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Altruism and its limits: the role of civil and political rights for American and French aid towards the Middle East and North Africa

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This article studies if and under which circumstances Western support to regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is contingent on concerns for political and civil rights. Using foreign aid as a proxy for support, we compare the role of political and civil rights with the role of different geopolitical and economic factors for aid allocation. We analyse French and US aid flows to 12 MENA countries, covering the period from 1990–2005. We find that, for both countries, strategic concerns are highly relevant for aid allocation; civil and political rights also matter, but only in places of no strategic value. Thus, although French and US foreign aid goes to different countries, the underlying motives are remarkably similar. Finally, to the extent that there is a difference between the two countries, France fares worse than even US military aid regarding the consideration of civil and political liberties.

Keywords: authoritarian resilience; democracy promotion; foreign policy; Middle East and North Africa

Introduction

External support is important for the stability of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The literature on democratisation increasingly assigns the international environment an important role in affecting domestic political development (see Pridham, Herring, and Sanford 1994, Remmer 1995, Bratton and van de Walle 1997, Whitehead 2001, Schmitz 2004). It is argued that the costs of maintaining overtly autocratic regimes have risen considerably since the end of the Cold War (Levitsky and Way 2002, pp. 61–63, Levitsky and Way 2005). Supposedly, the end of purely alliance-driven policies left more space for an altruistic or value-driven foreign policy.

After the end of the Cold War, a new approach of Western governments also appeared to emerge towards Middle Eastern and North African governments. For the Europeans, the Barcelona Declaration of 1995 upgraded human rights and democracy to become explicit

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goals of Euro-Mediterranean relations.¹ For the US, 'promoting more open political and economic systems, and respect for human rights and the rule of law' became an objective in the Middle East since the Clinton administration (Murphy and Gause 1997). More recently, president George W. Bush's freedom agenda has underlined new interest in Middle Eastern and North African democratisation. The unexpected, if short-lived, liberalisation in Egypt in 2005 following US pressure has indeed demonstrated that international actors can raise the cost of repression for authoritarian governments substantially.

Nevertheless, it is argued that the regimes in the MENA have been spared from post Cold War democratisation pressures on authoritarian governments: The MENA democratisation policies of both the US and the European Union have been criticised for their lack of commitment (Dalacoura 2002, Youngs 2002, Dunne 2004, Dalacoura 2005). Scholars of authoritarian resilience in the MENA go even further. They argue that Western support plays an active role for maintaining the stability of authoritarian rule in the MENA by providing both material and legitimacy resources (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2002, Brownlee 2002, Bellin 2004). Additionally, the literature on foreign aid finds that the MENA is 'over-aided', receiving substantially more aid per poor person compared with other world regions (Harrigan *et al.* 2006, p. 251).

Is European and US policy towards the Middle East and North Africa thus still merely driven by economic and geopolitical considerations with no regard for civil and political liberties? This article aims to contribute to an answer by studying US and French support to authoritarian governments in the Middle East and North Africa. Using US and French aid to MENA countries as a proxy for regime support, we seek to understand if and under which circumstances Western support is contingent on concerns for political and civil rights. Against this background, we also investigate the commonalities and differences in the US and French approaches towards the region.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses relevant patterns and trends of US military and economic aid and French economic aid from 1980–2005. Section 3 analyses the role of civil and political liberties in US and French aid towards the MENA. Section 4 discusses the limits of altruism in US and French approaches towards the MENA. Section 5 discusses the scope of our findings and concludes.

US and French aid to MENA countries 1980–2005

We operationalise support to MENA governments as foreign aid France and the US, respectively, disburse to MENA countries. Support and foreign aid are obviously distinct variables. Western support takes forms other than monetary transfers, for instance, with statements that legitimise or de-legitimise regimes. Likewise, the objective of aid is, among others, to promote development, independently of considerations about the political regime. However, it seems sensible to assume that aid and support *are* related: Monetary transfers from abroad are key to the survival of some regimes in the area and aid has been found not to be exclusively linked to development needs, a theme we will explore further in this article.

