

# US Humanitarian Discourses in the Middle East<sup>1</sup>

Heidar Ali Masoudi<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

The United States is reproducing its hegemony in global area, inter alia, through humanitarian discourses. Strategic regions can be subjugated by constructing international realities that are desirable for the United States. Unfortunately, western countries exploited humanitarian aids as a tool in their foreign policies. So these aids cannot be considered as neutral humanitarian responses to human threats. However, American humanitarian aids can be explained in the context through which the United States consolidates its hegemonic position in the world. This article seeks to inquire on how western countries especially the United States can constitute humanitarian discourses which are compatible with their foreign policy objectives. In other words, the article shows that humanitarian discourses are affected by foreign policy discourses. The article, using discourse analysis, attempts to relate American humanitarian discourses to its foreign policy discourses, based on primary resources in the UN official website.

**Key words:** Humanitarian discourses, USA, Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan.

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<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of Shahid Beheshti University  
Email: alimasoodi2002@gmail.com

**Introduction**

Nine years ago when I was departing the airport of Bam<sup>1</sup> by Norwegian aircraft, I never expect a day when I am flying to Japan for presenting an article with an anti-western content. The 2003 Bam earthquake is a representative example that shows how humanitarian assistances are embedded in foreign policy objectives of helping countries. After the Bam earthquake, the U.S. offered assistance with the hope that in return Iran would promise to comply with an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency which supports greater monitoring of its nuclear facilities. This example shows that humanitarian aids are misused as a political instrument for promoting foreign policy objectives.

Humanitarianism is deeply discussed in the varieties of conferences and workshops around the world in the recent years, especially after 11 September 2001 when global US-led coalition try to justify its military operations in terms of humanitarianism. For example, in a workshop held in March 2008 with a provocative title of 'Humanitarianism in the Age of Terror' Michael Barnett from a historically informed perspective argues that humanitarianism has always been political and to a certain degree securitized. Intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan created a multitude of operational and ethical dilemmas and contradictions for humanitarianism (Morton & O'Hagan, 2009, p. 3-6). Barnett contends three factors drove the storyline of politicization of humanitarianism including: the end of the Cold War, development of complex humanitarian emergencies and changes in the normative and legal environment. He insisted that:

The emphasis on human security and the discourse of the 'responsibility to protect' encouraged a growing number of actors to expand their assistance activities to include a wider variety of goals and to become more deeply involved in transforming domestic space in ways that are intended to remove the root cause of conflict. Those in the humanitarian sector can now dream of grander goals, such as rights, development, and even, as noted by the late Sergio de Mello, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to Iraq, building 'responsible' states (Barnett, 2009, p. 10).

Barnett pointed out to a 'hypothesised link between failed states and terrorism and insecurity' and some other rhetoric by US officials such as former US Agency for International Development administrator Andrew Natsios saying that the United States is threatened more by "failed, failing and recovering states" than by "conquering states" (Barnett, 2009, p. 11). Theoretically and practically, states are so engaged in humanitarianism that Law and Whelan (2009) recommended the Australian government to utilize a human security paradigm in all its strategic guidance (p. 19). In contrast, some critic analysts argue that:

It is extremely unlikely that workable criteria for a right of humanitarian intervention without Security Council authorization will ever be developed to the satisfaction of more than a handful of states ...The alternative- a select group of states (such as Western liberal democracies, or perhaps the United States alone) agreeing on criteria amongst themselves- would seriously undermine the current system of international law. It would also greatly undermine the position of the United Nations as an effective organization in the field of peace and security. (Byers & Chesterman, 2003, p. 202)

Outlining 'human security framework', Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy argue that international community is required to go beyond humanitarian intervention by addressing a broader range of threats to individuals' security. They insist that:

In short, one way of looking at the broadening of threats as one moves from humanitarian intervention to a Human Security engagement approach is that not only acts of direct violence are taken into account but also acts of structural violence (Galtung, 1969: 170), and indeed threats to security that lie beyond the control of human beings. Humanitarian intervention does not solve the problem of who is responsible for protecting human security against structural violence- poverty, disease, etc.- or natural disasters and economic downturns. (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p. 199)

