

A Project entitled

***Critical geopolitics of US foreign policy in the Middle East: a humanitarian-oriented  
policy?***

Submitted by

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## Declaration

I, *Li Chun Kuen*, declare that this research report represents my own work under the supervision of Dr Hui Lai Hang Dennis, and that it has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institutions.

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to examine to what extent humanitarianism has been a key consideration in framing US foreign policy through the rhetoric (Speeches) of the US foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) between the Bush and Obama administrations. The central argument of the research is that humanitarianism is significantly embedded in US foreign policy during both administrations. Yet, it was not stemmed from a humanitarian perspective but instead from political concerns, implying that power relations are inherent in all notions of humanity and humanitarian actions, ultimately serving as a means for states to justify their actions to achieve their own goals.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Middle East, Discourses, Humanitarianism, George W. Bush, Barack Obama

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## **Introduction**

According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report (2021: 10), the number of people living in extreme poverty in fragile states increased 8% between 2010 and 2020, indicating the world politics is becoming more unstable, thus increasing the risk of crisis, which more people become vulnerable and exposed to the instability, such as terrifying conflicts and oppression. The instability can be examined in a recent UN deputy chief speech, where he described the last few months in 2021 as ‘hurricanes of human crises.’

The international societies and different countries have still tried their best to engage in humanitarian action. Most of the humanitarian act is from a state’s foreign policy, where El Taraboulsi-McCarthy described the United States and Europe have long dominated it. The US is the most significant contributor to humanitarian assistance, totalling an estimated \$46.89 billion. (GHA 2021; Congressional Research Service 2020) However, the US is receiving regular criticism for failing to uphold humanitarian principles, which Margesson (2013) argued the way the humanitarian aid is used and whether it becomes more of a strategic policy tool depends on the situation and the degree to which the US has further interest in the region. These are the subjects I will address in this project, using the critical discourse analysis to address to what extent humanitarianism has been a key consideration in framing US foreign policy.

Here, I argue humanitarianism as a political discourse that constitutes the pattern of political subjects and establishes levels of the agency to construct geopolitical identity and actions (policy-making) (Moore, 2013). The study seeks to reconstruct the political imaginaries of humanitarianism in the context of the United States, through the lens of critical geopolitics, to deconstruct the normative claim of humanitarianism to understand how the foreign policy of the US informs the humanitarian in different administrations, Bush and Obama.

Discourse analysis will analyse the political discourses, mainly the Presidential Speech from Bush and Obama. The study of policy rhetoric enables the formulation and hearing of representation claims that transcend issues and audiences (Dryzek, 2010, as cited in Condor et al, 2013) and is used to construct persuasive arguments in formal public debates and everyday political disputes. (Condor et al., 2013)

## Literature Review

### *Critical Geopolitics*

Geopolitics, a term frequently used to describe the geographical study of strategic relationships between states, is “associated with a specific conflagration of social Darwinism and late-nineteenth-century *Fin de siècle* Europe”. (Parker 1985; Heffernan 2000, as cited in Dodds et al. 2016: 1) Kearns (2009) referred to the origin of geopolitics as the competitive ambition of European states, thus generating heartland theory from Halford Mackinder, which is viewed as the early tenets of geopolitical reasoning. The subject has later been linked with widespread fascist and authoritarian strands of thought in Germany, Italy and Japan during the inter-war period, where Karl Haushofer used geopolitics as a tool to explore different geographical strategies that can stimulate their revival after WWI, and it has been described as intellectual poison or problematic in the post-war period. (Moisio, 2015: 222; Dodds et al., 2013: 4) In short, Geopolitics is regarded as the “scientific” approach to international affairs, as what Ó Tuathail (1996b, as cited in Kuus, 2010) described as an objective science, a detached "god's eye" perspective of the geographical facts of international affairs.

While critical geopolitics tries to analyse and criticise classical geopolitical thinking's inflexible territorial assumptions, it also dissects the constant dependence on understandings of power and spatiality in geopolitical literature through various geopolitical genres. (Kuus, 2010; Moisio, 2015: 223) Critical geopolitics aims to investigate “the politics of the geographical specification of politics” rather than to define the geography of politics within a predetermined, prudence place. (Dalby, 1991: 274) Hence, in the context of the reimagining of power, this critique gained traction, earning it the moniker "critical geopolitics." (Dalby 1990; Ó Tuathail, 1996, as cited in Dodds et al, 2013, 6). Furthermore, scholars like Agnew and Ó Tuathail

viewed critical geopolitics as a sub-field of human geography, which explores the spatial assumptions and designations that go into the construction of global politics. (ibid; 6)

Critical geopolitics is redeployed by structuralism. It accentuated power (the capacity to act politically) and language's formative function in geopolitical practice, and it conceptualised geopolitics as “culturally embedded spatial practices.” (Moisio, 2015: 223) And therefore, it is understood as a “*set of socially constructed, rather than naturally given (classical geopolitics), practices and ideas through which the international political economy is realised geographically.*” (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995: 4-5). Critical geopolitics contends that spatiality is not limited to territoriality (Murphy, 1996, as cited in Kuus, 2010); instead, it contributes to the transition away from strictly territorialized political understandings and toward more sophisticated understandings of power's multifaceted spatiality. (Agnew, 1999; Dalby, 2002; Elden, 2005; Sparke; 2005, as cited in Kuus, 2010) According to Dodds et al. (2013: 6), such critical study treats geopolitics as “a fundamentally ideological and politicised mode of analysis” rather than an impartial examination of pre-determined "geographical" facts. Therefore, critical geopolitics advances a wide range of critiques of traditional studies of international affairs.

Furthermore, critical geopolitics is founded on postpositivist and postmodern writing. (Moisio, 2015: 223) Therefore, it reinterprets classical geopolitics, not about alleged physical realities or geographical factors restraining or empowering political actors. Instead, it argues that geography in international politics is constituted socially and is linked to broader issues such as expanding socio-spatial theory into the study of international relations. (ibid: 223) Critical geopolitics is employed to deconstruct the supposedly unbiased and objective scientific gaze of classical geopolitics. (ibid: 224) Hence, the “*contextual, contentious, and tangled spatiality of international politics*” is embedded in the analysis of critical geopolitics. (Herod et al, 1997; Ó Tuathail and Dalby, 2005, as cited in Kuss, 2010)



Furthermore, geopolitics is seen as a discursive practice in critical geopolitics. (Moisio, 2015: 224) As Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992: 192) argued, geopolitics should be “*critically re-conceptualised as a discursive practice in which statecraft intellectuals ‘spatialise’ international politics to represent it as a ‘world’ characterised by specific types of places, peoples and dramas.*” Moreover, the study of international politics is a diverse social and cultural reality, so there is a unique interaction between the representation of text (geopolitical discourses) and action conceptualisation. (Moisio, 2015: 224; Agnew, 2013: 28) In the studies of international politics, spatial assumptions are required to predicate certain geographical assumptions. And critical geopolitics would bring these issues to light and scrutinise them by evaluating discursive operations. (Kuss, 2010) Critical geopolitics aims to deconstruct texts, reveal alternate connotations, and present alternative interpretations of geopolitical texts to highlight the “*contingency of geopolitics and question its knowledge claim.*” (Ó Tuathail, 1994a, as cited in Müller, 2013: 52) In addition, the discursive practice is based on Foucault's conceptions, which described discourse as power-driven knowledge, some recognised facts that have been historically constituted, and collectively constitute a broader regime of truth (Foucault, 1980a, as cited in Mosio, 2015; 225), ultimately offered most of the interpretation of what has been represented by discourse and the focus on geopolitical representations. (Agnew, 2013: 24)

As a collection of capacities, discourse is a set of rules that enables readers or audiences to interpret what they hear and read and arrange it into a coherent, meaningful whole. (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 80) Müller (2013: 50) viewed geopolitics as texts, allowing us to perceive global space as a malleable construction with political purpose and numerous interpretations. Speeches and policy documents are regarded as geopolitical genres, known as “practical geopolitics”. Müller (2013: 51) demonstrated how official documents and speeches may uncover and undergird political decision-making, as well as how politicians perceive global

events and develop a cohesive plot. Therefore, some scholars, such as Ó Tuathail (1992) examined the portrayal of the end of the Cold War in the US foreign policy by using documents and statements by US President George Bush.