For the US, we consider economic and military aid, listed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).² For France, no data on military aid is available, and we thus consider only economic aid net disbursements from the OECD/DAC (2007) database.³ In the analysis that follows, following the literature, we perform a log transformation of the aid variable. For the cases where aid equals zero, the log transformation is problematic, and we substitute this value for 0.05 million US\$, which is lower than, but close to, the aid level of countries that obtain the least positive amount of aid.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 show the log of US economic aid, US military aid and French economic aid (FA) from 1980 to 2005, to 12 MENA countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, and Qatar.⁴ The data are averaged every two years.

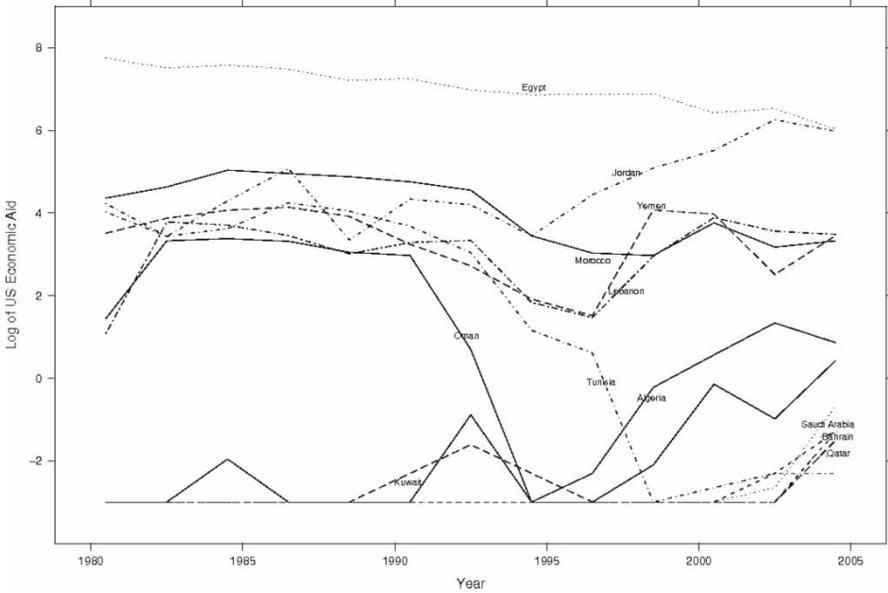


Figure 1. US economic aid 1980–2005.

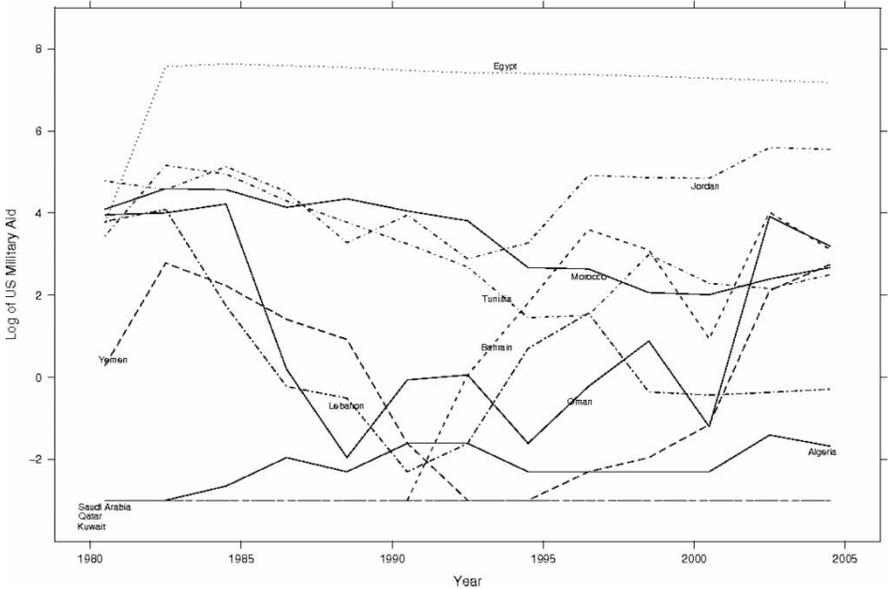


Figure 2. US military aid 1980–2005.

