A CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYS OF EGYPT'S NORMATIVE DUALITY: BETWEEN THE SPREAD OF U.S. NORMS AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB SPRING

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Abstract: This paper delves into the dynamics of democratic norms formation in the MENA region, with a particular emphasis on Egypt's normative duality. Grounded in the norm life cycle framework advanced by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, this research analyses the promotion, dissemination, and internalization of democratic norms. A pivotal facet of this study lies in the juxtaposition between the normative stages delineated by the United States and Egypt's distinct normative approach. More precisely, Egypt's role has oscillated between serving as a normative leader and a normative disruptive force. By examining normative interactions, this study unveils Egypt's normative duality and its broader implications in the MENA region. Employing a constructivist perspective, the research is structured into two distinct phases spanning the years from 2000 to 2011 and aims to analyze the promotion of democratic norms and their consequential impact. For the research framework, the article uses a qualitative methodology, focusing on the analysis of discourses from U.S. and Egyptian officials. Additionally, this work incorporates succinct quantitative details, rooted in the number of amendments and laws adopted in Egypt between 2005 and 2007, in order to ascertain the tangible outcomes of the normative influence exerted by the United States. Consequently, the research relies on both primary and secondary sources to assess the intersubjective meanings ascribed to democratic norms. Finally, this paper contributes to an enhanced understanding of normative dynamics in the MENA region, highlighting the normative pressure applied by the U.S. and its ensuing impact on the Mubarak regime.

Keywords: Arab Spring, democracy promotion, Egypt, Mubarak regime, normative breaker, normative cycle, normative duality, normative leader, U.S. foreign policy

Rezumat: Această lucrare analizează dinamica normelor democratice în regiunea MENA, accentul fiind pus pe dualitatea normativă a Egiptului. Bazată pe ciclul normativ propus de Martha Finnemore şi Kathryn Sikkink, cercetarea explorează promovarea, răspândirea şi internalizarea normelor democratice. Un aspect central al studiului este confruntarea dintre etapele normative stabilite de SUA şi abordarea distinctă a Egiptului. Mai exact, rolul Egiptului a oscilat între a fi un lider normativ şi un factor normativ disruptiv. Prin examinarea atentă a interacţiunilor normative, acest

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studiu dezvăluie dualitatea normativă a Egiptului şi implicaţiile asupra cadrului mai larg al regiunii MENA. Utilizând o perspectivă constructivistă, cercetarea este structurată în două etape distincte care acoperă perioada anilor 2000-2011 pentru a analiza promovarea normelor democratice şi impactul acestora. Utilizând o metodă calitativă, cercetarea analizează discursurile unor oficiali ai administraţiei americane, respectiv egiptene pe marginea unui studiu de caz reprezentat de Egipt în timpul declanşării procesului de tranziţie. De asemenea, lucrarea cuprinde şi detalii cantitative succinte bazate pe numărul de amendamente şi legi adoptate în Egipt între anii 2005-2007 pentru a determina care sunt rezultatele concrete ale influenţei normative exercitate de SUA. Astfel, cercetarea se bazează pe surse primare şi secundare pentru a interpreta semnificaţiile intersubiective atribuite normelor democratice. În final, lucrarea contribuie la înţelegerea dinamicii normative a regiunii MENA, punând în evidenţă presiunea normativă exercitată de SUA şi impactul acesteia asupra regimului Mubarak.

Cuvinte cheie: ciclu normativ, dualitate normativă, Egipt, factor disruptiv normativ, lider normativ, Primăvara Arabă, promovarea democraţiei, regimul Mubarak, politica externă a SUA

I. Introduction

Arab exceptionalism was a term widely debated and used especially by authors in the field of political science such as Eva Bellin, Steven Heydemann, and Stephen J. King to characterize the states in the MENA region[1] during the '90s. This concept generally referred to the "exceptional resistance to political liberalization, respect for human rights and formal democratic practice in the Arab Middle East"[2]. This particularity of the region has also been noted and analyzed by other authors, such as Larry Diamond, who stated: "every one of the world's major cultural realms had become host to a significant democratic presence, albeit again with a single exception – the Arab world"[3].

However, the situation changed significantly in the first half of the 2000s when the U.S. adopted a new position in its relations with the Arab states based

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[1] The MENA region includes all Arab states in the Arab League: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

[2] Stephen J. King, "Authoritarian adaptability and the Arab Spring", in *The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System*, ed. Raymond Hinnbusch and Jasmine Gani, (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 67.

[3] Larry Diamond, "Why are there no Arab democracies?", *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (January 2010): 93.

on "the promotion of democracy and good government"[4]. This led to the emergence of a new concept in the context of normative influence exerted by the U.S. on the MENA region, known as "upgrading authoritarianism". According to Steven Heydemann, this concept did not imply "shutting down and closing off Arab societies from globalization…", but rather the ability of Arab regimes to "adapt[...] to pressures for political change by developing strategies to contain and manage demands to democratize"[5].

Hence, a starting point for analyzing the promotion of democratic norms by the United States in the MENA region and its impact is understanding the new international context from the beginning of the 21st century, which triggered a shift in relations between the U.S. and the Arab states, especially Egypt. For this reason, the research is particularly interested in the works of authors who have addressed the issue of promoting democratic norms by examining the role assumed by the George W. Bush Administration after the September 11, 2001 attacks, his vision of democracy, the means and strategies used to achieve this goal, and their impact, as well as the reactions generated within the Arab world. Such authors include Katerina Dalacoura, Dionysius Markakis, Shadi Hamid, Amaney A. Jamal, and Thomas Carothers. Furthermore, important contributions to the analysis of the internalization of democratic norms and their effects on the domestic situation of Arab states, particularly Egypt, come from authors like Mona El-Ghobashy, Larbi Sadiki, and Tarek Osman.

This paper aims to analyze the promotion, dissemination, and internalization of democratic norms in the Arab world according to the normative cycle proposed by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink in 1998. In this regard, the research is structured into two parts as follows: a quantitative stage that examines the origin and process of promoting and disseminating democratic norms in the Arab world by the U.S. in the early 21st century, and a qualitative stage that investigates the internalization of these norms to determine their significance and the conditions of their implementation based on the measures taken by the Mubarak regime before the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011.