Viotti (2010) argued that policy-making takes place in what decision-makers generally see or come to understand as an increasingly complex international society, thus interpretations held by decision-makers about domestic and world politics in general and how they play in particular contingencies matter the most in shaping foreign policy. Therefore, political speeches and the like present us with a method of retrieving powerful actors' self-understandings in global politics. They contribute to understanding the social building of worlds and the function of geographical knowledge in that social production. (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 191) While geopolitics is sometimes about acts performed against powers, invasions, and the deployment of armed forces, such behaviour is undeniably geopolitical. Only via discourses is the endeavour meaningful and justified. (ibid: 191) Through rhetoric that leaders operate, foreign-policy acts are understood through certain simple geographical understandings, and conflicts are constituted intelligible by ready-made geographically infused reasoning. (ibid: 192) In short, political speeches serves as the socially regulated use of language, which comprehends and constitutes the social reality. (ibid: 192)

## *Humanitarianism*

Many academics regard humanitarianism as a doctrine or set of doctrines based on commonly unquestioned intent. While it is a trait that can make it impervious to conventional criticism or inspection, it can also lead to impunity for conduct that would otherwise be considered crimes. (de Waal 1997; Branch 2008; Allen 2015, as cited in Allen 2018: 142) While Barnett and Stein (2012: 13) claimed that humanitarianism premised on the perception and experience of something “bigger than ourselves” has religious aspects even for those ostensibly grounded in secular conceptions of reality. Allen (2018: 143) linked humanitarianism’s origin to the ideas drawn from Christianity, which is the doctrine related to Christian humanism. However, he also stressed that this was not a neutral concern. Instead, humanitarianism at the early stage is frequently connected with missionary work and the ostensibly civilising objective of colonial control. In the 19th century, Henri Dunant and his colleagues’ establishment of the Red Cross movement related humanitarianism to the supply of medicine and the ability to resolve conflicts, particularly the notion of neutrality. These ideas helped shape international humanitarian law and applied as a benchmark for defining the principles of humanitarianism in the UN. For example, The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has introduced four principles of humanitarianism adapted from the Red Cross:

*Humanity:* Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The goal of humanitarian action is to safeguard life and health while ensuring human dignity.

*Independence:* Humanitarian action must be independent of any political, economic, military or other aims that any actor may have about areas where humanitarian action is being carried out.

*Impartiality*: Humanitarian action must be carried out only based on need, with no discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious belief, class, or political opinions.

*Neutrality*: Humanitarian actors must avoid taking sides in conflicts or engaging in political, racial, religious, or ideological controversies.

(OCHA, 2012)

Humanity is commonly assumed to be a given among these principles as a starting point for humanitarian action. (Radice, 2018: 158) While in the book “*The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War*”, the author argued that the principle of "humanity" constitutes the primary moral value of humanitarianism and takes priority over all others, (Vaux, 2001: 5) Allen (2018: 159) argued that responding to the call of suffering humanity allows us to honour our humanity while also participating in constructing humanity as a putatively universal category. Thus, it legitimises Gropas (1999) ’s argument, where human rights have made an unprecedented entry into the global arena, with unparalleled standard-setting and the creation of monitoring and reporting procedures, particularly within the United Nations, which contribute to the establishment of humanitarianism as a form of justified enforcement. (Allen, 2018)

Humanitarianism entails more than just certain types of actions. Instead, it is an ideology, a closed system of thinking and acting. (Allen, 2018) An international agreement such as The 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Common Article I of the Geneva Conventions, “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) signed at UN World Summit in 2005, showing humanitarianism have also entered the realm of foreign policy-making. (Gropas, 1999) It also indicated the states are legally accountable for offering protection and welfare in times of crisis. (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2016: 1) Even though states are the primary offenders of human

rights, Mahoney (1994) claimed that states are also the best equipped to ensure their respect since sovereign nation-states still constitute the basis of international relations and remain the primary actors of international law. (as cited in Gropas, 1999) Therefore, different states have provided humanitarian intervention and humanitarian aid under the paradigm of humanitarianism.

Murphy (2005) described the humanitarian intervention as the “threats or use of force by a state, group of states, or international organisation primarily to protect the nationals of a particular state from widespread deprivation of internationally recognised human rights, including genocide and crimes against humanity”. However, the success of such efforts inevitably requires politics, power, and government commitments. (Radice, 2016) While humanitarian assistance refers to medical and other support provided to suffering individuals or populations ostensibly without regard for political and military constraints. (Allen, 2018: 144)

Green (2018: 25) thinks humanitarianism swims in the shark-infested waters of power and politics, filled with dangers, tensions, and complex judgments. Willitis-King et al. (2018: 1) have a similar argument, highlighting the government's response to humanitarian crises in regards to political will, or the government's priority for humanitarian needs above other objectives such as national security, commerce, and public sentiment. At the same time, El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al. (2016: 2) described the complexity and conflicts between a state's national interest (*Interest-based*) and its international legal or moral obligations (*Value-based*). Yet, the current international legal or moral obligation is moulded by previous traumatic human crises and failings of humanitarian organisations and policies, such as the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, where murdered 800,000 civilians and massacres in Srebrenica and other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Green, 2018: 19) On the other hand, the proposition of a government invoking humanitarian concerns to legitimize military involvement in territory beyond its boundaries is not novel, which Allen (2018: 152) stated that throughout the four decades after

the post-WWII accords, there was a slew of military interventions in sovereign countries, having main humanitarian objectives asserted most stridently while strategic concerns were evident, such as the USSR in Hungary (1956), Belgium in Congo (1960), France in the Central African Republic (1979), the USA in Grenada (1983) etc. It is worth noting that neither explicitly included a superpower nor any Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. They were all justified by the conquering state in self-defence rather than humanitarianism.

### ***Critical geopolitics and humanitarianism***

Critical geopolitics gives an ethical and geographical understanding of how assertions about *humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and universality* are integrated into particular humanitarian discourse. (Moore, 2013: 928) Furthermore, the deconstructive method of critical geopolitics helps us become more aware of the limits of these grounding principles and strengthen the theoretical framework for analysing how 'the politic' impacts the humanitarian in conventional humanitarianism. (ibid: 928) More importantly, a critical geopolitical study of the humanitarian framework recognises the limits of humanitarian activity and how humanitarianism functions as a performative term, less focused on International Relations (IR). For instance, debates on humanitarian responsibility necessitate paying more attention to how humanitarian responsibility is assigned and eventually carried out. (ibid.) From the colonial period to the present day, humanitarianism, and the concepts of humanity it represents, have always been intertwined with the power structures of the time. Hence, humanitarianism at times becomes a form of governance (Barnett 2012), and critical geopolitics can serve as a "problematizing conceptual endeavour that calls into question current structures of power and knowledge." (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 107), which overlooks how geopolitical claims result from historically negotiated power relations. Furthermore, reading about humanitarianism through critical geopolitics raises an issue about the traditional concern of just-war theory on the legal foundations of aggressiveness and territorialised conceptions of statehood inside the international community. (Moore, 2013: 941)

## Overview of American Foreign Policy

Foreign policy, in broad terms, refers to the government's approach to dealing with other countries. While Aronica and Parmar (2018) saw foreign policy in a narrow sense as associated with concerns of 'hard' power among states, i.e., war and military action. Yet, over the last century, the notion grew to embrace subjects that were previously off the foreign policy agenda, to the point that commerce, environmental challenges, health, and culture may all be envisioned within a foreign policy framework. (ibid.) It echoed with the declaration from The Department of State, which the foreign policy should be “*shape and sustain a peaceful, prosperous, just, and democratic world and foster conditions for stability and progress for the benefits of the American people and people everywhere.*” (The Department of State, 2016) Furthermore, the Committee on Foreign Affairs (n.d.) also suggested other elements include the promotion of democracy; peacekeeping, export-controls, mainly concerns with weaponry and disarmament; initiatives to encourage business cooperation with foreign states; international commodities agreements; and international education.