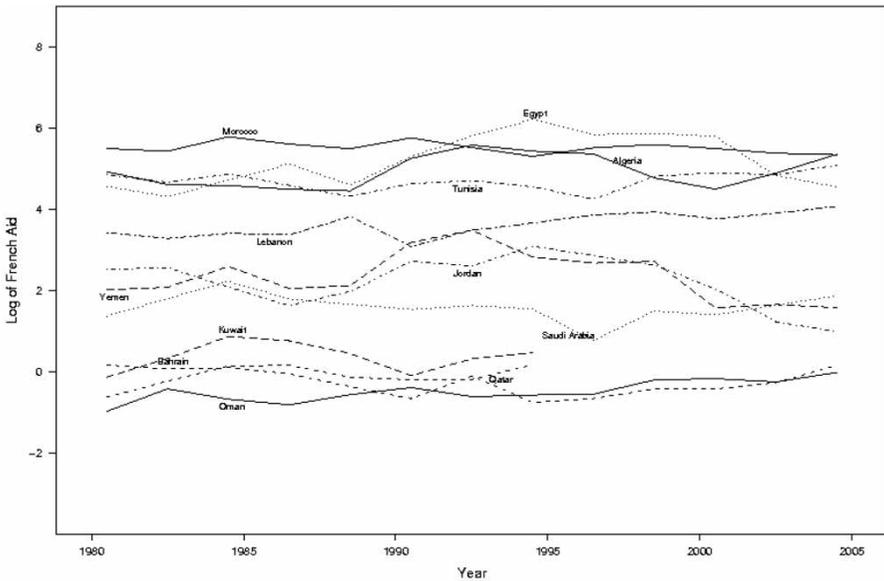


Figure 3. French aid 1980–2005.

Although the article focuses on the 1990s, we find it useful to show data from 1980 onwards for two reasons. First, because these data put the 1990s into perspective and, second, because the patterns qualify the common wisdom that support of Middle Eastern governments remain unchanged after the end of the Cold War. Indeed, we see in the graphs that in the 1980s, recipient groups were much more stable over time, especially for the US economic aid (USEA). For USEA, Egypt was far above other recipients. Then, there was a second group composed of Jordan, Yemen (Arab Republic), Morocco, Lebanon, Oman, and Tunisia and one group composed of the remaining Gulf States and Algeria not receiving aid. For US military aid (USMA), the pattern was essentially the same in the 1980s, with the exception of the second group being less stable: Lebanon and Oman suffered a sharp decline in military aid in the mid-1980s.

In contrast, aid levels and patterns have become more targeted and diversified in the 1990s. In the 1990s, for both USEA and USMA, formerly stable groups disintegrate. For instance, aid to Jordan increases to reach Egyptian levels by the early 2000s while aid to Tunisia declines sharply.

French aid follows *its own logic* and remains more stable overall. There is a first group of high aid recipients composed of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and, interestingly, Egypt. Then, there is a second, slightly more volatile group of aid recipients composed of Jordan, Yemen, and, the rather unlikely recipient of economic aid, Saudi Arabia in the middle. The third group towards the bottom is composed of Bahrain and Kuwait (for which we lack French aid data since the mid-1990s), and Oman and Qatar. Levels of French aid are generally quite stable over time. However, Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen share a pattern of change with aid increasing in the first half of the 1990s and falling thereafter.

Comparing the three types of aid, the following differences are apparent. First, the US gives development aid to countries to which it gives little or no military aid (Algeria, Yemen the Gulf States with the exception of Bahrain) and vice-versa (Tunisia). Second, French aid contrasts

especially with US economic aid in its preference for the Maghreb countries, the low levels of aid it allocates to Jordan and the aid it gives to Saudi-Arabia. Finally, French aid has changed relatively little after the end of the Cold War whereas the US economic and military aid has experienced relatively big changes.

Clearly, therefore, the pattern of aid to the MENA appears to have changed at the beginning of the 1990s. Does this change reflect a trend towards more value oriented aid policy vis-à-vis the MENA countries? Do the differences between US and French aid reflect different fundamental concerns? In particular, how important have political and civil freedoms become for aid allocation in the 1990s? To these questions we turn now.