The analysis spans the period between 2000 and 2011 since this timeframe best captures the three stages of the examined normative cycle and highlights the concept of normative duality characteristic of Egypt. In other words, this

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[4] George Bush White House. "Fact Sheet: Advancing the Freedom Agenda", 24.07.2008. https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/07/20080724-8.html.

[5] Steven Heydemann, "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World", *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution*, Analysis Paper, no. 13, October 2007, 1, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/10arabworld.pdf.

paper examines Egypt's voluntarily or involuntarily assumed role in two specific moments. The first refers to the year 2005 when a series of laws were adopted due to "growing domestic pressure from an unusually broad opposition coalition known as Kifaya..., as well as from U.S. President George W. Bush, who was also pushing for more open and competitive presidential and legislative elections"[6]. The second moment occurred in 2011 when the removal of President Hosni Mubarak from power as a result of popular protests represented a contradiction in terms of the typical practices in the Arab world.

The paper applies the norm life cycle model advanced by Finnemore and Sikkink to a specific case, namely, the spread of norms in the MENA region, particularly in Egypt, in order to observe the similarities and differences that may arise in this process. The primary objective of this paper is to answer the following questions: how were the norms promoted in the MENA region, and what was their impact on the Mubarak regime? Additionally, it aims to understand how the differences that may appear between the theoretical framework established by the two authors and its practical application to a specific case can be interpreted. In this way, relevant results can be obtained regarding the promotion and internalization of democratic norms in the MENA region from a constructivist perspective. This leads us to the initial limitations of this work, which must be considered, namely the application of a Western theoretical framework and concepts to understand the specific characteristics of Arab states. However, the study provides new insights into the promotion and internalization of norms in the Arab world.

Furthermore, another limitation in the analysis becomes more evident in the second part of the paper. Specifically, while the promotion of democratic norms can be tracked based on the means used or the objectives pursued, the impact remains harder to prove. Authors such as Larbi Sadiki or Katerina Dalacoura describe the reforms introduced by Arab regimes as rather cosmetic or very limited. Therefore, the paper does not seek to establish the impact of norms based on reactions or outcomes but rather through concrete references to the laws adopted and amendments introduced in the Egyptian constitution. In this sense, a constructivist approach is more suitable, as it focuses not so much on causes and effects but rather on the context in which the promotion and dissemination of democratic norms took place and how these were perceived by the actors involved in the normative cycle.

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[6] Diamond, "Why are there no Arab democracies?", 100.

The first part of this paper focuses on the method of promoting democratic norms in the MENA region by the U.S., which, in this case, can be likened to what Finnemore and Sikkink termed as a *norm entrepreneur*, given "its attempt to convince a critical mass of states (norm leaders) to embrace new norms"[7]. The measures taken by Arab states to comply with U.S. demands are also discussed. The second part examines the impact of promoting, disseminating, and internalizing U.S. norms on political regimes in the context of the Arab Spring, but not as a direct cause of it, as argued by several authors including Marc Lynch, Jean-Pierre Filiu, and Asef Bayat. According to this perspective, the Arab Spring is more accurately characterized as a grassroots movement, at least initially, with the influence and interest of the US playing a role in the unfolding protests in Egypt, the NATO intervention in Libya, and the involvement of Saudi Arabia and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies in Bahrain and Yemen. However, other authors also contend that "Bush's rhetoric on democracy and pressure on some Arab leaders such as Mubarak helped to create at least some space for mobilization"[8]. This assertion, coupled with the initial success in Tunisia and Egypt and the regional spread of the uprisings, constituted compelling reasons for the outbreak of a perceived existential crisis in other Arab states, especially following the fall of the Mubarak regime.

II. Methodology

Regarding the methodology employed, the adopts a qualitative approach based in constructivism, focusing on interpretation and description. The research also includes the analysis of Egypt as a case study. This methodological approach is motivated by the fact that, as argued by several authors, including David McCourt, constructivism is "an interpretive approach centered on the reconstruction of intersubjective meanings, and analyzing texts such as speeches, official documents, academic articles, and newspapers is the only way to do constructivism"[9]. At the same time, it must be emphasized that the study

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[7] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (September 1998): 895, DOI: 10.1162/002081898550789.

[8] Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), 63.

[9] David McCourt, *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), 97.

also has a quantitative dimension, analyzing three laws adopted and one constitutional amendment introduced in 2005. Their significance is reflected in the organization of the first multicandidate, direct presidential elections in that year. In this regard, the necessary information was collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including speeches by American and Egyptian heads of state, legislative and constitutional provisions, and works by specialists in the field of democratization.

Before delving into the actual analysis, it is first necessary to define the concepts used in this paper. Therefore, the definition of norms in this case refers to "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity"[10]. In other words, as Nicholas Onuf also suggests, norms, like rules, are "statements that tell people (in this case, states) what we should do"[11], and failure to comply may result in certain measures or sanctions imposed by states adhering to those norms. These norms can be expressed through speech acts, such as speeches by officials of the American administration, which, although not actual rules, when repeatedly promoted can be internalized as rules, resulting in normative effects. These acts, in turn, can be divided into "assertive acts that imply that the hearer should accept the underlying belief, directive acts that demand the performance of some action, and commissive acts that impose duties on the speaker"[12].

Thus, it can be argued that these norms entail a series of expectations and conditions for them to not only be disseminated but also internalized to a certain extent. In this regard, while the U.S. highlighted through its delivered speeches the benefits associated with a democratic regime, such as ensuring stability, prosperity, or countering radical Islamism, Arab states exhibited more reservation in adopting democratic principles. This hesitation stems from the fact that "autocrats and the millions who support them see dictatorship as a bulwark against chaos and the dangers of mass politics"[13]. A conclusive example in this regard is Algeria, where the first general elections organized and won by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in 1991 led to the outbreak of a devastating

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[10] Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", 891.
[11] Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *Making Sense, Making Worlds. Constructivism in Social Theory and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.
[12] Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations. The Politics of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 171.
[13] Shadi Hamid, *The Problem of Democracy America, the Middle East, and the Rise and Fall of an Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 116.

civil war. This conflict "alienated both Western strategists and westernized local elites from the idea of democracy".[14]

Analyzing the mode of promotion and dissemination of democratic norms in the Arab world by the US is particularly relevant, given the strategic importance of the MENA region in the context of international relations. Understanding this process can provide a broader perspective on the exercise of normative influence by the U.S. and its impact on Arab states. Furthermore, the use of a constructivist approach provides the research with a systemic view of how Arab states perceived and reacted to pressures for democratization coming from the U.S. The choice of Egypt as a case study is well-grounded, given its dual role during the analyzed period. Analyzing this case can help understand the complexity and diversity of perceptions and reactions triggered by the promotion of democratic norms.

