

The U.S. Foreign Policy Dynamics towards Tunisia during the Clinton Era

ديناميكيات السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية اتجاه تونس خلال عهدة كلينتون



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Abstract:

This paper examines the tension between idealism and realism in American foreign policy towards Tunisia during the 1990s. It addresses a significant issue of the ways Clinton's enlargement of democracy policy navigated the competing imperatives of promoting democracy and human rights (idealism) versus prioritizing counterterrorism, trade security, and regional stability (realpolitik) in its engagement with Tunisia. By combining deep presentation of the Tunisian domestic politics with a detailed analysis of Clinton's policy dynamics, the paper aims to determine the dominant paradigm that determines U.S. engagements towards Tunisia. Employing a qualitative case study approach and historical analysis, the study draws on authoritative sources. While the first facilitates the understanding of key events such as the early liberalized political and economic policies of Ben Ali and post-Cold war security cooperation, the second examines the evolution of U.S. policy through key periods. The paper finds that U.S policy-makers pursued democratic rhetoric that was overshadowed by intensive trade and counterterrorism collaboration with Ben Ali's Tunisia.

key words: Clinton; counterterrorism; enlargement; trade; Tunisia.

المخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة التوتر بين المثالية والواقعية السياسية في السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية اتجاه تونس خلال التسعينات. وتعالج قضية مهمة حول الطرق التي تناولت بها السياسة التوسيعية الديمقراطية لكلينتون المتطلبات المتعارضة لتعزيز الديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان (المثالية) مقابل اعطاء الاولوية لمكافحة الإرهاب والامن التجاري والاستقرار السياسي (الواقعية السياسية) في تعاملها مع تونس. من خلال الجمع بين العرض المعمق للسياسات

الداخلية التونسية والتحليل المفصل لديناميكيات سياسة كلينتون، تهدف الورقة الى تحديد النموذج السائد، سواء المثالية او الواقعية السياسية، الذي يشكل العلاقات الامريكية التونسية. باستخدام نهج دراسة حالة نوعية وتحليل تاريخي، تستند الدراسة الى مصادر موثوقة. بينما يسهل النهج الاول فهم الاحداث الرئيسية مثل السياسة الليبرالية الاقتصادية والسياسية المبكرة لبن علي، والتعاون الأمني في فترة ما بعد الحرب الباردة، يفحص النهج الثاني تطور السياسة الامريكية خلال الفترات الرئيسية. الورقة توصلت الى ان صناع القرار في الوم اتبعوا خطابا ديموقراطيا مغشى بتعاون لمكافحة الإرهاب واقتصادي مكثف مع تونس ابان حكم بن علي. الكلمات المفتاحية: كلينتون، مكافحة الإرهاب، التوسيعية، التجاري، تونس

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Introduction:

The United States foreign policy towards Tunisia during the 1990s is a fertile soil for study. This paper examines the dominant dynamics that contributed in shaping U.S. policy rhetoric and decisions. It then analyzes the outcomes and implications of the focal strategies, key events and aid programs that marked the U.S.-Tunisia engagements along these years. Tunisia, as part of the North Africa region, proved to be highly important for the U.S. policy-makers during the 1990s. Its geostrategic and economic position contributed in shaping strong bilateral ties with the U.S.

Tunisia's central location in the heart of the North Africa region and as a gateway between Europe and Africa attracted the interests of the U.S. administration under President Bill Clinton. The latter has already launched his grand strategy of 'enlargement', which aimed at widening the spheres of the U.S. influence in the world through the spread of free markets and idealist virtues, mainly democracy and human rights. The Clinton administration opted for building economic and security cooperation with Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali's government. The security cooperation was deepened after the growth of political extremism in the region. The U.S. valued Tunisia as a stable and moderate partner that aligns with the U.S. secular ideologies. Therefore, it provided the Tunisian government with considerable economic and security assistance to sustain its stability.¹

The U.S. diplomatic support was demonstrated also through exchanging visits of highly ranked officials. Furthermore, the U.S. official discourse

¹ Zoubir, Yahia H., U.S. Policy toward North Africa in the 1990s. In Y. H. Zoubir (ed.), North Africa in Transition: State, Society, and Economic Transformation in the 1990s (pp.232-52), University Press of Florida, 2002, p. 233.

reflected the significance of Tunisia's partnership, mainly in the security and economy sectors. It adopted a democratic rhetoric, highlighting the need for advancing further the democratization process in Tunisia. This stance stemmed from Clinton's approach to foster pragmatic alliances that would maximize U.S. economic, namely trade, gains and strengthen security goals simultaneously. This approach has often ignored the undemocratic practices exercised by the Tunisian government against its dissenters.¹ Therefore, Tunisia's role illustrated the U.S. attempts to balance between the overlapping idealistic virtues, embedded in Clinton's enlargement rhetoric, and realpolitik imperatives in the post-Cold war era.

