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**Revolution, Regime Change, and Rosewater:
The United States' Role in the Arab Spring**



By Grace Lewis

Under the supervision of Dr. Angela Kachuyevski

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Land Acknowledgement

I would like to begin my thesis with an acknowledgement to the community on whose stolen land it was written: the Lenni-Lenape Nation. This land acknowledgement was written by the community, and I proceed with respect to their land, heritage, and struggles through the past four centuries.

The land upon which we gather is part of the traditional territory of the Lenni-Lenape, called “Lenapehoking.” The Lenape People lived in harmony with one another upon this territory for thousands of years. During the colonial era and early federal period, many were removed west and north, but some also remain among the continuing historical tribal communities of the region: The Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation; the Ramapough Lenape Nation; and the Powhatan Renape Nation, The Nanticoke of Millsboro Delaware, and the Lenape of Cheswold Delaware. We acknowledge the Lenni-Lenape as the original people of this land and their continuing relationship with their territory. In our acknowledgment of the continued presence of Lenape people in their homeland, we affirm the aspiration of the great Lenape Chief Tamanend, that there be harmony between the indigenous people of this land and the descendants of the immigrants to this land, “as long as the rivers and creeks flow, and the sun, moon, and stars shine.”¹

¹ Cited from Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Nation.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to determine which international relations theory best explains the United States involvement in the Arab Spring, and to ascertain if the goals set by those theories were met. Through the literature, I determine that two theories offer reasonable yet competing explanations of US involvement, and that these theories are first, defensive realism, and second, democratic peace theory. I employ the analytic method of pattern matching to compare each theory against the empirical record. In my analysis, I match empirical data from five affected countries to determine the strategic importance to the United States of the outcome of the revolutions, and American efforts to promote democracy in the states. Ultimately, I conclude that both of these theories offer a reasonably accurate explanation of US involvement in the events of the Arab Spring, but that defensive realism matches US goals more closely.

Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War and the rise of the United States to the role of global hegemon, the United States has prided itself on promoting a culture of democracy worldwide. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in the US' activities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Examples of this can be seen in Cold War proxy wars in Afghanistan, Operation Desert Storm, and, most importantly, the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. These operations were all conducted under the guise of promoting democracy and liberal norms worldwide, but these operations all had a strategic reason beyond that; protecting American access to oil.

Oil is the main source of energy for the United States and the United States is the world's largest oil consumer (USEIA 2021). Access to oil is a matter of national security for the United States. Promoting democracy & liberal norms and ensuring access to oil are the two generally accepted reasons for general US involvement in MENA, and the 2010-2012 Arab Spring revolutions were no exception to this. The United States played a role in many of the revolutions. My thesis asks the question, under which international relations theory or theories was the United States operating when it became involved in the Arab Spring uprisings, and were the goals of the United States met through their intervention?

Through a comprehensive analysis of government documents and news articles, I seek to explain the United States' role in the revolutions and the reasoning behind them through international relations theories. By reviewing literature related to IR theory, I discern defensive realism and democratic peace theory as the two theories most likely to be able to explain the involvement of the United States in the region. Finally, I employ

the method of pattern matching to compare what the theory says will happen with the reality of how the event occurred. Ultimately, I develop an argument stating that both theories match reality over 60% of the time, but that democratic peace theory can explain the United States' actions with a higher level of accuracy. Despite this, the analyzed countries were not able to develop a fully liberal democracy to the extent that DPT argues reduces conflicts between states.

Background

As was mentioned above, oil is the United States' main form of energy and the United States is the world's largest consumer of oil. If access to oil for the US is cut off, the world's largest superpower will come screeching to a halt. Therefore, it is in the United States' crucial security interests to ensure their own access to oil for both the short and long term.

As a result of this strategic importance, the United States has long been involved in domestic and regional affairs in MENA. Most notably and recently, this has been true in the instance of the Iraq War. As the reader likely already knows, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States entered into armed conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Afghanistan was accused of harboring Osama bin Laden, the mastermind behind the attacks, and other members of Al-Qaeda who helped to orchestrate 9/11 (Sirat and Alokozay 2021). Iraq, on the other hand, was relatively uninvolved in the planning and implementation of the attacks, but was nonetheless invaded by American and coalition forces in 2003. The invasion of Iraq was justified by the United States as being a result of Saddam Hussein's hidden collection of weapons of mass destruction

(WMDs), proof of which was never found (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2021). What *was* found, however, was massive nationally-controlled oil fields closed to Western business, which since the invasion have been opened and are now largely controlled by foreign companies such as Shell and BP, which means that the United States have much more open and free access to these reserves than previously (Juhasz 2013). American access to oil was not the publicly touted reasoning behind the invasion, but was a major reason behind the scenes.

Since 2003, the United States has had a constant presence in the region, whether it be in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, or Kurdistan. The reasons behind these operations range from destroying WMDs to protecting human rights to promoting democratic values, but access to oil was always part of the equation. This was also true for the American involvement in the Arab Spring uprisings.

The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy protests beginning in Tunisia in 2010, when a fruit vendor named Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest government corruption and economic depression (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2021). The protests quickly spread to nearly every country in the region, causing mass protests, often with violent suppression at the hands of the government.

The Arab Spring was largely unsuccessful in installing democratic regimes or ideals in national governments. Tunisia is the only country that is considered to be democratic now, but as will be explained later, it is far from being a fully liberal democracy. Major conflicts began as a result of these uprisings, including the Yemeni humanitarian crisis, the devolution of Libya to a failed state, and the Syrian Civil War. Regime change occurred in Tunisia and Egypt. Overall, the political landscape of every country was largely affected, whether the country has become more democratic or not.

The flow of oil to the United States, however, has remained largely unchanged. My thesis attempts to diagnose the main reasoning behind the United States' involvement in these events by comparing the courses of action in the five analyzed countries against two international relations theories, defensive realism and democratic peace theory.

Research Aims and Objectives

In this thesis I aim to explore the role that the United States played in the Arab Spring uprisings of 2010-2012 and the reasons behind these actions, in an effort to determine the international relations theory that can best explain why the United States became involved in each respective case. I will use primary government sources and news articles as my main data sources and analyze them to determine the strategic importance of a country to the United States and the US role in the revolutions, in an effort to determine the pretext under which the United States became involved. My main objective in conducting this research is to determine the accuracy of two main international relations theories. If determined to be highly accurate, these theories could be used to help explain and ultimately predict world events currently and in the future. Additionally, I will attempt to use the most accurate language possible. In this vein, I will refrain from using the words "America" and "American" to refer to the United States and its population, and will instead refer to the country as "United States," "US" as an adjective, and "US Americans" to refer to the citizenry (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).

Literature Review

To inform my data section, I gathered a group of literature about the United States' involvement in the Arab Spring and about US foreign policy in general. These articles were gathered from JSTOR and scholarly sources on Google. The literature was generally split into three schools of thought. The first of these was that the United States operated its foreign policy with its main interest being strategic interests such as oil or geopolitics. Some articles argued this with a specific eye on the Arab Spring, while others argued this in a more general sense. The second school of thought was that in its foreign policy, the United States aims to spread its own ideals and values as a way of promoting itself as a global hegemon. Again, some of this literature argued this specifically in relation to the Arab Spring while others argued that the United States operates like this regardless of the world's current events. Finally, some articles argued that the United States' foreign policy is formed with both of these factors in mind simultaneously.

Ultimately, neither of the first two schools of thought sought to completely disregard the other, often arguing that both of these factors were at play but emphasizing one over the other. As is stated in one of the pieces, *Safeguarding US Interests* by Larocco (2013), there is a "hierarchy that exists among U.S. strategic interests as well as [a] ... contingency upon each other." With that in mind, there is not a debate among the scholars in this field, but rather a conversation.

As stated above, the first school of thought argues that the United States entered the Arab Spring in an effort to promote its own security interests, in particular in an effort to protect its access to oil. Protecting US interests here is a way to maximize

national security. In international relations theory, this argument aligns with defensive realism, which will be further explained in the next section.

Three main pieces of literature will feature in this section. These are *Safeguarding US Interests* by Larocco and Goodyear (2013), *Das eine sagen, das andere tun* by Abdullah al-Arian (2012), and *The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory* by Rosato (2003). Overall, all three of these pieces argue that the countries affected by the Arab Spring are all crucial to US strategic interests, especially in terms of oil, and that the United States became involved to protect American interests in those countries.

First, *Safeguarding US Interests* creates a hierarchy of American interests in the MENA region while also arguing that they are closely interconnected with one another (Larocco and Goodyear 2013). These interests include energy security (code for oil), efforts against nuclear proliferation, and ensuring security for Israel, the United States' main ally in the region. Below is a graph from the article visualizing these interests:



The article concludes that the Arab Spring intervention was conducted on behalf of all of these interests, the first in the hierarchy being energy security, or American access to oil.

Second, *Das eine sagen, das andere tun* [Saying one thing, doing another] is a piece by Abdullah al-Arian that argues that these two factors, protecting access to oil and promoting democracy, actually cannot co-exist and that in practice, one must win out over the other (al-Arian 2012). He argues that throughout the history of US involvement in MENA, American access to oil has meant that autocratic regimes are in place in the countries and are protected by the United States, and that this protection of autocrats is what protects the access to oil. Therefore, the rejection of these autocracies means that US interests in oil are being threatened, and that the United States became involved to protect those interests, and protect the autocracies that ensure that access.