III.   The Emergence of Democratic Norms in the MENA Region

The new international context of the early 2000s confronted Arab states with a difficult choice on whether they should maintain the stability characteristic of authoritarian regimes or reform them based on U.S. norms. This was because the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, prompted a reassessment of U.S. foreign policy, with a focus on addressing the democratic deficit prevalent in the MENA region, since it was seen as a threat to regional and international security and prosperity. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, the United States made promotion of democracy "a central tenet of US policy to the Middle East"[15], advancing the Freedom Agenda, as the strategy announced by George W. Bush in 2003 came to be known. The Freedom Agenda was based on "the belief that democracy was the best form of government, the assertion that authoritarian stability was no stability at all and that people wanted freedom"[16].

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[14] Peter Mansfield and Nicolas Pelham, *O istorie a Orientului Mijlociu* (Bucureşti: Humanitas Edition, 2015), 372.
[15] Dionysius Markakis, "US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East The Pursuit of Hegemony?", PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012, 2, http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/576/1/Markakis_US_Democracy_Promotion_2012.pdf.
[16] Steven A. Cook, *Protest, Democracy, and Violence in the New Middle East False Dawn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 24.

Consequently, the United States implemented a range of diplomatic, economic, and military measures to achieve its objectives in the MENA region, driven by the belief that "democracy promotion would by default also bring about pro-American attitudes – regardless of U.S. policies in the region"[17]. Among the most ambitious projects of the Bush administration was the presentation of a "new set of proposals for a Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) to be adopted by the eight industrialized nations"[18] during the G-8 summit in 2004. These efforts also extended into the realm of "informing and influencing the publics in the Middle East" by establishing "media outlets such as the Arabic-language Al-Hurra television station and the Al-Sawa radio station"[19].

Additionally, it is worth mentioning initiatives like Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002, which provided support for various activities, including "supporting civil society organizations in domestic election monitoring, training youth to develop advocacy skills, and voter education"[20]. There was also the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative, aimed at integrating various efforts related to "democracy assistance, free trade, investment incentives, private enterprise development, literacy and education, legal reform, civil society, and women's empowerment"[21]. Simultaneously, the Bush administration considered economic and military engagements with Arab states, concluding several investment and trade agreements to strengthen relationships. This also encompassed "an extremely large new package of military sales and assistance for Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the smaller Gulf states"[22].

Thus, while the primary American interests in the MENA region, such as "access to oil, the containment of Iran, support for the state of Israel, and the

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[17] Amaney A. Jamal, *Of Empires and Citizens Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 5.

[18] Tamara Cofman Wittes, "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation", *Brookings*, 10.05.2004, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-new-u-s-proposal-for-a-greater-middle-east-initiative-an-evaluation/.

[19] Markakis, "US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East", 97.

[20] U.S. Department of State Archive, "Fact Sheet: The Middle East Partnership Initiative: U.S. support for freedom and democracy in the Middle East", 18.07.2005, https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/scp/2005/49757.htm.

[21] Robert B. Zoellick, "The Middle East in Transformation – The BMENA Initiative an U.S. Foreign Policy", *U.S. Department of State Archive*, 20.05.2005, https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/46594.htm.

[22] Thomas Carothers, *U.S. Democracy Promotion During and After Bush* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 7, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/democracy_promotion_after_bush_final.pdf.

limiting of Islamist strength and their access to power and weapons of mass destruction"[23], essentially remained the same, they acquired a democratic component manifested by the United States through its influence on Arab regimes. In this regard, Larbi Sadiki identifies a series of strategies employed by the United States, such as intimidation in the case of Lebanon and the Palestinian territories and invasion in the case of Iraq. Both of these represent undemocratic means utilized in the service of promoting democracy, in contrast to the previously mentioned strategies. Hence, there is an inconsistency regarding the manner in which the United States promotes democratic norms, which is based on its economic and security interests, and the motivations of a normative entrepreneur. According to the normative circuit established by Finnemore and Sikkink, a normative entrepreneur focuses on "empathy, altruism, and ideational commitment"[24], with the last factor being the only one observable in the role assumed by the United States.

In other words, the call for democratization initially served as a justification for the initiation of the "war on terror" by the Bush Administration. In this case, it can be argued that a "pragmatic approach towards national interest prevailed over principles of democracy promotion and human rights"[25]. Nevertheless, the normative circuit used remains a relevant framework because, despite being rooted in the hegemon's interests, taking into account the United States' status as a global superpower following the end of the Cold War, the stages of the circuit were adhered to. Furthermore, as Finnemore and Sikkink emphasize, when analyzing the role of the United States in promoting democracy, one aspect to consider is that "many norm entrepreneurs do not so much act against their interests as they act in accordance with a redefined understanding of their interests"[26].

Having established that democracy promoted through methods that are inherently undemocratic cannot be successful, my subsequent focus will be on scrutinizing the objectives, expectations, and commitments adopted by the Bush Administration through an analysis of the President's political speech delivered in 2003 at the National Endowment for Democracy. At that time, President Bush declared his intention to continue promoting democracy and peace globally, with the Middle East region taking a central role in these efforts.

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[23] Jamal, "Of Empires and Citizens", 4.
[24] Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", 898.
[25] Larbi Sadiki, "The Arab Spring: The 'People' in International Relations", in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Louise Fawcett (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2016), 348.
[26] Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", 898.

More specifically, in his speech, Bush highlighted the normative capacity of the U.S., stating that: "It is no accident that the rise of so many democracies took place in a time when the world's most influential nation was itself a democracy"[27]. Additionally, the President mentioned the moral and military measures and commitments the U.S. had undertaken internationally to protect free nations and create the necessary conditions for new democracies to develop, likening the U.S. to a model that "provided inspiration for oppressed peoples"[28].