The Clinton administration designed a set of initiatives and aid programs, under the enlargement doctrine's umbrella, to enhance the U.S. commerce and investments in developing countries, including Tunisia. The U.S. policy-makers targeted the Tunisian market mainly due to the local authorities' preparedness for economic reforms and democratic openness. The U.S.-North Africa Economic Partnership was an example initiative that aimed at incentivizing trade and modernizing Tunisia's economy.² Tunisia's economic performance marked a constant progress in some sectors such as agriculture and textile, thanks to U.S. aid programs, namely the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). Although these U.S. intensified economic efforts helped in decreasing the unemployment rates and achieving modest economic progress, it indirectly supported the continuity of democratic violations committed by the local authorities³.

Politically, Tunisia under Ben Ali adopted convergent opinions with the U.S. in regard the Arab-Israeli conflict and war against terrorism. The U.S. policy-makers approved this moderate position as it aligned with Clinton's security goals in the region, mainly after Tunisia's acceptance of the Oslo Accords and key role in regional dialogues.⁴ Furthermore, their diplomatic and security ties have seen significant improvement as a consequence to their agreement about the necessity to contain the growing threats of extremist Islamists in the region. Security partnership was strengthened through incorporating Tunisia in security aid programs that provided considerable military assistance, training, and equipment to the Tunisian security apparatus. The latter employed this military and security expertise not only to combat

¹ Arieff, Alexis, Political transition in Tunisia, Congressional Research Service, 2011.

² U.S. Department of State, Daily press briefing [Collection of Transcripts], U.S. Department of State, 1999.

³ Murphy, E. C., Economic and political change in Tunisia: One step forward, two steps back? Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 54.

⁴ Entelis, J. P., Islam, democracy, and the state in North Africa, U.S., Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 74.

terrorist across borders, but also to prevent Tunisian's political and social grievances to be aired.¹

This paper addresses the overlap of idealism with realpolitik in U.S. policy, U.S. and Tunisian domestic politics, and regional dynamics. It seeks to highlight the effects of idealistic rhetoric and realpolitik decisions on governance, security and economic development, as well as U.S. regional role as democracy advocate. Drawing on authoritative sources, it maintains that the U.S.-Tunisian partnership, from 1993 to 2001, exemplifies a relatively realpolitik approach that failed to reflect the enlargement strategy's emphasis on long-term democratic reforms. It demonstrates that Clinton's administration preferred short-term strategic gains to long-term democratic stability, analyzing thoroughly the main outcomes for Tunisia's political system and U.S. policy coherence. This study criticizes the discrepancy between U.S. rhetoric and actions, advocating for a balanced approach that integrates human rights and governance reforms to enhance both Tunisia's stability and U.S. credibility.

The objective of that paper is to examine the U.S adopted policies, instruments and aims while dealing with Tunisia during Clinton. In parallel to the idealist rhetoric about human rights and democracy advancement, security collaboration and economic partnership proved to be central to Clinton's enlargement strategy. In addition, the paper aimed to provide a comprehensive discussion of the main findings and implications of Clinton's strategy towards Tunisia. It demonstrates how the U.S. democratic principles and idealist values overlapped with pragmatic economic and security interests, and illuminates the U.S preference of strengthening security and commercial partnership over democratic institutions.

This research utilizes a qualitative case study approach, combined with historical analysis, to discuss critically U.S.-Tunisia engagements during the 1990s. The case study approach is implemented through in-depth presentation of key events and policy developments to understand the interplay of U.S. policy, Tunisian domestic politics, and regional dynamics. This approach is suitable for its ability to provide detailed, context-specific analysis of complex phenomena, allowing for the integration of multiple data sources to trace patterns of U.S. pragmatism and its impact on Tunisia's political and economic trajectory.²

The methodology draws on a diverse set of primary sources, including U.S. government documents (State Department reports, Congressional Research

¹ Zoubir, Y., *Ibid.*, p 235.

² Yin, R. K. *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (5th ed.), SAGE Publications, 2014, p. 10.

Service analyses), and declassified archival records of U.S. policy statements (for example, U.S. Department of State, 1995). Secondary sources, such as scholarly works and U.S. foreign policy reports (For example, Entelis, 2016; Zoubir, 2002) provide theoretical and empirical grounding. The historical analysis traces the evolution of U.S. policy through key periods, while the case study approach enables for comprehensive illustration of pivotal events, such as the end of the Cold war and the economic aid programs. Data are analyzed thematically to identify patterns of pragmatism, assess policy outcomes, and assess its implications, ensuring an objective and evidence-based study of U.S.-Tunisia relations.

The paper is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis; it begins with a historical overview of Tunisia's significance in U.S. policies, followed by detailed examination of Clinton's enlargement policy in the 1990s, idealist rhetoric Vs. Policy decisions, Congressional Human Rights' role, economic and security aid programs, human rights tensions, and analysis of policy shifts in post-9/11. It concludes with a synthesis of findings and their implications for Tunisia, the U.S. and the North Africa region.

Tunisia's Domestic politics during the Pre-Clinton Era

Tunisia appeared as an independent country in 1956, after a long fight of their national movement against the French colonialism. Habib Bourguiba, a prominent figure of the liberation movement, was the country's first president, adopting a democratic republican model with strong central government. The latter is headed by a president elected unanimously each 5 years, with major prerogatives.

