

Dutch Foreign Policy Towards Egypt: the Democracy-Security Dilemma

Master Thesis

Radboud University



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|----------------|-------------------------------|
| University | Radboud University Nijmegen |
| Faculty | Nijmegen School of Management |
| Study | Political Science |
| Specialization | Conflict, Power and Politics |

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|------------|------------|
| Date | 24-06-2022 |
| Word count | 24.951 |

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Political Science (MSc)

Abstract

The regime of the Arab Republic of Egypt can be described as a repressive authoritarian regime that is violating human rights. The Netherlands is interested in promoting better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt, not only because it values human rights and democratic principles, but also because it is essential for a sustainably stable Egypt. However, whereas the Netherlands ideally wants to see a democratic, responsive and inclusive Egyptian government with respect for human rights, this is hardly reflected in their current actions towards the country. In the literature, an often named explanation for this ambiguity is the democracy-security dilemma, meaning that Western states fear short-term instability when an authoritarian country in the Middle East and North Africa region democratizes. This is named 'destabilization by democratization'. However, this thesis has shown that the focus of these theories is not enough to explain why the Netherlands is not *really* pushing Egypt to reform. The Netherlands is not afraid of 'destabilization by democratization'. Instead, the presence of two other interests prevent the Netherlands from taking action towards Egypt's authoritarian regime. Namely, the Netherlands has certain economic and migration interests. Pushing Egypt too hard on better human rights and democratic reform might weaken the (currently strong) bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Egypt. In turn, this can damage these economic and migration interests. De facto, this means that the Netherlands takes limited action against Egypt which enables President Sisi to strengthen his authoritarian regime and to crush human rights.

Preface

This Master Thesis marks the end of the Master's program Political Science with a specialization in Conflict, Power and Politics at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. My research showed that Dutch rhetoric on supporting better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt is barely translated into policy. By addressing this issue, I hope to contribute to changing this ambiguity. The process of writing this thesis, however, tested my perseverance. I could not have completed the work without the help and support of many.

First and foremost, I wish to thank dr. Willemijn Verkoren for her pleasant supervision during the thesis process. I was always amazed how fast you replied on questions by e-mail and your feedback was always clear and helpful. Also a big thanks to my friends, family and colleagues for their support and distraction after a long day of writing. Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to all interviewees that participated in this study. A special note to Amr Hamzawy and Maged Mandour, who are both in exile because of their critique on Egypt's regime: I sincerely hope you can ever go back to your beloved home country Egypt. To cite Hamzawy, "*inshallah*".

Finally, a very special thanks to my girlfriend Joni for listening to all my (complaining) stories about the thesis and for providing the necessary mental support. It cannot be a coincidence that the submission date of this thesis, 24-06-2022, also marks our 9 (!) year anniversary.

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1. Introduction

In December 2021, the Egyptian blogger Alaa Abd El Fattah, human rights defender Mohammed El-Baqer and journalist Mohammed Ibrahim Radwan were sentenced to respectively five, four and four years in prison. The three were charged for “spreading fake news undermining national security” and “joining a terrorist group” (Michaelson, 2021a). Amnesty International contends that the three are detained based on unfounded and vague accusations and that they should be released immediately because they were just peacefully protecting their human rights (Amnesty International, 2022). The UN human rights office have urged Egypt to release the three, as well as all other political prisoners, and to halt repression against civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders (UNHR, 2021). However, until now, the three are still in prison and represent a generation of thousands of Egyptians that are detained by Egypt’s authoritarian regime based on vague and unfounded accusations (Amnesty International, 2022).

Egypt is not the only authoritarian regime that is repressing and detaining peaceful civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders. Today, many countries in every region of the world are governed by authoritarian regimes that inhibit any political opposition and are crushing basic human rights (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is perhaps the most well-known example of a region where authoritarianism has been dominant for decades (Marzo & Cavatorta, 2019). Where democratization took place in many regions of the world since the mid-1970s, authoritarian regimes in the MENA regions seem to be hardly affected. Even after the Arab Uprisings in 2011, most regimes in the region either stayed authoritarian, or returned to authoritarianism after a short democratic upheaval. Furthermore, it is often argued that authoritarianism in the region has not only survived over the years, but that it has even strengthened and hardened (Marzo & Cavatorta, 2019; Boserup et al. 2019).

