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Does Foreign Impact Matter? Role of United States policy in Tunisia's Arab  
Spring

Záleží na zahraničním vlivu? Role zahraniční politiky Spojených států  
amerických v arabském jaru v Tunisku

Bachelor's thesis

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Hereby I declare that the submitted bachelor's thesis is a product of my own work with use of listed literature and sources.

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## Introduction

The uprisings and protests in the Middle East known as the Arab spring which started in 2011 had a significant impact not only on the region of the Middle East, but also on the whole world. These protests happened in almost all Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa. It led to bloody conflicts between protestors in Bahrain, Yemen, in case of Syria, it led to bloody civil war, which consequences can be seen still nowadays in Syria. In the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, we can talk about less violent protests. However, only the Jasmine revolution led to democratic transition, and Tunisia became, for a while, the only democratic country in the region of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). (Mendel 2015, 318)

As docent Mendel wrote in his book *Arab Spring: historical and cultural backgrounds of the events in the Middle East*, it is worth attention, that not just Middle Eastern events relate to the word “spring”. (Mendel 2015, 10) When we investigate the past, we can see the revolutions in Europe in 1848 be called as “Springtime of the Peoples”, or the events in socialistic Czechoslovakia in 1968 be called as “Prague Spring”. It is not a coincidence. With the word spring, there is always a hope for something new to be born, to be released. In the case of the “Arab spring” it was no different.

From the western point of view, the Arab spring was seen as a hope for something new, and big. Leaders of the West supposed that the MENA region will democratize itself, the human rights will be taken in mind, and that the countries will get away from economic problems as poverty, or unemployment. The only fear for the West was about the sources of the oil, which is located mostly in the Middle Eastern region. The possible destabilization could let to unexpected changes on the oil market. (Mendel 2015, 9)

Although it was one of the most stable and most developed country in the region, Tunisia was the country where, by the Jasmine Revolution, the Arab Spring started. The impact of the Arab spring in this North African country, the causes, the progress, and the consequences will be the topic of this bachelor thesis. Goal of the thesis in general is to find out, how the Arab spring in Tunisia was affected by the United States of America as a world’s biggest hegemon. Because the Jasmine revolution happened in 2011, and until today, three different presidents have changed in a head of the United States, the thesis will analyse all three administrations, and their position towards Tunisia. The problem is, democratic transition was successful in Tunisia, and Tunisia was a unique example of a successful democracy not only in MENA region, but in a Muslim country. However nowadays, the country is back to authoritarian rule,

and the democratic transition happened to be failure. So, can we talk about some kind of influence of the United States in regime change in Tunisia? It is a goal of the thesis to find out, why the Tunisian example failed, although the country was democracy for a while.

Although the topic of the Arab spring is widely known in the world, and we can meet with its consequences (for example immigration crisis, terrorist attacks etc.) in our everyday lives, Tunisia is sometimes quite overlooked in my opinion. Literature and scholars usually talk about the influence of the young generation, and the influence of the armed forces, there is not much works about the influence of the United States interests and policy in Tunisia. Of course, the details from secret documents and secret services cannot be known publicly, but it can be seen, when we compare Tunisia with other countries, where the Arab spring failed right in the start, that there must be something different about Tunisia, when the revolution was, at least in the start, successful. So, in my opinion, there is a huge space for new analysis and research.

The main research question in the Thesis is *whether foreign impact matter* as the title of the Thesis says. To broaden the question, the Thesis asks if foreign policy of one power, in this case the United States of America, can affect domestic policy of other country, in this case Tunisia. Because successful democratic transition happened in Tunisia in 2011, but now the country is back to authoritarian rule of one man, the goal is to find out, if the American policy somehow affected it and if it had or still has some influence. The two-good theory of international relations will be used in thesis to analyse three different administrations of presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden, how they manage their policy towards Tunisia and how could they affect the domestic situation there.

The main hypothesis of the Thesis is that *the foreign policy of the United States of America had an impact on Tunisia's domestic policy, so their policy is responsible for Tunisia's domestic situation*. This hypothesis is based on the used theory, and on intensive research of the literature and news from different countries and sources.

The two-good theory of international relations comes from book called *A theory of Foreign Policy* which was written by professors Glenn Palmer and T. Clifton Morgan. The book discusses the two-good theory of international relations which comes from base of realism, and neo-realism, but opposite to realists, they see the international environment not just as a place where all that matters is security. They also cover the domestic factors as key for foreign policy

decisions. The theoretical framework will be fully and deeply described in the first chapter, so the reader can fully understand the connection between the theory and practice.

As the thesis covers the topic of Arab spring, it will talk about the Middle East and North Africa region, while the United States will be included as “the influencer”. As I mentioned in the first part, the Arab spring started in Tunisia, in 2010, so the thesis will cover everything that happened between Tunisia and the United States of America since 2010 until 2023. For a full understanding of the situation in the Middle East, in the second chapter, which will talk about the Arab spring in general, the thesis will cover a little bit of history of the region, so the reader can fully understand the connections.

This thesis is, from the methodological point of view, a case study. Case study is a great way to research a unique occurrence in whole context and its better understanding. This method was popularized in the sociology in 20<sup>th</sup> century by Chicago school (also known as ecological school). The biggest spread of it happened in the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, twenty years later since its foundation. Since that, it became more and more popular and accepted in the qualitative research by the scientists in sociology. (Kořan, 2019: 99–104)

Object of the research is a particular case, particular occurrence, which is searched in detail. In case of this thesis, it is the influence of Western powers, particularly the United States of America, France, and Germany. The case of the research is the Arab Spring in Tunisia and its ongoing from role model in democratic transition back to authoritarian rule of one man or party. (Kořan, 2019: 104–105)

As in all methods, there are some disadvantages of case studies. For example, a clear methodology for conducting case study research has still not been established. We do not have such clear instructions on how to proceed it. The main problem of the case study is the subsequent limited possibility of generalizing the conclusions of the work to other phenomena. It is not the most suitable method for developing generally valid theories, thus the findings of the study relate only to our investigated case. (Kořan, 2019: 120)

As I mentioned previously, the literature about the Arab spring in Tunisia usually talks about the engagement of young generation, armed forces, or the unions. Not many of them mention the influence of other countries in revolution, but in some online magazines, there can be seen an attempt of that. In the thesis, I will use a mix of different articles, books, and sources in different languages, mostly English and Czech. All the citations from the Czech texts will be

translate into English by myself. The most important books for my work will be *Arabské Jaro* from Czech author Miloš Mendel, *A History of Modern Tunisia* by Kenneth Perkins, and *Arab Revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Lessons from Egypt and Tunisia* by Nader Fergany. For the latest news, or statistics, I will use online sources, mostly reputable news agencies as BBC, Foreign Affairs, or some Czech ones as ČT24, iROZHLAS, or The Institute of the International Relations Prague.

This thesis will be structured in five main chapters and of course, conclusion in the end. Firstly, the theoretical framework will be explained, so the reader can fully understand what the thesis will try to say and prove. As I mentioned previously the two-good theory of the international relations will be used in the thesis, so it is necessary to fully explain it, so the readers can understand.

Chapter number two will summarize the Arab spring in general, and then the situation in Tunisia will be fully and deeply explained. For understanding the situation, the past must be explained a bit, so the reader can have a full image on how the situation in the Middle East and North Africa looked in 2011 and how it is now. From a general view on the Arab spring, the chapter will continuously pass into deeper analyse of the situation in Tunisia before, during, and after the 2011 Jasmine revolution. The main stress will be put on the current president Kais Saied, whose role is the most important, as a leader of the country.