Concerns for political liberalisation?

In this section, we first look at differences in aid accruing to countries with different degrees of civil and political liberties. Following this, we also consider strategic factors as well as other altruistic determinants of aid, such as GDP per capita.

Aid and civil and political liberties

To account for the differences in civil and political liberties, we use the aggregate measure of Freedom House. In the case of the Middle Eastern and North African regimes, the ranking is either partially free (PF), or not free (NF). Our dataset includes 114 non-free cases and 75 partially free ones. The stable full autocracies are typically the Gulf states – with the exception of Kuwait – during most of the 15 years we consider. Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria change from partially free to not free at the beginning of the 1990s, an increase in repression from which they never recover. Morocco and Kuwait rank partially free throughout the period. The remaining countries oscillate between partly free and not free. There are some rankings that are questionable. In Jordan, for instance, the constant decrease in civil and political liberties throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, including the suspension of parliamentary elections from 2001–2003 (Wiktorowicz 2002, Lucas 2003, Ryan and Schwedler 2004) does not change that country's Freedom House ranking. Overall, however, the rankings of the 1990s and 2000s appear sensible.⁵

Do donors tend to give less aid to more autocratic countries? Table 1 shows the average aid by donor according to a country's Freedom House score. The figures are in logs so that their difference (shown in the third column) can be interpreted as the percent difference between the two.⁶ Thus, for USEA, partly free countries received around 200 percent or three times more aid than non-free. For France, the figure is 80 percent. As we see in this table, for all types of aid, partially free countries receive, on average, more aid than non-free countries. The difference is biggest for USEA and smallest for France. This is consistent with results in previous studies that show French aid as less value oriented than US economic aid (Alesina and Dollar 2000). Still,

Table 1. Average aid according to freedom house score.

	Freedom house		Difference
	NF	PF	
US economic aid	- 0.09	2.04	2.13
US military aid	0.15	1.36	0.98
French aid	2.6	3.2	0.6

according to our data, even for France the difference is positive. Considering only this table, we could thus conclude that US and French policies in the MENA are much more concerned with political liberties than is commonly assumed – at least when it comes to foreign aid.

These descriptive results, however, might be misleading. It is possible that these partially free countries have other characteristics that make them recipient to these larger shares of French and US aid than the non-free. Potentially, it might not be the degree of political and civil liberties that is rewarded but something else, for instance geopolitical and economic characteristics. To control for some of these factors as well as other altruistic factors that commonly account for aid, we use regression analysis.

Strategic factors as aid determinants

There are a variety of economic and political factors that can make a country strategically relevant for external actors. It is difficult, if not impossible to account for all of them. The literature on aid has followed different paths in dealing with this problem. Some introduce only clearly relevant variables such as exports or colonial past and add country dummies for 'special relations' with countries such as Israel or Egypt (Alesina and Dollar 2000, McGillivray 2003). Others use panel data estimations and use the countries' fixed effects as a proxy for their strategic relevance (for instance, Harrigan and Wang 2004). Fixed effects and country dummies, however, remain unexplained black boxes and implicitly assume the strategic relevance they are supposed to capture to be time invariant.

We consider as strategic factors exports, a country's relations with Israel, and colonial ties. While we improve upon previous approaches by partly uncovering the black box, our list of strategic factors is obviously far from complete. Oil, for instance, is an obvious strategic factor in the region. We do not include it because of its additional role as indicator of wealth which, from a donor's perspective, discourages development aid disbursements.⁷

Economic interests are an intuitive non-altruistic driver of foreign aid. We consider the volume of US and French exports to represent the economic side of their strategic interests. A high volume could induce donors to stabilise authoritarian regimes for the fear of losing exports to that country in case of political turmoil. In what follows, for expositional purposes, it will be useful to have strategic variables with discrete values. Trade is the only variable requiring a transformation, and we simply construct an indicator variable that equals one if exports were above the average over the entire period and zero otherwise.⁸