President Bourguiba held office for life-time after the 1974 constitutional amendment. In politics, political pluralism was prohibited as the Neo-Destour Party dominated the national political scene, granted popular support for its decisive role during the independence struggle. He ruled the country until 1987, achieving stability and remarkable progress in economy, social policies, education and women's rights.¹

Bourguiba's secular and moderate foreign policies contributed in establishing good diplomatic and economic ties with Europe and the U.S. Its economic reforms and shift towards liberalization helped to foster foreign investments and increase largely textile and tourism benefits.² Under the Cold-War context, Tunisia adopted a balanced approach between its need for the U.S.

¹ Alexander, Christopher, *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb*, New York: Routledge, 2010, p.35.

² Murphy, E. C., *Ibid.*, p. 58.

assistance and western investments, and its commitment to the pan-Arab central issues. It served the U.S. mediation in the Palestinian issue by arranging headquarters in Tunis to the Palestinian liberation Organization (PLO) from 1982 to 1994. These efforts contributed in solidifying further the Tunisia-U.S. collaboration.¹

Bourguiba's pragmatic policies in economy, social and foreign sectors were proceeded by his successor, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, after overthrowing him in 1987. The new president aimed through his early liberalized policies at projecting a different image than his predecessor. He alleged to lift press restrictions, the ban on political opposition, and promote citizen's rights and liberties. As a consequence of ratifying a 'national pact' with opposition leaders, thousands of political prisoners were freed and few Islamist parties were tolerated.² Furthermore, he cancelled the life-time term for president and promised further participation of political parties in elections. Despite these constitutional and political changes, the country remained under the single-party rule of the renamed Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), led by President Ben Ali.³ The other political parties were marginalized from taking part in the making-decision process.

Economically, during his early years in office, Ben Ali has to handle the inherited delicate economic situation resulted of the implemented IMF structural adjustment programs. New economic reforms and austerity regulations were required. Forecasting economic recovery, the government pursued further free market policies, such as privatization, to attract more foreign partners. As pro-West partner, Tunisia was encompassed by the U.S. economic aid programs and initiatives in attempt to stimulate domestic commerce and industry. Considering social policies, the government aimed to enhance particular sectors' performance, mainly education and infrastructure. Similar to Bourguiba's strategy, secular reforms have been carried out, issuing changes on the family code, empowering further women's role.⁴ The main objective of the new government's liberalized policies was to maintain order and stability through rising popular satisfaction, decreasing poverty and population rates, achieving economic growth, and consequently gaining European and U.S. support.

¹ U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E-7, Documents on South Asia, 1973–1976. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008.

² Perkins, Kenneth J., *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 28.

³ Alexander, C., *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-44.

In the aftermath of the 1987 coup, Tunisia's allies, namely France and the U.S. supported the new government and ignored the illegitimate shift in power, based their stances on pragmatic grounds of preserving internal and regional stability.¹ Therefore, the Ben Ali government intensified its diplomatic efforts on the regional and international levels. The Algeria-Tunisian cooperation kept thriving despite the border dispute that was settled in 1993. It achieved also rapprochement with Libya in 1987, after several cuts in their bilateral relations. Nevertheless, the Ben Ali government strengthened its political and economic ties with its western allies seeking diplomatic and economic support.²

U.S. Policy Goals in the North Africa Region

The 1990s came as the first decade in the post-cold war era, which has witnessed new world order led by the United States, after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. The U.S. pursued different foreign policy patterns that fit the particularities of the targeted era and region, but primarily aiming at preserving its security and economic interests. In North Africa, the U.S. foreign policy objectives were also determined by the growing threat of Islamic extremist groups, actively existed in Egypt and Algeria.

In this context, the Clinton administration embraced the enlargement doctrine that put emphasis on spreading U.S. influence through promoting democratic institutions and free market mechanisms. This strategy is dominated by idealist rhetoric, but it served mainly pragmatic policy objectives. It sought to maximize its economic and trade gains in the region through several aid programs and initiatives, such as the U.S.-North Africa Economic Initiative.³ Stability and security were also central to the U.S. as it afforded considerable military and security aid to the region's states, mainly with moderate political perspectives. Security training and intelligence sharing exemplified the scope of U.S. security partnership with the North African countries to achieve stability and combat the extremists' terror.⁴

Considering that North Africa is central part of Arab world, the U.S. aimed to mediate with these countries for proceeding the peace resolutions to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict. By launching aid programs in the region, it aimed also to advance democratic pluralism and governance.⁵ This would facilitate constructive dialogue between the opposing factions in each country, avoiding resort to violent means. U.S. preference for Tunisia and Morocco, rather than

¹ Entelis, J. P., Ibid., p.

² Ibid., p.

³ Department of State, Ibid.

⁴ Zoubir, Ibid., p. 168.

⁵ Arieff, Alexis, Political transition in Tunisia, Congressional Research Service, 2011.