Wittkopf (1990) has introduced the four typologies of foreign policy positions (which are *isolationist, accommodationist, internationalist and hardliners*), and by reflecting on how America's foreign policy has evolved through time across these categories can also explain the evolution of the US as a hegemonic power over the last centuries (Hurst, 2014) Deudney and Meiser (2008: 24) argued that the US foreign policy has been shaped by the mixture of both isolationism and internationalism even though they appeared to be unrelated. While Forsythe (2006: 161) referred to these different theories have long fought for dominance of US foreign policy. Yet, in general, the Americans had maintained a primarily 'isolationist' position until the Second World War. Still, with its intervention in that war, competition with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and the emergence of the global war on terror in the early 2000s,



the US adopted an increasingly internationalist position that has lasted to this day. (Aronica and Parmar, 2018)

The internationalist position is a result from, according to Deudney and Meiser (2008: 22), the United States saw itself as distinctive, as the ideological leader of the most powerful, compelling, and successful form of political, economic, and social organisation in contemporary times., particularly the ideology of liberalism. Forsythe (1999: 115) referred to American exceptionalism as the conviction in the great liberty and decency of the American people. He argued that it lies at the heart of the prevailing political culture in the United States. (ibid.) Moreover, scholars like Hartz (1991) claimed America as a quintessential liberal state. Cohen (2008: 2) argued the role of human rights in foreign policy throughout American history due to the foundation of the country, based on a constitution and a bill of rights that declared liberty and individual freedoms. Forsythe (2006: 160) mentioned that human rights, in the lens of the US, alluded to personal freedom as enshrined in the United States Bill of Rights, which is annexed to the country's constitution.

Nevertheless, human rights were not formally made a prominent aspect of American foreign policy only until the late 1970s. (Cohen, 2008: 2) President Carter recognised human rights as a primary concern in foreign policy. Nonetheless, the idea originated with Congress, prodded by the public and others. (ibid: 2) Before the 1970s, different administrations (such as President Eisenhower and Nixon) only had limited support or even neglected the role of human rights in formulating foreign policy, with the former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1975) argued that “*I believe it is dangerous for us to make the domestic policy of countries around the world a direct objective of US foreign policy*” (as cited in Cohen, 2008: 2) While the trauma of Vietnam and the Watergate scandal (Forsythe, 1990; Forsythe, 2006; Cohen, 2008) caused the Congress to assert human rights on foreign policy, as the US discovered that resisting communism (Dullesism) was not always the same as protecting human rights. (Forsythe, 1990:

437) Thus, enlarging the global democratic community served as the fundamental pillars of his foreign policy, were carried out as a result of America's pressure on others to promote personal liberty (Forsythe, 2006: 160), and his successors followed such direction. Human rights in foreign policy were manifested via security assistance, economic assistance, and voting in the international institutions (ibid: 160). For example, President Bush launched granting funds to other countries for programmes that promote civil and political liberty (Cohen, 2008: 5). At the same time, Togo received funding from the US Department of State and USAID to assist it in developing a national human rights commission. (ibid: 5) On the other hand, sanctions would also be applied to countries that violated human rights. For example, South Africa under the apartheid regime, where conflict arose in 1983, the Congress enacted the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in 1986, implementing commerce and economic sanctions against South Africa, which eventually swayed the South African government to stop the apartheid system. (ibid: 6)

Rosenau (1971, as cited in Schmidt, 2018: 8) identified the five primary sources in shaping the American foreign policy, which are the international system (external environment), societal background, bureaucratic roles and personalities of individuals. Except for the global system, the latter is within the domestic accounts. Firstly, the external environment is related to systemic theories of realism, in which the anarchic international system influences the states. Thus, sovereign states are considered the ultimate authority and can arrange their domestic affairs where they see appropriate. Moreover, it believes that states act based on self-help and take the appropriate steps to ensure their survival. In other words, it sees foreign policy as a tool to achieve its narrow self-interests (*national interests*) (Forsythe, 1990: 450; Schmidt, 2018: 11) partly account for the regional hegemony of the US. (Schmidt, 2018: 12) Secondly, the domestic factors, which Steven Rosenfeld (1974) wrote, "*no factor is more needful of fresh consideration in both practice and study of American foreign policy than its domestic underpinnings*" (as cited in Aronica and Parmar, 2018: 128), indicated the importance of

institutional influences on foreign policymaking. The foreign policymaking is highlighted and shaped by the "check and balance" between the legislative (Congress) and the executive (Presidency). (ibid: 130) The US government's executive branch structure, structured together in a system of agencies and departments linked to the president's office, serves as the foundation for foreign policymaking. (ibid:129) Therefore, the president's personality is also considered an essential factor in determining foreign policy direction, as Nelson (2012) argued that the president has the authority to assess the significance, context, and timeliness of various subjects. While Congress can influence policymaking indirectly (Lindsay, 1992), so-called "congressional activism" is covered in military activity, trade, aid, human rights, and surveillance of executive agreements. (Aronica and Parmar, 2018: 131) For example, in response to the US's assistance to a foreign government that violated the human rights (as a form of *clientelism*) in the 1970s, The Foreign Assistance Act was amended by Congress to oblige the Department of State to submit human rights reports, a requirement that is still in effect today (Cohen, 2008: 2), showed the Congress's position to influence foreign policy making directly or indirectly. Other domestic factors such as public opinions, media, and intellectuals also shape American foreign policy. (Aronica and Parmar, 2018; Robinson, 2018)

Critical geopolitics provides a paradigm for underscoring the significance of geopolitical discourse and its representation of identity and difference in geopolitical activity. (Dalby, 1996: 658) It refers to the "unravelling of how power works" necessitates looking at the "specific discursive tropes and related logic" that drive statecraft. (ibid: 658) While Ó Tuathail and Dalby (1998) also argued that states' everyday existence is characterized by boundary-drawing acts and performances. In other words, a critical geopolitics approach focuses on the formation of borders of different binaries, such as "in/out", "here/there", and "domestic/foreign". (Koluksuz, 2015: 39) Contrary to how states represent themselves, Campell (1998) claimed that the study of foreign policy is about countries continually altered by their relationships with Others. (ibid:

39) Thus, Ashley suggested that foreign policy is a "boundary-producing" act. (as cited in Ó Tuathail and Dalby, 1998, Koluksuz, 2015: 40) Ó Tuathail (1999) contended the object of study in critical geopolitics expanded into four different parts (*plurality*) rather than the traditional pyramidal structure (*singularity*) of geopolitical intellect. (as cited in Coleman, 2016: 498-499), while one of the terms from the four-fold typology, "practical geopolitics" relates to current foreign policy and encompasses work that is critical to both traditional and non-traditional statecraft methods. (Coleman, 2016: 498) This enables foreign policy to critically serve as part of the discourse for geopolitical reasoning, which discourses are a collection of abilities that people are given and are composed of socio-cultural materials that individuals utilise to enable them to generate an understanding of their surroundings. (Agnew, 2013; 28) Furthermore, Muller (2010: 51) claimed that examining official writings (such as foreign policy) might inform us about the geopolitical ideologies that motivate policy decision and how political elites create meaning of geopolitical events and construct a cohesive narrative. Hence, most critical geopolitics research, particularly those aimed at developing theories or formulating programmatic statements of purpose, is based on foreign policy analysis. (Coleman, 2016: 501)