This authoritarian governance comes not without problems. Many authoritarian regimes in the MENA region engage in severe repression, and this repression even seems to be on the rise over the last decade (Josua & Edel, 2021). Repression in the MENA region entails the crushing of basic human rights and freedoms, torture, disappearances and extrajudicial killings for example. Furthermore, there is political repression meaning that political opportunities are limited and any political opposition is (harshly) beaten down (Callaway & Harrelson-Stephens, 2013). In the literature, this is often named the ‘shrinking of civic space’ (e.g. Smidt, 2018; Buyse, 2018; Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Oram & Doane, 2017). The shrinking of civic

space means a decreased freedom for civil society caused by states that seek to exert control over civil society and try to silence critical and challenging voices (Buyse, 2018). In practice, the shrinking of civic space means that there is no ‘space’ for basic freedoms (e.g. freedom of speech, assembly, association) and political opportunities (e.g. activism, dissent, opposition). In turn, any initiatives by civil society that are not in line with the perspectives of the authoritarian regime, think of demonstrations or critical dissent, are crippled. These initiatives are undermined to turn down any popular uprisings that could threaten the survival of the authoritarian regime. In other words, repression is used to sustain the authoritarian regime (Brechenmacher, 2017; Boserup et al. 2019).

Egypt is perhaps the most well-known example of an authoritarian regime in the MENA region that is engaging in repression and the shrinking of civic space (Youngs & Echagüe, 2017). Egypt has a long history of being ruled by repressive authoritarian regimes, but repressive practices have even increased since current President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi came to power (Abozaid, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2022). Sisi, shortly after coming to power via a military coup in 2013, started to systematically repress and violate human rights, crushed all political opposition and blocked the public sphere (Abozaid, 2020). To give an example, Sisi implemented a permanent state of emergency (Hofmann, 2021) and a counterterrorism law (Abozaid, 2020) which Amnesty International described as a ‘draconian’ law crushing human rights (Amnesty International, 2019). This law classifies peaceful opposition activities as terrorist activities meaning that a critical journalist or citizen can be charged and imprisoned for ‘terrorism’ (Cairo Institute for Human Rights studies, 2015). Sisi justified these repressive practices given that Egypt experienced numerous terrorist attacks (Dentice, 2018) and faced increasing regional security threats from Islamic State and the civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya (Abozaid, 2020). In an interview with BBC news (2015), Sisi stated that his repressive practices are necessary to fight security threats like terrorism and to avoid Egypt from reaching the same fate as other countries in the region. However, according to authors such as Abozaid (2020), the main goal of Sisi’s repressive practices is not to save Egypt from these security threats, but to strengthen the power of his authoritarian regime by normalising, institutionalising and legitimising extrajudicial practices that not only target terrorists but also civil society and opponents of his regime.

Human rights organizations have been challenging those repressive practices and the shrinking of civic space for decades (Flower, 2019; Favour & Folarin, 2021). Furthermore, (Western) states have also raised their voice. In the case of Egypt for example, U.S. President Joe Biden has urged Sisi to stop the human rights abuse (Michaelson, 2021b). Furthermore, a

group of 31 (mainly) Western states issued a joint statement in March 2021 in which they expressed their concerns on human rights violations in Egypt and urged the Egyptian government to guarantee space for civil society (Cook, 2021). Although Western states pay great attention and are negative in their rhetoric towards Egypt's repressive practices and the shrinking of civic space, one could doubt whether this can be seen in concrete policies to change the behaviour of the Egyptian government. Carothers and Press (2021, p. 11) state that despite Biden's objective to change the situation in Egypt, "the result so far has been more continuity than change". Furthermore, the European Union recently launched a joint bid with Egypt for the leadership of a new international organisation on global counter-terrorism policies. Human Rights Watch is now urging the EU Council to abandon this idea due to "Egypt's abhorrent record of human rights violations" (Al Jazeera, 2022). Also the Netherlands is guilty claims Roelants (2021), as the Netherlands keeps supporting Sisi's regime with weapons despite the severe human rights violations.