The third piece in this school is *The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory* by Sebastian Rosato (2003). This article does not necessarily argue for the idea that access to oil is the main driver behind US foreign policy, but it does argue against the idea that democratic peace theory truly exists. Democratic peace theory will be explained more in the upcoming section, but the brief explanation behind this theory is that because of a shared set of values and a responsibility to public opinion, democracies are unlikely to fight each other and more likely to fight illiberal states. Rosato argues that “while there is certainly peace among democracies, it may not be caused by the democratic nature of those states,” but rather a shared set of interests between democracies, as long as those interests do not conflict with each other. He argues a realist stance, that states will act in their own best interests no matter their regime type. This argument can be applicable to this thesis by saying that the United States might have wanted to help instill democratic and liberal values in the affected countries, but

that ultimately, that was not what most greatly served their own best interests, but that it was rather the access to oil that was the greatest push factor.

The second school of thought in this literature review argues that the United States was involved in the Arab Spring mostly to support the pro-democracy protests and ensure their successes. This school most closely aligns with the international relations theory of democratic peace theory, which was mentioned in the paragraph above and will be a main focus of my data section. Three articles will form this school of thought, and their general argument is that it was in the United States' best interest to promote democracy in MENA, as it would spread American influence abroad and could help solve violent conflict in the region.

The first article, *Safeguarding US Interests* by Larocco and Goodyear (2013) was also analyzed in the last school of thought. The main argument in relation to this school is that democracy in the region is still a US interest, and that liberal norms could help the United States as well. The proliferation of democracy with help from the United States could prove beneficial to the US in terms of soft power and the American image abroad. Additionally, liberal norms include the free market and open trade. If liberal norms were able to be instilled and protected in a newly democratic country, then that could ensure US access to oil as well. If done in this way, then promoting democracy in the region could be a US interest worth economic and military involvement.

The second article in this school is *Democracy and Armed Conflict* by Håvard Hegre (2014). Hegre argues that democratic peace theory is a valid theory through which to understand the world. While various other factors exist that affect the stability and likelihood of conflict, including especially pre-existing socio-economic factors (which greatly affected the Arab Spring), but generally speaking, stable and strong

democratic states are unlikely to fight each other. In this thesis, this is applicable because it could be understood that the United States was engaging in a good-will attempt to instill democratic values and institutions in the countries in which they were involved, which could lead to a deeper friendship and allyship if successful.

The third and final article arguing for this school of thought is *The Public and Peace: The Consequences for Citizenship of the Democratic Peace Literature* by Gordon P. Henderson (2006). This article argues that democratic peace theory can exist in reality, but only because a main assumption of the theory is that the government is beholden to a peace-loving public who will hold the government accountable if they engage in unwarranted aggression, conflict, or other violence. The public, therefore, must be actively involved in “achieving or obstructing peace” (Henderson 2006). As was argued in Jae Sik Ha’s *Tailoring the Arab Spring*, American media largely portrayed the US involvement in the Arab Spring, and the Arab Spring as a whole, as being purely pro-democracy (Ha 2017). To the American public, the US involvement in the Arab Spring was understood to be the United States promoting democracy and liberal ideals abroad. Henderson’s argument, therefore, would say that because the American citizenry understood US involvement in the Arab Spring as helping the pro-democracy protesters, there was not much resistance against military involvement, despite a slew of other factors being present in the foreign policy decisions being made.

Finally, the third school of thought argues that it was both access to oil and the fight to promote democracy in MENA that gave the United States reason to become involved in the Arab Spring. Two main articles will be analyzed here: first, *Tailoring the Arab Spring* by Jae Sik Ha (2003), and second, *The Illusion of Geopolitics* by G. John Ikenberry (2014). Neither of these pieces argues that oil or democracy was more

important in the US' role, but rather that it was the intersection of these two factors that drove US foreign policy in this instance.

First, *Tailoring the Arab Spring* by Jae Sik Ha explores the way in which the Arab spring and the subsequent US involvement in the region was portrayed in the US media (Ha 2003). The article finds that the media “advocated principles that accentuated the liberalism paradigm of international relations, such as democracy, international cooperation, and economic independence,” despite the reasons for intervention being much more complex. “These papers placed great emphasis on the possible impact of the Arab Spring on the U.S.’s continued deterrence of radical Islam and terrorism, but essentially none on the possible impact these events might have on the U.S.’s continued dependence on Middle East oil,” states Ha. This piece argues that the reasons behind involvement were much more multifaceted than was originally clear to the public.

The second article in this final school of thought is *The Illusion of Geopolitics* by G. John Ikenberry (2014). The main argument here is that the United States is fighting to hold onto the title of global hegemon that it has had since the end of World War II. In this vein, both access to oil and pro-democracy efforts are being undertaken to reach this goal. Pro-democracy efforts would benefit American soft power in addition to the interests included in liberal norms that were outlined in *Safeguarding US Interests* (Larocco and Goodyear 2013). Additionally, Ikenberry argues that it is still important to the United States that they ensure access to oil, as without an energy source the country will stop. Either way, countries are under US influence, which in the end is the United States' goal in preserving hegemony. He states, “in the nearly 70 years since World War II, Washington has undertaken sustained efforts to build a far-flung system of

multilateral institutions, alliances, trade agreements, and political partnerships. This project has helped bring countries into the United States' orbit" (Ikenberry 2014). This is applicable to this thesis, as US involvement in the Arab Spring can be understood as a continuation of this effort to preserve global hegemony in a variety of different ways rather than focusing on one factor only.

To conclude, these pieces of literature help to inform the context of my argument and help to guide the framework for how I will analyze my data. The arguments complement each other and create a conversation about the formation of US foreign policy rather than a debate. My data will ultimately add to this conversation and conclude that there was not one singular reason for involvement, but rather multiple and it is the convergence of these reasons that form the exact reaction by the United States.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

In this thesis, I will be using pattern matching as my main method of data analysis. Pattern matching is a research method in which theories and schools of thought are used to analyze real-world events and compare the events with how the theory understands the world. The theory presents a hypothesis about what the event could look like, and how the events unfolded are compared against this lens. Eventually, the goal is to find a theory that can accurately predict the way events will unfold so that a fitting response can be planned. Pattern matching was the most fitting analysis method here because I am analyzing past events and attempting to understand the reasoning behind the foreign policy decisions that drove them. Therefore, using existing theories to compare against real-world events was the most effective method to use. In

this vein, the two theories that I will be using are first, defensive realism, and second, democratic peace theory.

First, defensive realism is a subset of realism whose main assumptions are the same as those held by offensive realism, but differs in their approach to how states should react. Defensive realism assumes that anarchy is inevitable and that a state's security should be maximized. In opposition to offensive realism, however, defensive realism emphasizes reaction rather than action and says that security can be maximized by states being reserved in foreign policy. Defensive realism is less aggressive than offensive realism and states that acting in an offensive manner and upsetting the status quo actually increases a state's insecurity instead of decreasing it.

Defensive realism can here be used as one way to understand the foreign policy decisions of the United States during the Arab Spring uprisings. The reasoning here is that the security of the United States would be increased if the governments of the MENA region were more aligned with the interests of the United States, especially in the area of keeping American access to oil open. A wider sphere of influence is here synonymous with increased security. This theory is most closely aligned with the first school of thought analyzed in the literature review, which argued that the United States entered into the Arab Spring in an effort to protect its own security interests.

Secondly, democratic peace theory is a theory first invented by Immanuel Kant that states that democracies are highly unlikely to fight other democracies based on the shared value systems held by true liberal democracies. The opposite is also true, that liberal democracies are highly likely to fight illiberal or undemocratic societies. Therefore, the security of the United States would be best maximized by minimizing conflict, which according to democratic peace theory could be done by increasing the

number and strength of democratic regimes in the MENA region. This theory is more aligned with the second school of thought in the literature review, which argued that the United States became involved in the Arab Spring in an effort to promote democracy in the region.

Democratic peace theory would be applicable here to attribute the actions of the United States during the Arab Spring as a way to instill and strengthen democracy in the region. If the United States supported the pro-democracy uprisings and their goals with military power and financial support, then the new regimes that would take hold in those countries would hold the same set of liberal values that the United States does, and conflict would be reduced and security therefore maximized.

In both theories, security is maximized for the United States by reducing conflict and war. Both theories serve to explain the actions of the United States to these ends, but have different ways of predicting the actions taken to meet this goal, and have different variables that can be analyzed in the course of events, such as liberal norms being created or strengthened.

As was previously explained, defensive realism is a subset of realism that emphasizes reaction over action and seeks to maximize security by reducing conflict while still realizing that anarchy is inevitable. Drawing from the theoretical framework I have compiled, there are four main points, here called variables, that I will be comparing to the real world events of the Arab Spring in an effort to compare the two and see how closely they match.

The variables that I have chosen to be the markers of whether an event can be described through the lens of defensive realism are first, actions taken to maximize US security. This variable has many sub-categories that will be explained in more depth in

the following paragraph. The second variable is actions signifying reaction rather than action, which similar to the previous variable has many subclaims. The third and final variable is any moves taken to reduce conflict in the region.

To begin, I will lay out the subclaims contained under the first overarching variable of actions taken to maximize US security. In this thesis, the applicable facets of US security are mainly oil-related. Because the United States depends on imported oil as its main form of power and energy supply, making sure that access to oil is open is of utmost importance to keep the country up and running. Much of the oil imported into the United States comes from the MENA region, so political change here can have large effects on the oil supply at home. Therefore, open access to oil is a matter of national security, and a point to look at when analyzing the events through a defensive realist lens.