Chapter three will talk about the influence of the United States of America. As three presidents changed in the head of the most powerful country since Jasmine revolution – Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden – all three administrations will be described, their relation to Tunisia, and how did they or how did they not help Tunisia with its democratic transition. All three presidents and their decisions will be explained in context of the two-good theory, which is pivotal for the thesis. It will also be interesting to look, how the relation from Washington was changing together with how the domestic situation in the United States were changing its topics, and hardest problems.

Last chapter will be the summary of the whole work, where the hypotheses and the research questions will be answered and proved. There will be summarized the author's view on the results of the topic, problems, achievements, and shortages. Possibilities of another research will also be discussed there.



# 1 Theoretical Framework

## 1.1 The Two-good Theory of International Relations

When it comes to theoretical framework, the Two-Good theory of foreign policy will be used. This theory was invented by professors Glenn Palmer and T. Clifton Morgan, and it is based on realist and neorealist theories. They firstly presented it in the book *A Theory of Foreign Policy* in 2006. The theory is necessary for the thesis so the readers can fully understand the whole complex and goal of the work.

The traditional realist theory was born in 40s in 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States of America. When it comes to predecessors of the realism, the classical ones, we talk about philosophers as Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, or Machiavelli. The situation in the foreign environment, containing war, Nazi regime and the communist threat contributed to the perception of the foreign environment as surroundings of states which firstly defend and protect themselves and their interests, where the behaviour of the states can lead to war. It talks about man as one of main factors of the shaping the international conduct, when “*man is evil, sinful, and power-seeking*”. (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1971, p. 65-66)

This classical realism was in 1979 surpass by the book *Theory of International Politics* by Kenneth Waltz and his new view on the behaviour of the states in the international environment, which went hand in hand with the new modern social science. The two main differences between classical realism and neorealism by Waltz were methodology and level of analysis. Based on the empirical grounds Waltz researched, opposite to classical realists, that war does not necessarily come from the character of mankind and its desire for power, but the main problem is the structure of the system. He also claims that international environment is anarchical, and the main goal of the states is safety and power is just a way to achieve it. (Waltz, 1979, p. 102)

Both, realists and neorealists see the international system as anarchist, however neorealists claims that the structure of it (for example bipolar versus multipolar) and the distribution of the power in this system impose constraints on the behaviour of the states. By the two-good theory, states increasing in their power are the most likely to pursue change-seeking politics, opposite to declining states or those not changing in power. (Palmer & Morgan, 2006, p. 32)

A Two-Good theory by professors Palmer and Morgan continue to this structural realist theory of Waltz and they extend on it. The first important axiom of the Two-Good Theory is, we must see the state's foreign policy behaving and the individual policies a state adopts in pursuit of its interests as one bundle of politics. In other words, they talk about so called portfolio of the foreign policy of the state, in our case it will be the foreign policy of the United States of America. (Palmer & Morgan, 2006, p. 23–24)

The fundamental tenet of the two-good theory is that foreign policy actions are goal directed. This is common with neorealism, but there is a difference in interpretation. When we look onto the neorealist theory, we find that the most important goal in international are is security, but it can be primarily achieved militarily. Till the international system is completely secure there is no space for other goals in the international system. To sum up this claim – security is seen as the only goal which the states seek in the international system. Palmer and Morgan argue on this by the example of the United States of America after World War II. There was no other state which would be more secure from war than this absolute hegemon those days, yet still the realist scholars saw the world threat with danger. (Palmer & Morgan, 2006, p. 43–44)

The two-good theory sees the states as actors who pursue two things – they are called change and maintenance. They are reach those two statuses through the behaviour in the international environment and through their foreign policy, while the main goal is to maximize their utility through foreign policy resources as much as possible. From that, the theory assumes the states do not have many and many goals, but they have just two – protect the aspects of the status quo they like and change the ones they do not. (Palmer & Morgan, 2006: 28–29)

There is an assumption in the two-good theory, the international politics is characterized by infinite number of issues. (Palmer & Morgan, 2006, p. 49) Authors Palmer and Morgan characterized as the issue everything which contains these conditions: *“can take more than one value, political actors have some influence over which value obtains, at least two actors have different preferences over the range of values, and the actors are aware of these things.”* (Palmer & Morgan, 2006, p. 47) As example of such issues we can meant for example a ruler of territory or how can citizens of some country enter another country, e. g. visa. This fits perfectly for the example of Donald Trump's policy and his attempt to ban an entrance to the United States of America for people from specific Muslim countries.

The advantages of the theory are the possibility of wide application of the theory on all states and their foreign policies. It is possible to predict changes in foreign policy, conflict initiation or alliance formation. However, the self-interest of the states is still the main factor which affect the alliance and agreements formation and its abiding. (Palmer & Morgan, 2006: 31) Other advantage, which is in contradiction to neorealist theory is that the domestic political factors have a significant effect on foreign policy choices. (Palmer & Morgan, 2006: 42) This gives us a great opportunity for this thesis, to find out, how domestic policy of a state can affect its foreign policy, and then, how this foreign policy of this state can affect domestic situation in another one. We can summarize it as a circle of how today's international works, and for another research, this could be a great example of globalization in practice.

Based on the two-good theory, we can deduce, the more powerful, bigger, and richer the state is, it is more likely to be the one is seeking to change the status quo, so it is change-seeking state, while the smaller, less important states would probably be the one, who is maintenance-seeking. In the case of this thesis, The United States of America, as the world leader and hegemon (even with the growing influence of China and its economy, the United States still plays the main part and role in the international area) would be the main game changer while it comes to changing or maintaining a situation in the unstable, smaller states, as the Northern African and Middle Eastern countries are. So, when it comes to the case of the thesis, the two-good theory will help us understand and examine, how the foreign policy of the United States (it will include all three different presidential administrations) affected the domestic policy and situation in Tunisia from the 2011 Jasmine revolution, by which the Arab spring in the whole region has started, until now, when Kais Saied is in power.

## 2 Arab Spring

### 2.1 General View

As I mentioned in the introduction of the work, protests and demonstrations known as the Arab spring began in Tunisia, on January 14, 2011. I briefly explained the 2011 situation in the introduction, but it is also necessary to investigate the past, so it can be fully understood the roots of the Arab spring.

For understanding the 2010 and further events, we must get back to the past, particularly to the year 1918. The First World War, sometimes called as the Great War has come to an end, the bloodiest and cruellest war till those days, that happened. Consequences were not just millions of deaths, or end of the old empires. One of the most important consequences for the Middle Eastern countries was the Sykes-Picot agreement. (Rabinovich & Sabel 2016, 1)

This agreement was signed between the winning powers, the Great Britain and France. Both were those days the most significant actors in the international area not just with their developed industry, also with their colonial imperium. With the Sykes-Picot agreement, these powers divided the spheres of influence in the divided Ottoman Empire. Without taking into consideration of ethnic or religion characteristics, the region was divided and by some scholars, this is the root of Middle Eastern riots. (Rabinovich & Sabel 2016, 2)

When we look back into the 2010, the Middle Eastern region was not in a good shape. All countries were mostly authoritarian regimes, some with absolutistic rules of the king and his family. High unemployment, human rights violation, political corruption, inflation, or poverty were the reasons, why the citizens of those states wanted a revolution. There is one interesting factor, which is not cited that much with connection to the Arab spring. That factor is food. (Zurayk 2011)

In 2007 and 2008, there was a huge food crisis, when the prices of food increased dramatically. The reason for that was an increase of world population which came hand in hand with the lack of food. Bad weather, shrinking farmlands and poor water distribution also played its role. Some experts, e. g. agronomy professor Ramy Zurayk says, that “*the prices of food mobilized people* “. (Zurayk 2011)

The development and consequences of the protest were different in each country, but there were some common factors as death, riots, army, and war. We can see Tunisia as an

exception because the Jasmine revolution there did not continue by civil war but was succeeded by free elections and by transition to democracy. But let me talk about Tunisia later.