One could thus observe a difference between the Western *attitude* towards the repressive practices and the shrinking of civic in Egypt on the one hand, and Western *actual policies* to change the behaviour of the Egyptian government on the other hand. Looking at the literature, this ambiguity could be explained by what is called the 'democracy-security dilemma'. The West is interested in promoting democracy and the protection of human rights across the globe (Dandashly, 2013; Faustini-Torres, 2020), but also in maintaining stability across the globe to counter security threats (Scott & Scott, 2020; Joffé, 2008). However, it is often argued that the two concepts of 'democracy' and 'security' are at odds because security interests may be threatened by democratization, creating a dilemma for the West (Scott & Scott, 2020). More concretely, democratization in authoritarian countries can cause instability in the short-term, which can in turn lead to security threats. Eder (2011) has called this 'destabilization by democratization'. Concretely, Western countries fear that such instability could expose them to security threats like terrorism and migration flows and endanger their access to energy supplies. Thus, the willingness of the West to promote democracy runs up against the reality of countervailing security interests (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019). As a result, the past has shown that despite the Western rhetoric on promoting democracy and human rights, the West has mainly focused on security, which in practice means that the West has taken limited action towards repressive authoritarian regimes that are violating human rights (Dandashly, 2013; Scott & Scott, 2020; Joffé 2008). This is in particular the case since 9/11 and the subsequent terrorist attacks in Madrid 2004, London 2005 (Scott & Scott, 2020), Paris 2015 (Durac, 2018) and the chaotic aftermath of the Arab Spring in the MENA region (Durac, 2018; Hatab, 2018).

These points can also be seen back in Western policies towards Egypt. Despite the Western negative rhetoric on Sisi's regime, both the U.S. (Toosi, 2021) and Europe (Roelants, 2021; Mahlouthi, 2021) keep supporting Sisi because achieving security interests is the main priority, even if this is at the expense of democracy and human rights.

However, the literature is increasingly focusing on the negative effects of favouring security over democracy and human rights. Authors such as Eder (2011) and Karlsrud (2019) have claimed that this Western approach of favouring security over democracy and human rights in the MENA region has failed to address the root causes of security threats like terrorism. Authoritarian regimes often engage in repression, deny human rights and offer limited political opportunities. These factors can lead to a sense of humiliation and hopelessness which in turn can contribute to the emergence of radicalisation and extremism, and eventually even to terrorism. Sticking to authoritarian regimes to counter security threats is thus short-term thinking because the root causes of those security threats are not tackled. Even worse, security threats can be amplified by this approach, meaning that the Western approach is perpetuating rather than resolving security threats like terrorism (Eder, 2011; Karlsrud, 2019). To cite Durac (2018, p. 119), who writes on the EU, the EU approach "secures limited gains, but sacrifices, once more, its commitment to the norms of democracy and human rights, while promoting the persistence in power of regimes which by their very nature contribute to the threat that EU policy is designed to address". The case of Egypt illustrates how favouring security over democracy and human rights can exacerbate rather than reduce security threats like terrorism. By Sisi's repressive practices and severe human rights violations, a generation of extremists and radicals has been produced which resulted in an increased frequency of terrorist attacks since Sisi came to power in 2013 (Abozaid, 2020).

What we see, then, is that the 'democracy-security dilemma' may be a false premise. The literature is increasingly acknowledging that the Western emphasis on security is problematic, not only because it comes at the expense of democracy and human rights, but also because it seems to exacerbate rather than reduce security threats. By taking limited action towards repressive authoritarian regimes to ensure security, the opposite may happen. Western policy towards authoritarian regimes in the MENA region therefore seems to be counterproductive because it is actually "contributing to the threat it tries to address" (Durac, 2018, p. 118). However, the current body of literature falls short concerning knowledge on how Western states are dealing with these new academic insights. The aim of the present study, therefore, is to qualitatively explore whether current Western policies towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise.

More concretely, the Netherlands will be studied on its foreign policy towards Egypt. In line, this thesis wants to answer the research question: *How does the Netherlands deal with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt?*

The scientific relevance of this research aim is two-fold. First, there are limited studies in the current body of literature on whether current Western policies towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. It is worth mentioning that a study by Johansson-Nogués and Escartin (2020) touches upon this research gap. The authors illustrate how the EU's response towards democratization in Tunisia after the Arab Uprisings in 2011 has been dominated by the EU desire for stability, in particular given the security threats from instability in Libya and Syria. However, in 2019, the EU realized that a better balance between democracy, human rights and security was needed. Therefore, the EU activated the "PARMSS" (Programme to Support Security Sector Reform and Modernisation in Tunisia) to better balance between the two concepts (Johansson-Nogués & Escartin, 2020). More concretely, this project tries to strengthen the security sector of Tunisia to counter security threats like terrorism while at the same time respecting democratic values, freedoms and human rights (Cowater, n.d.). Nevertheless, it is still uncertain whether the PARMSS project will contribute to a better balance between security and democracy and human rights, as the EU in the end still seems to prefer short-term stability (Johansson-Nogués & Escartin, 2020). The present therefore tries to shed light on whether current Western policies towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. Second, the study aims to contribute to the discussion on the relationship between academic knowledge and policy making. The discussion on whether, to what extent, and how academic knowledge translates into policy making is heavily debated (e.g. Mead, 2015; Newman & Head, 2015). Since this thesis will examine whether academic knowledge on the democracy-security dilemma is translated into actual Western foreign policy making, it contributes to this academic discussion. In particular, the obstacles of translating this academic knowledge into policy will be discussed.