The second sub-variable of maximizing US security is any actions taken with the express interest of taking out enemies. In this instance, those deemed enemies or adversaries included Moammar Qaddafi in Libya and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. These cases will be described in further detail in the following data analysis, but the main point they will make is that the groups or people in charge against whom the US made moves to remove posed a security threat to the United States, whether that was as a result of blocking oil ways or in a military sense. This must not be confused with actions taken against adversaries that were meant to maximize US power abroad, which would be a variable signifying offensive realism, but rather US security.

Next, I will be looking at actions that signify reaction rather than initial action. Defensive realism, as can be seen in its name, emphasizes defense rather than offense, and it would so stand to reason that states operating under this theory would take a

more reserved approach in international relations and make actions in response to other states rather than making those first moves themselves. Reaction in this thesis is defined as an action taken after aggressive action by another state or political group where that secondary action is directly related to that initial action. I would also argue that given the assumption of defensive realism that states should act reserved, that any reactions taken by a state are limited, or at most, proportionate.

This ties into the next variable, which is actions taken by a state to reduce conflict. As was stated above, an assumption of defensive realism is that security is maximized when conflict is decreased. More war equals less security and less war equals more security. Therefore, it stands to reason that states operating under defensive realism would take steps to reduce conflict or any instability as much as possible. I will be looking at these types of actions as well in my data analysis.

Now we will shift from the variables of defensive realism to the variables put forth by democratic peace theory. As was previously discussed, democratic peace theory is a school of thought that states that generally speaking, democratic societies do not go to war with each other because of shared sets of liberal values. Similarly, it states the opposite as well, that liberal societies will fight illiberal societies because those value sets are not shared and they disagree on that basic level.

There is one overarching variable that I will be analyzing in relation to democratic peace theory, and that is the support for implementation of liberal norms. There are many subcategories of this variable, because there are indeed many liberal norms that are present (or should be present) in countries deemed democratic, or at least not illiberal.

The first three sub-variables are meant to support democratic institutions in a country. The first of these is to strengthen the rule of law. The rule of law helps to ensure equality of citizens and ensure order in society. The second is strengthening election integrity. Election integrity helps to make sure that a democratic regime is just that, democratic, and that the will of the citizenry is being heard. The third variable is actions taken in an effort to decentralize power. This is similar to election integrity in that it helps to make sure that a democratic country is truly democratic and is not in danger of becoming a dictatorship or an oligarchy.

The next three sub-variables are under the umbrella of liberal norms. The first of these, therefore, is to strengthen protection of and respect for human rights in a country. In the case of Libya, human rights violations and fears of genocide at the hands of Moammar Qaddafi was one of the reasons for the NATO invasion and the dethroning of Qaddafi. However, it is more important to look at what happened next and what happened in other cases to strengthen human rights protections rather than just the initial action. The second variable is strengthening international cooperation through international organizations (IOs). International cooperation in these spheres is a liberal norm respected by many liberal democratic regimes all over the world. The sixth and last sub-variable that I will analyze in relation to my research question is whether actions were taken to strengthen respect for public opinion. Similar to the variables meant to empower democratic institutions, respect for public opinion is meant to ensure that a supposedly democratic regime is actually adhering to democratic norms and being a true democracy rather than in name only.

As we move forward into the data section, it is important to remember that as this thesis looks at multiple different cases of conflict in multiple different countries,

there is no clear cut way to determine the presence or absence of these variables. Actions taken to support the implementation of these variables can look different depending on the case. Different influences on a case can include the strength of existing norms and institutions, if they exist at all, and the history of a state in relation to governance. These variables are meant to standardize the analysis as much as possible, but a truly standard case study comparison is not always possible in the real world.

Data Section

To begin, it would be beneficial to give a short summary of the revolutions in the countries that I will be analyzing- Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria- to first understand *what* happened before looking at *why*. I will then follow the summaries with a detailed look at each of my aforementioned variables and the extent to which they were present in the case of each country.

Revolution Summaries

The Tunisian Revolution, also known as the Jasmine Revolution, began on December 17, 2010, when a 25-year old man named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire outside of a municipal office to protest government corruption (Zeidan 2019). Protests began following his self-immolation, with demonstrations against poverty, high levels of unemployment under the Ben Ali regime, and political repression. President Ben Ali had been in power since 1987 and initially resisted stepping down, offering other solutions such as not seeking another term. However, his tenure and the actions of his administration during the protests, including deaths of protesters as a result of clashes with police, were not adequate to meet the protestors' demands, and in January 2011 the

government was dissolved and Ben Ali stepped down. After some instability, an interim government was formed, comprised of officials from the Ben Ali regime and the opposition. After outcry, the officials who had served under Ben Ali resigned from the interim government (Zeidan 2019). Twelve years after the outbreak of the protests, Tunisia is regarded as the lone success story, with a democratically elected president and many reforms having been undertaken since the revolution (Abouaoun 2019).

The Egyptian Revolution was the second revolution in the Arab Spring, beginning January 25th, 2011 (Zeidan 2019). Young people and Egyptian citizens disillusioned with President Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule came out to protest all across Egypt, but most notably in Cairo's central Tahrir Square. Protests were met with violent suppression by Mubarak's security forces for one month, until the military announced it would no longer use force against anti-Mubarak protesters. After three weeks of mass protests, Mubarak stepped down and left the military in charge. An interim government, made up of the military formed elections that took place in November 2011, which the Muslim Brotherhood swept (Childress 2013). Mohammed Morsi was sworn in as President on June 30, 2012. Protests against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood began and continued until a military coup removed Morsi from office on July 3, 2012. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took over as an interim government until June 8, 2014, when its leader, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi was sworn in as president, which he remains to this day (CNN 2021).

The Libyan Revolution is infamous due to the NATO intervention and the subsequent demotion of Libya to a failed state. President Moammar Qaddafi had been in power for 42 years when the uprisings began on February 15, 2011 in Benghazi to protest the arrest of a human rights lawyer (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022). Violence

was used by state forces against the protesters, which resulted in the spread of protests around the country and to the capital city, Tripoli. Lethal force began to be used against protesters, drawing international criticism of the Qaddafi regime, who resisted stepping down from power. The country descended into civil war, with rebel forces fighting to remove the regime from power. The international community became involved in order to protect civilians, including the United Nations imposing a no-fly zone. This operation was later taken over by NATO. On October 20, 2011, Qaddafi was found in hiding and executed by rebel forces. Since his ouster, the opposition has failed to form a functioning government, with infighting among political groups blocking the path to a transition to democracy, or indeed to any sort of governmental rule at all (Rowan 2019).

The revolution in Yemen had a similar fate as Libya. Yemen as a country only unified from North and South Yemen in 1990, and political opposition to the Saleh regime had existed ever since (Dunbar 1992, Zeidan 2022). Late January 2011 brought the Arab Spring protests to Yemen, where demonstrations were held in opposition to Ali Abdullah Saleh's presidency, poverty, corruption, and in support of a transition to democracy (Wenner 2021). Saleh made concessions such as a promise to not seek reelection, but protesters were not convinced, largely because previous such promises made by Saleh had been broken. Clashes between demonstrators and security forces became more violent, resulting in protesters' injuries and deaths. After much violence and negotiation, Saleh basically transferred power to his vice president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, signing an agreement to hold an election with Hadi as the only candidate in exchange for immunity from prosecution. Yemen remained extremely divided under Hadi and the country has since descended into civil war, with the government fighting militant opposition groups, namely the Houthi rebels (Wenner 2021). The fighting is

ongoing, with the Hadi government being supported by a coalition of countries including Saudi Arabia and the United States, and the Houthis being supported by countries such as Iran (CFR 2022). Saleh was assassinated in 2019 and Hadi remains president. The transition to democracy fought for by protesters has yet to begin.

Finally, the revolution's aftermath in Syria is perhaps the most notorious, with the country plunging into civil war and causing a massive refugee crisis. Protests began in February 2011 with similar calls to action as other countries, i.e. demonstrating against corruption, oppression, and the al-Assad presidency that has been in power since 2000, and calling for democratic reforms (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2021). The protests were immediately met with violence from state forces, including the police-led torture of a group of teenage boys arrested for writing anti-government graffiti, which only further angered protesters (Laub 2021). The extreme force used by the government in an attempt to put down these protests, and the use of collective punishment in the form of the cutting off of utilities to residential areas of cities, led to the rise of militant opposition and the formation of the Free Syria Army, which was then seen as the main opposition military (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). The civil war has since only become worse, arguably reaching a head in 2014-2015, when the militant Islamic group ISIS gained enough territory in Iraq and Syria to declare itself a caliphate and caused a massive outflux of refugees (Zeidan 2020). The civil war has become a proxy war for the region, with fighters involved from Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Russia, and weapons being supplied by many more (Laub 2021).

Defensive Realism

The first theory through which I will analyze the events of the Arab Spring in these five countries will be defensive realism. There are three variables that I have named that signal to me whether defensive realism can explain the events of the United States' role and involvement in the uprisings. These variables are first, actions taken to maximize the national security of the United States, which I will split into actions undertaken to ensure US access to oil and the removal of US enemies, second, actions taken as a reaction to another event rather than the US taking initial action, and third, actions taken to reduce conflict and increase security, as one of the main facets of defensive realism is that instability leads to insecurity, and security must always be maximized.

In that vein, the first variable is actions taken to maximize the security of the United States. As previously mentioned, this includes two sub-variables, the insurance of US access to oil as its main source of energy and the removal of enemies to the United States. The presence of either or both of these variables will at least partially signal the strategic importance of the country's stability and friendliness to the United States for its own security.