In contrast, Duffield criticizes this maximalist human security approach, goes to claims ‘the new humanitarianism involves a shift in the centre of gravity of policy away from saving lives to supporting social processes and political outcomes’ (cited in Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p. 199)

Roxanne Doty argues that humanitarian aids have a productive aspect. She insisted that:

Foreign aid, as a set of productive representational practices, made possible new techniques within an overall economy of power in North-South relations. It put in place permanent mechanism by which the “third world” could be monitored, classified, and place under continual surveillance.  
(Doty, 2002, p. 128)

Henry Radice reminds us that the problem of humanitarianism is the notion of humanity itself and we reflect on humanity through experiences of inhumanity. He contends that it implies a political understanding of humanity, based on the recognition that humanitarians are engaged in a high-stakes “politics of humanity” (Radice 2009). But he points that “it would be extremely hard to maintain that the assessments of numbers of people at risk of malnutrition are purely fictional, or entirely strategic” (Radice 2009).

In terms of James Orbinski in his Nobel lecture “language is determinant. It frames the problem and defines response. rights and therefore responsibilities” (cited in Radice 2009).

Radice notes that one such as Craig Calhoun can understand colonialism as humanitarianism. He believes that this kind of attitude was deeply embedded in liberal humanitarian thought which treats colonial subjects as children to be educated. He said that: “rhetorically those engaging in dehumanizing discourses often claim to be doing so precisely in the name of a defence, a purification of the category of humanity. Indeed, for Rorty the category of human is precisely problematic because we always envisage humanity as ‘like us’” (Radice 2009). Radice concluded that humanitarianism represents the engagement “in a politics of humanity, negotiating the content and political salience of the category of ‘human’, as well as the response to attacks on the integrity of the human” (Radice 2009).

The article seek to uncover the mutual constitution of humanitarian and foreign policy discourses of the U.S. presidents after cold war, based on four case studies: Iraq, Afghanistan and Arab Spring respectively during G. Bush, Clinton, G. W. Bush and Obama presidency. This article attempts to elaborate the discursive interconnectedness between foreign policy and humanitarianism in the West. It focuses on American foreign policy as a representative of what western countries thinking and doing about humanitarianism. Using discourse analysis as a method, the article examines the selection of texts regarding US president's addresses to annual session of UN General Assembly. The central section of the article explores the mutual constitution of American foreign policy and humanitarianism. Throughout, my focus is on clarifying the correspondence of binary oppositions on which these humanitarian and foreign policy discourses are based.

### **Iraq during G. Bush Presidency**

In 1991 the United States intervened with allies in Operation Desert Storm to force Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. While the Bush administration portrayed the intervention in humanitarian terms, important strategic interests were at stake. The claim of humanitarianism was weakened because although President George Bush had urged the Iraqi Kurd and Shi'ite minorities to rise up against Saddam, the United States stood by while the dictator repressed them. Bush, presenting his lecture at UN General Assembly on October 5 1990, said:

Two month ago, in the waning weeks of one of history's most hopeful summers, the vast, still beauty of the peaceful Kuwaiti desert was fouled by the stench of diesel and the roar of steel tanks. once again the sound of distant thunder echoed across a cloudless sky. and once again the world awoke to face the guns of August. (Bush 1990)

Saying 'most hopeful summers', Bush tried to inspire that the United States has been so excited by Soviet dissolution that never imagined that something like Iraq's aggression can put the United States in a bad mood. He also dichotomized between contrasting groups of word such as 'hopeful', 'beauty', 'peaceful' and 'cloudless sky' in the one hand and 'stench of diesel', and 'roar of steel tanks' in another.