The research aim of this thesis is also societally relevant. First, many authoritarian regimes engage in repressive practices and the shrinking of civic space to sustain their authoritarian regime. Western states are taking limited action towards those repressive authoritarian regimes to ensure stability and thereby security. Thus, Western policy towards those authoritarian regimes de facto enables the continuation of repressive practices and the shrinking of civic space. Second, Western policy seems to exacerbate rather than reduce

security threats like terrorism, given that repressive practices and the shrinking of civic space contribute to security threats.

As mentioned, in particular the Netherlands will be studied on its foreign policy towards Egypt. The case of Egypt is first of all relevant to study given that it is a textbook example of a MENA country that is engaging in repressive practices and the shrinking of civic space (Youngs & Echagüe, 2017). To cite Abozaid (2020, p. 13), the regime of president Sisi is “on the threshold of becoming a terrorist actor itself” and is “crushing its country’s future”. Due to the limited time and resources available to conduct the present study, and to provide the necessary focus, this thesis will only focus on Dutch foreign policy to examine ‘Western’ foreign policy towards Egypt. First, the Netherlands states that its foreign policy with regard to supporting better human rights and democratic reform is largely in line with EU foreign policy (Rijksoverheid, 2020). Therefore, Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt will be somewhat representative of EU policy, and thus to a certain extent of Western policy¹. Second, the Netherlands is chosen because of data availability. The researcher of this thesis has most access to Dutch data resources such as policy documents and policy makers.

In order to provide an answer to the research question and to realize both scientific and societal relevance, the remainder of this thesis will be outlined as follows. In chapter two, a literature review further explicating the relevant concepts of the present study will be provided. This literature review will result in several sub-questions that will form the foundation for answering the main research question. In chapter three, an insight into the research methods of the study will be given. In chapter four, the main findings will be presented, followed by a discussion and conclusion in chapter five.

¹ This thesis refers to ‘Western’ policies towards Egypt. It is however important to note that the academic research used for the literature review in chapter 2 is mainly, but not exclusively, related to EU policy since the available literature is mostly about EU policy. However, given that other Western countries, such as the U.S., have also played a role in supporting democracy and better human rights in the MENA region and that the literature on their policies is similar to literature on EU policy, it is decided to not exclusively refer to EU policy.

2. Theory

The aim of the present study is to qualitatively explore whether Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt reflects the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. In order to conduct this research, it is important to discuss the theoretical background of the relevant concepts. This chapter will therefore be outlined as follows. First, theoretical background on the concepts ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ will be provided, after which the ‘democracy-security dilemma’ will be addressed. Then, this chapter will proceed with an overview of the recent academic discussion suggesting that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. In addition, a short description of the case of Egypt will be provided. Furthermore, literature on the relationship between academic knowledge and policy making will be discussed. The literature review will then lead to a series of sub-questions.

2.1 Democracy

Democracy is a multidimensional concept with various forms and interpretations (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). For the purpose of this thesis, the focus will therefore only be on why the West is interested in *supporting* democracy across the globe. The Western interest in supporting democracy across the globe started mainly after the end of the Cold War in 1989 as “the change from the bipolar international system to multipolarity opened the way for introducing several new themes (...) such as democracy and human rights” (Olsen, 1998, p. 343). Western policy makers were influenced by academic scholars such as Art (1998) who argued that democracy is the best form of governance for three reasons. First, democracies are less likely to confront other democracies, leading to less global wars. Second, democracy is the best guarantee to protect human rights as democratic systems do not tend to engage in mass murders and discrimination. Third, democracy can facilitate the most economic growth compare to other forms of governance. Furthermore, and especially relevant for the present study, it was argued that non-democratic systems with a lack of freedom, political opportunities, and socio-economic deprivation could stimulate conflict, extremism and terrorism. Since democracy can tackle these issues, it was assumed to be the best form of governance to ensure global security (Powel, 2009). Fukuyama (1989) even argued in his famous work ‘The End of History’ that Western democracy is the best and therefore final form of human government.