Oil Production and Geopolitical Importance

Tunisia, the first country to undergo Arab Spring protests, is not a large producer of oil or petroleum products and so would not be a state necessary to keep friendly to the United States in this regard (USEIA 2014). Egypt, however, is the largest non-OPEC oil producer in Africa and the third largest dry natural gas producer on the continent as well (USEIA 2018). It is not one of the top five countries from which the United States

imports crude oil but it is a significant producer for the world. US imports of Egyptian oil have been on the decline since before the Arab Spring, but it is not an insignificant producer (USEIA 2022). Another very important factor to note here is the fact that the Suez Canal is in Egypt. Around 15% of global shipping traffic travels through the Suez Canal. Massive amounts of oil are calculated within that- for example, in 2020, 1.74 million barrels of oil were transported through the Canal per day (Reuters 2021). Therefore, it would stand to reason that the United States would want a friendly regime in place in Egypt in order to facilitate both the oil imports that we do receive and the insurance of uninterrupted trade through the Suez Canal.

Libya is a major producer of crude oil and a major supplier of oil, not necessarily to the United States, but to Europe and to many NATO member countries. It is a member of OPEC, and holds both the largest crude oil reserves and the fifth largest natural gas reserves in Africa. In FY2010, at least 68% of Libya's oil exports went to European NATO member countries (USEIA 2015). Pre-2011, Libya was not a major source of US oil, supplying between 7,410 and 42,801 barrels per year (USEIA 2022). For the United States, the stakes here would be the insurance that its fellow NATO states have the resources they need, and the insurance that oil ways are open. Qaddafi was an irrational actor and that instability threatened the security of the United States as a result.

Yemen is not a major oil producer, especially because of its insatiable history laid out in the previous section, but it is geopolitically important because its Bab el-Mandeb checkpoint at the mouth of the Red Sea helps to control access to the Suez Canal, whose importance was laid out above (Calabrese 2020). Given the instability in the region, the

United States would likely want to stabilize whatever possible in order to keep this waterway reliably open.

Syria is strategically similar to Libya, albeit on a smaller scale. US imports of Syrian oil are not large enough to be a deciding factor in US foreign policy, but Syrian oil is more present in Europe. In 2011, at least 95% of Syrian oil exports went to Europe, at least 88% of that being exported to NATO member countries. However, in 2010, only 1.35% of all EU imports came from Syria (USEIA 2011). While not insignificant, that number is not crucial to the security of NATO. Additionally, much like Libya's Moammar Qaddafi, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad does not have a good rapport with the West or with the United States, and while arguably less erratic than Qaddafi, still holds the same animosity towards the United States and the general West (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2021). The United States would like to see a more friendly regime here, but Syria is not a strategically crucial country to have under control.

Actions Taken to Remove Enemies

I will now turn to the second sub-variable, which is actions taken to remove enemies of the United States. The reasoning for my choice of this sub-variable is straightforward- having friendly governments in other countries makes everything easier, whether that be diplomatic cooperation, opening up trade, agreeing on commonly held values and beliefs, or other aspects of international relations. Most importantly, sharing alliances with other countries can make a government more sure of its own security. Similarly, having governments at odds with your own makes these things more difficult, or more insecure, and so taking steps to remove an enemy or enemy government would increase a state's security, according to defensive realism.

President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia stepped down on January 14th, 2011, as a result of the widespread protests against his regime across the country (Zeidan 2021). His was a dictatorship without a doubt, with a less-than-free press and his own family benefiting from state-owned enterprises (Naumann and Elvers-Guyot 2019). That being said, the United States and the West as a whole was not as opposed to his regime as they were to others such as Qaddafi's. Perhaps this is because Ben Ali was open to foreign investment in Tunisia and cooperated in relation to the US's War on Terror, which led him to be what some scholars call a "model US client" (Falk 2011). However he is described, no evidence thus far would point towards his classification as an enemy of the United States, and none would point towards the possibility that the United States moved to depose him.

The US-Egyptian relationship was shaky throughout the 20th century but stabilized under the Nixon Administration. President Hosni Mubarak came to power in 1981 and held good relations with the United States throughout, despite being regarded as a dictator due to his strong police state, corrupt inner circle, and centralizing of power (Michaelson 2020). Most importantly, Mubarak kept oil ways open for the United States. Following massive protests and resistance from his own cabinet, he resigned in 2011. There is no evidence that I have come across that would point to the United States taking steps to remove Mubarak itself.

After Mubarak stepped down, the army was placed in charge of facilitating the elections that would decide the more permanent government that the protests demanded (Al-Jazeera 2011). The elections were held and on June 30, 2012, Mohammed Morsi was sworn in as president, ushering in a new era of Egyptian leadership under the Muslim Brotherhood (Childress 2013). The Muslim Brotherhood

was much less friendly to the United States and was much more fundamental in its values. The Council on Foreign Relations reports, “many Egyptians also feared insufficient protections for women’s rights and freedoms of speech and worship and distrusted the broad power accorded to the presidency” (Laub 2019). The group has ties to individuals who have promoted the formation of a caliphate, and would differ from Mubarak in his Israel policy and ability to promote peace regionally (Al-Jazeera 2009). All of this is to say, that the United States would have preferred Mubarak’s regime over Morsi’s because of these factors and because of the now-unstable access to oil and the Suez Canal, given the Muslim Brotherhood’s animosity towards the West.

On July 3, 2013, however, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces of Egypt (SCAF) overthrew Morsi’s government in what looked, walked, and quacked like a coup, but the United States was hesitant to call it that. President Barack Obama referred to the event as the “actions of the military,” and NPR called it a “transition” (Reuters 2013, Chappell 2013). This might be because the United States law states, “any assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup d’etat or decree,” and the United States supported the SCAF government more than the Morsi government and wanted to support its existence, especially in opposition to the previous administration (Reuters 2013). Interestingly enough, this only applies to statements put out during this time- a 2021 Congressional research report does, in fact, refer to a “2013 coup” in which SCAF took power (Congressional Research Service 2021). This points towards clear US support of SCAF over the Muslim Brotherhood. This does not mean, however, that SCAF is any more democratic or holds liberal values more closely than the Muslim Brotherhood, but it is more likely to cooperate and trade with the United States than was the Brotherhood.

Moammar Qaddafi was no friend of the United States. He was an illiberal dictator who was an irrational actor and was associated with terrorist attacks committed by the IRA in the 1980s (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022). He was also associated with groups that while being far from terrorists, were still treated with caution and wariness by the United States government, such as the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam. However, it was not his actions during the majority of his rule, but rather in response to the Arab spring protests that brought the most criticism, and ultimately, military action against Qaddafi from the West. The violent suppression of the protests led to internationally denounced human rights violations such as the use of live ammunition against protesters. The United Nations Security Council voted to engage militarily, including imposing a no-fly zone over Libya (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022). This military action was later transferred to NATO and was justified as a “humanitarian intervention (Green 2019). Qaddafi was ultimately killed by rebel forces in October 2011 (Asser 2011). These rebel forces were being funded by multiple countries, including the United States, and the US recognized these rebels as the legitimate government of Libya over the Qaddafi regime in July 2011 (Nixon 2011). It is difficult to decide whether the ultimate UN/NATO goal in the military intervention was to solely protect civilians or if part of that was to take out Qaddafi, but the fact of the matter is that in this instance, the lasting solution to protecting civilian lives was at the very least removing Qaddafi from power so that he could no longer order the military to bomb his own people.

The United States’ history with Yemen has been tense and unstable. Its neighbor Saudi Arabia has also had a tense history with Yemen, whether that be territorial disputes on its shared border or regional conflicts like the 1990 Gulf War, in which Yemen sided with Iraq, against Saudi Arabia. The United States and Saudi Arabia are

allies and will often side together in regional conflicts. In 2000, al-Qaeda terrorists operating out of Yemen attacked a US navy ship. Yemen's response and interrogation of the terrorists was not adequate according to Washington, which led to strains between Sanaa and DC (Riedel 2018). Despite this, I find it hard to believe that the United States would have such tensions with President Saleh himself so as to undergo an operation to remove him from power specifically. However, the relationship between Saleh and the House of Saud, the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, is much more tense and the arguments are more often and recent, given their close proximity to one another. As Yemen descended into civil war after the initial protests and after presidential powers had been transferred from Saleh to Hadi, Saudi Arabia moved to support the government in their war against the Houthi rebels (CFR 2022). This included sending weapons, money, and fighters, and conducting air campaigns of their own to take out Houthi strongholds (Third Way 2019). Saleh was assassinated in 2019 by the Saudi-backed government (Zeidan 2022). It is again difficult to assess whether the Saudi goal in their involvement in this war was to take Saleh out specifically, but given their history, they did not lose an ally when he was killed. The United States assisted Saudi Arabia in this campaign.

Finally, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has been in power since 2000, and throughout the War on Terror, Washington has accused Syria of harboring terrorists and allowing militants to cross Iraqi border to fight coalition forces. This was seen in President George W. Bush's 2005 State of the Union address: "we expect the Syrian government to end all support for terror and open the door to freedom" (Washington Post 2005). This is not new; Syria has been on list of terror-sponsoring nations since 1979 (Crane 2005). All of this to say, the United States would not lose an ally in Assad, and would probably like to see a more friendly government in its place, especially given

the proliferation of militant groups during the civil war. President Assad has not been removed from power and is unlikely to be removed any time soon, and the United States has scaled back its footprint in Syria under presidents Trump and Biden (Mogelson 2020). Therefore, there is no evidence that while the United States and Assad do not see eye to eye on virtually anything, that the United States is attempting to move to remove him from power.