Iraq's leaders should listen: it is Iraq against the world. Let me take this opportunity to make the policy of my Government clear. The United States supports the use of sanctions to compel Iraq's leaders to withdraw immediately and without condition from Kuwait. We also support the provision of medicine and food for humanitarian purposes, so long as distribution can be properly monitored. Our quarrel is not with the people of Iraq. We do not wish for them to suffer. The world's quarrel is with the dictator who ordered that invasion. (Bush 1990)

Bush at first presumed that Iraq is against *the world* but what he immediately makes clear is the policy of *US government* and then again referred to *the world's quarrel* with Iraq. In this way, He equalizes the world and US government. It is very interesting that while supporting the use of sanctions to compel Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait *without condition*, he immediately laid down the condition under which the United States would support the provision of humanitarian aids to Iraqi people i.e. monitoring distribution. In fact, the United States is presumed in a hegemonic situation that is able to clarify conditions for others.

Today the regime stands isolated and out of step with the times, separated from the civilized world not by space but by centuries. Iraq's unprovoked aggression is a throw-back to another era, a dark relic from a dark time. (Bush 1990)

Bush again dichotomized between a 'dark time' when Iraqi regime comes from and a new era when 'the civilized world' belongs, separated from each other 'by centuries'.

The United Nations can help bring about a new day, a day when these kinds of terrible weapons and the terrible despots who would use them are both a thing of the past. It is in our hands to leave these dark machines behind, in the dark ages where they belong, and to press forward to cap a historic movement towards a new world order and a long era of peace. (Bush 1990)

Although Bush expects a day when weapons of mass destruction disappeared, he made an intimate link between these weapons and the people who have control over them. Bearing this in mind, it implies that these weapons become the most dangerous one only if they will be controlled by 'despots'.

This is precisely why the present aggression in the Gulf is a menace not only to one region's security but to the entire world's vision of our future.

It threatens to turn the dream of a new international order into a grim nightmare of anarchy, in which the law of the jungle supplants the law of nations. (Bush 1990)

The order/anarchy, dream/nightmare, the law of the jungle/the law of nations oppositions enable the array of practices that constituted the United States operation in Iraq. These oppositional binaries complemented one another. Iraqi regime, guided by law of the jungle, are imagined to be dangerous and disrupter of the international order. In contrast, the United States is represented as positive identity to be guardian of international order.

The world remains a dangerous place. Our security and well-being often depend, in part, on events occurring far away. We need serious international co-operative efforts to make headway on threats to the environment, on terrorism, on management of the debt burden, on the fight against the scourge of international drug trafficking, and on refugees and peace-keeping efforts around the world. (Bush 1990)

Bush clearly points to master signifier as 'our security and well-being' that is threatened by 'events occurring far away'. According to this geographical, hierarchical approach to international life, there is master region as a core which is under threatening from 'events' that have been occurring far away in the periphery. By using the word 'events', it implies that rest of the world, beyond the core, is supposed to be hosted by unpredictable semi-realities that necessitates security concerns for the core. Bush said: "We are united, prepared to swim upstream, to march uphill, to tackle the tough challenges as they come - not only as the United Nations, but as the nations of the world united" (Bush 1990). In

terms of G. Bush, the world is supposed to be understood as a challenging area to encounter by 'we'. In this sense, 'we' does not refer to 'the nations of the world united' as Bush rhetorically said, but it refers to the speaker i.e. the United States government. In fact, the United States vivaciously represented itself so determined that resolve any obstacles it faces in its worldwide trajectory.

### **Afghanistan and Iraq during G. W. Bush presidency**

While US policy makers in Clinton era have been mostly preoccupied with events in the Americas and the Europe, the Middle East was going to be an important concern for the United States in Bush era. Although the Middle East has used to be of strategic importance for the United States during last decades, 9/11 terrorist attack helped the United States to justify its intervention in this region by a hegemonic discourse based on Bush Doctrine. The Bush Doctrine has been defined as a collection of strategy principles, practical policy decisions, and a set of rationales and ideas for guiding United States foreign policy. Two main pillars are identified for the doctrine: preemptive strikes against potential enemies and promoting democratic regime change.

