The cycle of state violence has continued to escalate since this tragic incident. The day after the incident, President Obama made it clear that the US could not continue its cooperation with Egypt as usual in the face of the deaths of civilians and rights being rolled back.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Plummer, “The U.S. gives Egypt \$1.5 Billion a year in Aid.”

<sup>34</sup> Amy Hawthorne, “What's Happening with Suspended Military Aid for Egypt? Part 1,” *Atlantic Council*, October 16, 2014, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/what-s-happening-with-suspended-military-aid-for-egypt-part-i/>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

The US Congress conditioned the provision of military aid on the improvement of human rights and democratic transition to civilian government in 2012. However, those restrictions were waived and the delivery of weapons and military aid resumed shortly after despite severe degradation in Egypt's human rights records and lack of investigation for security forces, which were accountable for mass killings.<sup>36</sup> A similar inconsistent policy was witnessed under the Trump administration as the US government decided on the partial suspension of military aid to Egypt in 2017 over concerns as to Egypt's bleak records in human rights. The military aid to Egypt was resumed only a year after although no change was observed regarding the military regime's dealing with NGOs, press, journalists and opposition groups.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the intensified crackdown on Brotherhood members along with severe restrictions imposed on civil society organizations, the US has not taken any substantial punitive measures against the military backed government of Egypt. Oddly enough, in November 2013, when human rights violations came to a head, in his high level visit to Egypt, Secretary of State John Kerry announced that Egypt was on the right path to democracy.<sup>38</sup> From the current political landscape, it is evident that Egypt is likely to continue to receive US military and economic aid regardless of its undemocratic practices.

The pro-military position following the coup was not limited to the US. In a similar pattern, the EU failed to criticize the military's actions even when there was media pressure to do so. For decades, under the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, the Union's main priorities were to open up export markets, to control illegal migration flowing from North African countries and to share information and intelligence on counter-terrorism. Despite the political rhetoric emphasizing democratic reforms, the EU aid allocated to democracy promotion made up a small fraction of the total EU

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<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch, "US: Don't Green Light Egypt's Repression," April 9, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/09/us-dont-green-light-egypts-repression>.

<sup>37</sup> "US lifts Suspension of US \$195 Million in Military Aid to Egypt," *Mada Masr*, July 25, 2018, <https://madamasr.com/en/2018/07/25/news/u/us-lifts-suspension-of-195-million-in-military-aid-to-egypt/>.

<sup>38</sup> Micheal R. Gordon, "Egyptians Following Right Path," *New York Times*, November 3, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/04/world/middleeast/kerry-egypt-visit.html>.

foreign aid to Egypt (it was € 1.2 billion from 1996 to 2006).<sup>39</sup> Much of the EU foreign aid to Egypt was assigned to economic reform and it bode well for the liberalization of the Egyptian economy. As for the security basket, the EU allocated a large sum of funds to keep illegal migration flow from the Southern Mediterranean region under control. Nonetheless, though conditionality clauses were inserted in the association agreements within the Euro-med partnership program, they were not activated and no EU aid was suspended in the cases of apparent human right violations and repression in the period under Mubarak.

Just like the US, the EU chose to ignore the Egyptian regime's bleak records in democracy and human rights as long as the authoritarian regime acted as a shield against the rise of radical Islam and ensured regional stability. Eventually, in the face of the military coup and numerous massacres in the aftermath, the European Union did not define the military intervention to oust the elected president forcefully as a coup and failed to clearly condemn mass arrests of Brotherhood members and acts of violence inflicted on them. Catherine Ashton, the foreign policy chief of the EU, paid a visit to Sisi and announced the EU's support for his government's June 30 road map.<sup>40</sup> This tacit support to the interim government by the EU and the Union's reluctance to suspend EU aid to Egypt provided the military backed government with the much-needed legitimacy it had been looking for.

From the perspective of Arab public opinion, the US administration's rhetoric about democracy promotion in the Middle East suffers from a lack of credibility and legitimacy in the region for several reasons. In the turn of the new millennium, the American interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003 under the banner of democracy promotion were marred by serious violations in human rights including arbitrary arrests and the torturing of suspected citizens. Particularly, a series of human rights violations committed against detainees in the Abu Ghraib detention center in Iraq drew wide-scale reactions.<sup>41</sup> The US intervention in these

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<sup>39</sup> Selim, *The International Dimensions of Democratization in Egypt*, 93.