Algeria, was reflected for example in the considerable trade aid allotted for each of these countries in the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). The U.S. security-based stance illustrates the U.S. priority of security and commercial partnerships in the region. The first mentioned countries were often considered by the U.S. policy-makers as moderate regimes that enjoyed relatively internal stability, unlike Algeria that witnessed troubling events, affecting its stability and bilateral relations with the U.S.¹

U.S. Policy Goals in Tunisia

Tunisia's Geostrategic significance in North Africa and the Mediterranean regions were decisive factors in forming the nature of the bilateral U.S.-Tunisia relations. During Clinton's presidency, regional stability, security, and economic collaboration were on the top of the U.S. policy goals. Clinton's policy of enlargement of democracy have covered the U.S. pragmatic interests with idealist virtues of democratic governance and human rights advancement.

Counterterrorism and Stability:

The U.S. administration under Clinton opted for maintaining stability in the region. Given the geostrategic location of Tunisia and its pro-western government, the U.S. policy makers were fully aware of the significant role it might play in fighting terrorism and safeguarding the regional stability. For that reason, it provided in discreet the Tunisian military and security apparatus with limited equipment and expertise through intensifying its security initiatives, military training and counterterrorism treaties.² In addition, Tunisia's pragmatic foreign policy helped to push forward the peace resolution in regional conflicts as well as the Palestinian issue by accepting the terms of the Oslo Accords. That stance manifested the diplomatic potential of the country in mediating between the Arab countries and Israel to resolve the broader conflict.³ The U.S. policy-makers were aware of the significance of Tunisia's internal stability for securing their commercial and energy interests, and migration control.

Clinton's Enlargement of Democracy Strategy:

The U.S. government under Clinton adopted two-fold enlargement strategy: enhancing the liberalization of Tunisia's governmental institutions and civil society to ensure the good functioning of free market mechanisms. This would guarantee the flow of their commercial interests. President Clinton's National Security Advisor, Anthony Lake, devised the foundations of this

¹ Entelis, J. P., Ibid., p.

² Zoubir, Ibid., p. 158.

³ Entelis, J. P., Ibid., p.

strategy.¹ It was implemented on Tunisia through emphasizing the need to enhance human rights and achieve democratic inclusiveness. In addition, the U.S. offered approximately \$15 million as a democracy assistance under the framework of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs. The latter targeted central components of Tunisia's political landscape, namely the judicial body and the civil society.²

However, the U.S. policy-makers were aware of the significance of Tunisia's internal stability for securing their commercial and energy interests in Tunisia and the region as a whole. Consequently, the enlargement strategy's governance reforms remained rhetorical; it overlooked the need to employ effective long-term mechanisms to deal for example with institutional corruption and opposition's harassment. Moreover, it was blamed for the failure to impose conditional assistance on the local authorities to accelerate genuine governance reforms.³

USAID Programs : Trade and Economic Collaboration

The bilateral commercial and economic ties between United States and Tunisia thrived remarkably during the Clinton era. Several programs were launched via USAID initiative in North Africa, including Tunisia. Trade deals, economic aid allocations and increased U.S. investments in Tunisia were part of the Clinton's overall economic strategy. Its primary objective was to advance free market economy and privatization, focusing on agriculture and small-business institutions. Tunisia received around \$50 million, intended to promote modern economic institutions, and encourage trade and small industrial sectors that would help the country to get involved in broader foreign markets.⁴

In commerce, significant development was accomplished in the late 1990s through increasing their trade exchanges to approximately \$300 million annually. Thanks to commerce agreements with the U.S., Tunisia benefited free access from charges of particular agricultural and industrial goods. As an example, the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) extended to Tunisia in 1996 focused mainly on textile items and olive oil exports.⁵ Furthermore, the U.S. allotted economic assistance for Tunisia sought to develop critical sectors, mainly education and other infrastructure institutions. The goal was to work within the framework of the structural changes dictated by the International

¹ Lake, Anthony, From Containment to Enlargement, U.S. Department of State Dispatch, 4(39), 1993, p.658–64.

² U.S. Agency for International Development, Tunisia Country Assistance Strategy. USAID, 1999.

³ Murphy, E. C., Ibid., p. 59.

⁴ U.S. Agency for International Development, Ibid.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, Ibid.

Monetary Fund (IMF).¹ Nevertheless, U.S. economic investments in Tunisia extended to encompass tourism and industry, marking \$200 million. It helped largely in reducing the unemployment rates, reflecting partly the objective of Clinton's core stress on the global trade.²

Assessment of Clinton's Strategies and Policy Initiatives: Implementation and Efficiency

This section seeks to analyze the major outcomes and effects of the Clinton's policies towards Tunisia, illuminating their conflicting aspects. Their wider implications on a regional level are also considered. The enlargement strategy that was implemented on Tunisia, and other neighboring countries, from 1993 to 2001 held both idealist and realpolitik perspectives. The idealist principles were overwhelmingly reflected in Clinton's official discourse, reaffirming the U.S. support for democratic reforms and human rights promotion. The U.S. considerable aid allocations for Tunis, in comparison to Algeria for example, aimed at empowering the civil society and improving their political activity. Yet, this liberal commitment was overlapped with the U.S. pragmatic actions that give priority to maintaining order and strong economic ties. For that reason, U.S. policy-makers sustained the continuity of Ben Ali's rule for more than two decades, ensuring not only a permanent political ally in the region, but also fostering the bilateral economic and trade dealings.