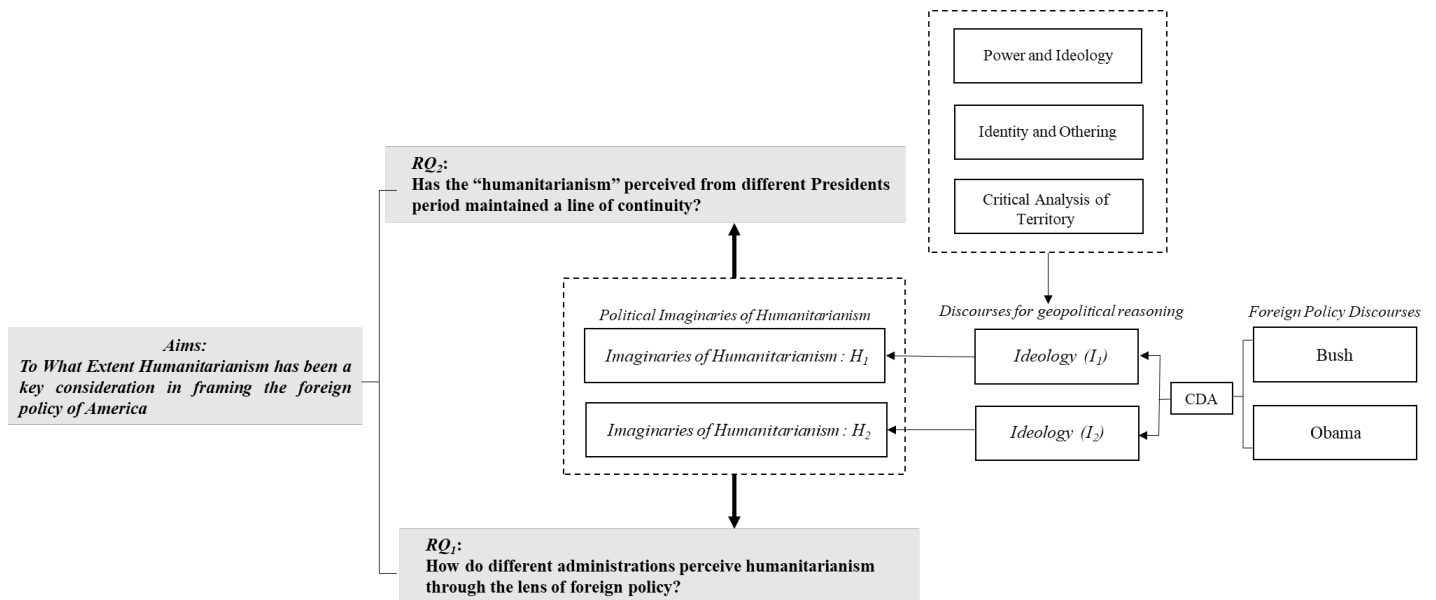
## **Methodology**

In this study, I argue humanitarianism is a political discourse that cannot be expressed definitively and decisively. (Moore, 2013: 926) Instead, it develops degrees of agency and forms the pattern of policy matters to construct geopolitical identities and acts. (ibid: 926) This paper primarily focuses on the specific discourses of US foreign policy in Middle East between Bush and Obama. The study seeks to reconstruct the political imaginaries of humanitarianism in the context of the United States, through the lens of critical geopolitics, to deconstruct the normative claim of humanitarianism to understand how the foreign policy of the US informs the humanitarian in different administrations periods.

The study aims to examine to what extent humanitarianism has been a key consideration in framing America's foreign policy. This paper used the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) as the case study of US foreign policy, particularly looking at Bush and Obama's administrations of different periods, with different management styles. At the same time, the reason for selecting MENA is that it is one of the most undemocratic with widespread violations in recent few decades, more accessible to access the efforts done by the US government. The materials were primarily derived from President's addresses (practical genre), since political speeches and such offer us with a way of rediscovering prominent actors' self-understandings in world affairs. They contribute to understanding the social building of worlds and the function of geographical knowledge in that social production. (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 191) Hence, the political speeches here serve as discourses for geopolitical reasoning; the use of language and words in speeches inform us about the geopolitical ideologies that motivate policy decision and how political elites create meaning of geopolitical events and construct a cohesive narrative. (Muller, 2010: 51) I argued the use of language in the discourse is intentional, thus presenting the ideology of different leaders from the discourses. Discourses for geopolitical reasoning (Ideologies) in the studies provided us with a means to examine how

the foreign policy discourses articulate humanitarianism and re-construct the political imaginaries of humanitarianism in different administrations, as shown in the below graph.

*Framework of the study*



It adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework to achieve the study's goal. The framework is divided into three phases of critical discourse analysis (CDA): *text description*, *text interpretation*, and *text explanation*. (Fairclough, 2001; 21) Fairclough (ibid; 65) argued the coherence of the discourse, which is about “what components of the discourse in reality, connect to and what sort of universe conception it posited.” Moreover, interpreters build the links by drawing on their experience and expertise (ibid; 65)

CDA, according to van Dijk (2018: 229), is a form of discourse analysis research that focuses on “how social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are acted, reinforced, and contested through text and speech in the social and political context.” (2018: 229) While Jensen (2012: 82) defined discourse as “an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, which brings an object into being.” That is, language produces a phenomena, an object, whereas text produces an act, a performance. (Erdogan, 2016: 22)

Discourse, according to Fairclough, is a kind of "social practice" that is constituted by the social environment. (Koluskuz, 2015: 56) Van Dijk contends that the analysis of discourse in CDA considers the "larger picture" rather than merely the qualities of language; it considers the implications for social, political, and cultural acts. (ibid: 57)

Along with the critical geopolitics approach, three major themes are proposed and adapted from Koluskuz (2015: 41), which would be used in analysing the discourses, which are '*power and ideology*' and '*identity and othering*' and '*critical analysis of territory*'

### *Power and ideology*

Driven by Foucault's ideas on geography and power, he defined space as "the site where history imprinted itself. Thus, geography has to study what resides and is created there." (as cited in Koluskuz, 2015: 32), and any exertion of power necessitates the use of space. (ibid: 33) As "communication is the basis enabling communication in modern society, and how that language is employed is a kind of power." (ibid: 44) Hence Ó Tuathail (1996: 59) and Dalby (1990: 4) suggested that critical geopolitics allows it to examine discourses in terms of "how they justify and therefore reproduce power systems." So, the power of ideas may be an "empowering or manipulating element that provides as a tool for understanding way discourses are employed to achieve goals." (Koluskuz, 2015: 42). This is particularly useful in understanding the rationale of policy-decision making. Ó Tuathail (1996) further emphasised the significance of hegemony in geopolitical thinking since it provides for the rationale and legitimacy of policy actions. Gramsci defined hegemony as the common-sense value that dominates our society, and hegemony is generated through a variety of ideologies formed throughout the discourse. (Koluskuz, 2015: 45)

### *Identity and Difference*

Dalby (1990: 5) suggested the notion of the Other is important in critical geopolitical analysis., because it “offers a blueprint for comprehending how foreign policy ideas and rationale are developed.” (Koluskuz, 2015: 46), which focuses on the relationship between political identity and different geopolitical specifications, such as “us” and “them”, “their space” and “our space”.