It is therefore not surprising that the West became interested and engaged in promoting democracy across the globe. In the EU, promoting democracy even became an official foreign and security policy with the Maastricht Treaty on European Union signed in 1992 (Scott & Scott, 2020). To cite from this treaty, one of the EU’s foreign and security policy objectives

was to “develop and consolidate democracies and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (CVCE, 2013, p. 8). In 2003, the EU drafted the “European Security Strategy (ESS)” which stated that EU security could best be ensured by creating a world with well-governed democratic states. Supporting democracy would help to promote human rights, development and good governance. In turn, the root causes of security threats like extremism, terrorism and conflict would be tackled (Smith, 2004; Biscop, 2008). To cite Dandashly (2018, p. 71), the EU views “democracy as a tool to combat terrorism”. The United States also has a long tradition of integrating democracy promotion efforts in its foreign policy for similar reasons as described above (Poppe, 2010). For example, former U.S. President George W. Bush wanted to spread democracy to non-democratic states, particularly in the MENA region, because states like Afghanistan and Iraq were seen as hotbeds for terrorism. Democratizing those states would make those states more stable and would “make the world more secure by undermining terrorism at its source” (Monten, 2005).

Before continuing with this thesis, it is worth making a note on the relationship between ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’. Although these are different concepts, the two are highly interrelated. As mentioned, democracy is the best form of governance to protect human rights (Art, 1998). Furthermore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948 includes rights such as freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the right to take part in a country’s government, the latter either directly or indirectly through freely chosen representatives (UN, n.d.). These human rights are clearly related to democratic values. This is also stated by Dahl (1998), who writes on the close interrelationship between democracy and human rights. To cite, “democracy is not only a process of governing (...) democracy is inherently also a system of human rights” (Dahl, 1998, p. 86). In this thesis, the concepts of ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ will therefore be used interchangeably when writing on the democracy-security dilemma. It is worth noting that the academic literature also uses these two concepts interchangeably when writing about the democracy-security dilemma.

2.2 Security

Since security is a very broad concept, here the focus will be on the main Western security interests towards the MENA region. Concretely, the West perceives certain threats to its security from the MENA region. A first security threat is terrorism, which became especially apparent since 9/11 (Durac, 2018; Dandashly, 2018) and the subsequent terrorist attacks in European cities like Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 (Scott & Scott, 2020). The two terrorist

attacks in France in 2015 gave the Western fear of terrorism another boost (Durac, 2018). Another but related security threat that the West perceives is the threat of Islamic radicalism, which became especially apparent since the rise of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (Hatab, 2018). A third security threat, in part related to the above mentioned security threats, comes from the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing from countries like Syria and Libya to Europe (Durac, 2018). Politicians and voters fear that these refugee flows could endanger Western national security because they might enable terrorists to spread to the West (Taneski & Petrovski, 2018) and because they might change the ethnic, cultural and economic composition of the Western countries, putting a strain on social security and employment (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006). A final threat is more a threat in economic terms, and relates to the Western fear of losing access to energy supplies in the MENA region as a result of instability (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019; Durac, 2018).

2.3 The democracy-security dilemma

As became clear from the above paragraphs, the West is interested in both promoting democracy across the globe and in achieving certain security interests. However, it is often argued that these two concepts are at odds because security interests may be threatened by democratization (Scott & Scott, 2020). Thus, the willingness of the West to promote democracy runs up against the reality of countervailing security interests such as terrorism, migration management and access to energy supplies (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019). In the literature, the tension between these two concepts is called the ‘democracy-security dilemma’ (e.g. Scott & Scott 2020; Börzel, Risse, & Dandashly, 2015; Faustini-Torres, 2020). The democracy-security dilemma means that “efforts to promote democratization and build security are at times at odds and reasons for promoting democracy are therefore weighed against security interests” (Scott & Scott, 2020, p. 62). Faustini-Torres (2020, p. 17) uses democracy promotion by the European Union as an example and describes that “despite being an explicit goal in its foreign policy, the EU does not engage in democracy promotion at all costs”.