Within the post-cold war context, the realpolitik's security and economic interests took precedence in the U.S. policy over the moral virtues' and the democratic reforms' promotion. Through discussing the focal relevant policy results, this section traces the discrepancies between Clinton's idealist rhetoric about fostering individuals' liberties and state's democratic institutions in Tunisia and the U.S. pragmatic objectives, namely trade and security collaborations amid the growing terrorist challenges to regional stability.³ Furthermore, this analysis highlights the long-term effects of these U.S. policy decisions on Tunisia's democratization path, leading to the so-called 'Spring revolution in Tunisia'.

Official Rhetoric Vs. Policy Decisions' Outcomes :

The official speeches and statements of the Clinton administration was compatible with the idealist virtues of democracy and human rights. However, the enlargement strategy's results came at odd to the official discourse, particularly in terms of aid allocations. The examination of public statements

¹ Murphy, E. C., Ibid., p. 61.

² Clinton, Bill, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement. The White House., 1997.

³ Zoubir, Ibid., p. 157.

during Clinton's presidency (1993-2001) demonstrated consistent moral orientation, urging for democratic reforms that guarantee the liberties and rights of an active civil society. Simultaneously, the policy decisions' outcomes indicated a significant preference of U.S. aid allocations for economic and security demands rather than political and social changes.

Foreign Assistance Reports stated that Tunisia received official disbursement of U.S. funds of \$30 million total.¹ Yet, Murphy in her analysis observed a sharp gap between the \$5 million allotted just for maintaining internal stability and fighting terrorism, and \$50 million for improving trade, but not for democratic reforms.² This analysis revealed the outcomes of this U.S. implemented strategy that is to improve the country's political and economic stability.

The U.S. allocated aid for Tunisia therefore aimed primarily at ensuring a permanent ally in the region, but not adequately on the need for promoting democracy. The inconsistency between idealist rhetoric and realpolitik actions persisted as the Clinton administration relatively permitted Ben Ali's government to utilize the aid allocations for specific strategic and economic goals, overlooking moral aspirations. Martinez went further in interpreting the serious effects of that U.S. policy instrument and its goals by arguing that the U.S. prioritization of safeguarding its trade partnership and security collaboration contributed in endorsing non-democratic patterns in Tunisia, leading to "political stagnation".³

By examining the U.S. official rhetoric under Clinton, this section critically demonstrates the common use of notions and themes of democracy, as a main constituent of their bilateral ties. The U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher announced in his 1995 address, "Our partnership with Tunisia is strengthened by its progress toward democratic openness".⁴ This statement revealed Tunisia's political preparedness to align with the U.S. stances. Likewise, during a 1999 U.S.-Tunisian meeting, Assistant Secretary Martin Indyk appreciated the country's "potential for pluralistic governance".⁵ This diplomatic complement offered implicitly clues about the one single-party nature of Tunisia's political system that is required to adopt policies and visions that are more inclusive.

¹ U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2003, U.S. Department of State, 2002.

² Ibid., p. 74.

³ Martinez, L. The Algerian Civil War, 1990-1998. New York. Columbia University Press, 2000, p, 70.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Speeches: 1995Collection, U.S. Department of State., 1995.

⁵ Department of State, Daily Press Briefing, 1999.

These U.S. formal announcements reflected Anthony Lake's enlargement vision that sought for constant democratic progress. The latter was one of the two pillars of the enlargement strategy, designed by Clinton's National Security Advisor, A. Lake. Democracy and human rights promotion coupled with free market liberalization were Clinton's central instruments for the spread of American economic and security interests. To achieve these policy goals, the U.S. employed several aid programs, namely the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that allotted around \$15 million to install and enhance democratic institutions in North Africa.¹

Yet, Sadiki contested the claimed U.S. democratic rhetoric as it lacked well defined and genuine liberal standards through which the state's democratic institutions can be measured.² He offered as evidence the critical results of a conducted qualitative study that examined 20 statements and speeches during Clinton's presidency. This study provided that the U.S. emphasis on democratic "progress" was frequently theoretical without authentic practical foundations.³ It can be concluded that the core objective of Clinton's enlargement doctrine in Tunisia was to consolidate its strategic and economic security as a central ally in the region, regardless the extent to which democratization efforts were implemented on the ground.

On the other hand, the 1996 Renewal of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is considered as an additional argument for the U.S. emphasis on the economic interest's vital role in the U.S.-Tunisia engagements. The GSP is a trade program initiated first in 1974 for a number of developing countries, and it was renewed for Tunisia in 1996. It guaranteed for some Tunisian exports a free-duty access to the U.S market. The textile sector alone benefited of 20% exports, along with some agricultural items and manufactured products, such as olive oil.⁴ Although this program have boosted remarkably the economic growth of some sectors, namely textile trade, only a small elite faction within the Tunisian society exploited the generated wealth.⁵

This economic aid, coupled with security aid, helped the Tunisian government to consolidate order and economic progress while overlooking the

¹ Lake, Anthony, From Containment to Enlargement. U.S. Department of State Dispatch, 4(39), 1993, pp. 658–64.

² Sadiki, L. The Search for Arab Democracy: Discourses and Counter-discourses, U.S., Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 87.

³ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴ Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 1996 Trade Policy Agenda and 1995 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program. Washington : U.S. Government Printing Office., 1996.

⁵ Murphy, E. C., Ibid., p. 91.

masses' demands, such as the 1998 Tunis demonstrations.¹ Carothers stressed, "U.S. aid often favored strategic partners over democratic principles, entrenching authoritarianism".² The GSP initiative improved trade exports and decreased unemployment rates in Tunisia, but workers' growing grievances about the status of labor rights and corruption measures, recorded by NGOs reports, were ignored.³ This attitude reflected again the overlap between U.S. idealist rhetoric and pragmatic economic priorities.

U.S. Security Assistance: Stability Prioritization over Reform :

The Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) is another U.S. notable program designed for retaining security demands in North Africa region, including Tunisia. Although the Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program was launched in 1983 by US department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, it was until 1996 that Tunisia started receiving its security assistance. The U.S. intensified its security efforts in the region consequently to the rising influence of Islamic extremist movements in the region, particularly in 1990s Algeria and Egypt.

By sharing its military and security training exercises, intelligence expertise, and other key mechanisms for crisis management and border security, the U.S stressed the importance of maintaining Tunisia's political and economic stability as a central frontline state against terrorism.⁴ Indeed, The ATA's strategic aid sustained the expertise and equipment of the local intelligence and security apparatus to contain potential dangers. Nevertheless, this strategic cooperation led also to the then government's consolidation of power that further restricted freedoms and prevented political pluralism and opposition in the name of counter-terrorism efforts.⁵

In Tunisia, the misused ATA's security assistance and its outcomes that undermined the rights and freedoms of Tunisia's civil society and political opposition showed again the inconvenience between Clinton's idealist values embedded in the enlargement strategy's rhetoric and its realist outcomes. The ATA's aid was primarily meant to preserve the Tunisian people's basic rights of life, safety, and rule of law enforcement. Conversely, the local authorities, supported by US stance of non-conditionality for liberal reforms, acted autocratically when it served U.S realpolitik security imperatives, even with moderate Islamists, employing undemocratic methods such as the 500 arbitrary

¹ Human Rights Watch. Human Rights in Tunisia. Human Rights Watch.1999.

² Carothers, T. Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999. p. 97.

³ Arieff, A. Ibid.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, Patterns of Global Terrorism, Washington : U.S. Department of State, 1999.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, Ibid.

arrests and detentions in 1997.¹ The Clinton administration's flexibility towards the Ben Ali's documented abuses was motivated by the US realist preventive strategies implemented in the region in the post-cold war context to combat regional and Trans-Saharan terrorism.

Considering Clinton's official rhetoric, the U.S. State Department cited frequently the human rights' violations committed by the Ben Ali's government, documenting its "systematic torture and arbitrary detentions".² In contrast, the U.S. policy-makers avoided employing tangible pressure or enforcing conditional aid on the local government so that it would comply with the international law and democratic norms. Using solely idealist rhetoric without actual actions can be considered as ambivalent, or even inconsistent, attitude with preaching for the necessity of respecting peoples' human rights and embracing democratic diversity.

The U.S. security policies implemented in Tunisia during the Clinton era further illustrates the overwhelming realpolitik considerations of security and economic interests rather than the idealist values. The U.S. constant flow of security aid persisted along this era, offering approximately \$10 million from 1996 to 2000 for military training and equipment, regardless the recorded documents of security apparatus' abuses.³

The U.S. realpolitik approach crystalized mainly with the increased military exercises organized by the U.S military during the 1997 Operation Bright Star to develop around 500 local military troops' expertise in crisis management.⁴ The Tunisian authorities utilized units of this U.S. formed forces in 1997 Tunis demonstrations, during which "over 1,000 arbitrary detentions" were reported by Human Rights Watch.⁵ Similar attitude took place in the subsequent year against the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), which the U.S. State Department noted down in official reports, but did not control.⁶ Perkins advocated that retaining security aid "enabled the regime to project progress while maintaining control."⁷ The U.S. enlargement doctrine's democratic dimension was not reflected adequately by the U.S. realpolitik actions in Tunisia for strategic objectives.

¹ Ibid.

² U.S. Department of State, Country Reports 1995, 1995, 1235.

³ Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 1996 Trade Policy Agenda and 1995 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program. Washington : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996.

⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Bright Star Report, Washington : U.S. Department of Defense, 1997.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, World Report, No. 253, U.S. : Human Rights Watch, 1998.

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Country Reports, No 1245, Washinton : the White House, 1998.

⁷ Perkins, Kenneth J., A History of Modern Tunisia. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014., p. 198.

Tunisia's stability for the U.S. is fundamental for the broader regional security. The Clinton administration provided the Tunisian regime, as a reliable ally, the necessary economic and military means to join the U.S. efforts to contain the growing terrorist threats in the region. This led the U.S. to overlook several undemocratic practices in Tunisia, such as the recorded regularities during the 1999 election, in which President Ben Ali took 99,44% of the general vote, retaining office for the third term unopposed. By doing so, the U.S. helped Ben Ali's government generate a fake picture of internal order and democratic transition, halting political dissent.¹ This realpolitik approach resulted in serious violations of peoples' rights of press, speech and association, throwing away the enlargement doctrine's commitment for democracy. The outcomes of such anomaly between U.S. idealism and realpolitik affected critically not only the democratic aspirations of the domestic political forces, but also the U.S. credibility in the Tunisians' eyes. In the long-term, the U.S. security and economic gains, supported authoritarian rule and ignored fundamental rights and freedoms of Tunisians, prepared the ground for the 2011 events.