The War in Afghanistan, began on October 7 2001, as the armed forces of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Afghan United Front launched Operation Enduring Freedom. The primary motivation of the invasion was the September 11 attacks on the United States, with the stated goal of dismantling the al-Qaeda terrorist organization and ending its use of Afghanistan as a base. The United States also said that it would remove the Taliban regime from power and create a democratic state. In this section I discuss some of representational strategies to which Bush referred when lecturing in the UN General Assembly in 2001.

While seeking to constitute a philanthropic identity for the US, Bush considered the Taliban to be a subject responsible for all human suffering in Afghanistan. He said:

We are making progress against military targets — and that is our objective. Unlike the enemy, we seek to minimize, not maximize, the loss of innocent life. I am proud of the honourable conduct of the American military. And my country grieves for all the suffering the Taliban

have brought upon Afghanistan, including the terrible burden of war. (Bush 2001)

According to Bush, there is an enemy in Afghanistan that seeks to maximize the loss of innocent life. Through this, 'American subject' was constituted as innocent, instead of being itself engaged in suffering Afghan people. It is to be realized that the Taliban was replaced by the American military for all human suffering in Afghanistan. Not only was the Taliban responsible for casualties, but they also misruled Afghanistan. Bush said: "Years of Taliban misrule have brought nothing but misery and starvation. Even before this current crisis, 4 million Afghans depended on food from the United States and other nations, and millions of Afghans were refugees from Taliban oppression" (Bush 2001). Afghan people have been represented as dependent on food from the U.S. even before this crisis. It implies that there is something essentially negative in Afghanistan to be eliminated as a root of all this country's miseries. The United States, as a speaking subject, has seen itself in a superior position, enabling to speak on behalf of the rest of the world. He said: "the Taliban's days of harbouring terrorists, and dealing in heroin, and brutalizing women are drawing to a close. When that regime is gone, the people of Afghanistan will say, with the rest of the world, good riddance" (Bush 2001). What is interesting is that while the main motivation for occupying Afghanistan was its so-called sponsoring of terrorism, Bush mostly pointed to domestic problems including dealing in heroin and brutalizing women as the main target of American military operation. 'Rebuild their country' is used to cover the U.S. strategies in war against terrorism. "I can promise, too, that America will join the world in helping the people of Afghanistan rebuild their country" (Bush 2001) Bush said. When talking about humanitarian aid, he pointed to the US not directly but as one nation among others. It implies that the US would not accept the complete responsibility for humanitarian aids to Afghans. In contrast to his father in 1990 whose precondition for humanitarian aids to Iraqi people was proper distribution, Bush tried to constitute a more human-loving image of the US saying that:

Many nations, including mine, are sending food and medicine to help Afghans through the winter. America has airdropped over 1.3 million packages of rations in Afghanistan. Just this week, we airlifted 20,000 blankets and over 200 tons of

provisions into the region. We continue to provide humanitarian aid, even while the Taliban try to steal the food we send. (Bush 2001)

According to Bush, the US is not going to be an actor for reconstruction unless in corporation with the United Nations and development bank, depending on precondition such as the Taliban withdrawal and ceasefire. He said: "More help, eventually, will be needed. The United States will work closely with the United Nations and development banks to reconstruct Afghanistan after hostilities there have ceased and the Taliban are no longer in control" (Bush 2001).

Speaking after Iraq occupation in 2003, Bush tried to justify US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq by making this point that 'many' nations supported those operations in spite of 'some' disagreements. One can question what meanings and identities are being constructed by portrayal of Taliban and Saddam as inherently anti-democratic and anti-human rights, thereby justifying the military operations that caused many sufferings and casualties for the people in these two countries. In trying to make sense of a positive identity for the US, Bush draw upon a whole array of hierarchical oppositions, the most notable being positive free people/ negative terrorists. It is worth quoting at length what he said:

Our actions in Afghanistan and Iraq were supported by many Governments, and America is grateful to each one. I also recognize that some of the sovereign nations of the Assembly disagreed with our actions. Yet, there was and there remains unity among us on the fundamental principles and objectives of the United Nations. We are dedicated to the defense of our collective security and to the advance of human rights. Those permanent commitments call us to great work in the world, work that we must do together. So, let us move forward. First, we must stand with the people of Afghanistan and Iraq as they build free and stable countries. The terrorists and their allies fear and fight this progress above all because free people embrace hope over resentment and choose peace over violence. (Bush 2003)

Through a process of repetition, US discourses constructed the oppositional dichotomy between US and its allies in the one hand and al Qaeda and the Taliban on the other. In the following text, Afghan people have been imagined as the people in the need of food, medicine and advising on constitution and election.