Given that the West is confronted with the democracy-security dilemma, Western countries have to establish which of the two they prioritize. The past has shown us that the West in the end has often prioritized security over democracy (e.g. Roccu & Voltolini, 2018; Eder, 2011), and in particular since 9/11 and the subsequent terrorist attacks in Madrid 2004, London 2005 (Scott & Scott, 2020), Paris 2015 (Durac, 2018) and the chaotic aftermath of the Arab Spring (Durac, 2018; Hatab, 2018). Looking at the earlier paragraph on ‘democracy’, one might raise questions on this choice as it was argued that promoting democracy can lead to more

security. Yet, the Western rhetoric on promoting democracy has rarely translated into concrete actions². This seemingly contradictory finding can be explained by the Western fear of ‘instability’ in the MENA region. Even though democracy is ideally the best form of governance to ensure global security in the long-term, promoting democracy in authoritarian countries can cause instability in the short-term, which can in turn worsen global security. Eder (2011, p. 442) has called this “destabilization by democratization”.

Indeed, Scott and Scott (2020) show that the West, despite the possible advantages of a democracy, maintained limited aspirations to undermine incumbent authoritarian regimes as this could result in destabilization and disruption. In practice, this means that the West has targeted most of their democracy promotion efforts to strengthen already democratic regimes rather than to destabilize and disrupt authoritarian regimes. In other words, democracy promotion efforts are seen as valuable but not if they undermine the incumbent authoritarian regime because that will lead to destabilization and disruption. In turn, this may lead to insecurity (Scott & Scott, 2020). In particular, the fear is that destabilization and disruption in the MENA region could give rise to extremist and radical Islamic parties or groups as happened in Egypt (Pace, 2009; Eder, 2011), create a power vacuum which is a breeding ground for terrorism (Durán & Bados, 2017), or lead to civil wars like in Syria and Libya (Fraihat & Yaseen, 2020). Consequently, these security threats in the MENA region could lead to massive migration flows to Europe (Durac, 2018). Authoritarian regimes were thus seen as guarantors of stability and predictability, which in turn could prevent security threats like Islamic extremism, terrorism and migration flows to Europe. With these security interests in mind, the West sacrificed their commitments to democracy and human rights to avoid destabilization by democratization. In practice, this means that the West preferred sticking to authoritarian regimes over a risky democratic transition (Eder, 2011; Hatab, 2018; Durac, 2018).

Roccu and Voltolini (2017) show that the West has used the ‘security-stability nexus’ as their dominant frame to approach the MENA region. The security-stability nexus frame projects the idea that Western security is maximized through the preservation of stability in the MENA region, which in turn has made the West hesitant to take action towards authoritarian regimes. With regard to counter terrorism objectives, it is even argued that these objectives are best secured through cooperation with the regional incumbent regimes, regardless of whether they are authoritarian or not (Roccu & Voltolini, 2017). Similarly, Hinnebusch (2012, p. 24) states that, especially since 9/11 and the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid, “the stress has

² The U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq could be seen as exceptions.

shifted to cooperation with MENA regimes against the shared terrorist threat from radical Islamists (...) despite rhetorical insistence that political reform is needed to attack the roots of terrorism”. As a result, EU policies towards authoritarian regimes in the MENA region contained “little or no reference to concern for the promotion of democratic reform or human rights in the partner countries whose cooperation is increasingly central to the EU’s interests in ensuring security through stability” (Durac, 2018, p. 110) and the EU was willing “to turn a blind eye to human rights violations as long as the country in question was a partner in the Global War on Terror” (Karlsrud, 2019, p. 11). As mentioned, this EU approach de facto enabled (repressive) authoritarian regimes in the MENA region to stay in power.

To get a better grasp on how this democracy-security dilemma works in practice, it is valuable to show how the EU has dealt with the democracy-security dilemma *before* and *after* the Arab Uprisings in 2011. The EU’s orientation towards the MENA region before the Arab Uprisings in 2011 was characterized by the democracy-security dilemma. Confronted with this dilemma, the EU prioritized security over democracy and therefore took limited action towards authoritarian regimes to keep stability. However, the Arab Uprisings in 2011 threw this EU approach into disarray. Given that popular movements in countries like Egypt and Tunisia successfully confronted and toppled their authoritarian regimes, the EU started to doubt whether the authoritarian regimes in this region could still provide the desired stability. In this context, the EU wanted to move away from its “short term calculus of material security interests (...) to a more long-term orientation that includes the risky policy of democracy promotion” (Hatab, 2018, p. 24). Nevertheless, the instability in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings eventually limited the democracy aspirations of the EU. As a result of the rise of Islamic forces like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the civil war in Libya and the expansion of Islamic state in Syria and Iraq, the EU re-awakened its security interests and returned to its old habit of prioritizing security over democracy. Stability was again seen as the most preferable rational choice in the MENA region at the expense of a newly volatile democracy. In practice, this made the West hesitant to interfere and the calls for political and human rights reform were quickly forgotten (Hatab, 2018; Durac, 2018; Van Veen, 2021a).