<sup>40</sup> Alastair Sloan, "Is the EU legitimizing Sisi's Coup?," *Aljazeera*, April 20, 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/04/eu-legitimising-sisi-coup-egypt-20144161181767834.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Maha Hilal, "Abu Ghraib: The Legacy of Torture in the War on Terror," *Aljazeera*, October 1, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/abu-ghraib-legacy-torture-war-terror-170928154012053.html>.

countries was followed by erosion of state authority, the rise of violent non-state actors and a dramatic increase in violence and unrest. More recently, American indirect involvement in Libya and the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen were of no use other than empowering corrupt, oppressive, and undemocratic forces.

On the other hand, the US refused to recognize the Hamas government as a legitimate political force despite being freely elected in 2006. This decision was simply because Hamas did not hold the American point of view on the settlement of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. The credibility of American democracy discourse was also challenged by the successive US administrations' unresponsiveness to authoritarian practices of the Gulf monarchies. These double standards pursued by the US in its foreign policy toward the MENA region raised serious suspicions among Arab publics as to its promotion of democracy in the Arab world. The Arab publics were convinced that the US would support democracy in the Arab World only if elections brought those groups that would serve American political and security interests into power. According to the Arab Barometer in post-2011, Egyptians and Tunisians considered American influence on their countries overwhelmingly negative and foreign influence as an obstacle to reform.<sup>42</sup>

In consequence, the Arab countries swept by the uprisings of 2011 have poor linkage to the democratic countries of the West. Given the lack of an Arab democracy on the eve of the Arab uprisings, they also had no model to aspire to in the region. In addition, in terms of leverage, international actors have been reluctant to provide the kind of financial and political support that was so helpful in promoting or facilitating political and economic reforms once implemented in Eastern Europe. Western actors have been ambivalent about Egypt's political transition in 2012. Owing to their security and political concerns arising from the rise of the Brotherhood into power, they focused primarily on whether transitions in the region would change the status quo and hamper Western interests in the region. They undergirded a policy of providing financial aid and political support to the military institution, which had a shared security agenda with the West and

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<sup>42</sup> Mathilde Dugit-Gros, "Foreign Influence in the Middle East: Changes in Perceptions and Expectations," *Arab Reform Initiative*, September 10, 2015, [https://www.arab-reform.net/en/no de/763](https://www.arab-reform.net/en/no+de/763).

provided to be a reliable partner fulfilling Western strategic interests along with Israeli security. To this end, they chose to carry on renewing financial aid or arms supplies to Egypt, and to return to “business as usual” despite increasing authoritarianism and the ongoing domestic crackdown under the military rule.

#### **4. The Gulf Monarchies and the Egyptian Uprisings**

Traditionally, Egypt enjoyed good relations with the Gulf States. Under Mubarak, mutual relations were close between different heads of states, and they had several economic and political interests in common. In the region’s balance of power, with the backing of the US, Egypt and the Gulf Monarchies made up an important strategic alliance, or a united Sunni coalition which lasted for several decades up to the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Egypt had also been among the top recipients of economic aid from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). For the Gulf Monarchies, the Arab Spring meant the shaking of the strategic foundation that determined the course of Saudi regional policy since the Islamic revolution in Iran. The wave of protest movements leading to the fall of long-standing autocrats created fear among the ruling monarchs, who viewed democracy as an existential threat to the political stability of the Gulf Monarchies. Therefore, from the inception of the uprisings, the Gulf Monarchies fervently supported Mubarak regime vis-à-vis revolutionary political forces.

The Saudi Kingdom was shattered by the quick downfall of Mubarak in early 2011. Mubarak was a longtime ally of the Kingdom and the alliance between Egypt and the Gulf States peaked in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait with Egypt sending its troops to defend Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf War. The Saudi Kingdom was even more appalled when President Obama demanded that Mubarak step down. The kingdom perceived this move as an American betrayal, which could have worrisome implications for the Gulf Monarchies. They condemned the Obama administration for having abandoned its strong ally. In addition, Saudi media remained critical of the Obama administration, and blamed it for being unreliable and hostile to the kingdom.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel Byman, “Saudi Arabia is a Partner, Not a Friend,” *The Atlantic*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/09/saudi-arabia-obama-al-qaeda-terrorism/502343/>.



The ouster of Mubarak opened a new chapter in Egypt's relationship with the Gulf Monarchies. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power following their electoral victory in the first free and fair elections of the country further strained relations between Egypt and the Gulf Monarchies, with the exception of Qatar. The hostile attitudes of the Gulf Monarchies towards the Muslim Brotherhood manifested in the cut of financial aid to Egypt by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 2012 when Morsi rose to power. The financial aid to Egypt was resumed only after the removal of Morsi and the Brotherhood-led government.