Reaction versus Action

The second variable I will analyze in relation to defensive realism is the actions undertaken by a state being reactionary, rather than the states taking any initial action. Reaction in this thesis is defined as an action taken after aggressive action by another state or political group where that secondary action is directly related to that initial action. I would also argue that given the assumption of defensive realism that states should act reserved, that any reactions taken by a state are limited, or at most, proportionate. Even in cases of supposed inaction, such as in Tunisia, it is important to remember that when it comes to a global hegemon such as the United States in a region that has long been fought over, inaction cannot be confused with neutrality. As Shadi Hamid writes, “Where exactly is the line between inaction and complicity? The notion of neutrality, for a country as powerful as the United States, is illusory. Doing nothing or “doing no harm” means maintaining or reverting to the status quo, which in the Middle East is never neutral, due to America’s long standing relationships with regional actors” (Hamid 2015).

In foreign policy discussions, the United States often describes the beginning of the Arab Spring as a surprise that intelligence did not see coming (Inboden 2017).

Despite the initial shock of Boazizi's self-immolation, the United States did not act in any way outside of acknowledging the protests until a few days before President Ben Ali stepped down, when they called for his resignation. No military action was undertaken by the United States, and diplomatic power was used in ways such as publicly supporting the democratic reforms being made (USAID 2022). According to this definition of reaction, all known actions taken by the United States during the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia were reactionary and the United States did not act to decisively steer the outcome of the protests one way or another.

The case in Egypt as it relates to actions undertaken by the United States is less clear-cut. I will lay out the facts as they happened. First, Egypt under Mubarak was a strategic regional ally of the United States (Selim 2015: 179). He supported the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty that included a framework for diplomatic and commercial ties between the two countries and established some sense of stability (Northam 2011). Mubarak stepped down in 2011 following the protests and an interim government was formed, composed of the military, also called the Supreme Council of Armed Forces-SCAF (Childress 2013). Second, the United States was fundamentally opposed to the platform of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Muslim Brotherhood would not have continued to respect the 1979 peace treaty, further destabilizing the region (Laub 2019). Third, in 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood was overthrown and replaced with SCAF, and al-Sisi was elected to president following elections led by the military (Childress 2013). Today, President al-Sisi is relatively friendly with the United States and respects the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty (Cook 2021).

It is difficult to look at the evidence present in news sources and scholarly articles and attempt to extract from that the full truth about all forces at play during these

transitions. As for the United States' role in this as it relates to my broader thesis argument, the only hard evidence that would point towards a bias for or against a ruling group would be the continued support of SCAF despite the coup they committed in 2013 to depose Morsi. There is no evidence that the United States worked with SCAF or against the Muslim Brotherhood to facilitate this regime change, but if one follows the money, one will find a trail.

The question of whether the United States acted or reacted in Libya is a bit more clear. The protests were organic and inspired by those in Tunisia and Egypt. However, the Qaddafi regime's reaction to these protests was disproportionate and extremely violent, which in turn led the country down the path of a civil war (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022). As a result, the United Nations and later, NATO, began operations to establish a no-fly zone in Libya with the express goal of protecting civilian lives (Green 2019). This operation was begun under the umbrella of the international norm established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005 called Responsibility to Protect, or R2P for short (Global Centre for R2P 2022). This norm was established with the goal that the world would never again fail to stop genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, or war crimes from being committed. In this sense, the operation was reactionary and came as a result of the Qaddafi regime's actions taken against its own people during this era. Therefore, the United States' role in Libya in concurrence with the UN and NATO would qualify as a reaction to a previous action and would agree with this facet of defensive realism.

Similar to Libya, the protests in Yemen were organic and inspired by those that happened previously in other MENA countries (Wenner 2021). In the subsequent breakdown of the situation in Yemen and the current state of its civil war, most if not all

actions taken by the United States have been in conjunction with and under the leadership of Saudi Arabia (Third Way 2019). This includes the supplying of weapons and the financial support of the Hadi regime (CFR 2022). Much of the current situation has been affected by foreign influences such as the facilitating of the transfer of power from Saleh to Hadi and the arms deals & financial support for warring factions now (Zeidan 2022). As for the United States' role in this conflict, there is no evidence that it has used its power, independently or through Saudi Arabia, to take any initial action in Yemen, but rather to react to existing events and forces.

Lastly, as with Yemen, the civil war in Syria is still unfolding today. Although the United States has stepped back from earlier levels of military intervention, it is still present in the war and has affected the events since the outbreak of war. Protests in Syria against the Assad regime began organically (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). As in the Libyan case, the Assad regime acted disproportionately and used heavy violence against protesters and other civilians, which then resulted in the protesters arming themselves and the situation escalating into war (Laub 2021).

According to the previously outlined definition of reaction as opposed to action, any action taken in connection with this escalation by the Assad regime, excluding any action that would further escalate the conflict, could be seen as reactionary. The United States' role in the Syrian conflict evolved as the war continued, and I will look at the most important involvements now. First, the United States was involved in a covert operation to train the Free Syria Army from 2013-2017 (Jaffe and Entous 2017). This operation involved trainers from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, according to Jordanian intelligence (Reuters 2013). When ISIS declared itself a caliphate on the border of Syria and Iraq, the United States became involved with "boots

on the ground” troops recruiting and training Kurdish and Arab troops to fight ISIS. A suspected chemical attack on civilians in 2017 led to punitive air strikes by the United States, United Kingdom, and France. In 2019, the United States began the withdrawal of its forces, leaving Syrian and Iraqi Kurds to fight ISIS alone (Associated Press 2019). All of these actions were in reaction and/or retaliation to an action committed by the Syrian government, and would therefore match this facet of defensive realism.

Actions Taken to Reduce Conflict

My final variable under defensive realism is the presence of actions that were taken to reduce conflict in a given situation. As previously explained, one assumption of defensive realism is the idea that states will act to maximize their own security, and that one way to do this is to decrease conflict as much as possible. In defensive realism, stability equals security, and instability equals insecurity. Therefore, the presence of an action taken to reduce instability is consistent with the beliefs of defensive realism.

In Tunisia, the main point of conflict was President Ben Ali and his tenure, and the social issues that had arisen as a result, such as corruption and widespread poverty due to economic stagnation. As was previously mentioned, the United States was caught by surprise by the Arab Spring, and so did not have a lot of time to undertake actions that would have immediately reduced conflict in Tunisia. In the Tunisian case, the only real action that could qualify under this umbrella would be the United States asking for Ben Ali’s resignation a few days before he resigned, when it was already fairly clear that his presidency was headed nowhere (BBC). This action did not really reduce conflict, but it did signal the United States’ solidarity with the protesters as they demonstrated for democratic reforms.

In Egypt, the main point of conflict was the governance of the country- specifically, President Mubarak's rule. While there is no evidence that the United States acted to depose Mubarak, especially considering he was a strategic ally of the United States in the MENA region, some scholars argue that the United States worked with both SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood to establish a new Egyptian "ruling elite" that could stabilize the country's government (Cook 2011; Selim 2015). Mubarak, of course, resigned on February 11, 2011, ending that point of conflict, but the election of Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood only served to change the point of contention. Protests continued against the Muslim Brotherhood throughout 2013 and SCAF was a vocal opponent of the regime (Al-Jazeera 2011; Childress 2013). This point of contention ended in July 2013 when Morsi was removed from office and placed under house arrest by SCAF. Since al-Sisi became president, political opposition of course continues, but what the United States considers the "status quo" has returned, with policies in place similar to those under Mubarak (Cook 2021).

As for actions taken by the United States meant to reduce conflict during this period, I would argue that the continued flow of economic and military aid to Egypt despite the governmental transitions constitute a stance taken by the United States that would promote a return to the status quo under Mubarak. Throughout the protests and transitions, the United States attempted to resist straying from Mubarak's policies that stabilized the region by supporting governments that respected the 1979 peace treaty and did not add fuel to the fire. I would therefore argue that while the United States did not change its policy towards Egypt, that the continuation of its Mubarak policy towards SCAF constitutes an action taken to reduce conflict and increase stability.

In Libya, the conflict was more violent than that in Egypt and the situation less malleable. The main point of contention in Libya was Moammar Qaddafi and his iron-fisted rule. Unlike Ben-Ali or Mubarak, Qaddafi was not only resistant to step down, but absolutely refused. Both sides of the initial conflict, i.e. the protesters and the regime, were equally stubborn and unlikely to stop, considering that the protests only intensified as the regime reacted with violence. Qaddafi “repeatedly vowed to use violence to remain in power” (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022). To an outsider such as the United States, it seemed, and was, highly unlikely that the conflict would solve itself, because the grievances of the protesters were only increasing and proving themselves as the regime reacted. The two possible endings to the revolution were first, that instability and demonstrations would continue until Qaddafi was forcibly removed, or second, that protests would be suppressed by the state, only adding to the grievances and causing another revolution at a later point.

Because of the reality of the situation as a civil war and Qaddafi as an erratic dictator who was no friend of the West, the United States, however informally, sided with the rebel forces and provided them funding and weapons (Arsu and Erlanger 2011). These US-funded rebels then acted to kill Qaddafi in October 2011 (Whitson 2011). The rebels were also aided by NATO forces in Libya as a humanitarian mission meant to protect civilians. There is debate about NATO’s actions in conjunction with the rebels and the extent of their intervention, especially as it related to Qaddafi’s death, but the question is really less black and white and more strategic: In the long term, would protecting civilians in Libya involve killing Moammar Qaddafi? Would his death protect them more than just his removal from office? Under R2P, NATO was directed to stop ethnic cleansing and genocide, which Qaddafi was arguably committing. Scholars can

argue whether the NATO intervention was truly about R2P or whether it was put forth under the guise of R2P with a real intention of regime change, but I would argue that either way, it was an intervention with the goal of reducing conflict and instability, because the main point of conflict was Qaddafi (Green 2019).