Opposite to Tunisia, Arab spring gave way to bloody civil wars in Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen. Each of them differently, but all of them happened to end in conflict between citizens, and none of these conflicts are closed yet. What is common for these countries is an intervention of foreign powers, especially the hegemons as United States of America, European Union, and Russia. Their impact in the region is unquestionable. (Patrovský 2020)

In Syria, authoritarian regime of President Bashir al-Assad is continuing to rule, and with the help of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, it seems, this regime will prevail. Just out for curiosity – in continuing Russian war in Ukraine, it is Syria together with Iran, who supports Russian dictator no matter on how cruel his regime is and what atrocities it does on Ukraine nowadays. (Otte 2022)

Another country from the region, Yemen, is since the civil war one of the poorest countries in the whole world. In 2021, Yemen faced the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, when more than a half of the population could not afford to meet their basic needs as food, drinking water, or stable home. Yemen is one of the most affected countries by the chaos of the Arab spring revolution in 2011. (Roth 2021)

Authoritarian dictatorships also continue to rule in Bahrain. King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa keep his powers mostly because of the oil. It is practically impossible for all the countries, especially for the most developed, to live without this commodity, so even the big power as United States of America closes their eyes in front of what is going on in Bahrain, in a change of good oil prices and stability of the market. The media are fully under the control of the king, and so is the full control over the lives of the Bahrain citizens. (Roth 2021)

To summarize the text – Arab spring started as a hope for new, better world with democracy, human rights, and economic stability of the MENA region. However, what seemed to be a good way, happened to be a complete chaos with most countries in the region in bloody conflicts, civil wars, and riots. The only exception could be seen in Tunisia, while this country as the only one in the region happened to become a democracy. However, as we will find out in other chapters, this claim is not true anymore.

## **2. 2 Arab Spring in Tunisia**

### **2. 2. 1 The Jasmine Revolution and the Democratic Transition**

As I mentioned in the previous part of the chapter, the situation in the Middle East and the area of North Africa was crucial before 2011. Authoritarian regimes, growing terrorism, endless wars, and horrible economic situation were just a small part of the problem. From nowadays view, it was just a question of time, when something is going to happen. Tunisia was a first from all countries in the region, where people expressed their dissatisfaction with the regime, and so the Jasmine revolution started.

Tunisia in that time was not an exception between other countries in the area, and the problems as corruption, lack of food, inflation, high unemployment, or lack of political freedoms (freedom of speech, equal and fair elections) were on a daily occurrence. (Patrovský 2020) General Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his 23 years of bad governing threw the country into poverty. What was a paradise and favourite holiday destination for tourist on one hand, was on the other poor country lead by authoritarian dictator.

Everything started on December 17, 2010, when a young street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in a small town Sidi Bouzid in the centre of the country. He did it after the humiliation from a municipal official and her co-workers while they wanted to confiscate his goods, because he did not have a permission to sell. (Patrovský 2020) His act caused a massive protest led primarily by younger people, who felt with Bouazizi, as they were in the same situation. A high unemployment affected mostly younger people, when 70 % of all unemployment people in the country were youth between 15 and 29. (The World Bank Group 2014)

The protests started to spread through the country, it led to chaos, involvement of the army, and repressive organs, and many other Tunisian protestors were killed. As the situation started to be unbearable, President Ben Ali announced on January 13 his decision to not candidate in the next presidential elections in 2014. This announcement had quite a response between the protestors, but the promise was not enough. The whole situation escalated to escaping of the president, a day later, when he, along with his wife and some wealth fortune, flew to Saudi Arabia. After that, Mohamed Ghannouchi became a temporary president of the country. (Strašík 2011)

First after revolution elections were held in October, and a modern Islamist party called Ennahda won them and formed a coalition government with two secular parties. (ALJAZEERA 2011) The protests however continued, the main trouble was between supporters of pro-secular parties and in opposite pro-Islamist parties. It was because of the new constitution, on which the newly elected government worked in 2012, and its reading triggered passion debate on Islam in politics. The constitution became effective in 2014. (The Guardian 2014)

A key event happened in 2013, when Chokri Belaid, opposition leader of Democratic Patriot's Unified Party, and Mohamed Brahmi, founder, and leader of the People's Movement, were both assassinated. This led to other riots and protests mostly targeted against Ennahda party, although the authorities arrested Salafist militants. (BBC 2013)

In 2014 elections were the Islamist edged out the polls, and a former prime minister, and minister of foreign affairs Mohammed Beji Caid Essebsi was elected as president. Although the young generation has started the protests in 2011, the turnout of youth was lowest in the elections. The reason was simple – many young men left Tunisia and went fight for terrorist group ISIS to Syria, Iraq, or Libya. The biggest reason for this was probably still dismal economic situation in the country. (Abouaoun 2019)

Although the newly elected government worked hard on democratic transition and improving of the living conditions, in 2017 the economy situation of Tunisia was still dismal. The unemployment was still high same as the inflation rate, and tax increases. This led to other protests in January 2018 over price hikes. (FRANCE24 2018)

### **2. 2. 2 Kais Saied and His Presidency**

Kais Saied was elected as 8<sup>th</sup> Tunisian president in 2019 elections as a figure with no political experience, but with impression of a new and uncorrupted leader. In the elections, he got over 73 % of popular vote and in October he was sworn to the office. He was seen, especially by the young generation, as someone new, with no ties with existing political parties with whom the youth were no more satisfied. So, it was no surprise, that Tunisian citizens were happy with his election. (BBC 2019) However, this happiness did not have a long duration when Saied showed his real face.

Although Saied promised during his campaign to care about economic situation in the country, and to continue in the democratic transition, during his presidency has nothing changed. Country still stayed in economic instability, had not enough sources as food and oil,

or not enough jobs. On the opposite, step by step, he strengthened his power and authority, which graduate on July 25, 2021, when a bloodless takeover of the power happened. (iROZHLAS 2021)

Saied removed prime minister Hichem Mechichi from office and stopped the activity of parliament for the next 30 days. A day later, he removed minister of justice, and minister of defence from their offices and new strict orders come into effect. The parliament was occupied by the army, and a few moments later also by protestors, who did not agree with Saied's steps. (Hosensneidlová 2021) Saied claimed, these steps were inevitable because of the worsening of COVID 19 pandemic, and so he decided to take control over the executive power and rule everything by himself. Curfew from 7 PM till 6 AM or banning the freedom of assembly of more than three people came into effect. Saied also proclaimed, that the control over the pandemic will take the army. (Hosenseidlová 2021) Although the country was one of the most affected through the whole African continent by the COVID 19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>, from my point of view, Saied just made a use of the situation for implementation of his own personal ambitions.