### *Critical Analysis of Territory*

Critical analysis of territory, in other words, relates to how space is given sense, as the interpretations that fill up space are socially constituted via many discourses. (ibid; 51) The meanings of space, for example, might somehow validate policy actions, such as the justification of activity in the Middle East area amid operations and intervention in the Global War on Terror.

These three themes would serve as the framework to address the US foreign policy in the Middle East by examining related foreign policy discourses as the ideological device to justify or legitimate their actions related to humanitarianism or anti-humanitarianism. We can understand the rationale behind different administrations’ stances on foreign policy and their take on humanitarianism through the discourses. We can evaluate humanitarianism's role in shaping American foreign policy during different administrations.

Most of the materials range from the 2000s until 2017, which fulfils the case study timeline. And the paper would pay special attention to the lexical style, argumentation, persuasive devices, and rhetorical figures. While the keyword in searching the materials are words like “human rights”, “Middle East”, “humanity”, “intervention”; also with words includes the concept of binaries, such as “we/us” or “they/them”, “peace/violate” etc. And it is noted that



the material chosen for analysis sees the language as intentional, hence presented as ideology via the deconstruction of the discourse.

## Criteria of selecting and analysing specific discourses in the study

### *Criteria of selecting specific discourses*

1. *Keywords*
- “Middle East”, “Humanity”, “Human Rights”, “Democracy”, “Intervention”, “Bush”, “Obama”, “We” and “They”

### *Criteria of analysing specific discourses*

1. *Argumentation*
- Usage of facts
2. *Lexical Styles*
- Choice of Words
  - Over-Lexicalization/ Recurrence of the word
  - Binaries of words: “Peace/Violate”, “we” and “they”, “us” and “them”
3. *Rhetorical Figures*
- Euphemisms, Denials, Metaphors and Contrast



## **Discourses Analysis/ Discussion**

### ***American foreign policy discourses in the Middle East***

The earliest relationship of the United States to be involved in the MENA was shaped by the demise of the Ottoman and the British empire (Dodge, 2018: 177), which President Woodrow Wilson's speech after WWI marked a change in the Middle East, which was the fourteen-point agenda that aimed at promoting post-war diplomacy, collective security, and open markets. Wilson's advocacy for formerly oppressed countries' self-determination had become a touchstone for those Arabs. (ibid: 178) Hence, Wilson was considered as the founder of the contemporary sovereign Middle Eastern state. (Dodge, 2005, as cited in Dodge, 2018). However, the increasing involvement of the United States in the MENA due to the competition between the US and the Soviet Union, along with the strategic interests in the region (Masoudi, 2015), drove growing resentment amongst Arab nationalists. For instant, the US has empowered some states in MENA as proxy states with weaponry, making these countries become increasingly detached from the society, Iran in particular, thus resulting in a radical manifesto of Islamism and anti-Americanism in several countries that the US have intervened in, such as Iran, Lebanon and Afghanistan. (Dodge, 2018: 182-184)

### *Bush's foreign policy discourses in the Middle East: Exceptionalism*

Following the demise of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, the post-Cold War era was seen as a success of free-market liberal democracy. (Rogers, 2018: 296) Those in the Bush administration were optimistic about the prospect of a New American Century in the twenty-first century. (Dodge, 2018:177) Nonetheless, the al-Qaeda raid on the United States was a watershed moment in US foreign policy. (Kevlihan et al., 2014). Masoudi (2015) argued that the 9/11 terrorist attacks enabled the US to legitimize its intervention in this area with a hegemonic discourse based on the Bush doctrine. After the attacks, the President has released a public statement:

*"The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror."*

*"We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them."*

*(Bush, 2001)*

In response to the attacks, Bush (2001) has used words like "moms and dads", "federal workers", "friends and neighbours" to describe those victims who suffered in the attacks, in contrast to the latter, who described those who attacked as "evil" and "despicable". And to demand the countries to cease harbouring the terrorists or risk using the US military to terminate the regime if they did not comply also indicated the US has issued a threat or final warning to the sovereignty that harbour the criminals. Soon, the US declared military actions in the Middle East to combat terrorism to protect the security of the US and to its world, also known as the Global War on Terror (GWOT), which was perceived as a "self-assigned obligation" by the US to maintain the peace, not just for itself, but also for its friends and the rest of the world. (Koluskuz, 2015: 230) During the West Point Speeches, Bush has mentioned the role of the US in the world, as he says:

*"Our Nation's cause has always been larger than our Nation's defence. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace... a peace that favours liberty. We will defend the peace against the threats and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building a good relation among the great powers. And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent"*

*(Bush, 2002b)*

In the statements above, Bush displayed "America as a guardian of global peace, a self-assigned duty that does benefit the whole." (ibid; 232) He accomplishes this by promoting America's "good" (positive) qualities, such as its pledge to "fight" and "be just", as well as to "create good connections" and "promote free societies." Hence, such obligations can supply for those suffering (those people living under the tyranny and threats by terrorists or dictators). Furthermore, the above statement also differentiated the identity of "us" (the United States of America and its allies) who protect others and "them" (terrorists and tyrants) who pose threats to others. Bush's statement also argued the "cause" as a fight for peace, showing the ideology of the Bush administration of viewing itself as superior to others and serving as a leader or "saviour" to promote peace and liberty to the world. Such messianic and crusading role can be found in his speech during the 2003 State of the Union address regarding the invasion of Iraq:

*"Once again, this nation and our friends are all that stand between a world at peace, and a world of chaos and constant alarm. Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility"*

*(Bush, 2003)*

In this case, Bush made his assertions through contrast, making a distinction between America and its "friends" and everyone else, implying that America is the only one capable of "saving" a globe rife with "chaos" and "constant alert" (ibid; 233) As a result, American strength is depicted as necessary to save the globe from chaos. While over-lexicalisation of the words, such as the world in "chaos" and "constant alarm" to alert people the world is vulnerable to harm from the terrorists. Bush's continuous emphasis on the role of America in saving the "hope of all mankind" somehow reflects the exceptionalism of America. According to Madsen (1998, as cited in Deudney and Meiser. 2018), American exceptionalism is viewed as "the

belief that the United States is an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not unique but also superior to among nations".

While Deudney and Meiser (2018: 23) argued that American exceptionalism has different meanings, for neo-conservationists, exceptionalism can refer to the "green light" for ignoring international laws, invading and forcing regimes on other nations and habitually equating specific, sometimes provincial and pedestrian American objectives with the global pursuit of development and freedom (ibid: 23). At the same time, it can be regarded as the cypher for liberal internationalist desires for a free and peaceful world. (ibid: 23) McCrisken (2003:11) provided a missionary view of exceptionalism, which promotes "US involvement into other states' affairs but believes the US is unable of attempting control over other peoples in their self-interest." Instead, they solely want to improve the lives of others. (ibid: 11) The American exceptionalism can be reflected in the Bush's foreign policy and his discourse on the invasion or intervention in the countries in the Middle East, with its beliefs of American right and obligation to act in other regions of the world, demonstrating what Theodore Roosevelt referred to as a "international police power". (Weinberg, 1935, as cited in Koluskuz, 2015: 80)

### ***Bush's Political Imaginaries of Humanitarianism***

President Bush has adopted a more humanistic role to account for or legitimate their actions in the intervention in the Middle East, particularly Afghanistan and Iraq, which he showed his care and mercy to the victims in Afghanistan as well, as he delivered during the 2001 UN General Assembly:

*"Unlike the enemy...we seek to minimize, not maximize...the loss of innocent life...And my country grieves for all the suffering the Taliban have brought upon Afghanistan, including the terrible burden of war."*

*(Bush, 2001)*

Here, Bush referred to Afghanistan as the "enemy", with a negative and lousy identity, and related them as the "initiator of evil", with words like "Enemy" and "Maximize...the loss of innocent life". On the other hand, Bush also referred to the US as the one who was "trying to minimize the loss of life", which constituted the American identity as one of the victims of the "enemy" as well. Furthermore, the prepositional word "Unlike" is used to compare the difference in identity between the US (Victims/Innocents) and Afghanistan (Enemy). In the latter part of the discourse, he represented the United States to extend their commiseration to the people who are being tortured by the local government. He created a message to the world that the Afghanistan Invasion (Intervention) was more than taking acts of revenge for attacks, but to helping those who were vulnerable from regime that inflict terror on their own people.