Israel's security and the normalisation of its relationship with the Arab countries is a key US foreign policy goal in the MENA (see, for instance, Sharp 2007). We divide our cases into three groups, according to the type of relations a MENA country has with Israel. These range from no official relations at all, to official relations that include the opening of an Israeli representation in a country, to signing a peace treaty. The countries having 'stable' relations with Israel are, on the one hand, Egypt which signed a peace treaty in 1979 and Algeria, Bahrain Saudi-Arabia, Lebanon, Kuwait and Yemen, which reject official relations with Israel, on the other. The ranking of the other countries changes in the early-mid 1990s. First, there is Jordan that signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. Secondly, there are countries that entered into some form of official relations. Tunisia and Morocco signed a 'Joint Declaration' with Israel in 1994 that allowed for trade links and the opening of an Israeli representation in their countries, and Oman and Qatar allowed for the opening of Israeli trade offices in 1996. Tunisia, Morocco, and Oman closed the Israeli offices in 2000, after the beginning of the second Intifada and thus are again ranked as cases that have no official relations with Israel.⁹ For these three groups, we

create three different dummy variables: ME0 equals no-official relations, ME1 represents some official relations, and ME2 represents a peace treaty.

Previous studies have found that former colonial ties are a relevant determinant of aid (see, for example, Alesina and Dollar 2000). Indeed, simply looking at the aid graph in Figure 3, we see that former colonies are among the highest recipients of French aid. Thus, we include a dummy for Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Lebanon to represent former French colonies.¹⁰

In the following regressions, we also include other 'altruistic' factors. Following previous literature on aid determinants we use – besides civil and political liberties – GDP per capita and population to represent the altruistic side of aid (see, for instance, MacDonald and Hoddinott 2004).¹¹ Finally, we also include a measure of government size, measured by the government share of GDP (Penn World Tables 2007 in Heston, Summers and Aten 2007) to account for the possibility that donors privilege small government, for instance, because they believe that it signals efficiency.

Regression analysis

We estimate a regression with this wider range of altruistic and strategic factors. Following the literature, we log aid, exports and population. The Freedom House variable (FH) is coded to equal one in "partly free" cases and zero otherwise. In particular, the equation we estimate is:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Log}(Aid) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1(Gov/GDP) + \beta_2\text{Log}(GDP/capita) + \beta_3\text{Log}(Population) \\ & + \beta_4FH + \beta_5Exports + \beta_6ME1 + \beta_7ME2 + \beta_8Colony \end{aligned}$$

We estimate this equation for each dependent variable: US Economic aid, US military aid and French development aid. Following Alesina and Dollar 2000, we perform a simple OLS estimation and average our data over several time periods. In our case, as mentioned before, we average over two years. Moreover, to partially deal with the possible problem of reverse causality, we lag all regressors two years. For instance, if exports are tied to aid, then a positive coefficient for exports would not necessarily reflect that higher exports lead to higher aid but could simply imply that part of the aid comes in form of the donor's products. Lagging the exports variable twice (as MacDonald and Hoddinott 2004 do in their study on Canadian aid) partly tackles this problem.

The results of the estimation are reported in Table 2, with the three columns using as dependent variable US economic aid, US military aid and French aid, respectively. The table shows that civil and political liberties (FH) matter even when accounting for other altruistic, and, importantly, strategic explanatory variables. Indeed, political and civil liberties appear to be a concern to all, even if for France, it fails to be statistically significant.

Among the other altruistic variables, GDP per capita appears as negative and significant in all cases: all donors consider poverty as a relevant criterion for aid disbursements. Population size appears with a 'non-altruistic sign' for the US: countries with a smaller population are more likely to receive US aid. This effect is actually widely found in the literature and is known as the "small country bias" (Forsyth 2005 – Encyclopedia of International Development, p. 19).

Overall, the US economic aid appears to be the most altruistically driven, followed, according to our regressions, by US military aid, and, only then by France. This is consistent with the descriptive statistics in Table 1 and holds for both indicators of altruism: concerns about liberties and a recipient country's economic needs.

Table 2. OLS Regression with altruistic and strategic determinants of aid.