In July 2022, after public referendum, a new constitution come into effect, and so Saied got an authority of naming into office and removing from the office of the prime minister and other ministers on his own. He also got a power of presenting and confirming new laws as high priority to the parliament. The turnout of the referendum was only around 25 % of all citizens with the valid right to vote, around 9 million people listened to the appeal of the opposition and ignored the referendum. However, the new constitution come into effect and so the democracy in Tunisia got another punch from the president. (Zeman 2022)

A new electoral law, which has come to effect before the elections should, by the words of Saied, stabilize the situation. The number of seats in the parliament were reduced, and so the power of the political parties was weakened. Also, the quotas for woman, and for the candidates under 35 were dismissed, which can be seen as a step back in the current trend. Other changes in the new electoral law were for example no providing public financing for campaign, the candidates had to be born to Tunisian parents, and have no history of legal violations (the condition of age 23 stayed same), or that imams, members of the government, or leaders of sports association could not run for the office within a year of serving that role. (Al-Mailam & Yerkes 2022)

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<sup>1</sup> According to official statistics by WHO, can be find here <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/tn>



The first elections after Saied's coup took place one year later, on December 17, 2002. Not surprisingly, the turnout was historically low, with around 11 % in both rounds, most political parties boycotted them too. Although by the president Saied, the parliament failed, and he tried to help the country to address the social, and economic issues, that can be seen same since the 2011 Jasmine revolution, Saied just took control over the country for himself. (The Carter Center 2023)

### **2. 2. 3 Current Situation in Tunisia**

Twelve years after the revolution, we can say, Tunisia is on the way from quite successful transition back to authoritarian regime of one man, Kais Saied. His constitutional reform, new electoral law, and dismissing the parliament were all clear example of take over the power in the country. The last case of Saied's presidency was arresting of the leader of Ennahda Movement, Rached Ghannouchi. (AlJazeera 2023)

Ghannouchi, the founder of the Islamic Tendency Movement, which later became Ennahda, was arrested in April this year on charges of incitement against state authorities. Together with the loudest critic of Saied's regime, Tunisian police also raided and closed the Ennahda headquarters in Tunisia capital, Tunis. Ghannouchi and all Ennahda movement has criticised Saied and his regime since his 2021 coup which I described in previous lines. (AlJazeera 2023)

Another problem which Tunisia is facing currently is a huge period of draught which affected whole country. The Reuters agency claims this can make the bad social situation in the country even worse, and that there can be another big immigration wave from the North Africa to Europe. (Karlík 2023)

To summarize the situation, after 12 years from the Jasmine revolution, Tunisia came from successful democratic transition back to authoritarian rule of one man, Kais Saied. Elimination of the opposition leaders, referendum about the constitution, and other steps are a clear example of one man rule, and so the Tunisia become, against, as all other countries affected by the Arab spring wave, authoritarian.

In the next section, I will explain how this situation was or was not affected by foreign policy of the United States of America. I will analyse three different presidential administrations, Barack Obama's, Donald Trump's, and Joe Biden's, because all of them were

in power of the presidential mandate while the changes happened in Tunisia. The policy and its influence will be explained by the two-good theory of the international relations.

### 3 United States of America's Policy Towards Tunisia

There is no doubt, the United States of America have become a world leader after the War World II and although China tries to replace its role, the US is still a world hegemon, which mostly affects the world policy. This was clearly seen again in the Arab spring and the uprisings in the Middle East, when the whole world waited, what the US administration will do, and how former president Obama handle the situation in the MENA region. As four professors from Kentucky University asked in their article *Leader, Follower, or Spectator? The Role of President Obama in the Arab Springs Uprisings*, what was the role of the United States of America in the Middle Eastern turmoil in 2010 and onwards? (Hayden et. al, 2012, p. 1185)

Since Tunisia independence in 1956, the United States of America is one of the strongest allies of this North African state. The United States government was between the first who recognized the official existence of independent Tunisia after the end of French colonial rule. United States supported Tunisia however the regime was not always democratic here. (U.S. Department of State, 2022) But as the Article 1 of Inter-American Democratic Charter says, *"The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it"*. (USOAS, 2001)

Through the years, the United States government have supported Tunisia not just economically, but also in its transition to democracy (particularly after the Jasmine revolution), political stability, strengthening the civil society, empowering the young people, creating jobs and equal opportunities for women, countering the threat of transnational terrorism, or managing increased demands on the national security forces. (U.S. Department of State, 2022)

Both states are members of the biggest global organizations, such as the United Nations<sup>2</sup>, the International Monetary Fund<sup>3</sup>, the World Bank<sup>4</sup>, or the World Trade Organization<sup>5</sup>. Although Tunisia is, opposite to the United States of America, not a NATO member, it is one of the following states which are part of so-called Mediterranean Dialogue, together with for example Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, and Morocco. (NATO, 2020)

Tunisia was no exception when it came to global war on terrorism, which was caused by the 2001 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. Former president George W.

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<sup>2</sup> Via official UN website <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/member-states>

<sup>3</sup> Via official IMF website <https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/memdir/memdate.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Via official WB website <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/leadership/members>

<sup>5</sup> Via official WTO website [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/org6\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm)

Bush had a strong ally in former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, both men met in the oval office in the Washington D. C. and discussed and agreed on cooperation on war on terrorism. (George W. Bush, The White House, 2004) However, as Tunisia was not democratic before the 2011 Arab spring, sometimes Washington criticised the regime, for example in a question of freedom of press and freedom of speech. (Reynolds, 2004) In the end of his presidency, Bush proposed a new budget for the Arab countries, which was supposed to help to support democracy, to increase the programs for governance, and human rights. (McInerney, 2008)

Although the partnership has been strong for decades, the Jasmine revolution in 2011 and the ongoing situation was changing it to nowadays situation. The role in that also played the three different presidents and their administrations who has changed through the years. First Afro-American president, democrat, popular between the citizens, but also in the world, who inherit a legacy of 9/11 attacks and instability in the Middle East, Barack Obama, was replaced in 2016 elections by controversial republican and entrepreneur Donald Trump, who did not have a problem to be a good friend with dictators as Putin or Kim Jong-un. And finally, in 2020 elections, democrat was elected again, former Obama's vice president Joe Biden, and so the United States of America started to act a bit differently again in their foreign policy towards the region of Middle East and North Africa, with no exception to Tunisia.

In the next chapter, the thesis will examine, how different administrations have affected Tunisia and its regime since 2011 Jasmine revolution, to 2020 pandemic crisis, to 2022 war in Ukraine, and energy crisis. All three presidential administrations will be deeply examined, so the reader can have a full picture of how the relations between the United States of America and Tunisia have changed through the decade. By application of the Two-Good theory, the work will try to prove, that United States foreign policy has affected Tunisia, and that the democratic transition, and following return to authoritarian regime has a connection with American interests in the region of Middle East and North Africa.

### 3. 1 Obama's Administration Policy Towards Tunisia

Former US president Barack Obama was elected as a first Afro-American citizen to this function in 2008 elections and in 2009 become a 44<sup>th</sup> president of the biggest hegemon in the world. The legacy he inherited include a global war on terrorism, which caused an unstable Middle East after Iraqi and Afghanistan invasions, growing influence of China and its rapidly growing economy, the unpredictable Russian imperial whims, unpredictable North Korean nuclear program, and he started his presidency in the time of big economic crisis which affected a whole world.<sup>6</sup> Although the times were hard, the 2010 political turmoil in Tunisia, which started the revolutions known as the Arab spring, gave his administration a new hope for democratic region of Middle East and North Africa, and stable political partnership with more states. (Hayden et. al, 2012, p. 1185)

After the declared global war on terrorism by Obama's predecessor George W. Bush, it was one of the goals of the new administration to lead the world again and to restore the confidence in Muslim countries, to become partners again. It was important to stress the American position as the world hegemon again, to be the leader in world crisis, and conflicts, to keep this position however the Chine's economy and influence grows. (Hayden et. al, 2012, p. 1188) As Obama declared, "*...America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more.*" (Nuruzzaman, 2015, p. 171)

Another significant change in US foreign policy was Obama's approach to promoting of the democracy and its values. Unlike president Bush Jr., Obama did not stand on democracy promoting by hook or by crook. He believed, crusading the democracy can harm the United States interests in the certain states, and so his policy stands on an ability of the cooperation with the state, no matter if the government is led by democrat, autocrat, or dictator. He was also willing to cooperate and talk not just with friendly states of the United States, but also with enemies. He was for example willing to talk with Taliban in Afghanistan, or with China and Russia on the problem with nuclear weapons in North Korea, and Iran. He followed this approach also in the Arab spring uprisings when he used different approaches to the single states. (Hayden et. al, 2012, p. 1189)