*"Years of Taliban misrule have brought nothing but misery and starvation. Even before this current crisis, 4 million Afghans depended on food from the United States and other nations, and millions of Afghans were refugees in from Taliban oppression"*

*(ibid.)*

The president kept accusing the accountability of Afghanistan as a sovereign state by indicating the Taliban government as "oppressive" and "misrule" to show all of the problems were origin with its government, its inability to prevent its people from suffering. On the other hand, it also mentions that the US has been assisting the countries for an extended period, along with other

nations. This shows the rationale of the intervention or the invade operation was for the goods of the Afghanistan people, which he further elaborated,

*“Taliban’s day of harbouring terrorists, and dealing in heroin, and brutalizing women are drawing to a close...When the regime is gone, the people of Afghanistan will stay with the rest of the world...good riddance”*

*(ibid.)*

This entailed and justified the role of the intervention as to protect the civilians in Afghanistan from the brutality of the Taliban. Thus, he continued, “America will join the world in helping the people of Afghanistan to rebuild their country”, here Bush mentioned Afghanistan’s people would be helped by the world, indicating the thoughts of the rest of the world underlying the operations, that rest of the world pursue the same values with the America that human rights should be respected, and opposed to any human rights violation.

To further construct a more humanistic image of the US, Bush also provided usage of facts and numbers to support his arguments:

*“America has airdropped over 1.3 million packages of rations in Afghanistan... Just this week...we airlifted 20,000 blankets and over 200 tons of provisions into the region... We continued to provide humanitarian aid, even while the Taliban try to steal the food we send”*

*(ibid.)*

Here, Bush used numbers and facts about the humanitarian aid provided to the those who suffer in Afghanistan to convince the people around the world that America’s intervention (we) was for the good of the Afghanistan people that the United States showed its neutrality. In the last quote of the statement, Bush used contrast to describe “them” (Taliban) as those who steal the food the US send, constituting a role that Taliban regime not only related to terrorism but also neglect the basic needs of their people.



The following part will focus on the discourse related to the intervention in Iraq, which is regarded as the centrepiece of the GWOT. Here, Bush outlined how the dictatorship in Iraq violated human rights as he spoke during the 2002 UN General Assembly:

*“Tens of thousands of political opponents and ordinary citizens have been subjected to arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, summary execution and torture by beating and burning, electronic shock, starvation, mutilation and rape...”*

*“Wives are tortured in front of their husbands; children in the presence of their parents; and all of these horrors concealed from the world by the apparatus of a totalitarian state”*

*(Bush, 2002b)*

According to the aforementioned statements, Bush began his address with figures and "facts" concerning the atrocities (Koluksuz, 2015: 226) committed by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in order to persuade others that Saddam's brutality posed a threat not only to his people but also to the rest of the world. Mainly, Bush has used examples such as “wives being tortured with children in their presence”, further culminating the notorious acts of Saddam’s government, hence relating the actions to the like of totalitarian states. Furthermore, language shapes our intellect and influences our emotions, so emotional claims are so enticing. (Jackson, 2005) Unlike the Saddam regime, Bush argued the intervention in Iraq was to liberate those who suffer in the name of humanity and once again emphasize the good intentions of “we” (The US):

*“The United States has no quarrel with the Iraqi people. They’ve suffered too long in silent captivity. Liberty for the Iraqi people is a great moral cause and a great strategic goal”*

*“We must stand up for our security and for the permanent rights and hopes of mankind”*

*(ibid.)*

Bush has described the people in Iraq as “suffered in long captivity”, showing the dilemma the people there were facing. The second quote showed the United States viewed itself as the liberator to set these people free. Bush also mentioned the intervention is based on a “moral

cause”, implying that the United States advocates for human rights, opposes any infringement of human rights, and “must act on the principle” (ibid: 227):

*“America believes that all people are entitled to hope and human rights, to non-negotiable demands of human dignity. People everywhere prefer freedom to slavery, prosperity to squalor, self-government and torture. America is a friend to the people of Iraq.”*

*(ibid.)*

From the above remark, Bush provided liberalism traits such as "hope" and "human rights" to demonstrate the American government's resolve to assist the people of Iraq. Furthermore, Bush argued such attributes are pursued by people worldwide, hence discussing the importance of human rights as universal values that is or should be followed by anyone. Bush also presupposed that “slavery” and “torture” violated human rights and accused the Iraqi government of not behaving humanely. Hence, it further legitimates America’s intervention to terminate the tyranny of the Saddam’s regime, which he mentioned the people of Iraq as “friends” to them, implying that the operation is being undertaken “for the sake of the Iraqi people”. (ibid; 226) and for the name of “promoting freedom and democracy” (human rights) to people.

A few days after the operation in Iraq, Bush spoke on the battle there and emphasised the need of intervening in the country just for humanity:

*“Iraqis are a good and gifted people. They deserve better than a life spent bowing before a dictator. The people deserve to stand on their feet as free men and women ... the citizens of a free country”*

*“This goal of a free and peaceful Iraq unites our coalition...The liberty we prize is not American’s gift to the world; it is God’s gift to humanity.”*

*(Bush, 2003e)*

The President first described the people as “good” and “gifted” yet being tortured by their government, which they needed to “bow” before their dictator. Here, Bush contrasts different Iraq under Hussein and Iraq after the US intervention, which transformed from people grovelling to their leaders into embracing freedom, indicating the country has become a “free”

nation under the “help” of the United States. While the second statement portrayed America and its allies (Western Countries) as the “peacekeeper” and thus are inherent of good intention. Again, positive language is used about America, while negative language is used to “them” (Saddam’s regime)

Bush's Middle East foreign policy was primarily centred on the "War on Terror" to eliminate the terrorists underground and associated governments striving to develop weapons of mass destruction. Hence, intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq resulted. Bush’s discourse presented an ideology (exceptionalism) that it viewed itself as superior and had the responsibility to lead others to promote peace and safety. According to the rhetoric, the US viewed the intervention (military operations) as a mandate for presenting peace rather than provoking violence. (Koluksuz, 2015: 235) Furthermore, Bush has employed diametrically opposed rhetoric to present American principles as having a “moral purpose”, particularly identifying the human rights violations, declaring “them” (Taliban/Saddam) as “evil”, and keep portraying “we” (America’s intention) as good and in the moral obligation to save these people through removing the regime there. Hence, humanitarianism is used to legitimate its action in the Middle East and convince the public that the intervention was nothing but for promoting democracy and helping others, as heeding the call of suffering humanity enables us to honour our humanity and participate in the construction of humanity as a putatively universal category. (Allen, 2018: 159)

## *Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East: Passive Liberalism*

After two terms of “expansive” US foreign policy under Bush, “driven by the notion that the United States ought to project force unilaterally abroad in the protection of its own and its allies' national interests, Obama's foreign policy strategy looked to be non-interventionist at first.” (Kreig, 2016), as he spoke during the 2009 Inaugural Address:

*“To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect... To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West, know that your people will judge you on what you build, not what you destroy”*

*(Obama, 2009)*

In the first two quotes, President Obama sees the countries in the Middle East as friends or partners, using the word “we” to suggest the multilateral cooperation to move forward together and relied on each other instead of the unilateral intervention carried out by the Bush administration, demonstrating Obama's intention to separate his administration from that of his predecessor and attempt to repair the damage done to the US's global reputation by Bush's unilateral measures. Furthermore, Obama endorsed multilateral collaboration, as as shared interests link states together, and that these mutual interests would override political differences to enable for collaboration. (Nau, 2010) The latter part of the quote indicated a message to the leaders in the Middle East that, instead of the “destruction” and “conflict”, it would be better to adopt some constructive measures for the good of the people. Later, Obama further delivered more during the Cairo speech in 2009:

*“So let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America. And I believe that America holds within her the truth that regardless of race, religion, or station in life, all of us share common aspirations -- to live in peace and security; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities, and our God. These things we share. This is the hope of all humanity.”*

*“I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.”*

*(Obama, 2009a)*

From the first statement, Obama viewed Islam, a crucial element in the Middle East region, as part of the constitution of the society in America. Therefore, there are a lot of common grounds between the people in the Middle East and the United States, that “we” all share the aspiration to live in “peace” and “security”. The cultural relativism approach reduced the difference between “we” and “them”, entailing only multilateral cooperation can be a means for the good of all humanity. The second statement expressed the view that the ideology of Liberalism is a universal value that is pursued by everyone around the world, which further constitute a view that the work done by the US is not for exploiting its national interests but for promoting the ideology of human rights to the people in the Middle East, as the Obama’s government believed that human rights are equivalent to bringing “good” and “prosperous” life to people.

Contrary to Bush’s expansionist foreign policy in the Middle East, Obama maintained that America should 'rightsize' its foreign involvement owing to a lack of funding, public will, and the capacity to fight 'everywhere' conflicts. (Zakaria, 2012), as evidenced by his speech during the 2009 Inaugural Address:

*“Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age.”*

*(Obama, 2009)*

Hence, the principle of “multilateral retrenchment” guided Obama's foreign policy. (Krieg, 2016; Krieg, 2017), a strategy for minimizing the United States' abroad duties, restoring its global prestige, and shifting responsibilities to global partners (ibid.), accentuate the need to rely on diplomacy and multilateral cooperation instead of the military intervention, as Obama spoke in a 2015 press conference after the upheaval during the Arab Spring:

*“Ultimately, it is not the job of the United States to solve every problem in the Middle East. The people in the Middle East are going to have to solve some of these problems themselves.”*

*(Obama, 2015)*

From the above statements, Obama seeks to shift the role of maintaining the regional security from itself to its regional “partner” and “allies”, as examined in the National Security Strategy (2015: 8): *“The threshold for military action is higher when our interests are not directly threatened. In such case, we will seek to mobilise allies and partners to share the burden and achieve lasting outcomes”*. Therefore, the military intervention in Obama’s perspective was treated as the last resort in protecting vital US national interests. (Kreig, 2016) To resolve local challenges in the Middle East, the Obama administration emphasised the necessity of strategic burden-sharing through multilateral initiatives instead (ibid.) Therefore, Obama’s foreign policy ideology reflects passive liberalism driven by “multilateral retrenchment” and domestic factors.

## *Obama's Political Imaginaries of Humanitarianism*

President Obama's foreign policy aimed to "rightsize" the overseas commitment, particularly the military intervention in the Middle East, which attempted to distance itself from what it perceived as the previous administration's "dangerous obsession" with the Middle East. (Dodge, 2018; 191) Instead, the focus of Obama's foreign policy was pivoting toward the Asia-Pacific region since he came into office (Lizza, 2011; Krieg, 2016). However, the unrest in the Middle East initiated by the Arab Spring forced the US to top the MENA region on the US foreign policy agenda. In response to the development of Arab Spring, Obama's administration's foreign policy discourses are different in different areas of countries. Humanitarian intervention was determined by his foreign policy objectives instead of his human conscience, as argued by scholar Dan Nexon:

*"Humanitarian intervention against military weak fossil fuel producing countries in strategically important regions, that are also located near many NATO military bases and are run by dictators who kind of piss us off and have no powerful allies."*

*(Nexon, 2011)*

Here, Nixon criticized Obama's humanitarian intervention through R2P in Libya as an "intervention against weak military fossil fuel producing countries". At the same time, many regions are "run by dictators" that may be in a more urgent situation but do not have any powerful allies. Hence, it criticized Obama's approach to intervention as originating from the foreign policy objectives or national interests instead of heeding the call of suffering humanity. The following part will address Obama's foreign policy discourses in response to the crisis initiated by the Arab Spring.

It is vital first to understand how Obama viewed the concept of intervention, as the President addressed how and when intervention should be used during his speech in Oslo after he received the Nobel Prize:

*“I believe that force can be justified on humanitarian grounds, as it was in the Balkans, or in other places that have been scarred by war. Inaction tears at our conscience and can lead to more costly intervention later. That's why all responsible nations must embrace the role that militaries with a clear mandate can play to keep the peace.”*

*(Obama, 2009c)*

From the speeches, Obama believed that intervention or military forces can justify based on humanitarian ground and stated that inaction would only lead to a more costly intervention in the future. Therefore, militaries are endowed to protect the peace, which is similar to the idea with his predecessor. As the uprising in Libya worsened, the group consisted of big states (USA, France, UK) along with the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Africa Union and Arab League (Aljaghoub et al., 2013, as cited in Erdogan 2016), calling for a stricter measure, to invoke the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The result was UN Resolution 1973, which gave authorization for a no-fly zone, and intervention operation was mandated internationally. President Obama further discussed the progress and result of intervention during the Address to the Nation on Libya:

*“Last month, Qaddafi's grip of fear appeared to give way to the promise of freedom. In cities and towns across the country, Libyans took to the streets to claim their basic human rights. As one Libyan said, “For the first time we finally have hope that our nightmare of 40 years will soon be over.”*

*(Obama, 2011b)*

The statement above implied the message that the US's contribution in providing the “freedom” and “basic rights” to the people in Libya helped them to get out of the “nightmare” (the Qaddafi's regime), again shaping the US identity as the crusader and the saviour of the suffering people in Libya. Contrary to the positive image of the US, he described the dictator Qaddafi as “fear” of “freedom”, presupposing that the Qaddafi's regime was “evil” and it could never withstand the “just”, which is freedom. To further strengthen his argument, he quoted a Libyan's thought on the intervention, stating that the intervention helped them get out of their



“nightmare”, implying that the US intervention in Libya was much to gain and nothing to lose.

President Obama has further elaborated on the success of the intervention during the 2011 UN

General Address:

*“Forty-two years of tyranny was ended in six months... Yesterday, the leaders of a new Libya took their rightful place beside us”*

*“The youth are delivering a powerful rebuke to dictatorship, and rejecting the lie that some races, religious and ethnicities do not desire democracy.”*

*(Obama, 2011)*

From the first statement, Obama described the action of the newly formed sovereignty as “taking the rightful place beside us”, referring to the master signifier, the “United States”. Hence, it articulates the role of the US as the ideological leader to spread and promote human rights in the Middle East. Furthermore, Obama again has used contrast to amplify its success, constituting the negative identity of Qaddafi’s regime as “tyranny” and the positive of the intervention as “rightful”. Similarly, in the second statement, words such as “rebuke” to “dictatorship” of Qaddafi used to oppress its people, and the “desire” to pursue “democracy” by the willing of the people in Libya created binaries that the only one “evil” was the tyranny from the Qaddafi’s regime, not the civilians in Libya nor the US. Moreover, Obama related the initiation of the intervention to the local youth there to justify further its intervention, underlying that the role of the Western or the US is to heed the call from the suffering people there.