	US Economic	US Military	France
Intercept	33.02 (4.61)**	24.6 (5.11)**	7.37 (1.93)**
Gov/GDP	- 0.07 (0.02)**	- 0.12 (0.02)**	- 0.01 (0.01)
GDP	- 3.42 (0.45)**	- 2.35 (0.49)**	- 0.75 (0.19)**
Population	- 0.62 (0.26)*	- 0.66 (0.29)*	0.37 (0.14)*
FH	1.14 (0.4)**	1.06 (0.44)*	0.13 (0.18)
Exports	0.82 (0.74)	- 0.11 (0.82)	0.81 (0.37)*
ME1	- 0.38 (0.56)	- 0.11 (0.62)	- 0.28 (0.26)
ME2	4.04 (0.62)**	5.91 (0.68)**	1.85 (0.26)**
Colony			2.39 (0.23)**

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis.

One star and two stars denote significance at the 10% and 1% level, respectively.

M1 and ME2 denote some relations with Israel and Peace Treaty, respectively.

As to the strategic factors, the volume of exports to a MENA country matters positively for all types of aid, although it is only significant for France. For France, additionally, whether a country has been a colony is a strong predictor of aid.

A country's stance towards Israel matters not only to the US – as we would expect – but also to France. This concern, however, is much higher for the US, particularly for its military aid. Interestingly, moving from no-official relations to some relations is not rewarded by any type of aid. This may also be a reason why three of the countries (Morocco, Tunisia and Oman) that engaged in these relationships during the 1990s closed the Israeli representations in their countries following the beginning of the second Intifadah in 2000. At that moment, official relations with Israel became domestically more costly.¹²

The limits of altruism

We have seen that both strategic and altruistic motives seem relevant for aid allocation to the MENA. In this section we confront the two types of motives to uncover the limits of altruism in US and French aid and investigate whether altruism is limited to places that are not strategically relevant.

In order to answer these questions, we first construct a simple index that captures whether a country in a particular year is of strategic importance for the US and France, on the basis of the results of regressions above. Thus we construct a variable, *Str*, that equals 1 if the country is either a relevant trade partner, has a peace treaty with Israel or, in the case of France, is an ex-colony. Countries with relations with Israel but with no peace agreement are not considered as strategic given that in the regressions above, the variable never appeared as significant.

Tables 3a, 3b and 3c display, by donor and type of aid, the relative differences (differences in logs) in aid disbursements for countries that are 'partly free' and those that are 'not free' in the Freedom House rating, grouped according to whether they are strategically relevant or not. The number of cases in each cell is relatively balanced, ranging from 24 to 84 in the case of the US and from 32 to 65 in the case of France.

Strategically relevant MENA countries receive more aid from all donors than those that are not. At the same time, donors give more aid to countries that respect civil and political liberties to an extent that they are considered 'partly free' than to full-fledged autocracies. The balance

Table 3a. US economic aid by FH and strategic importance.

	NF	PF	Diff
Non-Strategic	- 0.6	1.7	2.3
Strategic	1.3	2.6	1.3

Table 3b. US military aid by FH and strategic importance.

	NF	PF	Diff
Non-Strategic	- 0.3	1	1.3
Strategic	1.5	2.2	0.7

Table 3c. French aid by FH and strategic importance.

	NF	PF	Diff
Non-Strategic	0.3	1.2	0.9
Strategic	4.0	4.2	0.2

between altruism and strategic interests seems clearly tilted towards the latter in the case of France (Table 3c). Overall, countries that are strategically relevant to France get around four/five times more than non strategic ones while partly free countries get less than double than non-free ones. The balance is most tilted towards altruism in the case of US Economic aid with US Military aid being somewhere in between. All these results are in line with those in the regression above.

Besides these comparisons, the tables allow us to contrast the effect of civil and political liberties in strategic countries and in non-strategic ones. For both strategically relevant and irrelevant countries, the respect of civil and political liberties is rewarded. Importantly, however, this difference is bigger, in relative terms, for strategically irrelevant countries. Table 3a that displays the US economic aid shows that among strategically important countries, those that are 'partly free' receive around double the amount of aid, whereas in non-strategic countries they receive more than three times. The same pattern applies to military aid and to France.