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<sup>6</sup> Information from the official White House website <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/barack-obama/>

Even though, there can be seen similarities in foreign policy towards MENA region between new Obama's administration and former president Bush. Unlike his predecessor, Obama did not present a clear doctrine, which would shape his foreign policy towards Middle East. This was seen by some scholars as good decision, while on the other hand, some criticised him for this approach. (Hayden et. al., 2012, p. 1187) However, he continued in realist policy of Bush administration, and his main goal in the MENA region stand on fighting al-Qaeda and working to limit nuclear proliferation. (Hayden et. al, 2012, p. 1188)

When the Jasmine revolution started, the United States government has strongly supported Tunisia's protestors, opposite to for example the ones from Bahrain, with their attempt of overthrowing the dictator, Ben Ali. (Hayden et. al, 2012) After six months, in October 2011, few days before the first democratic elections in Tunisia, former president Barack Obama welcomed former prime minister of Tunisia, Mr Beji Caid Sebti in White House, and awarded him and Tunisia as a great inspiration for the Arab Spring. He said, "*The United States has enormous stake in seeing success in Tunisia and the creation of greater opportunity and more business investment in Tunisia*". He hoped, with the whole US, Tunisia will bring an example for other countries in the region in their attempt to change their dictatorship to democracy, and that others will follow. (Bull, 2011)

The US administration was aware of how important is providing money for a country which processed a regime change and which sectors are important to support. Barack Obama's administration has provided Tunisia with money for new economic opportunities and its private sector. Another sphere where the money went was a new democratic institutions and independent civil society, both are crucial part of every democratic country in nowadays world. The security sector was also necessary to be provided with new financial help and it was important to provide Tunisia with humanitarian assistance in remote areas.<sup>7</sup> At first meeting with the new representative of Tunisia, Obama discussed an aid package worth \$ 50 million in loan guarantees and enterprise seed capital. He also claimed, the U. S. Peace Corp will return to Tunisia in 2012 and Tunisia will be provided with \$ 30 million in loan guarantees and \$ 20 million to an enterprise fund for private sector growth. (Bull, 2011)

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<sup>7</sup> All sector which where provided with financial aid can be found on <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/us-assistance-to-egypt-tunisia-and-libya>

As other elections were coming for Obama, he had to be very careful about how to spend the money in foreign policy aid and to which countries his administration should help more, and which less, and which government he should support. This balancing could be clearly seen on his status towards the first countries affected by the Arab spring. While in his 2011 speech towards United Nations he was strongly supporting the protestors in Libya and Syria, backwards the protestors in Egypt, and Tunisia, on the opposite side, in Bahrain, he was strongly for maintaining the status quo, which meant staying of the authoritarian regime of the king Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa. (Hayden et. al, 2012)

As Obama was re-elected in 2012 elections, when he defeated his opponent from Republican party Mitt Romney, he and his administration could continue with money support for Tunisia and its democratic transition.<sup>8</sup> In July 2012, a first loan guarantee of \$ 485 was provided for Tunisia from the American administration. A declaration of this loan was signed two months earlier between U. S. Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner and Tunisian Finance Minister Houcine Dimassi. The goal of this loan was to provide people of Tunisia with ability to manage the democratic transition economically and so the country could follow to prosperous democratic years. Second loan, \$500 million was provided to Tunisia two years later, in 2014. (Karuri, 2016)

In 2015, the Memorandum of Understanding reaffirming the common bonds and shared values of long-standing friendship between Tunisia and the United States was signed between the two countries, with the key millstones as expanding inclusive economic growth, promoting democracy, civil society, and consensus building, fostering cultural, and educational ties, or enhancing security capabilities.<sup>9</sup>

A year later, in June 2016, Tunisia signed a loan guarantee with the United States for \$ 500 million, which the country can borrow from the international capital markets. This loan was signed as a continuation of 2015 discussions, and again, the main purpose of it was to improve Tunisia economy, creating new jobs and opportunities, which goes hand in hand with building of a successful democratic country. This was a third guarantee loan after the two mentioned previously. (Karuri, 2016)

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<sup>8</sup> US elections results <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-20233064>

<sup>9</sup> All goals of and the whole text of memorandum <https://tn.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/fact-sheet-enduring-u-s-tunisian-relations/>

### **3. 1. 1 Obama's Reaction to Jasmine Revolution in the Context of the Two-Good Theory**

As it was explained in the theoretical framework, the two-good theory follows the classical realist and neorealist theories in international relations. If we would look on the reaction of the United States on the Jasmine revolution by the eyes of neorealists, we could have said that the only goal for the United States was to provide security. That could be seen as a good explanation – Tunisian dictator Ben Ali has escaped the country, the opposition has led a successful protest, and there was nothing what would stand in a way of democratic transition. So, the United States provided money, and a loudly support for the change, so the country could be secured. However, this is true, there is a disagreement between scholars about how Obama's policy was or was not realistic. Let me firstly summarize Stephen Walt's article called "Obama Was Not a Realist President".

In summary, Walt reproach Obama mostly that his achievements were mostly on the domestic, not on the foreign policy soil. Obama care, rescuing the country from the 2008 great depression, and promoting greater tolerance toward minorities by legalizing same-sex marriage. But what about the situation in the Middle East? The chaos in Syria, and Libya? The still bad situation between the Israel and Palestine? And of course, still ongoing conflicts and chaos in Iraq and Afghanistan? (Walt, 2016)

On the other hand, Stephen R. David claims in his article "The Reluctant Realist" that Obama's foreign policy did maybe not fit into realist paradigm every time, but his "Pivot to Asia", handling the Iran nuclear programme, handling the Russian imperial whims on Ukraine, and dealing with the uprisings in the MENA region known as the Arab spring, can be seen as clear examples of following the realist paradigms. (David, 2015, p. 15)

As I mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter, the two-good theory of international relations sees the stronger states as the one who is likely to pursue change-seeking politics. This would fit perfectly on Obama's approach towards Tunisia, while his administration did not pursue former dictator Ben Ali to stay in charge but let the Tunisian opposition to take over the power and change the policy towards democratic transition. As promoting of democracy was one of the goals of Obama's administration, this could be seen as a logical step towards this MENA country. It also fits in the so called "portfolio" which is an important part of two-good theory of international relations, in our case the "portfolio" is the foreign policy of each United States of America administrations.



Obama's foreign policy stand on promoting democracy, making United States the world hegemon again, to be the leader in the world conflicts and crisis again. These goals were supposed to be achieved not only militarily, as it would be expected from the neorealist theory, but also by negotiating, discussions, and through world institutions such as the United Nations etc. As I mentioned in the previous chapter about Obama's policy, he did not have a straight foreign policy doctrine, and he was able to negotiate even with not so democratic presidents and leaders in the world.

As the two-good theory bears in mind the domestic factors, and how they can affect foreign policy, we could have said, the Obama's administration was more focused on the domestic policy and situation, while the only thing, which he could do in foreign policy is to send money, troops, and weapons. But in a case of Tunisia, US government send just money, and the administrations signed some loans for restoring the economy. Nor weapons were sent to Tunisian rebels, nor the American army intervene Tunisia and start to fight there. Opposite to for example Egypt, or Libya, and Syria, Tunisia had to depend strongly on themselves, as the rebels, same the army.

While using the two-good theory, Obama's foreign policy could be expected to be exactly how it was. As he inherited the global war on terrorism, which caused the United States millions of dollars and thousands of people's lives, and as he was, unlike his predecessor, member of Democratic party, his militarily non-intervention to Tunisia riots, and just waiting for how the people over there will handle the situation fits into the two-good theory of the strong state which seeking the changing of policy and status quo in the states.