Moving on to Yemen and the continuing civil war there, the United States' alliance with Saudi Arabia and its action in Yemen being taken in conjunction with that government may muddy the waters and not allow for a clean-cut answer because of Saudi Arabia and Yemen's tense relationship. The main point of conflict in this war is also difficult to assign given the many moving parts, but it seems to be the Yemeni government. The United States' support for the Hadi government may have come as a result of its historical animosity towards former president Saleh, who aligned himself with Houthi rebels, or it may come as a result of the Saudi alliance with the Hadi government. It's difficult to see exactly what the United States' goal in supporting the Hadi government was, because it was done through the third party of Saudi Arabia, who comes into this conflict with a slew of its own reasons, historic and strategical, to be there. It is also important to remember that the current humanitarian crisis in Yemen is a result of Hadi policies meant to choke Houthi strongholds and bring the country under control (Reuters 2021). It is also difficult to see what the outcome of the civil war would have been without the Hadi government receiving US-Saudi support. That being said, the actions taken by the United States during this civil war are not helping to promote stability or peace, and are hurting the civilian population. The war continues. I would argue that the actions taken by the United States during this war, whatever their nebulous reasons for being, are prolonging the war and increasing instability, therefore not proving this facet of defensive realism.

Finally, we move to Syria and the continuing civil war there. The nature of the conflict as it came to be and the fracturing of the opposition to the government, plus the presence and arrival of internationally recognized terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS made it difficult for the United States, or indeed any group to undertake actions that reduce conflict. Bashar al-Assad is no friend of the United States and is the main point of conflict in this war. The United States' formal involvement in the war began as a result of chemical attacks against civilians by Assad, but became more visible as ISIS became stronger, especially in the deployment of troops to aid the Kurds in fighting ISIS (Associated Press 2019). American informal involvement began in 2013 as covert training of Free Syria Army fighters (Reuters 2013). These actions were not promoting peace, but I believe they were important responses to the war crimes being committed by Assad and the proliferation of the Islamic State. As for the presence of the variable as it relates to my thesis, I would not argue that the actions taken by the United States in this regard were meant to reduce conflict.

Democratic Peace Theory

The second theory through which I will analyze the United States' role in the Arab Spring is democratic peace theory. Democratic peace theory states that liberal, democratic states are unlikely to fight each other because of their shared set of values, and similarly, illiberal states are likely to fight liberal states. The United States prides itself on its democracy and liberal values, and as a global hegemon has taken it upon itself to spread those values worldwide. Therefore, it would stand to reason that the United States would have an interest in promoting democracy and liberal values in countries in which they are weak or do not exist. The Arab Spring, as a series of

pro-democracy protests, would be a perfect time to promote these values, and so I seek to explain the United States' role in the Arab Spring through this lens of promoting liberal values and attempting to foster them in the analyzed countries.

From democratic peace theory I will pull two variables, and for each variable three sub-variables. First, I will look at the presence of support for the implementation of liberal norms and institutions. The three sub-variables here will be the support for 1) the rule of law, 2) the strengthening of election integrity, and 3) the decentralization of power. The second variable will be support for the implementation of and respect for liberal norms and human rights. The three sub-variables here will be 1) strengthening respect for human rights, 2) strengthening international cooperation through international organizations (IOs), and 3) strengthening respect for public opinion. Through these variables I will be able to see if the United States sought to strengthen these values in the analyzed countries, and if democratic peace theory is a viable theory with which to explain the United States' actions during this time.

Support for Democratic Institutions

I will begin with Tunisia. The Jasmine Revolution is widely regarded as the most successful of the Arab Spring revolutions because of its relative success in installing a more democratic and more liberal regime than its predecessor. The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, responsible for the democratic transition in the country, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for its role in fostering democracy (Norwegian Nobel Committee 2015). While far from perfect, as are most democratic countries, it was internationally heralded for its success.

That being said, democracy is a never-ending work in progress. Two free and fair elections have been held in Tunisia since the revolution, which elected current president Kais Saied (Grewal 2021). Tunisia is still struggling to fully implement bodies provided for in the 2014 Constitution, resulting in the lack of a fully liberal democracy, and other hurdles to the democratic transition remain (Grewal 2021). Economic stagnation is threatening the viability of the young democracy, especially in the face of COVID-19. Recently, complaints against President Saied have included arrests made against critics and the dissolution of the Supreme Judicial Council, a body meant to ensure judicial independence. In July 2021, he dissolved Parliament and granted himself executive powers (Gbadamosi 2022). All of this is to say that Tunisia had a celebrated and strong start to its democratic process, but seems to be slipping back into the old habits of an illiberal dictatorship.

The United States' role in the democratic transition has been somewhat muted. Two organizations are important to note here: first, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). These organizations are loosely affiliated with the American political parties and receive money from the US federal government to foster liberal and democratic values abroad. They also work through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in this vein. USAID is "actively" supporting democratization initiatives in Tunisia with current grants set to expire in 2023 (USAID 2022). These grants are aimed at, among others, decentralization, accountability, and strengthening elections. Both the NDI and the IRI are set to help facilitate upcoming Tunisian elections in July 2022 (NDI 2022; IRI 2022). While this evidence shows an effort by the United States to support the democratization process in Tunisia in relation to these three sub-variables, the recent

developments under President Saied are worrisome and create a higher hurdle to a liberal democracy.

Since the 2011 Revolution removed Mubarak in favor of Morsi, and since the 2013 coup removed Morsi in favor of al-Sisi, Egypt has not been on a path to democracy. The 2012 elections were special in that the outcome was “genuinely unknown” and were more open and fairer than previous elections in Egypt’s history (Carter Center 2012). However, the Muslim Brotherhood was not particularly liberal in its policy platform and was hesitant to form a government that involved different political opinions in a way that would be truly democratic (El-Sharif 2014). Their policies led to extremely low voting turnout in a Constitutional referendum in 2013 despite voting being compulsory under Egyptian law (Laub 2019).

After al-Sisi came to power in a decidedly undemocratic way in 2014, the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed, which it had also been under Mubarak. Membership is accused of people that the government wants to be rid of (Laub 2019). Egypt under al-Sisi is considered illiberal and American officials, such as Trump, have described him as a dictator: “where is my favorite dictator?” (Youssef 2019). Egyptian presidential elections in the current era have been described as not so much an election as a referendum, with al-Sisi winning 97% of the vote in the 2018 election (Fürting 2018). In 2021 Egypt was given a score of 18/100 by Freedom House, labeling it “not free” (Freedom House 2021).

Judicial independence and the rule of law have not improved since Mubarak’s tenure; Morsi attempted to institute judicial immunity for certain governmental bodies but he pulled the decree after immediate public backlash (Laub 2019). When Morsi was removed from office and SCAF took over in 2013, the new government set up an

emergency court to attempt to clear judicial backlog, which resulted in legal corners being cut, “mass prosecutions of protesters and the abandonment by many trial court judges of Egypt’s usual standards of the requirement of individualized evidence of guilt and due process of law” (Risley 2016). Four amendments added to the Constitution in 2019 further erode judicial independence, allowing the head of state to choose the chief justice on the Supreme Constitutional Court, among others (Hawthorne et al. 2019). Therefore, the sub-variables here are not quite present in Egypt in the way that the 2011 protesters were fighting for.

As for the United States’ role in a democratization process in Egypt, the passage of a 2012 law regarding international NGOs forced the Cairo NDI, IRI, and Freedom House offices to close, among other human rights-oriented groups. The United States had been active in supporting pro-democracy groups before the Arab Spring, bringing youth leaders from all over the world (including Egypt) to a conference in New York in 2008 aimed at teaching activists how to harness social media to bring attention and support to their cause (Nixon 2011). Since the Revolution, it has been more difficult for staff of these groups to enter Egypt to continue this work (Kirkpatrick 2014). However, USAID continues to be active in Egypt including in the area of governance, with grants set to run through 2027 at the latest in areas like judicial accountability, sustainable economic development, and gender equity (USAID 2022). Given this evidence, I would argue that the United States is supporting the implementation of liberal and democratic institutions in Egypt, despite governmental hurdles to that goal.

The democratization process in Libya cannot really be called one because of its current status as a failed state. That being said, Moammar Qaddafi was a cruel dictator who ran an extremely oppressive Libya, and his removal and the prevention of the

implementation of another autocrat would have been an improvement from what existed before (Whitson 2011). However, Qaddafi's ouster left a power vacuum which was never filled. Libya currently does not have a fully functioning government. The transitional government that was in place after Qaddafi's 2011 assassination fell apart due to warring factions of rebels and the civil war continues (Daragahi 2017). With the help of the United Nations, an interim government was established in 2021 with the main goal of facilitating November 2021 national elections (United Nations 2021; Al-Jazeera 2021). Unfortunately, these elections did not proceed due to an inability of the interim government to agree on a framework for elections (Hammady 2022). As such, it is also difficult to address the success or failures of election integrity, as there have not been elections to speak of.