The Role of Congressional Advocacy and Post-9/11 Shifts in U.S. Policy :

Several factors influence the shaping of U.S. policy-making process. Pressure groups inside the Congress, and global key events took a considerable part in determining the policy design that fit for each state and each context. Congressional Human Rights Caucus is one example of bipartisan pressure groups that functioned inside the U.S. congress since 1983. Led by Tom Lantos and Frank Wolf, the caucuses operated dynamically under Clinton, in convenience with the enlargement doctrine's idealist perspective. They share similar objectives concerning the human rights promotion and democratic progress in the world.

In Tunisia, they highlighted the restricted freedoms and frequent cases of torture and arbitrary detention in the State Department official reports. They also stressed in the commission hearings the urgency of reinforcing conditionality of human rights advancement in return to the allocated aid to Tunisia.² Some of their demands were approved and the Congress framed amendments, such as the Leahy Amendment (1997), to stop providing aid for authoritarian system of governments that practiced severe abuses. The important role of this Congressional caucus appeared mainly in the passage of the Freedom Support Act (1992) and the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. The last act

¹ Sadiki, Ibid., p. 93.

² U.S. Department of State, Country Reports, No 1235, Washington : 1995.

ordered for recording annually the religious harassment in Tunisia against minorities and even some moderate Islamic parties, such as Ennahda.¹ However, Tunisians noticed no tangible political or religious change on the ground.

Considering this contrast, Carothers maintained, “Domestic human rights advocacy often clashed with executive realpolitik in U.S. foreign policy”.² Despite the caucuses’ efforts for pushing forward democratization in Tunisia, it was not effective to adjust the U.S. executive body’s decisions about conditioning aid disbursement. The U.S. government proceeded offering security aid that safeguarded primarily its economic and security interests under the argument of security interests, but not Tunisia’s democratic path.

As the USSR declined, the post-cold war era was a proper context for spreading the U.S. ideals of western democracy and free markets to exert its influence in the different corners of the globe, including Tunisia under the name of democratic rhetoric. Yet, in the end of Clinton’s term, the 9/ 11 attacks provided different contextual dynamics for the U.S. policy-makers. The new administration, headed by George W. Bush, opted for a further security-centered strategy to combat international terror. The growing scope of fanatic Islamist groups’ threat in North Africa region offered further strategic significance to Tunisia. As a result, the U.S. intensified its military and security assistance by 50% in 2002.³

The al-Qaeda’s launched attacks inside the U.S. soil were a landmark event that “shifted U.S. policy from democracy promotion to security cooperation, reinforcing authoritarian regimes”.⁴ In the case of Tunisia, the U.S. military assistance amounted to \$10 million in 2002 to fight al-Qaeda’s affiliated factions in the region.⁵ Moreover, the U.S. supported the anti-terrorism law, passed in 2003, extending the security apparatus’ detention prerogatives, including 1500 opponents.⁶ Although these efforts were blended with idealist rhetoric about the importance of democratic dialogue, but the emphasis on security cooperation exempted the Tunisian authorities from genuine reforms and political accountability.

¹ U.S. Congress, International Religious Freedom Act, Washinton : U.S. Congress, 1998.

² Carothers, T. Aiding Aemocracy abroad: The Learning Curve, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999, p. 102.

³ U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E-7, Documents on South Asia, 1973–1976. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008.

⁴ Henneberg, S. Strategic U.S. Engagement with Algeria: A Pathway amid Shifting Global Dynamics (Policy Note 159). The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2025.

⁵ Clinton, Ibid.

⁶ Amnesty International, Tunisia: Anti-Terrorism Law, U.S. : Amnesty International, 2003.

The post-9/11 era resulted in further challenges to the Congressional Human Rights caucus, restricting their influence under the justification of national security priority. Bush's War on Terror has seriously undermined its active position and pressure inside the Congress. Their 2001 resolution on Tunisia's violations was overridden by the executives' approval for the unconditional continuity of U.S. aid.¹ The domestic politics proved to be important in influencing the U.S. policy-makers in the former administration (1993-2001), even if it was just verbal improvement of human rights in Tunisia. However, the Bush administration's policy towards Tunisia was determined primarily by security imperatives, reflecting the significance of global landmark events in shaping the subsequent U.S. policy decisions.

Long-Term Implications

The analyses' outcomes demonstrated a wide gap between U.S. policy-makers' words and actions towards Tunisia. During Clinton's years, the U.S. adopted an idealist stance that dominated its official rhetoric, symbolized by his strategy of enlargement. Clinton's idealist vision attempted to balance between the allotted aid shares for Tunisia's economic progress and the democracy aid (\$15 million). Yet, the security aid was an evidence for the significance of the country's stability in ensuring the flow of U.S. economic interests. The Tunisian government projected an idealist picture of the country's human rights status and political openness that contradicted the Non-governmental Organizations' reports. Even the U.S. State Department's official documents noted serious human rights violations of both civilians and political dissenters.