To sum up, it seems clear that the West perceives that it is confronted with the democracy-security dilemma. Although Western states acknowledge that democracy is the best form of governance, and can even tackle security threats like terrorism more effectively in the long-run, their strategy so far has been short-term oriented and focused on maintaining the authoritarian status quo to ensure stability. These security concerns and the subsequent prioritisation of security over democracy in particular arose in the context of multiple terrorist

attacks in the West (Scott & Scott, 2020; Durac, 2018) and the instability in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (Hatab, 2018; Durac, 2018).

2.4 The democracy-security dilemma revisited

As became clear from the above paragraph, Western policies towards the MENA region have been confronted with the democracy-security dilemma, eventually leading to prioritizing security over democracy. In practice, this means that the West has taken limited action towards authoritarian regimes in order to keep stability and thereby to secure Western security interests. However, the literature is increasingly focusing on the negative effects of favouring security over democracy. Authors such as Eder (2011), Durac (2018) and Karlsrud (2019) have claimed that the Western policies towards the MENA region have failed to address the root causes of security threats like terrorism. Authoritarian regimes often engage in repression, deny of human rights and offer limited political opportunities. These factors can lead to a sense of humiliation and hopelessness which in turn can contribute to the emergence of radicalisation and extremism, and eventually even to terrorism. Sticking to authoritarian regimes is thus short-term thinking because the root causes of security threats like terrorism are not tackled. Even worse, security threats like terrorism can be amplified by this approach, meaning that the Western approach is perpetuating rather than resolving security threats like terrorism (Eder, 2011; Durac, 2018; Karlsrud, 2019).

Van Veen (2021b) makes a note on the possible future of the MENA region. He shows that COVID-19 has deepened the socio-economic problems in a country like Egypt, while its repressive authoritarian regime has done little to increase its quality of governance to respond more effectively to such problems. Given that socio-economic problems in combination with repression led to the Arab Uprisings in 2011, van Veen (2021b) does not exclude the possibility of other uprisings in the future. In line, van Veen (2021a) adds that the West should learn from the Arab Uprisings in 2011 to no longer expect stability in the MENA region due to the poor performance of Arab dictators in terms of governance and human development. Therefore, the West should “put a halt to the blatant disregard for human rights and democratic values that their dealings with the region’s authoritarian rulers often display as long as Western interests are accommodated” (Van Veen, 2021a, p. 31).

The above claims that a lack of democracy and human rights can actually contribute to security threats like extremism and terrorism are confirmed by multiple quantitative studies. For example, Morris, LaFree and Karlidag (2020) study the effect of state-based repression and human rights violations on the number of terrorist attacks. They show that state-based

repression and human rights violations by authoritarian regimes, such as harshly punishing political opposition, significantly increases both domestic and international terrorism. A report by the United Nations Development Program (2021) shows that factors like political marginalization, the shrinking of civic space and harsh responses to political opposition (i.e. severe human rights abuses) are key motivators of young men joining extremist and terrorist groups.