However, the U.S.A's commitment to promoting democracy continued to face significant challenges in a region like the Middle East where "democracy has not yet taken roots", especially in those "countries of great strategic importance"[29]. Nevertheless, Bush maintained his belief that Islam was compatible with democratic values, citing examples like Turkey or Indonesia as Muslim-majority countries with democratic governance. He also noted that over half of the Muslims worldwide lived under the rule of "democratically constituted governments"[30]. Notwithstanding these affirmations, the President was acutely cognizant of the democratic deficit afflicting the Arab states, the negative repercussions of which reverberate not only at regional level but also on the international stage. It is precisely for this reason that President Bush issued a call to the allied Arab governments of the Middle East, warning them about the perils posed by military and theocratic dictatorships, and that they "need to confront real problems, and serve the true interests of their nations"[31].

In this context, the speech distinguished between Arab allies and states hostile to American objectives, such as Syria and Iraq under Saddam Hussein, which were generally associated with negative events and actions such as the Syrian occupation of Lebanese territory and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait[32]. Unlike Syria and Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia held an important role in terms of their strategic relationships with the United States. In this sense, President Bush had much higher expectations for these two states as evidenced by his

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[27] George W. Bush White House, "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East", 06.11.2003, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] George W. Bush White House, "Fact Sheet: President Bush's Freedom Agenda Helped Protect The American People", 18.12.2008, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/freedomagenda/.

statements: "Saudi government can demonstrate true leadership in the region" regarding the implementation of reforms, and "Egypt... should show the way toward democracy in the Middle East"[33]. The speech concluded by reaffirming the new position adopted by the U.S. regarding the promotion of democracy in the MENA region, stating that "lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe"[34], and this required that the U.S. pursue a new strategy in the region.

Therefore, relative to the content of the discourse, all three categories of previously enumerated speech acts become apparent, with the United States assuming the role of a normative entrepreneur through its declarations, commitments, and demands addressed to the states in the MENA region. In this manner, the United States sought to persuade a critical mass of Arab states, with Saudi Arabia and Egypt as the most prominent among them, to adhere to these democratic norms. This persuasion is pursued through tailored approaches, such as the adoption of political and economic initiatives that would grant greater rights and liberties to their citizens.

In the same vein, the 2003 discourse constitutes an initial phase of a normative circuit as established by the United States through methods such as "praise (for behavior that conforms to group norms), and ridicule (for deviation)"[35]. Moreover, concerning Egypt's predominant role as a norm leader, this was once again underscored during the 2005 discourse by American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, delivered at the American University in Cairo.

More specifically, in her speech, Condoleezza Rice initially emphasized the importance the U.S. placed on its economic and strategic relations with Egypt, noting Egypt's role as a leader in the history of the MENA region, as the "first modern nation"[36]. This assertion was primarily based on Egypt's decision-making process in times of crisis, such as introducing economic reforms or making peace with Israel, leading the state to be considered an essential leader for regional progress, a role that the U.S. expected its ally to continue fulfilling in the future.

Secretary of State Rice thus continued her speech by calling on states in the region to respect the will of their citizens and the democratic ideals. She

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[33] George W. Bush White House, "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East".
[34] Ibid.
[35] Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", 902.
[36] U.S. Department of State Archive, "Secretary Condoleezza Rice – Remarks at the American University in Cairo", 20.06.2005, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm.

highlighted progress made by some Arab states in this direction, like Iraq and Jordan, while also assuring support not only from the U.S. and Egypt but from the entire world, especially regarding the Palestinian issue. Furthermore, the highest expectations expressed were still centered around Egypt's progress given "President Mubarak's decision to amend the country constitution and hold multiparty election", directly urging both the government to "fulfill the promise it has made to its people – and to the entire world – by giving its citizens the freedom to choose"[37], and the opposition to accept the final results and refrain from acts of violence. These very demands were to further weaken the normative influence exerted by the U.S. over Arab states, particularly with the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections of 2006.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that Condoleezza Rice underscored the benefits democracy could bring not only to governments but also to their citizens, given that it "can help to build trust and settle old disputes" and "can be a path to lasting justice"[38]. However, for these objectives to become reality, the Secretary of State made a final appeal to the Egyptian people, who "should be at the forefront of this great journey, just as you have led this region through the great journeys of the past"[39].

It can be observed from the structure of the discourse that it is very similar to the one delivered by George W. Bush in 2003, through the declarations and promises made regarding the U.S.' and its allies' support in the process of democratizing the Middle East. The only distinction that stands out is that while the American President directed his requests towards the governments of Arab states, the Secretary of State had similar expectations from the Arab people, primarily the Egyptians. In other words, the American Secretary of State's discourse was based on the belief that for the promotion of democracy to be successful, efforts had to be jointly made by both parties, emphasizing the central role of cooperation between the political and social spheres.

Before moving on to the analysis of the next speech, it can be noted that the arrival of a new president at the White House in 2009 also meant a change in the Middle East policy based on "a set of liberal internationalist principles which are part and parcel of the ideology of the mainstream of the Democratic Party"[40]. As Katerina Dalacoura remarks: "As the many failures of US

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Katerina Dalacoura, "US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Theoretical Perspectives and Policy Recommendations", *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 2, no. 3 (July 2010): 68.

democracy promotion in the Middle East became apparent by 2005-6, realist views were gradually re-asserted against neo-conservative idealism in the Bush administration"[41].

To further support these claims, I will refer to the speech delivered by the American President Barack Obama in 2009, at the American University in Cairo. During the speech, Barack Obama brought to the attention of his audience a series of issues that have historically fueled tensions between the West and Islam, with the focus here being on the promotion of democracy. In this case, the American President made a direct reference to the Iraq War and the controversies it sparked, assuring the audience that "No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation by any other"[42], while simultaneously stating that U.S. support for promoting democratic ideals "to governments that reflect the will of the people"[43] remained unwavering. Furthermore, in his speech, Obama highlighted the benefits of a democratic regime, stating that "Governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful, and secure"[44].