The United Nations has been a friend of the Afghan people, distributing food and medicine, helping refugees return home, advising on a new constitution and helping to prepare the way for nationwide elections. NATO has taken over the United Nations mandated security force in Kabul. American and coalition forces continue to track and defeat al Qaeda terrorists and the remnants of the Taliban. Our efforts to rebuild that country go on. I have recently proposed to spend an additional \$1.2 billion for the Afghan reconstruction effort, and I urge other nations to continue contributing to that important cause. (Bush 2003)

Afghans were regarded as precocious child who doesn't have any tradition of community and security and must be regulated by adolescent nations namely United Nations, NATO and the US. This poor child needed to be paid by his father in petty cash. The US generously shows its readiness of paying for it.

It is hard to imagine that it would be possible for Bush thinks differently about the situation in Iraq. The dichotomy between what have been doing in Iraq by Saddam's regime and what is going to do by US-led coalition can aid the understanding of what the text does in realizing the facts favorite for the US. Again, Iraq was represented as a country without any public infrastructures that must be reconstructed by American forces. As bush said:

At the same time, our coalition is helping to improve the daily lives of the Iraqi people. The old regime built palaces while letting schools decay, so we are rebuilding more than a thousand schools. The old regime starved hospitals of resources, so we have helped to supply and reopen hospitals across Iraq. The old regime built

up armies and weapons while allowing the nation's infrastructure to crumble, so we are rehabilitating power plants, water and sanitation facilities, bridges and airports. I have proposed to Congress that the United States provide additional funding for our work in Iraq, the greatest financial commitment of its kind since the Marshall Plan. (Bush 2003)

Pointing to Marshall plan, Bush tried to remember the continuity between current war on terrorism with earlier good/evil encounters such as the second world war and the cold war, thereby the US can be imagined in a dangerous world of competing forces of good and evil which lasting half of the century. The US is presumed as a final winner in an enduring struggle with the evils. According to Bush, 'helping the Iraqi people' can be ultimately considered as an objective way to secure the US. In other words, the US security can be thought of as the center of the Bush discursive structure. It can be suggested that a distinctly American version of security was the dominant signifier in these texts. In fact, the US will be more secure only if Iraqi people build a peaceful country. It means that all other countries in the world should be considered in the service of the US security. Bush said the following: "Having helped to liberate Iraq, we will honour our pledges to Iraq, and by helping the Iraqi people build a stable and peaceful country we will make our own countries more secure" (Bush 2003). Sometimes master signifier is completely omitted in the text and humanitarianism is represented in terms of pure altruism. For example, Bush said:

We must act decisively to meet the humanitarian crises of our time. The United States has begun to carry out the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, aimed at preventing AIDS on a massive scale and treating millions who have the disease already. We have pledged 15 billion dollars over five years to fight AIDS around the world. (Bush 2003)

Or when Bush argued that:

My country is acting to save lives from famine as well. We are providing more than 1.4 billion dollars in global emergency food aid, and I have asked our United States Congress for 200 million

dollars for a new famine fund so that we can act quickly when the first signs of famine appear. Every nation on every continent should generously add their resources to the fight against disease and desperate hunger. (Bush 2003)

To speak of the altruistic nation, Bush inevitably invoked images of a country i.e. the US that is always ready to generously 'act quickly' against famine and other humanitarian crisis such as human trafficking. In this regard, Bush said that:

There is another humanitarian crisis, spreading, yet hidden from view. Each year, an estimated eight to nine hundred thousand human beings are bought, sold or forced across the world's borders. Among them are hundreds of thousands of teenage girls and others as young as five who fall victim to the sex trade. This commerce in human life generates billions of dollars each year, much of which is used to finance organized crime. There is a special evil in the abuse and exploitation of the most innocent and vulnerable. The victims of the sex trade see little of life before they see the very worst of life— an underground of brutality and lonely fear. Those who create these victims and profit from their suffering must be severely punished. Those who patronize this industry debase themselves and deepen the misery of others, and Governments that tolerate this trade are tolerating a form of slavery. (Bush 2003)

Speaking in annual session of General Assembly in 2007, Bush at large clearly drew on a master dichotomy between democracy and dictatorship and their followers which can aid the understanding of collective identities which are constructed in the text. It is worth saying that again the people of Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon are regarded as a child needed help from his or her father. Bush sums it up in following manner:

Brave citizens in Lebanon and Afghanistan and Iraq have made the choice for democracy. Yet, the

extremists have responded by targeting them for murder. This is not a show of strength; it is evidence of fear; and the extremists are doing everything within their power to bring down these young democracies. The people of Lebanon and Afghanistan and Iraq have asked for our help, and every civilized nation has a responsibility to stand with them. Every civilized nation also has a responsibility to stand up for the people suffering under dictatorship. (Bush 2007)

We can note several overlap between Bush foreign policy discourse and his discourse on humanitarianism. The US security is the nodal point around which these two separate but overlapping discourses are fixed. All humanitarian aids have been meaningless if they wouldn't have been useful for American security. Liberating Afghanistan and Iraq had less to do with the promotion of democracy and human rights than with the promotion of US security and representation of the US as a world power capable of exercising moral leadership in the term of humanitarianism. Moreover, we can also note a subject positioning for the people of Iraq and Afghanistan that implies qualities closer to children than adults. Categories often have worked together with these analogies to parent/child oppositions and metaphors in order to create meanings and identities which are at work in realizing the realities interested by the speaker. The speaker varied from Bush to Obama which is discussed in the following section.

#### **Arab Spring during Obama presidency**

Dan Nexon has effectively summed up the Obama Doctrine as the "Humanitarian intervention against militarily weak fossil fuel producing countries in strategically important regions that are also located near many large NATO military bases and are run by dictators who kind of piss us off and have no powerful allies." (Nexon 2011). Having been strategic and rich in oil, Arab countries was a test case for Obama Doctrine in foreign policy and its relationship with humanitarianism. What is taken for granted in Nexon's definition is the interconnectedness between Obama's foreign policy and humanitarianism. It means that the humanitarian intervention during Obama presidency is seemingly determined by his foreign policy objectives, not by his human

conscience. In this section I briefly examine a text that is representative of this interconnectedness i.e. Obama address at UN General Assembly in 2011. It will be comparatively discussed that although Obama rhetoric is formally different from his predecessors, what is remained stable is a line between America's friends and foes by which one can anticipate which side the United States is going to stand when the future hasn't been clear. At first I point to Libyan case.

As far as Libya is concerned, Obama made a point, referring to 'mass atrocity' that is went challenged by the United Nations. It presupposed that 'rightful place' of the leader of new Libya is 'beside us' which referred to master signifier i.e. the United States. He said: "Forty-two years of tyranny was ended in six months ... Yesterday, the leaders of a new Libya took their rightful place beside us, and this week, the United States is reopening our Embassy in Tripoli." (Obama 2011). What is to be considered as the main factor thereby meanings are fixed in the text is a dichotomy based on dictatorship/democracy opposition. It highlights in the following text:

Something is happening in our world. The way things have been is not the way they will be. The humiliating grip of corruption and tyranny is being pried open. Technology is putting power in the hands of the people. The youth are delivering a powerful rebuke to dictatorship, and rejecting the lie that some races, religious and ethnicities do not desire democracy. (Obama 2011)