By application of the two-good theory, we can see Tunisia as an example of the changing of the status quo from the view of the Obama's administration. US had no interest to strongly support the dictator Ben Ali, because obviously they had nothing to gain from that. As Tunisia (opposite to Bahrain) has no important world sources of gas or oil, it was no problem for the Americans to let them deal with their situation by their own. And although the promotion of the democracy was not the main goal of Obama's policy, there was no reason for him to support autocratic Ben Ali's regime, and his position was on the home scene strong enough so he can afford to provide Tunisia opposition with loans for restoring the economy and the better prosperity of this North African country.

### 3. 2 Trump's Administration Policy Towards Tunisia

A significant change in American policy towards Tunisia and a significant decrease of foreign assistance happened after 2016 presidential election, when Republican Donald Trump was elected as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America.<sup>10</sup> Controversial entrepreneur, and a TV show star, whose win over Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton was quite a surprise, has changed American foreign policy towards the Middle East very strongly, with his anti-immigration campaign and strong rhetoric against Muslims and Islamic countries. (iDNES, 2016)

After 10 years of Barack Obama in charge, Trump brought to American foreign policy significant changes, which can be best described by his election slogan "America First". Unlike his predecessor, Trump was more active in discussion with world leaders, authoritarian rulers and dictators included. In November 2017, he met in Beijing with Chinese president Xi Jinping<sup>11</sup>, in 2019, he met in demilitarized zone between North and South Korea with North Korean dictator Kim Yong Un<sup>12</sup>, and we cannot forget about his five time meeting with Russian dictator Vladimir Putin<sup>13</sup>. Although the meetings were important for American foreign policy and for its economic goals, Trump was known to be, we can use the word friend, with dictators and autocrats in the world. However, as I mentioned in previous chapter about Obama, nor former Democrat did not have a problem to negotiate with non-democratic presidents, while it was in American interest. (Waterhouse, 2020)

While Donald Trump was named a president, Tunisian democratic transition was on a good way. Former Tunisian president Beji Caid Essebsi led the country towards democracy, however his effort could not prevent a still economic instability, high unemployment, and other economic obstacles. However, before Kais Saied, the country tried its best to become a first democratic place in the North Africa, and the American administration was helpful.<sup>14</sup> After Donald Trump inauguration, he, and Tunisian president Essebsi has discussed further cooperation, including security matters, fight terrorism, and possible expand in cooperation

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<sup>10</sup> Information about president Donald Trump can be find on the official White House website <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/donald-j-trump/>

<sup>11</sup> Meeting with Xi Jinping <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g20-summit-trump-xi/trump-says-had-an-excellent-meeting-with-chinas-xi-idUKKCN1TU04V>

<sup>12</sup> Meeting with Kim Yong Un <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/30/737365074/trump-to-meet-kim-jong-un-at-dmz>

<sup>13</sup> Meetings with Vladimir Putin <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/15/us/politics/trump-putin-meetings.html>

<sup>14</sup> Via previous chapter about Arab Spring in Tunisia

between these traditional allies. Trump praised Tunisian democratic transition, and the country's stability and security. (U. S. Embassy Tunis, 2017)

Before Donald Trump was inaugurated, The Centre For The Study Of Islam And Democracy organized a luncheon panel at Washington D.C. where the democratic transition of this country was discussed. It was agreed, Tunisia should be a priority for Trump administration, when it was important to show, Islamic and democratic values can go hand in hand. The main stress was given on the importance on military and security cooperation, which mostly meant fighting terrorism. Although in a meeting with president Essebsi Trump promised this cooperation to continue, it did not take a long time when he changed his mind. (The Center For The Study of Islam and Democracy, 2017)

As Andrew Miller wrote in the title of his article in the Washington Post, "*Tunisia is one of the Arab world's biggest success stories. The Trump administration does not seem to care.*" In May 2017, Trump administration introduce a new budget request with a significant decrease on foreign assistance for the countries in the Middle East, and North Africa. The only exceptions, Israel, Egypt, and Jordan did not include Tunisia. The Republican and Democratic senators refused these drastic changes and agreed on a financial assistance of \$ 165.4 million. A year later, in 2018, Trump again proposed to cut the budget form \$ 185.4 million to about half of it, \$ 80 million. These cuts are a clear example of Trump's foreign policy, when instead of softer forms of policy, he was obsessed with the threats of terrorism and security in general. (Miller, 2018)

The main changes in the United States budget for Tunisia was a change from a military grant to loan, which could complicate the relations very badly. Another one was cutting the budget by 62 % decrease in US-Middle East initiative budget, which was primarily targeted on young generation in Tunisia and should have helped the youth with seeking a job. (McCormick-Cavanagh, 2017)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019, Tunisia and the United States signed new, five-year bilateral Development Objective Agreement for USAID which provide up to \$335 million to support increased private sector employment and democratic consolidation. (U. S. Department of State, 2022) This agreement will end next year, and it is a question, if Joe Biden's administration will sign a new one, while he will prepare himself for the next election campaign.

COVID than fully paralysed the whole world in 2020. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the United States fell by almost 9 % in the second quarter of 2020 from \$ 22 trillion to \$ 21 trillion. Opposite to other economics, the US recover from this unexpected situation, and in 2021, the numbers were even better than before the pandemic. However, more than million American citizens died because of the COVID 19 through the whole pandemic. (Weinstock, 2021, p. 2)

However, the US was hit hard by the pandemic, as a world economic hegemon, they were able to help other countries in the world by distribution of the COVID 19 vaccines. In total, the American government send almost 690 million vaccines to 117 countries. Since July 2021, almost three million of them were send to Tunisia. The United States were so the biggest donator for the North African country with the vaccines, and current president Joe Biden did not stop the shipping and continued in help for Tunisia with another COVID 19 vaccines. (U. S. Department of State, 2022)

One month before the 2020 presidential elections, Mark Esper, former Secretary of Defence, visited Tunisia, and a new 10-year military cooperation agreement was signed there. This new agreement was a reaction on continuing unstable regime in neighbouring Libya and confirmed a long-standing partnership between the United States and Tunisia. By the official statistics, since 2011, United States have invested more than \$ 1 billion to Tunisian army. (Poletti, 2020)

COVID pandemic was not the only factor which changed from 2019. In 2020, Joseph Biden Jr. was elected as a 46<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America and replaced Donald Trump after his four year term. As I mentioned previously, Trump's policy towards Tunisia was not that friendly, and helpful as it was with his predecessor Obama. With new president, who served as vice president just for Barack Obama, it was a hope for Tunisia, that the relations with US start to be better again, and that the new president will help this country with its democratization. Before the Biden's policy will be analysed, let me try to explain the Donald Trump policy in a context of two-good foreign policy theory.

### **3. 2. 1 Trump's Reaction to Jasmine Revolution in the Context of the Two-Good Theory**

Opposite to former president Obama, Donald Trump was a clear realist even before he was elected as president. His strong position towards other countries and his „America First“ were a clear examples of a strong realistic policy with the United States of America as a world number one hegemon and leader. (Zakheim, 2017) So how does Trump's behaving in the international area fits into two-good theory of foreign policy? And does it fit?

When we look onto the so-called „portfolio“ of the two-good theory, which means the Trump foreign policy, we can see a clear and strong leader, who is not afraid of China and its growing economy and influence, we can see a leader who is willing to negotiate with Russian dictator Putin to stop Syrian civil war, we can see a strong leader who is not afraid to talk with unpredictable dictator Kim Yong Un, and he is not afraid of him even he is well aware of the North Korean nuclear programme and its possible danger. In summary, Donald Trump's foreign policy lays on the principle of the United States of America as a leader in the international area number one.