However, unlike the previous speeches analyzed, Barack Obama did not emphasize the role of a single state or a particular people in promoting democracy; his demands were much more general. In this manner, the American president sets a unique standard for those in power, stating that "You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise..."[45]. President Obama put the emphasis primarily on the idea of cooperation, without singling out any particular actor's role in this matter. In this way, the U.S. assured other governments, their citizens, religious leaders, and business people that only together can they create a better world, "a world where extremists no longer threaten our people, and American troops have come home, where Israelis and Palestinians are each secure in a state of their own,... where governments serve their citizens..."[46].

Based on the analysis of the speeches examined above, it can be asserted that the U.S., through the discourses of the American officials, established a pattern

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[41] Ibid., 67.
[42] The White House – President Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at Cairo University – Remarks By The President On A New Beginning", 04.06.2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-Cairo-university-6-04-09.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

in terms of promoting democratic norms. Specifically, the external influence exerted by the United States, alongside the political initiatives implemented through the introduction of "programs on judicial reform and support and training for journalists; civic education and human rights awareness... and support for women's empowerment"[47], did indeed contribute to forming a critical mass of Arab states where democratic norms could be disseminated. When considering their impact on U.S. foreign policy, the effects of these three speeches remain more quantitatively oriented, given that the quality of their impact has consistently degraded, shifting from one U.S. administration to another.

This was due to two main reasons. Firstly, the need for the democratization of Arab states and the benefits expressed in George W. Bush's speech were interpreted differently by these states, especially Egypt, to avoid becoming a threat to their regimes. In other words, although these acts were not outright ignored or rejected by Egypt, their effectiveness was affected by the significance attributed to the norms and how they were internalized. Secondly, the speeches also entailed the existence of a set of expectations, best exemplified in Condoleezza Rice's speech, when addressing the Palestinian issue. Her expectations regarding the establishment of a democratic regime after the 2005 elections remained unrealized, with the victory of Hamas in 2006 causing "The Bush administration's reaction to the Palestinian elections so qualified U.S. advocacy of democracy as to render it almost meaningless"[48].

These observations demonstrate that the normative cycle established by the U.S. did not follow a gradual, progressive trajectory; quite the contrary, the entire process entered a period of stagnation or even regression due to events in the MENA region, which caused "most American policymakers... be less enthusiastic about democratization abroad if democratization doesn't produce encouraging outcomes"[49].

So far, the analysis showed Egypt's role as a norm leader which in this context becomes evident when considering the demands and expectations of U.S. officials towards this state. The next objective of this research is to analyze the impact of democratic norms on Egypt. To achieve this, it is necessary to consider two additional secondary questions: how were democratic norms

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[47] Katerina Dalacoura, "US democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a critique", *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (October 2005): 965.

[48] Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention The Politics of the U.S. – Egyptian Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 101.

[49] Hamid, *The Problem of Democracy*, 114.

perceived, and under what conditions were they implemented? As such, the next section aims to analyze the chosen case and answer the previously mentioned questions so that, in the end, we can understand the essence of the normative duality attributed to Egypt.

IV.   The Impact of Democratic Norms on the Mubarak Regime

At the beginning of the 21st century, democratic norms and principles seemed to be on the rise in the MENA region, at least at the level of political discourse. This was also the case with the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. In a speech delivered in 1999, the Egyptian head of state announced the commitments that Egypt would undertake for democratization: "We will work towards consolidating our democracy gradually, steadily, and in the spirit of tolerance and cooperation that is known about the Egyptian people"[50]. The commitments made by the president hold significant importance for our analysis, considering that they directly referred to the political measures that needed to be implemented in the following years. After securing a new presidential term through a referendum that year, the parliamentary elections of 2000 followed, in which candidates from the Muslim Brotherhood won 17 seats, "some of whom were independent and some of whom were nominated in other parties"[51].

This constituted a first blow to the regime and particularly to the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), which only secured 38% of seats. The party was rescued "from this embarrassing situation only after 216 independent candidates joined or rejoined the party after the election"[52]. Consequently, the measures taken by the Egyptian authorities towards democratization were realized through the fact that "They have expended political spaces – electoral arenas in particular... They have also tempered their opposition to Islamist political participation"[53]. These outcomes are rooted in another discourse of President Mubarak from 1999, in which he stated "my complete confidence in

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[50] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 67.
[51] Ismail Kurun, "Democratisation in Egypt From A Historical Perspective: Problems, Pitfalls and Prospects", *Yonetim ve Ekonomi* 22, no. 1 (2015): 186.
[52] Khalil Alanani, "Egyptian Parlamentary Elections in the Shadow of 2000", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 20.08.2008, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/21117.
[53] Heydemann, "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World", 1.

the fact that the opposition is part of governance!... I am not talking about a token presence for the opposition... rather... about a real presence!"[54].

Given that the subject of this article focuses on the impact of democratic norms on the Egyptian regime, I will examine how these norms were perceived and implemented by the authorities in order to identify, based on promises, requirements, and expectations, the formation of a normative pattern different from that established by U.S. officials. In this regard, a starting point can be traced to the pro-democratic declarations made by President Mubarak in the early 2000s. To determine the impact of democratic norms in Egypt, I analyze the practices of the Egyptian political authorities understood as "those realizations of a particular purpose which are considered to comply with certain generally conceived principles"[55].

Alongside the above-mentioned commissive statements, we find other types of acts, such as assertive ones, which are evident in the same 1999 discourse by the Egyptian president. In this respect, he expressed the following factual statement: "It (Egypt) has granted freedom of opinion and of the press in an unprecedented way... Egypt has taken important steps... that cannot be denied except by an arrogant ingrate"[56]. In this initial phase, Hosni Mubarak emphasized a state of affairs that seems to provide the necessary foundations to meet the expectations subsequently declared by officials of the United States administration in 2003 and later in 2005.

Interestingly enough, the Egyptian president's discourses and those of the American officials appear to complement each other, to a certain point. This point is reached when President Mubarak switches to a declarative act where, unlike U.S. officials who emphasize the role of the regime or the idea of socio-political cooperation for democratization, he rather highlights the role of parties and individuals. He believed that "if we collectively are eager for guarantees – to guarantee free and fair elections, then it is up to the parties and individuals participating in the electoral process, to put aside undemocratic practices"[57].