The effect of trade as a strategic variable for the US was weak in the regression above, so we have repeated the same exercise dropping trade as a strategic variable for the US. The results (not reported) show a similar pattern except for the fact that, among strategic countries, freer countries *do not* obtain more aid from the US. It is worth noting that, in this case, the number of observations is relatively imbalanced, with only Egypt and some years of Jordan counting as strategic for the US, so the results are less trustworthy. Still, they put in doubt whether, among strategic countries, becoming partly free makes a difference whatsoever.

Regression analysis

To examine the robustness of the findings in the previous tables and to be able to control for some potentially relevant factors, we now turn to regression analysis. As before, we estimate

Table 4. OLS regression with interaction between freedom house and strategic variable.

	US Economic	US Military	France
Intercept	48.91 (5.05)**	49.99 (5.93)**	16.36 (1.73)**
Gov/GDP	- 0.13 (0.02)**	- 0.2 (0.02)**	- 0.05 (0.01)
GDP/capita	- 4.97 (0.48)**	- 4.83 (0.57)**	- 1.62 (0.17)**
Population	- 1.33 (0.31)**	- 1.83 (0.36)**	0.05 (0.11)
Str	4.53 (0.92)**	5.73 (1.08)**	2.93 (0.31)**
FHxStr0	1.56 (0.52)**	1.67 (0.61)**	1.44 (0.32)**
FHxStr	0.1 (0.96)	- 0.22 (1.13)	- 0.19 (0.26)

Notes: See Table 2. Notice that the strategic variable is not the same for the US and France.

a simple OLS regression. In the regression, we include the index of strategic importance (*Str*) and the interaction between this and the Freedom House index. In particular, we estimate:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Log}(\text{Aid}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Gov/GDP}) + \beta_2\text{Log}(\text{GDP/capita}) + \beta_3\text{Log}(\text{Population}) \\ & + \beta_4\text{Str} + \beta_5\text{FHxStr0} + \beta_6\text{FHxStr}^{13} \end{aligned}$$

where the variable *Str0* is just $1 - \text{Str}$; i.e. the indicator variable of non-strategic places. Thus, the coefficients β_5 and β_6 reflect the effect of Freedom House in non-strategic places and in strategic ones, respectively.

Table 4 presents the results of the estimation for the three types of aid. As in the previous regression, aid appears negative and significantly related to the government share of GDP and to GDP per capita. The ‘small country bias’ is also present for the US, though not for France. The variable reflecting strategic importance, as expected, appears strongly and positively related to aid.

Regarding the interaction between strategic importance and the Freedom House Index, the results are remarkably similar for the three types of aid. In all cases, the effect of political and civil liberties appears as positive and significant when interacted with the variable for non-strategic places (*FHxStr0*). Freedom House in strategic places does not appear significantly related to any of the types of aid we consider. The message is therefore consistent with the one in the tables above: US economic and even military as well as French aid are value driven only in places that have little strategic relevance. In places that are strategically important, liberalisation does not appear to be rewarded or de-liberalisation punished.¹⁴

Conclusion

This article has studied one dimension of US and French support to authoritarian governments in the Middle East and North Africa. Using foreign aid as a proxy for US and French support we have examined the circumstances under which Western support is contingent on concerns for political and civil rights and the commonalities and differences of US and French approaches towards the region.

Using statistical analysis, we compared first the role of political and civil rights for aid allocation with the role of different geopolitical and economic factors. Secondly, we investigated whether the effect of liberties differs in strategically relevant vs. strategically irrelevant places.

We found that French aid and US economic and military aid take a MENA regime’s respect of civil and political liberties into account, provided that a country is not strategically relevant. In

this case, civil and political liberties are of little or no concern to both donors. This result sounds intuitively sensible: As long as none of their interests is at stake, France and the US promote values, otherwise either the fear of the political instability that accompanies democratic transitions or the costs of change to a possibly less pro-Western government are too high. Moreover, we find that both countries give more aid to countries that are strategically relevant than to those that are not. Thus, although French and US foreign aid goes to different countries, the underlying motives are remarkably similar. Finally, to the extent that there is a difference between the two countries, France fares worse than even the US military aid regarding the consideration of civil and political liberties.