The two-good theory claims, that states main goal is to maximize their utility, and they do it by change or maintenance. In a case of Trump and Tunisia, in my view, and by the two-good theory, Trump's administration went by the maintenance way. As Trump was in charge after the Arab spring, he did not need to pursue a policy of changing something. Although the democratic transition was not completed yet, he and his administration had other foreign policy goals, which were more important to pursue, and Tunisia and its situation was not one of them.

In the case of Trump's foreign policy while focusing on the domestic factors, Trump's presidency was affected by the COVID 19 pandemic as I mentioned many times in the previous part of this chapter. The global pandemic, which stopped the whole world for a while affected foreign policy decisions, as the administration had to focus mostly on its own citizens, on the distribution of COVID tests, COVID vaccines, and on managing the pandemic, so the whole country would not completely collapse. He also had to deal with problem of immigration, especially from Mexico and South America, where he promised to build the wall which should reduce illegal immigration to the United States. More than \$ 1.3 billion was provided from Congress on building the wall. (Waterhouse, 2023) It is a question, if those money could not be better spent, maybe for Tunisia and its government, for building not a wall, but strengthening the new weak democratic regime and its institutions

To summarize Trump's policy towards Tunisia in a context of the two-good theory, he and his administration focused primarily on the US-Chinese, US-Russian, and US-Asia (in general) relations, and after years of global war on terror and focusing on the region of Middle East and North Africa, changed the American way a bit. As the riots and uprisings stopped, a new government was elected together with new president, Trump's administration had nothing more to gain from focusing primarily on Tunisia as it is not a strategic and important country such as China, Russia, North Korea (in context of nuclear weapons), or Japan. In combination with Trump's often controversial opinions and ideas about Muslims and Arab countries, in the context of the two-good theory, it is a clear example of maintaining the situation in the country and no more interfering into its domestic policy and problems. However, Trump's administration, in a name of the United States of America as traditional Tunisian partner, did not stop to support Tunisia by different kinds of loans and financial aid on its way to democracy.

### 3. 3 Biden's Administration Policy Towards Tunisia

Joe Biden was elected as 46<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America in 2020 and was inaugurated in January 2021. After controversial republican Donald Trump, election of Biden was a return to democratic candidate with maybe more liberal view on foreign policy. Moreover, as former vice president in Barack Obama's administration, his view on foreign policy was expected to follow the liberal views of former president.<sup>15</sup> However, Biden and his administration continues the policies of the previous administration, especially in the relations with China, and military presence in the Greater Middle East. (Schake, 2023)

Biden's presidency was affected by the continuing pandemic of COVID 19 disease, and by Russian aggression on Ukraine, which started over a year after the inauguration. His presidency was also affected by the domestic problems such as racial riots, problems with disputable interventions of the armed forces, especially the police or economy and energy crisis. (Oreg & Shavit, 2022) It is obvious, and it was proved by many international theorists before, that problems in domestic policy can hugely affect the decisions in foreign policy.

Biden was inaugurated in January 2021, half a year before Saied's coup. The whole time of his presidency, Biden is under pressure of different people, such as diplomats, politicians, or even public, about his aid to Tunisia and about his relation to President Saied.<sup>16</sup> The continuing COVID 19 pandemic could sometimes hide other problems from the world leaders. As COVID pandemic was a global problem, and as its solution was in the interest of each state, Washington continued to support Tunisia with sending another Pfizer vaccines to stop the pandemic.<sup>17</sup> As I mentioned in previous part about Donald Trump's presidency, in total United States has send more than three million vaccines to Tunisia. After the disease was beaten, the ordinary problems again started to bother Washington and the Oval office.

Saied's 2021 constitutional coup was a first problem which has occurred in Tunisia during Biden's presidency, and so the Ennahda, as the main Tunisian opposition movement has expected his reaction. However, it was a little disappointment for the members. Although democracy and human rights were considered as a top priority for Biden before elections,

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<sup>15</sup> All information about president Biden can be found on the official White House website <https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president-biden/>

<sup>16</sup> For example <https://freedomhouse.org/article/president-biden-must-help-reverse-tunisias-authoritarian-slide> or <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-officials-academics-demand-biden-suspend-assistance-tunisia>

<sup>17</sup> Information about the donated vaccine from the official U.S. Embassy in Tunisia website <https://tn.usembassy.gov/united-states-donates-additional-100620-doses-of-the-pfizer-vaccine-to-tunisia/>

Washington's reaction was lukewarm. Of course, Tunisia is one of the top interests for the United States, because of the only example of successful democratic transition after the Arab spring. However, Biden's administration could not take serious measures and cut the financial aid for Tunisia, because from the view of law, Saied's dismissal of parliament, and removal of prime minister Mechichi was not a coup. There is a clear definition what is a coup, and by implying it on Tunisia's example, Saied's did everything withing his presidential authority. Although it could feel wrong for the Tunisian opposition, the reaction of Biden's administration was appropriate for the situation, if we consider the law. (Ibrahim, 2021)

Start of the 2022 was hugely affected by war on Ukraine. The aggression of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin carried the attention of the whole world onto the Eastern Europe and made it a world problem number one since that. (Harzer, 2022) However, the other conflicts did not stop, other dictators did not die. So, in April, Biden's administration has proposed to cut of the US military aid to Tunisia because of the growing authoritarian machinations of President Saied. (Szuba, 2022)

The Biden's administration has proposed to cut the military and security aid for Tunisia from former \$112 million to almost a half, \$61 million. There was also a request from the State Department to reduce the economic aid to Tunisia by \$40 million, which is again, as in case of military and security, a half. The reason for that was obvious – growing authoritarianism of Kais Saied and his coup from July 2021. (Szuba, 2022)

The growing anti-democratic tendencies of Saied were also one of the main topics for discussion for the African leader summit which took place in December 2022, in Washington D. C. By this summit, Biden continued former president Obama, whose administration has organised the same conference eight years ago, while Biden was a vice president. Between the main topics to discuss, such as climate changes, food security, and global health, was also a topic of good governance in which can be seen the need for promoting democratic way of ruling in the African continent. With growing influence of Russia and China in the region, with ending of COVID 19 pandemic and with continuing of war in Ukraine, the summit was a great opportunity for Biden and his administration for strengthening the relations with African leaders, and to consolidate American influence in the region. Between 49 leaders of different African countries were the most important Ethiopian prime minister, or the presidents of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, President Kais Saied, after the 2021 July coup, was also expected with great expectations. (Al Jazeera, 2022)



The summit of the African leaders was a closely watched conference by different institutions, organizations, and even public. The biggest press was on President Biden from a Tunisian advocacy group called Tunisian United Network, whose members pressed American president with urgency of confronting the Tunisian president with his authoritarian methods, such as abuse of human rights, unfreedom of speech, prosecution of the dissidents, threatening freedom of association, brutality of the armed forces, and a risk of growing of the domestic violence on women. Moreover, the summit took place right before Tunisian election, the first vote in the region after the summit. (Volkman, 2022)

In May this year, again, a group of former American officials and activists has urged President Biden and his administration to stop financial aid to Tunisia, to stop authoritarian practices of Kais Saied. It was a reaction on a \$ 1.9 billion loan from International Monetary Fund, which was provided to Tunisia. Another reason for calling to stop was an arresting of an opposition leader Rached Ghannouchi, who, as I mentioned previously, was arrested in April 2023. (Al Jazeera Staff, 2023)

To summarize the chapter, democrat Biden as successor of republican Trump, could be maybe expected to be more liberal, and more reserved. However, he was aware of Saied's policy and his authoritarian tendencies, which has growing rapidly since 2021 constitutional coup. He proposed some cut in financial and military aid, and he called on Tunisian leader to stop destroying the democratic way which has started after the 2011 Jasmine revolution. As promoting democracy and liberalisation was one of the biggest topics of Biden's election campaign, it could be expected, he will not let the Tunisian situation without attention. As Africa is one of the places, where the American interests are colliding with Russia and China, it is in the interest of Biden and his administration to take care of Tunisia, and to try to keep an eye on Saied. However, with climate changes, war on Ukraine, energy crisis, and other domestic challenges such as racial riots, it will not be easy for Biden to do it. Another factor is the following presidential elections, which will take place in the United States next year. Biden will probably now focus mostly on his campaign, and the question is, if the Tunisian problem is enough for the electorate to vote for him again.