Not being directly engaged in military operation, the US sought to display an overwhelming rhetorical humanitarian concern with spreading democracy in the Middle East. It is the case with Syria as following. There is a clear distinction between people and oppressors that is equally valid bases of strategic significance at issue here. In Syrian case, Obama seems to call for rather more sensitivity to killing, torturing and detaining than to other cases like Yaman and Bahrain. He said:

As we meet here today, men, women and children are being tortured, detained and murdered by the Syrian regime. Thousand have been killed, many during the holy time of Ramadan. Thousands more have poured across Syria's borders ... The question for us is clear: Will we stand with the

Syrian people, or with their oppressors? ...  
Already, the United States has imposed strong sanctions on Syria's leaders. We have supported a transfer of power that is responsive to the Syrian people. (Obama 2011)

In contrast to the prevailing conceptualization of Syrian case, which continues to draw heavily on killing and torturing people by regime, Obama's rhetoric on Yaman suggests that although current regime in Yaman can be considered as a corrupt system, but corruption as a signifier stands alone without any articulation with dictatorship while the later is the main signifier in discourses on Syria. This can be showed in the following text:

"In Yaman, men, women and children gather by the thousands in towns and city squares every day with the hope that their determination and spilled blood will prevail over a corrupt system. America supports their aspirations. We must work with Yaman's neighbors and our partners around the world to seek a path that allows for a peaceful transition of power from President Saleh, and a movement to free and fair elections as soon as possible. (Obama 2011)

The United States' reaction to Bahrain's developments is distinctly different from previous cases. According to Human Rights Watch, the Obama administration's decision to move forward on a \$1 million arms sale to Bahrain sends the wrong signal to a country that is engaged in serious human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch 2012). Obama talked about Bahrain in such a manner that there is a close friendship between these two countries. As if there had been any kind of violence, killing, torturing and detaining in Bahrain. In other words, friendship with the United States can be regarded as an excuse for Obama neglecting the use of violence in Bahrain by its regime and its regional allies. It is clearly evident in the following:

In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability, but more are required. America is a close friend of Bahrian, and we will continue

to call on the government and the main opposition bloc – the Wifaq – to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people. And we believe the patriotism that binds Bahrainis together must be more powerful than the sectarian forces that would tear them apart. (Obama 2011)

In sum, our presentation points to mutual constitution between Obama's foreign policy discourses and humanitarian discourses in regard to Arab Spring developments. There is no doubt that there seems a difference between Obama's and his predecessors' discourses on humanitarianism, But what is still significant in highlighting some humanitarian cases while neglecting some others is the priorities which are presupposed in foreign policy area.

### **Conclusion**

The particularly discursive relations between US foreign policy and humanitarianism show a telling case of relations between political discourses. First, both foreign policy/humanitarianism are historically grounded in a quest for hegemony by global powers. Second, humanitarian discourses have been selectively used by the United States for justifying its global strategies. Third, US humanitarian discourses are deeply embedded in US foreign policy discourses. It means that US humanitarian aids can only be meaningful in the broader context of US international priorities. This brings us back to the beginning of the article and a better explanation for relationship between foreign policy and humanitarianism. It also gives a more adequate conception of humanitarianism in contemporary western-led international system. The 'humanitarian foreign policy' should possibly best be used as a starting point to re-imagine forms of engagement by hegemonic powers in humanitarian crisis throughout the world. It should be analyzed by scholars whether or not 'the humanitarian' can be considered as a new opening in International Relations scholarship. If it is the case, the article will be successful in making the point that humanitarianism in the United States is stemmed from polity not humanity.

**NOTES**

1. The 2003 Bam earthquake was a major earthquake that struck Bam and the surrounding Kerman province of southeastern Iran at 1:56 AM UTC (5:26 AM Iran Standard Time) on Friday, December 26, 2003. The earthquake was particularly destructive, with the death toll amounting to 26, 271 people and injuring an additional 30,000. Following the earthquake, many countries such as Norway offered direct humanitarian assistance to Iran. In total a reported 44 countries sent in personnel to assist in relief operations and 60 countries offered assistance.

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