The continuity of the U.S. aid while acknowledging the Tunisian authorities' abuses of power reveals the inconsistency between Clinton's ideals and implemented strategies. As a result, this stance has endorsed undemocratic rule in the country along three decades. Furthermore, it enriched the culture of fear and skepticism among the local people toward their ruling elite. An attitude that was fostered by the exclusive nature of the local government, halting the participation of various political factions in the making-decision process. This has delayed but not stopped Tunisians' calls for political, economic and social reforms that would eventually lead to the 2011 events.

Simultaneously, the U.S. failed to promote the promised democracy and human rights by the enlargement doctrine, generating a distorted picture about its credibility due to its prioritization of pragmatic interests on the ground rather

¹ U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, fiscal year 2003, U.S. Department of State, 2002.

than liberal values. This approach illustrated the real motives of U.S. policy-makers in Tunisia during this era, utilizing democratic language and aid disbursement as instruments to achieve its economic and security goals.¹ The Bush administration put further emphasis on strategic interests in its policy toward the country. Justified by security demands dictated by the 9/11 events, the U.S. consolidated its bilateral relations with the Tunisian government, increasing only the allocated security and economic aid.

Congressional caucuses, in its turn, contributed in raising the official and public awareness about Tunisia's human rights' status, turning their verbal advocacy to constitutional legislations, but not to practical decisions. Their emphasis on conditional aid in exchange of reformed was overlooked by the executive's strategic priorities. Therefore, domestic politics was another U.S. policy dynamics that subordinated liberalization to realpolitik national interests. This approach helped to create democratic facade in the Maghreb region, stressing the need for consistent decisions that reflect the liberal rhetoric in future U.S. policies.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Clinton administration's policy toward Tunisia from 1993 to 2001 embodied the conflicting dynamics of idealism and pragmatism that govern the U.S. foreign policy process. Idealism was manifested in Clinton's enlargement doctrine, seeking the spread of U.S. influence through maximizing democratic reforms and free market economy.² The realpolitik approach emphasized national interests of advancing economic gains and security objectives. In rhetoric, the Clinton administration kept encouraging and appreciating the Tunisian authorities' preparedness and efforts for democratizing the government's institutions. However, these liberal values were systematically marginalized in favour of the economic progress and security collaboration against terrorism in the region.

The U.S. preferred to maintain strong economic and security ties with the Ben Ali government despite the latter's documented violations of Human rights and democracy development. It offered \$50 million to improve trade exchanges and \$5 million for counterterrorism. This allotted assistance for relatively stable country reflected the priority of pragmatic objectives in U.S. policies. The ideal virtues of human rights and democratic pluralism were defended continuously by official governmental and Congressional caucuses' reports but overshadowed in practice by the continuity of economic and security aid. This consistent preference of economic and security partnership was justified by the strategic role Tunisia played in assisting the U.S. to counter terrorist threat and therefore maintain the regional stability. For that

¹ Murphy, E. C., *Ibid.*, p. 98.

² Lake, *Ibid.* p. 658.

reason, it afforded Tunisia with considerable military and security aid. In return, this aid was employed by the local government to consolidate its authority and prevent democratic pluralism by silencing opposition figures as well as citizens' protests. The U.S. government condemned the illegal use of force against citizens only in its reports, avoiding direct criticism or enforcement of conditional aid. Critics illustrated this discrepancy in U.S. policy towards Tunisia as a cautious, but strategically well calculated, realpolitik stance stemmed from the need of the U.S. for a stable partner in its war against regional terrorism, but mostly for ensuring economic and trade development.

The Clinton administration attempted to divert criticism by projecting human rights advancement rhetoric, meanwhile consolidating realpolitik goals that served to entrench undemocratic practices by the Ben Ali's government. The post-9/11 era provided a fertile ground on which the subsequent U.S. administration based its policy priorities and objectives. The global war on terror subordinated further the democratic rhetoric to the pragmatic goals. Securing Tunisia's borders from al-Qaeda's affiliated terrorist groups was a priority to the U.S. administration in order to guarantee the regional stability. As a result, it intensified their security aid and overlooked the local authorities's violations of human rights. This dynamic, as Zoubir notes, "allowed the U.S. to justify alliances with authoritarian regimes through selective human rights rhetoric".¹ The post-9/11 context undermined further the true implementation of the U.S. idealist values of democracy in Tunisia by ignoring the increased calls for democratic reform and genuine economic progress. This approach has affected heavily the civil society's trust in the U.S. aid programs, namely the USAID governance aid, for ameliorating their rights and addressing their grievances. It also escalated a sense of discontent towards the U.S. as it practiced political hypocrisy by preaching the need for democratic progress and acting conversely for the sake of safeguarding only its own economic and security interests. Finally, the Clinton administration's policy in Tunisia marked a consistent idealist rhetoric, but failed to balance that adopted selective idealism with practical decisions that push forward earlier Tunisia's democratic transition.

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¹ Ibid., p. 371.

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