A number of reasons lied behind Saudi hostility towards the Muslim Brotherhood. First, political power of the Brotherhood was viewed as a threat by the Gulf Monarchies as the Brotherhood had several offshoots in the region and their electoral victory set an example for them. The Muslim Brotherhood branches in the region gained unprecedented public support and sought to take over political role in their respective countries. In addition, the Brotherhood's rise to power caused suspicion among the Gulf Monarchies as to their intention to bring down governments across the region and export the revolution beyond Egypt. Hence, the Gulf Monarchies, except Qatar, quickly moved to contain the spread of mass protests demanding democracy in the MENA region. In order to assuage those fears, President Morsi, immediately after his inauguration as the President of Egypt stated that Egypt did not have any ambitions of spreading the revolution to other Arab countries.<sup>44</sup> Second, the Muslim Brotherhood came to be seen as representing both democracy and Islam and the group challenged the Saudi Kingdom's claim to be the sole protector of Islam. Besides, the model provided by the Brotherhood in which democracy could go hand in hand with Islamism was a lethal blend that would erode the Kingdom's legitimacy over the long haul. The Brotherhood had the potential to successfully export its model to the rest of the region.

Under Mubarak, Egypt was an ally and a fervent supporter of the anti-Iran alliance, however, under Morsi, Egypt began to give signs of alignment with Iran in line with the dominant public opinion. Once Mubarak stepped down, Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic

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<sup>44</sup> Fouad El-Auwad, "Egypt, Gulf States Strengthen Their Ties," *Deutsche Welle*, August 25, 2012, <http://www.dw.com/en/egypt-gulf-states-strengthen-their-ties/a-16193917>.



of Iran, hailed the revolution as “Islamic awakening”, and embraced the Brotherhood as both a legitimate actor and a close ally to Iran. Moreover, historically it could not be denied that Brotherhood ideas were central to the ideological foundations of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and it was Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who translated the works of Sayyid Qutb, one of the founding thinkers of the Brotherhood, into Persian. Morsi displayed the Brotherhood’s intimacy with Iran by paying a visit to the country during the Non-Aligned Movement Summit only two months after his election.<sup>45</sup> This visit was a milestone in the two countries’ relations given that Iran and Egypt had not had diplomatic ties since 1979 when Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel.

On the other hand, the Brotherhood’s alignment with Iran posed a threat to the West and the Gulf Monarchies both ideologically and geopolitically tilting the balance of power in the region in favor of Iran, which was a central reason why the West turned against the Brotherhood.<sup>46</sup> Different from Mubarak, Morsi attempted to pursue diversified foreign policy targeting to reach out to the whole region instead of building ties solely with the Gulf Monarchies. Morsi proposed that Arab States, Turkey and Iran should build closer relations based on communication, negotiation, cooperation rather than isolation and confrontation.<sup>47</sup> Even this view was a menace itself to the Saudi Kingdom whose primary foreign policy was built on isolating Iran from regional politics of the Middle East and the Gulf Region.

The electoral victory gained by the Brotherhood was not the only threat perceived by the Gulf Monarchies. The electoral success of the Salafi al-Nour party which won almost a quarter of seats in the first free elections in Egypt raised concerns among the monarchies as to the future of their own

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<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Dot-Pouillard, “Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood: The Best of Enemies?,” *Middle East Eye*, May 20, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-and-muslim-brotherhood-best-enemies-2061107490>.

<sup>46</sup> Daniela Huber, “US and EU Human Rights and Democracy Promotion since the Arab Spring: Rethinking its Content, Targets and Instruments,” *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 48, no. 3 (September 2013): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2013.787827>.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Salem, “Morsi Moves to Rebuild Egypt’s Mideast Leadership Role,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, October 5, 2012, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2012/10/05/morsi-moves-to-rebuild-egypt-s-mideast-leadership-role-pub-49620>.

Salafi community. The monarchies were agitated by the fact that Salafists in the Gulf region could be inspired by their Egyptian counterparts and be critical of the ruling family. After all, Salafists in Egypt and Tunisia had not been politically active and adopted political quietism prohibiting participation in politics and uprisings against their ruler prior to the Arab uprisings. The changing conjuncture in the region with the embracement of democracy and widespread grassroots support to democratic processes led to a new thinking on the side of Salafists in that democracy and Islam could be compatible. Some Salafi Saudis had already raised their discontent toward the monarchy and began demanding political representation in a democratically elected parliament.<sup>48</sup> Thus, this new ideology enabling the coexistence of Islam and democracy would pose a serious threat to the legitimacy of the Gulf Monarchies unless it had been contained.