Despite these hurdles, civil society in Libya continues to exist and pro-democracy groups continue their work. The National Democratic Institute supports civil society groups (CSOs) in fields such as grassroots activism, equitable gender representation, and human rights (NDI 2022). Similarly, the International Republican Institute works with groups to promote accountable governance and stronger ties between a community and its government (IRI 2022). USAID has grants in place until 2023 to promote election integrity, strong civil society, and community reconciliation, among other topics (USAID 2022). Similarly to the United States' role in Tunisia and Egypt, I would therefore argue that the United States is taking action to promote the implementation of democratic institutions in Libya.

Yemen has also had little time to implement democratic reforms as the country is engulfed in a civil war and the world's largest humanitarian crisis (Ebrahim 2022). As with the last section, the United States' cooperation with Saudi Arabia is an important

aspect to consider in relation to the presence and validity of the sub-variables currently being analyzed. Saudi Arabia is not a democracy, and nobody is arguing that it is one (Third Way 2019). The United States is not partnering with Saudi Arabia under the guise of democratic solidarity, but it is rather a strategic and historical partnership based on wealth and access to oil. Through the support for Saudi Arabia, the United States is showing that it would rather have a complacent oil supplier in the region rather than the implementation of a democratic regime in Yemen. In this sense, the idea that the United States is involved in Yemen in an effort to implement democratic institutions is invalid.

As for direct evidence of the presence of the sub-variables, Freedom House has given Yemeni elections a score of 0/4 due to their complete lack of freedom and fairness (Freedom House 2021). Similarly, it has given the Yemeni judiciary a score of 1/4 for being nominally independent, but highly susceptible to influences from the government and pursuant bias. The decentralization of power is difficult to assess because “Yemen has no functioning central government with full control over its territory” (Freedom House 2021). As such, the democratization process in Yemen has not made any real progress since the civil war began.

That being said, a two-month truce between warring parties was signed in early April 2022 for the first time since 2016, offering hope for peace, at least in the short term (Ebrahim 2022). The IRI does not have information on its website regarding its activities in Yemen, but the NDI has programs in the country regarding political party development, legislative support, and tribal conflict mitigation (NDI 2022). USAID provides aid and assistance aimed at solving conflict on a more local level and promoting social cohesion along with leadership training (USAID 2021). In this way, the

United States is involved in the beginnings of a democratization process, but the reality of the situation in Yemen makes it very difficult to make any progress, let alone specific progress on the three sub-variables.

Finally, the situation in Syria is similar to that in Yemen, in the way that ongoing conflict has barred the way for the implementation of democratic reforms or any sort of democratization process. The United States and the West in general have been at odds with President Assad since the beginning of his rule in 2000, and since the 2011 Revolution and subsequent civil war there has been no regime change and no chance to implement any democratic institutions. Election integrity is a joke, with Assad recently winning reelection with 95% of the vote (Reuters 2021). His family has been in power in Syria for over 50 years (Lund 2014). Bashar al-Assad's father centralized power under his rule, and the current president has not taken any steps to decentralize power since the Revolution began (Laub 2021). As such, judicial independence is a pipe dream, and war crimes have been committed by the Assad regime without recourse or consequences from the Syrian government (Pelley 2021). Information on the judicial system is not easily accessible.

As in Yemen, despite the ongoing conflict presenting obstacles towards the democratization process that the Arab Spring began, the United States is putting money and effort into continuing the push against authoritarianism. The IRI continues to educate the public about the situation in Syria, the NDI is active and supports programs aimed at supporting the pro-democracy opposition in the country and in opposition-held areas despite not being able to work in-country, and USAID, while focusing mainly on humanitarian aid, also assists local governments in integrating internally displaced persons and strengthening their governance abilities (IRI 2022;

NDI 2022; USAID 2022). The three sub-variables are difficult to specifically analyze in relation to United States support because of the ongoing civil war and the pursuant priorities and possibilities.

Support for Liberal Norms

Next, I will move on to my second variable for democratic peace theory and the last variable of this data section. The second variable I will be looking for to prove or disprove the validity of this theory in explaining the United States' role in the Arab Spring is support for the implementation of liberal norms. Three sub-variables on which I will focus in relation to this variable are 1) strengthening respect for human rights, 2) strengthening international cooperation through international organizations (IOs), and 3) strengthening respect for public opinion. Liberal norms are the backbone of democratic peace theory and help to comprise the set of values that democratic countries can agree upon, making it less likely that they will go to war with each other.

I will begin, as with the other variables, with Tunisia. Since the creation of the more democratic republic of Tunisia that we see today, there have certainly been democratic reforms in these three areas that were not there before the 2010 revolution. However, as I have said before, democracy is a never-ending work in progress, as too is the implementation of the liberal norms with which this section concerns itself. In the previous section, I mentioned that the 2014 Constitution of Tunisia has been lagging in its application and the formation of the institutions that it is supposed to create. Some of these institutions are meant to mitigate inequalities in Tunisia, and the lack of their existence means that human rights such as the rights of the LGBTQ+ community are still oppressed by the state (HRW 2021). Tunisia is a member of multiple IOs, including

the United Nations, World Trade Organization, the Arab League, and the World Bank, signaling their openness and willingness to work together with other countries to solve global issues (Republic of Tunisia 2017). The strength of and respect for public opinion is difficult to measure, but the existence of free and fair elections and the governmental adherence to the results is a good sign. However, President Saied's recent centralization of power is worrisome and a sign that public opinion may be less valued in years to come.

The United States' efforts to support these developments can be seen in the same way as its efforts to support democratic institutions taking hold in Tunisia. The IRI conducts polls of Tunisian public opinion that are then reported to the government, which uses the results to form policy (IRI 2022). The NDI, similarly, is involved in a number of civil society programs meant to strengthen the link between the public and their government and help local governments to solve public health issues (NDI 2022). USAID has two main development objectives in their activities in Tunisia, one of which is to advance social cohesion in an effort to curb extremism and the pursuant violence (USAID 2021). These three groups and their support for these programs show the United States' efforts to promote the three sub-variables in Tunisia: human rights through gender equality and public health, respect for public opinion through increased government accountability and responsiveness, and strengthened international cooperation through the US-Tunisian partnerships shown here.

Since al-Sisi's tenure as president began in 2014, Egypt has returned much to its status quo as it was under Hosni Mubarak. Human Rights Watch has described the situation in Egypt as a "prolonged human rights crisis" with a high rate of state-sanctioned executions, violent suppressions of political dissidents, and a virtual

refusal by the state to prosecute sex crimes (HRW 2021). Egypt continues to be a member state of multiple IOs such as the United Nations, the International Organization of Migration, and the African Union, symbolizing its willingness to work with other states (IMUNA 2022). The relative lack of democracy under al-Sisi, however, means that public opinion is by and large not respected and policy is largely not informed by the public (Freedom House 2022).

As was explained in the previous section, Egypt passed a law in 2012 severely curtailing the ability of foreign NGOs to operate in Egypt, and the IDI and NDI were victims of this law and have not been able to carry out programs as they are able to do in other countries analyzed here. However, USAID is able to support and run programs. These include programs aimed at increasing accountability and transparency of government, reducing gender disparities, and solving public health problems. The United States continues to work with Egypt on many platforms and in multiple IOs in which they both take part. In this way, the United States is supporting and strengthening human rights, respect for public opinion, and international cooperation in Egypt.

Libya is far from implementing liberal norms. Human rights in Libya are dismal, with a prolific slave trade, warring extremist factions, and a decided lack of religious freedom (Baker 2019; Freedom House 2022). Libya is currently a member state of IOs such as the International Monetary Fund, United Nations, and World Bank (State Dept 2021). Given the current status of the Libyan government as virtually nonexistent, it is difficult to claim that public opinion is or is not being respected, because there is no national government taking it into account.

Despite the importance of these liberal norms to the United States and allegedly to its activities abroad, the majority of American support in Libya through USAID are aimed not at supporting these norms, but rather at economic growth. USAID states that a main goal in their country strategy in Libya is to “improve the climate for private-sector investment that fosters broad-based economic opportunity and benefits U.S. and Libyan business interests” (USAID 2021). However, there is not a lack of support for the strengthening of these three sub-variables. A focus by the IRI on promoting accountable governance can translate into strengthening respect for public opinion, and the NDI cites support for Libyan civil society organizations that, among other activities, work to make Libya more accessible for people with disabilities and work to end child marriage (IRI 2022; NDI 2022). The United States also continues to work with Libya in IOs in which both countries are members, but the lack of a centralized national government makes that work difficult. Therefore, I would argue that the sub variables here are present, but not as strong as they are in other countries such as Tunisia, where they take center stage in American activities in-country.

Before I analyze the United States’ role in Yemen, I would like to bring attention to the fact that the United States’ activities in support of Saudi Arabia and the Hadi government are worsening the humanitarian crisis in the country and are in fact oppressing the human rights of Yemeni civilians as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights include, but are not limited to, the right to life, liberty, and the security of person (United Nations 1948). American support for Saudi Arabia shows not only neutrality in cases of extreme human rights abuses, but in fact continued support for a regime committing them (Third Way 2019). Therefore, I would argue that any activities on behalf of the United States in supporting respect for human rights in

Yemen are automatically invalidated in relation to the legitimacy of democratic peace theory in explaining the US role in Yemen. Actions speak louder than words.