We can remark that just as the United States promotes and disseminates norms through a normative circuit, Egypt had built its own pattern through

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[54] Michele Durocher Dunne, *Democracy in Contemporary Egyptian Political Discourse*, (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 75.
[55] Nicholas Onuf, "Rules in Practice", in *On Rules, Politics and Knowledge: Friedrich Kratochwil, International Relations and Domestic Affairs*, ed. Oliver Kessler et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 117.
[56] Dunne, "Democracy in Contemporary Egyptian Political Discourse", 76.
[57] Ibid., 77.

which norms were to be internalized. Thus, the mode of implementing these norms involved the existence of different perceptions and convictions in Egypt regarding democracy compared to those of its U.S. partner. In other words, Egypt adopted a distinct approach to the practical implementation of democratic norms that were "never intended to extend into substantial political reform and a sophisticated structure of checks and balances"[58]. This difference arises from the existence of distinctive perceptions of democracy. Rather than focusing on the benefits announced by George W. Bush, Egypt seemed to emphasize the disadvantages of this type of regime, which could lead to political instability. This prompted Hosni Mubarak to "reinforce the image of a strongly centralized government as a desirable reality, and of democratization as a top-down process completely controlled by the government"[59].

Thus, at the start of the 2000s, there were 50 legally established political parties in Egypt. However, their significance was quite limited, given that the "two real political forces in this country are the military and the Muslim Brotherhood"[60], and the latter was outlawed. Additionally, press censorship persisted, albeit at a much lower level than that instituted by Mubarak's predecessors. Notably, even though authorities took measures toward implementing political and economic reforms, the limits within which various organizations such as the press, trade unions, and political parties could operate remained strictly determined by the government. Consequently, "[t]he various players who were increasingly empowered were not supposed to evolve into viable opposition or real agents of change"[61]. This being said, the first half of the 2000s proved to be a considerably tense period for the Mubarak regime. He had to contend with external pressure exerted by the Bush Administration for the implementation of political reforms in Egypt, as well as deal with internal protests organized by the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kefaya), which gained momentum in 2004. This prompted the authorities to employ a mixture of containment, coercion, and confrontation strategies, allowing the regime "to claim progress and some political development, and to diffuse some of the masses' anger"[62].

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[58] Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 186.
[59] Dunne, "Democracy in Contemporary Egyptian Political Discourse", 53.
[60] Ibid., 46.
[61] Osman, *Egypt on the Brink*, 186.
[62] Ibid., 206.

Nevertheless, the situation worsened further after the presidential elections of 2005 when, for the first time since taking power in 1981, Hosni Mubarak "announced the intention of holding competitive presidential elections"[63]. However, despite this initiative leading to limited democratic reforms through constitutional amendments, the Mubarak regime ensured the elimination of all anti-regime elements from the political arena. In this manner, the Egyptian president secured a new term, while his main political opponent and founder of the Al-Ghad party received only 7.58% of the votes due to "the unfair election system and the electoral frauds"[64]. Under these circumstances, the event that dealt a blow to the regime's established control came after the parliamentary elections held in 2005. In that year, the Muslim Brotherhood garnered the largest number of votes in its history, securing 88 seats in the People's Assembly. The resulting political landscape served as a warning signal for the regime. The subsequent years were characterized by repressive measures taken by the authorities to suppress the Islamist threat and local uprisings that further eroded citizens' trust in the regime.

For Egypt, 2005 marked a turning point in terms of promoting and internalizing norms. If during this year, the Mubarak regime introduced a series of limited political reforms that allowed for a competitor to arise in the 2005 presidential elections, after this year, authorities embarked on a wave of repression targeting members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other secular and religious political factions. This was to ensure that the outcomes achieved by these groups in 2005 would not be replicated.

To better understand the context in which these reforms were introduced, it is necessary to review the laws adopted and amendments made to the constitution in 2005, with particular significance placed on Article 76, which "called for the direct popular election of the president and established an electoral commission"[65]. This is the way in which Mubarak was preparing for the presidential elections to be held that year. That said, the amendment to Article 76 was heavily criticized, especially by opposition parties, with Nathan J. Brown suggesting that "As amended in 2005, Article 76 set such a stringent

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[63] Tamara Cofman Wittes, "The 2005 Egyptian Elections: How Free? How Important?", *Brookings*, 24.08.2005, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-2005-egyptian-elections-how-free-how-important/.
[64] Kurun, "Democratisation in Egypt", 186.
[65] Michele Dunne, "Evaluating Egyptian Reform", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, no. 66, January 2006, 8, https://carnegieendowment.org/2006/01/24/evaluating-egyptian-reform-pub-17940.

standard for eligibility for presidential candidacy that the National Democratic Party would have been left without competitors in the next election"[66]. Despite the fact that the amendment was perceived to be rather undemocratic, it represented a unique political decision, considering that the last time a constitutional amendment was passed was in 1980, "allowing the president to run for an unlimited number of terms, rather than one term as was initially stipulated in Egypt's 1971 constitution"[67].

Among the laws worth mentioning are the Presidential Election Law 174 of 2005, which outlines rules for the electoral campaign, with Article 1 stipulating that "The president shall be elected through direct, public, secret ballot by voters enrolled on electorate rosters"[68]. Additionally, the procedure for the formation of political parties was altered through the adoption of Political Parties Law 177 of 2005. According to the new law, parties are required "merely to notify the Political Parties Committee (PPC) that they have started operating, putting the onus on the committee to object within 90 days" instead of requiring parties "to apply for permission to operate"[69]. Another law that should be mentioned is Law 173 of 2005, which deals with political rights, "establishing an electoral commission for parliamentary elections"[70].

The changes on the Mubarak regime were not just effects of democracy promotion by the USA, nor were they in line with the generally negative reactions coming from both leaders and the Arab public, given that "In the post-9/11 Middle East 'democracy' was often perceived as a Trojan horse for Western interests at the expense of local ones"[71]. Instead, the impact of democratic norms can be measured through concrete measures such as the amendments or laws adopted in 2005 by the Mubarak regime to organize the presidential and parliamentary elections in that year. These reforms aimed primarily to alleviate the domestic pressure from popular movements like

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[66] Nathan J. Brown, Michele Dunne, and Amr Hamzawy, "Egypt's Controversial Constitutional Amendments", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 2007, 4, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt_constitution_webcommentary01.pdf.