Some notes of caution need to be borne in mind when interpreting these findings. First, as mentioned, aid is only one dimension of external support to regimes. Economic aid is per definition development aid and thus needs to respond – and indeed does respond to some extent – to the needs of the recipient countries. In this way, it cannot capture the extent of support Western governments give to richer countries, precisely by providing legitimacy to these regimes, for instance by praising their reforms, or their constructive role in the region ('moderate Arab governments'). The reverse is also true. The consideration of civil and political liberties in aid allocation is only one aspect through which democracy could potentially be promoted in the region. Second, we only consider a limited amount of strategic variables, exports, colonial ties, and a country's relations with Israel. Oil, for instance, was not considered for its dual role as signal for wealth as well as strategic relevance. Finally, beyond strategic variables, other factors could matter for Western support to the authoritarian leaders of the region. Importantly, the fact that the major opposition are Islamist movements, whose democratic credentials are questioned, and that more generally, a majority of the populace holds anti-Western or at least anti-American attitudes is worth to be considered as a motive of Western support in future research.

Nevertheless, we believe our analysis can be a useful starting point and complement to research on Western support of authoritarian regimes and democracy promotion. Our findings both confirm and qualify the extant literature. They qualify the literature because they show that the MENA is not fully exempted from concerns regarding civil and political liberties. They confirm it because the strategic relevance of a MENA country is a highly relevant predictor of aid allocation and, because for strategically relevant countries, a higher degree of repression is tolerated. Echoing the critics of the US and European democratisation and, more generally, foreign policy in the MENA, our analysis shows how comparatively small the West concern for political change in the region is.

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Notes

1. For the inception of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, see, among many others, Jünemann 1999 and Hibou and Martinez 1998.
2. USAID Report, 2006. US Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations. This report is commonly known as 'The Greenbook' and can be accessed online.
3. In both cases, aid is listed in millions, constant 2005 US\$.

4. We consider only MENA countries with pro-Western or “neutral” regimes as we want to exclude cases where ‘regime change’ would be the dominant Western policy goal.
5. This is less the case for the 1980s, where the rankings appear way too positive for some countries that can be considered Cold War allies of the US. This point has also been made for Freedom House rankings in other world regions (see Bollen 1992). In the MENA, this is shown, for instance, by the Tunisian ranking in the 1980s as compared to the 1990s. Tunisia was surely as autocratic during the 1980s – when it was ranked as partly free – as during the 1990s. Similarly, it is difficult to find evidence for Morocco being partially free since the mid-1970s throughout today, with even better disaggregated scores in the early 1980s than in the late 1990s, when the late King Hassan II implemented important political liberalisation measures.
6. Negative values in logs reflect a figure for raw aid lower than US\$ 1 million.
7. As it happens, this role seems to dominate, for in (unreported) regressions aid consistently appeared as negatively related to oil.
8. The data on exports come from United Nations Comtrade (2007). They are expressed in constant US\$ 2000, deflated using the World Bank GDP deflator available at the UN common database.
9. All information pertaining to the opening and closing of Israeli offices comes from the Israeli government’s website. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/About+the+Ministry/Diplomatic+missions/Israel-s+Diplomatic+Missions+Abroad.htm> [Accessed 11 January 2008]
10. Strictly speaking, Lebanon was not a French colony, but a French creation. However, since France had the mandate over the territory that included the later Lebanese republic, it is sensible to include it as ‘ex-colony’ in our analysis.
11. GDP per capita is in PPP and correspond to the Laspeyres real GDP per capita in the Penn World Tables 2007. The population data come from the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects.
12. Jordan and Egypt, in contrast, whose peace treaties yield important dividends, resisted strong domestic pressure.
13. Notice that the index of strategic importance *Str* differs for France and the US so that the respective *Str* variable enter in their corresponding regression.
14. For robustness, in (unreported) regressions, we redid the exercise dropping trade from the strategic variable for the US. The results of this exercise were qualitatively the same.

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