The current state of the sub variables in Yemen is dire. As has been stated, human rights are under severe oppression due to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. Yemen is a member state of multiple international organizations such as the United Nations, Interpol, and the World Health Organization (CIA 2022). The lack of a functioning government at the national level has left many citizens dependent on their local governments. Under Saleh, power was much more centralized and local governments did not have key authorities, but since the collapse of the national government, power has had no choice but to decentralize (Rogers 2019). That fact separates the situation in Yemen from that of the aforementioned countries, because governments then automatically have a somewhat closer connection with their communities. However, governance limitations put on these groups as a result of war, such as lack of funds for public services, have not helped local governments to function. As is clear, the war is exacerbating the problems facing all of these aspects.

The United States, despite working with Saudi Arabia to support the Hadi regime, is active in Yemen through the three agencies I have been analyzing. The IRI does not include Yemen-specific programs on their website, but the National Democratic Institute outlines programs in Yemen aimed at increasing women's political participation and strengthening local government (IRI 2022; NDI 2022). USAID has a strong strategy in place to support local government and governmental accountability, helping to strengthen respect for public opinion. Additionally, USAID programs are in place to reinstate education and health systems and increase access to clean water, helping in the area of human rights (USAID 2021). In this way, I would argue that these

State-Department funded programs are working on the ground to foster and bolster these liberal norms in Yemen. However, to restate my initial argument here, the military's action to take part in worsening the situation these agencies are attempting to fix means to me that one cannot truly argue that the United States is working to support the implementation of these norms.

Finally, the possibility of implementing these norms in Syria is unlikely, considering the extreme illiberalism of the current government and the ongoing civil war taking precedence over any progress. As for the current state of these norms under Assad, I would argue that human rights are at the worst state, as the Assad regime has taken many actions over the course of the conflict that constitute war crimes, such as the 2013 use of chemical weapons against civilians and the apparent usage of the strategy of collector punishment among residential urban areas (Laub 2021). President Assad is a dictator who has the majority of the power in the country, and public opinion is not respected (Reuters 2021). Finally, Syria is a member state to many IOs such as the United Nations, WHO, and the G-24 (CIA 2022). The situation, therefore, regarding these norms' current status in Syria, is dire and does not have much room to get worse.

Despite serious obstacles, the IRI, NDI, and USAID are all active with programs operating in Syria with express goals of relieving suffering. Much of the USAID activities are operating to provide emergency food assistance in conjunction with the United Nations (USAID 2021). Access to food is a human right (United Nations 1948). Both the IRI and NDI recognize that regime change or platform change at the national level is highly unlikely, so both are working to strengthen local government in opposition-held areas where there is both room for democratization and relative safety for those pushing for it (IRI 2022; NDI 2022). Both groups are supporting civil society organizations

working to promote these norms in Syria. Because of this work, despite the progress they are able to make given the reality of the situation, I would argue that the United States is working to foster these norms in Syria.

Data Analysis

I will now move onward to the data analysis. I would like to preface this section by saying that the conclusion I have come to is informed only by the data I have collected. Being able to decisively diagnose the pure reasoning behind the United States' actions during the Arab Spring and its aftermath in these countries is something that would be very difficult to do given the data that is freely available and would be nearly impossible to do under my time constraints. While I am able to come to a conclusion using this data, I have left many stones unturned. This research question will be discussed and debated in the field of foreign policy for decades to come, and I am not claiming to have found the one true answer, but simply a possible answer given what I could find.

That being said, I have been able to come to the conclusion that the evidence shows that democratic peace theory is the best framework with which to explain the United States' role in the Arab Spring. As will be shown in a table later on, the proportion of valid pattern-matching between the variables and the reality is shown to be higher with democratic peace theory than with defensive realism. At the same time, this data does not show defensive realism to be invalid, and there are aspects of each theory that are helpful when attempting to explain what happened and why. I am not arguing the truth of one theory over the falseness of another, but simply stating that the level of accuracy for democratic peace theory is higher.

As a way of calculating the accuracy of each theory here, I have put the evidence and my conclusions into the following table. Each variable has a row, and each country a column. If a variable is considered to be accurate regarding a matching pattern, I have assigned it one point. If inaccurate, I have assigned it zero points. If there is insufficient or inconclusive information, half a point has been assigned. Five points are possible because of the five countries analyzed. Therefore, it is possible to measure the accuracy of a variable through a percentage. I will then measure the average accuracy of a theory and compare the percentages against each other to determine which is more accurate.

	Tunisia	Egypt	Libya	Yemen	Syria	Overall
Defensive Realism						
Oil production/ geopolitical importance	no	yes	yes	yes	no	3/5
Removal of enemies?	no	no	yes	yes	no	2/5
Reaction vs. action	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	5/5
Reducing conflict?	?	yes	yes	no	no	2.5/5
<i>Overall Score</i>						12.5/20 = 62.5% accuracy
Democratic Peace Theory						
Democratic institutions	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	4/5
Liberal norms	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	4/5
<i>Overall Score</i>						8/10 = 80% accuracy

As is visible in the table, democratic peace theory is overall more accurate than defensive realism. However, defensive realism is not inaccurate and matches reality over half of the time. When separated by variable, we can see even higher levels of accuracy for certain aspects of defensive realism, such as the United States reacting to occurring events rather than acting to initiate them themselves. Each variable of democratic peace theory is 80% accurate. I would argue that there were aspects of each of these theories that can explain the United States' interventions in the Arab Spring and these affected countries, and that both variables for democratic peace theory would be present there while only some defensive realism variables would be.

In analyzing the data, it would stand to reason that if a variable met more than 50% accuracy in matching with reality, then it is likely to be a result of planning rather than coincidence. Per this reasoning, the variables of defensive realism that I would defend the statement that the United States was more likely to intervene in a country's revolution and following regime change (or not) if it was geopolitically important, which more often than not meant that a country helped to control access to oil for the US. This was the case three out of the five times, in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, where the United States provided military and/or financial aid to support their interests in the region. Similarly, a highly accurate variable in defensive realism was the idea that the United States would react rather than take initial action in an instance of intervention. This variable met 100% accuracy.

Overall, I would therefore argue that these two facets of defensive realism, paired with the two variables of democratic peace theory, at least partially comprised the reasoning behind the United States' role in the Arab Spring. There are likely many other factors that went into the strategic decisions made here, but the assumptions made by

defensive realism and democratic peace theory can help to explain the US' actions as a whole.

Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis tackles the question, under which international relations theory or theories was the United States operating when it became involved in the Arab Spring uprisings, and were the goals of the United States met through their intervention? I undertook this research with the goal of finding which theory is the most accurate in explaining the US intervention in these revolutions, in the hopes that an accurate theory could be used to predict similar events in the future.

I first sought to understand which international relations theories could best explain the American role in these uprisings, which I ultimately concluded were defensive realism and democratic peace theory. These theories both help to explain the US role from a long-term strategic point of view. Through a comprehensive pattern-matching analysis of the strategic importance of these five countries to the United States and the subsequent actions of the United States in relation to their 2011 revolutions, I came to the conclusion that the theory pitched by democratic peace theory more often matched with reality than did the theory proposed by defensive realism. However, neither of these theories was inaccurate and both matched reality over 60% of the time. Therefore, I argue that while both defensive realism and democratic peace theory can be used to explain certain aspects of the US role in the Arab Spring, that democratic peace theory can explain and could predict the events with a higher level of accuracy.

This fits into the literature by adding further evidence to the literature's general argument that it was the convergence of multiple deciding factors that formed the United States' response to the Arab Spring, and that the two main factors in this decision were the threat to American access to oil and the possibility to foster democracy and liberalism in MENA.

My data and analysis has shown that multiple factors and reasons informed the American response to the Arab Spring and its subsequent involvement in the protests and conflicts. The literature agrees. But what does this mean in the greater sense and why does it matter?

First, understanding the United States' response to this upheaval can help us to understand American foreign policy as a whole. As the US is currently still the global hegemon, understanding how the United States operates and what factors play heavily into its decisions can help the world to decipher these decisions and predict the United States' next move.

Secondly, there is a debate in world politics currently about the state and stability of the United States as the global hegemon and whether it is in the process of hegemonic decline (Chase-Dunn et al 2011). However, the global order is constantly changing, and the rise and fall of hegemons is a part of this (Lo 2020). No matter the current status of world superpowers, the world needs to be ready and responsive to the actions of any state. As the United States is a country involved in many different regions around the world, understanding how the US operates in terms of foreign policy is important to understanding world events and how they proceed. As Ikenberry argued, the United States is currently making foreign policy decisions with an eye on the fight to maintain their hegemonic status (Ikenberry 2014). As the global order continues to change, this is

likely to only intensify. Understanding what this looks like can help the world to prepare.

Finally, it is also important to understand the forces at play in relation to regime and government change. Understanding what helps and hinders these changes can aid in understanding how the world works and why actors operate the way they do. The world is currently in an “age of authoritarianism” with autocracies on the rise (Repucci and Slipowitz 2022). As we move forward, this phenomenon will either continue to strengthen and non-autocratic states will turn into autocracies, or it will begin to reverse and autocrats will be overthrown. Either way, there is a high probability of regime and government change in the future, and understanding the forces that affect that and the events that can take place surrounding government change can aid in stabilizing volatile situations such as the Arab Spring, whether the processes are successful or not.

The United States must decide whether it values its current strength or its desire to stay the global hegemon as it goes forward in foreign policy decision making. It has a chance now to secure its place in history as an oil-hungry, self-serving hegemon, or to change its trajectory to spread its wealth and power worldwide, and to help form new democracies. The United States prides itself on its democracy and freedom, something that it has worked to develop and strengthen throughout its history. However, to go abroad and prevent democracies from being able to take hold in countries in favor of securing American economic interests is a prime example of cognitive dissonance, and something that will come back to hurt the United States in the end.

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