It came as no surprise when Saudi Arabia together with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates politically and financially supported the counter-revolutionary forces in Egypt to contain the spread of democracy wave in the region. The United Arab Emirates is speculated to have donated funds to the Tamarod movement, a civil campaign that collected signatures and called for mass protests across the country to overthrow Egypt's elected president.<sup>49</sup> Above all, the Gulf Monarchies publicly celebrated the July 2013 coup and Sisi's roadmap announcement and a year after the coup, they declared the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots as terrorist organizations. Last but not the least, as a survival kit to the military, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait provided a combined aid package of 12 billion dollars to the military-backed government immediately after the military-backed power shift.<sup>50</sup> This aid package was four times as much as the military and economic aid received from the US and the EU combined. With this move, the Gulf Monarchies, except Qatar,

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<sup>48</sup> Gregory F. Gause, "Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East's Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring," *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, no. 8 (September 2013): 29.

<sup>49</sup> Louisa Loveluck, "Egypt's Military Rise to Power 'Partly Bankrolled by Emirates' Audio Recording Suggests," *Telegraph*, March 2, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/11445060/Egypt-military-rise-to-power-partly-bankrolled-by-Emirates-audio-recording-suggests.html>.

<sup>50</sup> David Hearst, "Why Saudi Arabia is Taking a Risk by backing the Egyptian Coup?," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/saudi-arabia-coup-egypt>.

clearly demonstrated their political will to sabotage any emerging move in the direction of democracy in Egypt and, at whatever costs it would be, to protect the status quo by supporting old regime forces to maintain the regional balance of power.

## **5. Conclusion**

On many fronts, transition from authoritarianism in Egypt has been a challenging and tumultuous process. External influence on Egypt's short-lived democratic transition not only failed to foster the democratic outcome but also hampered democratic opening and helped restore authoritarianism. Unlike their political willingness to use leverage and linkage to integrate post-communist states of Eastern Europe, both the EU and the US pursued inconsistent policy towards Egypt during its turbulent transition. Western foreign policy formulation was based on preserving the existing structure and balance of power in the region to maintain Western interests. Hence, far from using leverage to facilitate democratic transition in Egypt, Western actors remained reluctant to advocate and advance political reforms in favor of democracy lest elections bring Islamists to power and eventually lead to diversion from the status quo. They pursued paradoxical and often self-contradictory policies vis-à-vis Egypt. While retaining emphasis on democracy in their political discourse, Western governments neither imposed conditionality to carry on providing financial aid nor placed sanctions on Egypt over the coup. The lack of a committed and consistent Western response to the military coup enabled the entrenchment of an authoritarian order in post-revolution Egypt, and raised suspicions among the Arab publics as to the sincerity of the West in respecting and supporting peoples' free will.

The Gulf Monarchies, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait supported Mubarak, their long-standing ally, in the face of the uprisings and acted promptly to contain the spread of pro-democracy movements that engulfed the Arab world. Their first and foremost priority was to preserve the status quo, and keep Egypt in the Sunni coalition to create counterweight to the Iranian alliance at all costs. To these Gulf Monarchies, democratic change in Egypt would benefit the Muslim Brotherhood representing an Islamist democracy, which they perceived as a great menace to the

continuation of their monarchies. The group ideologically presented a new alternative to the Gulf Monarchies combining Islam and democracy, and Saudi Arabia feared that this new political blend would challenge its domestic legitimacy and the entire basis of its regional supremacy. Therefore, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were the first to declare their support to the military coup, and rushed to assist the new regime with a generous aid package. Today, Egypt's heavy dependence on Saudi financial assistance precludes the free exercise of its domestic and foreign policies. In addition, the financial aid strengthens the military's hand against revolutionary forces.

As a consequence, the external support to the military-backed regime, be it economic, political or military, has thwarted prospects for democratization in Egypt. Western actors and the Gulf Monarchies put their weight behind the military, which would otherwise have had a harder time coping with the country's mounting economic, security, and political challenges. The implicit and explicit support received from the West and the Gulf Monarchies gained the military regime legitimacy it had craved for, and convinced generals that they would save their face irrespective of the ferocity of the massacres they carried out against civilians. Given that those generals came to an understanding that they could easily get away with human rights abuses without paying any price, they are likely to carry on their undemocratic political practices and inhumane treatment of civilians and activists.

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