[67] Khairi Abaza, "Egypt: Constitutional Amendment and Prospects for Change", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 25.05.2005, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/egypt-constitutional-amendment-and-prospects-change.

[68] Law No. 174 for the year 2005 on Regulating the Presidential Elections", https://ace project.org/ero-en/regions/mideast/EG/Law%20No.%20174%20of%202005%20-%20english .pdf/view.

[69] Human Rights Watch, "Monopolizing Power: Egypt`s Political Parties Law", *RefWorld*, 04.01.2007, https://www.refworld.org/docid/45a4e0a92.html.

[70] Dunne, "Evaluating Egyptian Reform", 8.

[71] Dalacoura, "US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion", 64.

Kefaya, as well as the external pressure from the U.S. Consequently, they drew the attention of the American administration which stated that "We encourage a fair contest for the parliament and presidency, with impartial observers. The world will watch with great interest as the Egyptians write their new election law, establish the election commission, and create novel expectations for democratic participation"[72]. These expectations were continually fueled by other constitutional amendments under which "the president's power to dissolve any houses of the legislative was removed; the parliament was given the right to discuss and vote on budgetary issues; the parliament gained the right to dismiss the cabinet with a no-confidence vote"[73].

Lastly, it is worth noting that the Mubarak regime continued to implement a series of reforms in the following years, in part due to the influence exerted by the U.S. This was because the Bush Administration "exerted the greatest pressure on Egyptian President Mubarak, but even that has ended up largely toothless"[74]. In other words, the reforms adopted by Egypt did not threaten the stability of the regime but increasingly favored the ruling elite as the commitment made by the U.S. to promote democracy in the MENA region continued to decline, following Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections and the outbreak of a civil war in Iraq the same year.

As a result, "by the beginning of 2007, it was evident that the Bush push for Middle East democracy was effectively over"[75]. This was the year in which the Mubarak regime continued to implement amendments for its own benefit. These included amendments to Article 76 passed in 2007, which "restricted the right of any individual to run for the presidency", and Article 88, through which "the duty of monitoring of the judiciary over the elections was removed, and this task was given to the electoral commission"[76]. It should be noted that there are also authors such as Michele Dunne, Amr Hamzawy, and Nathan J. Brown who place the end of the promotion of democratic norms one year earlier, in 2006 because "its (U.S.') priorities shifted from transformational back to traditional diplomacy to contain regional crises"[77].

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[72] Zoellick, "The Middle East in Transformation".
[73] Kurun, "Democratisation in Egypt From A Historical Perspective", 186.
[74] Carothers, "U.S. Democracy Promotion During and After Bush", 6.
[75] Ibid., 7.
[76] Kurun, "Democratisation in Egypt From A Historical Perspective", 186.
[77] Michele Dunne, Amr Hamzawy, and Nathan J. Brown, "Egypt – Don't Give Up on Democracy Promotion", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 2007, 1, https://carnegie endowment.org/files/pb_52_egypt_final.pdf.

Though President Bush "had eased his pressure over Egyptian democratization following the success of Islamists in the 2005 elections"[78], the results of the parliamentary elections in 2010 proved to be a double-edged sword for the regime. They had led to the removal of the Muslim Brothers from the parliament, and thus made the regime's main problem go away, but, at the same time, they exacerbated another by "draining nearly all remaining credibility from the electoral system"[79].

From a normative standpoint, throughout the first decade of the 21st century, the U.S. objective of promoting democracy in the MENA region posed a dilemma for Arab states: should they heed the declarations and expectations of the U.S. or continue their longstanding practice of maintaining regime stability by eliminating any form of threat? A response to this dilemma was provided by President Mubarak himself who, at the Alexandria Conference in 2004, stated that "Existing political structures would be 'strengthened' and 'modernized' but there would be no strategic overhaul, such as the introduction of real competitive elections, the end to emergency regulations, or the suspension of restrictions on civil-society organizations"[80].

The model promoted by Mubarak came into contradiction with President Bush's vision expressed in the proposal of the Greater Middle East Initiative, during the G-8 summit in 2004, which, in addition to economic development projects and efforts to combat illiteracy, included "government-to-government talks intended to offer political support and technical advice to Middle Eastern leaders interested in undertaking reform"[81]. In practice, the American proposal only exacerbated the fears of Arab leaders, who believed that "America was attempting to impose external political models on the region"[82], ultimately leading to the abandonment of the proposal.

Precisely this pattern, rooted in the belief that Arab states, including Egypt, should continue their established practices, remained the organizing principle in

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[78] Lynch, "The Arab Uprising", 94.
[79] Michele Dunne and Amr Hamzawy, "From Too Much Egyptian Opposition to Too Little – and Legal Worries Besides", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 13.12.2010, https://carnegieendowment.org/2010/12/13/from-too-much-egyptian-opposition-to-too-little-and-legal-worries-besides-pub-42128.
[80] Robert Satloff, "Alexandria: The Twin Faces of Arab Reform", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 19.03.2004, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/alexandria-twin-faces-arab-reform.
[81] Council on Foreign Relations, "In Support of Arab Democracy: Why and How. Report of an Independent Task Force", New York, 2005, 38, https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Arab_Democracy_TF.pdf.
[82] Cofman Wittes, "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative".

the region, at least until 2011 when the wave of uprisings in Tunisia jeopardized the status quo and the stability of the MENA region as a whole. In this case, Egypt's role could be likened to that of a norm breaker. It is difficult to imagine what would have happened if the consequences of the Arab Spring had only affected Tunisia, leaving other countries in the region unaffected by the ripple effects of these revolutionary movements. However, in 2011, just days after the removal of Tunisian dictator Ben Ali from power, the Cairo regime's confidence in its own stability seemed unshakable. Egyptian Interior Minister Habib al-Adli declared: "No Egyptian official trembled at what happened in Tunis. It's impossible to compare it to Egypt; the whole world acknowledges Egypt's stability"[83].