In the next chapter, I will use the two-good theory of the international relations on Joe Biden's policy towards Tunisia, and as in the two previous examples of former presidents Obama, and Trump, I will try to explain his behaviour, and decisions with the help of the theory.

### **3. 3. 1 Biden's Reaction to Jasmine Revolution in the Context of the Two-Good Theory**

However different can seem the foreign policy of Republican Trump and Democrat Biden, the later one, in his own way, continued in what the former one has started, but in his own, maybe more liberal way. After Trump's maybe a bit selfish motto „America First“, Joe Biden changed in on „America is Back“. He again restored the sign of the United States on Paris Climate Accords, and the World Health Organization, and re-establish the U. S. role on the climate diplomacy. When it comes to foreign policy, and especially towards Middle East, Biden continued in Trump's steps. (World Politic Review, 2023)

As I mentioned in previous part, half a year after Joe Biden's inauguration, a self-coup of Tunisian president Kaeis Saied happened in the country, and so the democratic transition was stopped. Biden was and still is under pressure of different diplomats, and influence people on how he should behave towards Tunisia and its leader. But why would he care about the small country in the North Africa, where there is no oil or other mineral sources, while there is a huge crisis in Europe, suspense between China and Taiwan, and growing Chinese economic influence? Let me examine the position of Biden in the context of the two-good theory and let me try to predict Biden's behaviour in the following months.

Joe Biden had to face the ending of the COVID 19 pandemic, and so he had to adapt his domestic and foreign policy by that. When Kaies Saied made his coup, Biden's reaction was maybe not that strong, as some would expect. But in the context of the two-good theory, he followed steps of his predecessor Trump by the policy of maintenance, while he had no special interest in the domestic policy of Tunisia. This approach is even more understandable in the context of war in Ukraine and the Russian invasion from February 2022 which still lasts till these days, and which is the most important and serious issue in the international are right now, not only for the United States of America and Biden's administration, but for the most countries in the world.

As the U. S. presidential elections are following next year, it can be expected, Biden will focus primarily on the domestic issues and policies, as the energy crisis, unemployment, and racial riots. Tunisia will probably not be a number one of his foreign policy, Ukraine will probably stay there together with traditional US-Chinese rivalry, which is even more tight as the suspense between China and Taiwan.

## Conclusion

The goal of the thesis was to prove and examine, how the three different American presidential administrations did or did not affect a situation in Tunisia, its way from authoritarian country towards successful democratic transition, and back by using the two-good theory of international relations. However I tried to prove that American foreign policy has an effect on the domestic situation in Tunisia and on its way from authoritarian regime to successful democratic transition, and back to authoritarian rule of one man, the answer on the research question „Does Foreign Impact Matter?“ is ambiguous.

What I achieved in the thesis was a summarization of how three different presidents – Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden – lead their foreign policy towards Tunisia. I could not prove a straight influence of United States foreign policy on Tunisia’s domestic regime. There are boundaries of the research, for example we cannot investigate secret CIA documents, we do not know the insight political and diplomatic bonds between those two countries etc. As all three presidential administrations since the 2011 Jasmine revolution has supported Tunisia with financial aid, and for some time, Tunisia was the only democratic country in the region of the Middle East and North Africa, there are still questions, which stays without answer. For example, “Was the money which were send enough?” or “Should the US intervene militarily in Tunisia and prevent Saied from his self-made constitutional coup?”

All three US presidents supported Tunisia financially, and the current president Biden continues with financial aid. However, after Tunisia’s president Saied’s constitutional coup in 2021 and the return to authoritarian regime, it is unpredictable, if the financial aid will continue. We also cannot fully claim, if the money from the United States administrations helps or did not help Tunisia if enough money was invested to the country development after the 2011 Jasmine revolution. We can see that since Obama, Trump’s and Biden’s administration both proposed cut aid for Tunisia, even before Kaies Saied took over the office, and before his 2021 constitutional coup. However, we cannot fully provide, if in case of not cutting the budget would Tunisia stay on its way towards fully democratic country, because we must take in mind the Kaies Said personal ambitions, and character. There are so many questions which stays unanswered, for example „What if US would send its troops to Tunisia?“ or „Was the money which were send enough?“ “Why did US intervene militarily after the Arab spring in Syria but not in Tunisia?” “Why Obama’s administration supported democratic transition in Tunisia but not for example in Bahrain?”

Those are questions which could be a subject of another research. It would also be interesting to look on the Tunisian situation from perspectives of Foreign Policy of other states, maybe China and Russia as authoritarian countries, or maybe from the view of European Union and its member countries as the United States was not the only country, which supported and supports Tunisia financially since the Jasmine revolution.

To summarize the whole thesis, it was not approved that United States foreign policy would have a straight effect on Tunisia and its regime after the Arab spring and during the following years. Although there is enough literature about the topic of Arab spring, and Arab spring in Tunisia, and successful democratic transition in Tunisia, we lack secret documents and insight bounds and agreements in diplomatic area. However, Tunisia with its leader Kais Saied is no more democratic country, and it is a question, how the relations between this North African country and the world hegemon, the United States of America, will continue in the context of Chinese growing influence, Russian intervention on Ukraine, and problems such as energy and climate crisis, and growing racial and extreme right riots in the United States.

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## **Abstract/Abstrakt**

### **Abstract**

The uprisings known generally as the Arab spring which started in Tunisia in 2011 by Jasmine revolution had affected not just the region of the Middle East and North Africa, but also other countries in the whole world, especially Europe with the immigration wave of people who run away from bloody riots and wars. Tunisia was for a while the only example of successful democratic transition, however today, country is back under rule of one man, Kais Saied.

The thesis should cover the topic of how foreign policy of one state can affect domestic situation in other, in this case how and if American foreign policy affected the domestic development in Tunisia since the Jasmine revolution until now by using the two-good theory of the international relations.

### **Key words**

Tunisia, Arab spring, Jasmine revolution, United States of America, foreign policy

## **Abstrakt**

Protesty známé obecně pod pojmem Arabské jaro, které začaly Jasmínovou revolucí v Tunisku v roce 2011 neovlivnily pouze státy regionů Severní Afriky a Blízkého východu, ale také další země, především Evropu, která čelila masivní migrační vlně prchajících lidí před krvavými protesty a válkou. Tunisko bylo po dlouhou dobu jediným příkladem úspěšné demokratické tranzice, ačkoliv dnes je země opět pod autoritářskou vládou jednoho muže, prezidenta Kaise Saida.

Tato bakalářská práce pokrývá téma vlivu zahraniční politiky jednoho státu na domácí politiku jiného, v tomto konkrétním případě se jedná o otázku vlivu americké zahraniční politiky na vnitřní politiku a vývoj Tunisku od Jasmínové revoluce až do dnes. Práce využívá “two-good” teorii mezinárodních vztahů.

## **Klíčová slova**

Tunisko, Arabské jaro, Jasmínová revoluce, Spojené státy americké, zahraniční politika