In response to the Syrian civilian war evolved from a peaceful demonstration against the Assad regime, which turned out to be oppression by the Assad regime, to deploying a high level of violence, including the use of chemical powers, to stay in power. Obama kept a less assertive tone about whether to intervene in the country or not as he spoke during the UN General Assembly:

*“Men, women and children are being tortured, detained and murdered by the Syrian regime. Thousands have been killed, many during the holy time of Ramadan. Thousands more have poured across the Syria’s borders...”*

*“The question for us is clear: Will we stand with our troops with the Syrian People, or with their oppressors?... Already, the United States has imposed strong sanctions on Syria’s leaders. We have supported the transfer of power that is responsive to the Syrian people”*

*(ibid.)*

Here, the President rhetorically condemned the Assad’s atrocities against his people, stating how Assad’s regime “tortured”, “detained”, “murdered”, and “killed” the innocent people, how he violated the fundamental human rights in an attempt to display an overwhelming rhetorical humanitarian concern with the spreading democracy in the Middle East. Yet, nothing has been taken into action than the “strong” sanctions on Syria’s leader. While in response to the crisis in Yemen, Obama provided a slightly different view:

*“In Yemen, men, women and children gather by the thousands in towns and city squares every day with the hope that their determination and spilled blood will prevail over a corrupt system. America supports their aspiration. We must work with Yemen’s neighbours and our partners around the world to seek a path that allows for a peaceful transition of power from President Saleh, and a movement to free and fair elections as soon as possible.*

*(ibid.)*

Contrary to the statement of Syria, Obama praises the people in Yemen as “fighters” who “spilt their blood” to pursue freedom and against the “corrupt” regime Yemen and stated that America is more than pleased to support the people’s will, with the “work with Yemen’s neighbour and our partners to seek a path”, implying the crisis can only be successful only with multilateral cooperation, not just by the US itself, echoing the burden-sharing principles by the Obama administration (Krieg, 2016) Moreover, with the support of Saudi Arabian forces, the Bahraini government used military force to repress a pro-democracy rally. In response to the crisis there, Obama used a much softer and friendlier tone when addressing the issue during the UN General Assembly:

*“In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability, but more required. America is a close friend of Bahrain, and we will continue to call on the government and the main opposition bloc, the Wifaq, to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people. And we believe the patriotism that binds Bahrainis together must be more powerful than the sectarian forces that would tear them apart.”*

*(Obama, 2011)*

Unlike the response in Libya and Syria, Obama has described the relationship between the U.S. and the oppressor Bahrain government as “friend” instead of demonizing or using Othering to differentiate “we” and “them”. Further, the President has adopted a more subdued adjective choice, indirect non-reference to the horrific crackdown and entrenched despotism in Bahrain and asked for a “meaningful dialogue” between the government and its opposition, which sounded like what Fisher (2011) said as “echo the older style of U.S. rhetoric on reform in the Middle East”. The discourses above showed how the “friendship” with its allies (Saudi and Bahrain) served as an “excuse” for the administration to neglect the use of humanitarian intervention in Bahrain.

The Arab Spring, a rally demanding more socioeconomic security and political liberalisation, was the central focus of the Obama administration's Middle East foreign policy. Obama offered nothing more than moral support to the upsurges in the Middle East, reflecting its position and stance in the Middle East, which was to “rightsize” its overseas commitment and “lead from behind” subjected to the multilateral retrenchment and the “war-fatigue” from the public that viewed the military intervention as the “last resort” in providing the US national interests. And it is given the fact that the multiple crises (such as the crisis in Syria and Libya) were not deemed "urgent" enough in terms of essential US national interests and humanitarian concerns to warrant action alone. (Kreig, 2016) While the multilateral intervention in Libya fulfilled Obama’s agenda of burden-sharing, hence it was approved by the US government. Furthermore, we can see how contradictory Obama was with the concept of a "humanitarian impulse," the urge to reject a fixed image of humanity in favour of one that is contingent, possibly felt before

thinking, to leave "some saved and some overlooked." (Pasic and Weiss, 1997), particularly his policy in Syria and Bahrain. Furthermore, it reflected Radice's (2018) contention that the humanitarian impulse becomes institutionalised and entwined with existing structural power connections.

## **Conclusion: from Bush to Obama - Continuity and change in humanitarian imaginaries**

The study examined the discursive relationship between the rhetoric of US foreign policy and humanitarianism and how their ideology articulates their imaginaries of humanitarianism. Both administrations shared a similar foreign policy goal, mainly to lead the combat against terrorism and the prevention of nuclear proliferation. Yet, their approaches to reaching the goals bifurcated, with Bush seeking to maximise the use of “promoting of democracy” in his policy in the Middle East, while Obama tended to acquire a non-interventional approach (mainly diplomacy and multilateral cooperation) when addressing the crisis in the Middle East.

Nonetheless, most of the study's US foreign policy rhetoric discourses indicated how humanitarianism is deeply embedded into the US foreign policy discourse. When addressing different humanitarian violation issues during the crisis in other states in the Middle East, words like “liberty”, “freedom”, and “human rights” frequently appeared in both the Bush and Obama administrations to support the will of the oppressed civilians, mostly it accentuates the identity of “we”, as the ideological leaders in promoting such concept and constituted an identity of “friend” to the suffering people there, and create an “enemy” through Othering to condemn how their states make their people become suffered. This is particularly evident during the Bush administration.

Furthermore, power is extensively embedded within the humanitarian imaginaries during both administrations. Both Bush and Obama have initiated the intervention in Iraq and Libya, respectively, which both justified the intervention in the name of humanitarian concerns, for an instant, “for the good of people...”. “no more torture”, “liberate people from the evil regime” etc. However, moral reasons for intervention and democracy are tainted by the desires of individual actors inside international systems. (Moore, 2013: 934) It contends that humanitarian framing emerges from inside specific identities, interests, and discourses. In the

context of the Bush administration, the purpose of the intervention was to remove the government that was associated with the terrorist group or Weapons of Mass Destruction, which was deemed to pose a danger to US national security. Hence it initiated the intervention in Iraq in the name of “humanitarianism” to reach its “authentic” goal of national interests, which Bush’s humanitarian imaginaries were derived from what Watson (2011) called the state and social security discourse, taking priority the state or society as a way of safeguarding human life and dignity. Hence, it questioned the humanity tendency of the US government, whether is it to bask in the suffering of others or to subordinate to “one’s conception of humanity”. Such tendency may lead to the “paternalism of humanitarian action”, how humanitarianism and the conceptions of humanity it embodies have always been imbricated with the power structures of the times. (Radice, 2018; Barnett, 2012) In the context of the Obama’s administration, the discourses in Libya and Bahrain implied the symbol of the “politics of rescues”, in which its intention to rescue or not was primarily based on the “friends” or “strangers” approach. Such distinctions between "friends" and "strangers" are embedded in social and political discourse. (Moore, 2013: 934) While Obama's ideology was to collaborate with other countries depending on their capacity to assist the US in reaching its goal. Hence it made it difficult for the Obama administration to tackle and address the crisis in Bahrain adequately due to the “friendly” relationship between the Saudi and Bahrain government.

All in all, humanitarianism was deeply embedded in the US foreign policymaking, but this was not stemmed from a humanitarian perspective but instead from political concerns (national interest-based). Hence, power relations inherent in all notions of humanity and humanitarian actions can use judiciously to justify different actions for states to achieve another goal, such as Bush using the humanitarian discourses selectively to legitimate their actions.

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