The fall of the Mubarak regime just a few weeks after the Tunisian events turned Egypt into a regional norm breaker, giving protesters not only hope that dictators could be defeated but also the conviction that the outcomes achieved in Tunisia and Egypt could be successfully replicated. In other words, while "Egypt did not produce a regional 'revolutionary bandwagon', given that "protests were under way in four other Middle Eastern countries before Egyptian took to the streets"[84], the removal of the dictators in the first two countries created the critical mass necessary to pave the way for the rest of the political changes that were taking place in the region. This was due to the fact that the risk of reproducing the outcomes achieved in Tunisia and Egypt posed an existential threat to other Arab leaders in the region. As such, they had to adapt to the new situation by finding fast solutions such as offering political and financial concessions in the case of states like Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Jordan or resorting to coercive acts in countries like Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

Another argument supporting the notion that Egypt acted as a norm breaker is the manner in which subsequent waves of protests unfolded. If the uprisings in Tunisia were characterized by spontaneity, "moving from the periphery to the center... the opposite of the Egyptian occupation of Tahrir Square, which ignited disturbances all over the country"[85]. Thus, the protests that continued in other states of the region seemed to follow a pattern more similar to the

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[83] Mona El-Ghobashy, *Bread and Freedom Egypt`s Revolutionary Situation* (California: Stanford University Press, 2021), 3.
[84] Cook, *Protest, Democracy, and Violence*, 4.
[85] Jean-Pierre Filiu, *The Arab Revolution Ten Lessons From the Democratic Uprising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64.

Egyptian case, attempting to emulate "the methods used, the language, and, of course, the success achieved"[86].

A final question arises in this study. If Egypt served as an example for protesters in other Arab states, why can we still not call it a normative leader? This is because norms involve expectations and commitments, no matter how general they may be, made by one party to another. In the case of the Arab Spring, we lack this element. In Egypt, we have the collision of two different visions: of people demanding regime change and of President Hosni Mubarak, who relied on a mix of promises made to protesters through his own speeches and acts of violence that only discredited his position further.

In practice, what made this state a regional norm breaker was the replication of Tunisia's outcomes in a country with "the largest population in the region and... with so much political, cultural, and social influence in the Middle East"[87]. The removal of President Hosni Mubarak was perceived as a threat that other Arab regimes had to respond to in order to reinstate the old "normative circuit". In this sense, the most important objective for the other affected Arab states was no longer about preventing or halting change but focused rather on the manner in which it was conducted: top-down, in accordance with the old normative pattern.

V.   Conclusions

Drawing a final parallel with the normative cycle proposed by Finnemore and Sikkink, throughout this study, we can discern the main stages of a norm's life: its emergence; widespread acceptance through the creation of a critical mass of states; and ultimately, internalization. This final point marked the stage where the circuit established by the U.S. collided with the one associated with Egypt and Arab states in general, as they preferred the adoption of limited reforms that "did not bridge the gap between state and society"[88]. Through its speeches, the U.S. conveyed to the Arab states what they should do, leaving the implementation of norms in the hands of the regimes. In this regard, although the U.S. declared that it does not want to impose a specific political model on

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[86] Lynch, "The Arab Uprising", 102.

[87] Cook, *Protest, Democracy, and Violence*, 4.

[88] Cihat Battaloglu and Fadi Farasin, "From Democratization to Securitization: Post-Arab Spring Political Order in the Middle East", *Digest of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 2 (2017): 312, DOI: 10.1111.

the MENA region, its interests and expectations transformed the Arab states into a monolith without taking into account the specific characteristics of each case. This context led eventually to the negative outcomes witnessed in the cases of Iraq, Hamas, and even Egypt, which, in turn, convinced the U.S. to abandon democratization in exchange for the stability of Arab regimes. Their stability would then ensure its security needs in the MENA region.

This U.S. approach, however, placed its Arab allies in a difficult position with direct consequences for the stability of their political regimes. Specifically, Arab states had to choose between complying with U.S. declarations and expectations or continuing their historical practice of ensuring regime stability through the implementation of limited political reforms. The situation placed both Egypt and the U.S. in an unwanted situation that now they had to confront directly. For the U.S., the failure to achieve its democratization objectives in the MENA region led to a reorganization of its foreign policy objectives concerning its relations with the Arab allies. In other words, the U.S. prioritized cooperation on strategic and economic issues over democracy promotion. This was due to the fact that "American leverage in the Middle East is low when it comes to democratization... This is because Arab governments doubt our commitment to those values and think our threats hollow"[89]. For Egypt, particularly in the case of the Mubarak regime, though the commitment gradually lost credibility among the citizens and the regime gained a false sense of stability, this false impression proved fatal not only for Mubarak but also for other leaders who faced an existential threat to their regimes.

Based on what we have analyzed so far, the study has showed that Egypt's case meets the conditions of normative duality. Egypt alternately fulfilled two completely opposite roles, both willingly and unwillingly: that of a norm leader according to its U.S. ally's expectations and that of a norm breaker for other Arab states facing the wave of protests that erupted in 2011. Regarding the application of Finnemore and Sikkink's normative framework, this is more challenging to determine, as the case study depended not only on the strategies or tools used to promote democratic norms but, on their internalization as well. In this case, Egypt was more concerned with the stability of the regime than with the implementation of a genuine democratization process.

In relation to the research objectives, the study juxtaposed two entirely different circuit: 1) the American normative cycle which featured well-defined stages, clear expectations, expressed commitments, and intended beneficial

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[89] Hamid, *The Problem of Democracy*, 237-238.

consequences for the involved actors; and 2) in contrast, the circuit specific to Arab states was based on different perceptions of the significance of the promoted norms and of the internalization pattern. Notably, although the pattern was designed to ensure the stability of the regime, it yielded a series of unwanted consequences that the authorities had to confront during the Arab Spring outbreak.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the presented case no longer adheres to the model proposed by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink. Instead of normative influences shaping the behavior of the participants in the process, the application of democratic norms has been predominantly shaped by internal constraints and external interests, thus resulting in the overall construction of an artificial normative circuit. Hence, the role of Egypt as a norm breaker referred both to the proliferation of the protestors' calls for regime change, and, more critically, to the reproduction of the initial success achieved in Tunisia and how other Arab states reacted in turn. In hindsight, these states became acutely aware of the existential crisis they were in, especially after Mubarak's removal from power, and took measures as to prevent or delay a similar outcome.

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