2.5 Western foreign policy towards authoritarian regimes in the MENA region: the case of Egypt

Egypt has a long history of being ruled by authoritarian regimes. In particular Hosni Mubarak, whose predecessors Anwar Sadat and Gamal Abdul Nasser were already authoritarian leaders, strengthened his powers as an authoritarian leader and ruled the country for nearly thirty years (Saikal, 2011). The rule of Mubarak came to an end during the Arab Uprisings in 2011. Inspired by the revolution in Tunis and in a context of government corruption, repression, unemployment, poverty and inequality, millions of Egyptians started to revolt and protest against the authoritarian rule of Mubarak. As a result of these protests, Mubarak officially resigned on February 11, 2011 (Saidin, 2018). After the resignation of Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as one of the key political forces in Egypt during the first Egyptian elections in history. The Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Freedom and Justice party won the elections for the replacement of Mubarak and its party chairman, Mohamed Morsi, became the first democratically chosen president of Egypt in June 2012. However, Morsi was already removed from power by a military coup in July 2013 after which General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi became the new president in June 2014 (Al-Anani, 2015). Shortly after removing Morsi, and thus the Muslim Brotherhood, from power, Sisi designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization because it was seen as a radical group threatening the existence of Egypt (Darwich, 2017). Furthermore, Sisi stressed the importance of implementing counterterrorism initiatives given that Egypt experienced numerous terrorist attacks (Dentice, 2018) and faced increasing regional (terrorist) dangers from Islamic State and the civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya (Abozaid, 2020). The narrative that Sisi used to justify the military coup and the subsequent counterterrorism initiatives was “saving the country from terrorism”, while they are in practice often misused to silence any (political) opposition (Abozaid, 2020, p. 51). As mentioned in the introduction, these counterterrorism initiatives include a counterterrorism law (law no. 94) which Amnesty International has described as a ‘draconian’ law crushing human rights (Amnesty International, 2019). For example, the law classifies peaceful activities by

political parties, the media, civil society and student movements as terrorist activities. Furthermore, prison sentences can be prescribed for any violation of the law. In practice this means that a critical journalist or citizen can be imprisoned for criticizing Sisi's regime. A full summary of the criticisms on law no. 94 can be found in Appendix 1. It is estimated that up to 65.000 people have been detained for political reasons since 2013 (Jannack & Roll, 2021). In line with the above findings, this lack of democracy and the severe human rights violations have exacerbated security threats. For example, the number of terrorist attacks have increased since Sisi came to power in 2013. To give a few numbers, the number of terrorist attacks in Egypt did not exceed 20 between 2010 and the military coup lead by Sisi in 2013. In contrast, there were 2814 terrorist attacks between 2013 and 2017. Seventy percent of those terrorist attacks happened in the last two years, and thus after the implementation of Sisi's 'draconian' laws crushing human rights. Therefore, Abozaid (2020) argues that there is a correlation between Sisi's repression and the frequency of terrorist attacks.

The Western approach of taking limited action towards authoritarian regimes for the sake of stability and security has also been applied to Egypt. To take the EU as an example, the EU's action plan for Egypt has an extensive section on democratising the country, but the picture becomes different when it comes to implementation due to security concerns (Dandashly, 2018). It is however good to note that the EU democracy promotion efforts in Egypt had some impact in the early 2000s. The EU was able to persuade Mubarak to open up the political space in Egypt. As a result, Mubarak took some significant measures leading to, at least some, political liberalization. For example, Mubarak provided more room for opposition parties to enter the political space and established an electoral commission to supervise the parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, when this political liberalization enabled the Muslim Brotherhood to gain a considerable number of seats in 2005, the EU's pressure on Mubarak for political reform declined. The EU realized that political liberalization in Egypt could enable (extremist) Islamic groups to power. Since then, the EU limited its commitment to democracy promotion in Egypt and prioritized stability over political reform (Karakir, 2014). There was a shared understanding among EU states that "if they push Arab-Mediterranean regimes, such as that of Mubarak, too hard on political reform issues (democratization, respect for human rights, rule of law, etc.) then their likely replacement (in Egypt, potentially the Muslim Brotherhood) might seriously challenge the status quo of EU-MENA cooperation on counterterrorism strategies, stability and peace policies" (Pace, 2009, p. 44). As a result, the EU hardly pushed Egypt for better human rights and democratic reform (Dandashly, 2018; Karakir, 2014).

Before the Arab Uprisings in 2011, the EU thus chose to support Mubarak's regime in order to keep stability and thereby ensure security. After the Arab Uprisings had thrown this approach in disarray, the EU started to see the uprisings as a window of opportunity for democratic transition. With regards to Egypt, the EU financially aided the country to support democratization shortly after Mubarak was removed from power. The democratic elections that followed were won by the Muslim Brotherhood and its leader, Mohamed Morsi, became the new president of Egypt. Similarly to 2005, the introduction of an Islamic party to Egypt's political system was viewed with caution by the EU. Furthermore, the EU was dissatisfied with President Morsi's policies and behaviour. Morsi showed no signs of democratic reform. For example, he adopted a constitutional decree that would allow him to bypass judicial control. Moreover, he did not make any progress regarding respect for human rights and freedoms. In addition, the long authoritarian history of Egypt had resulted in limited democratic capacities of civil society. Consequently, this prevented new social forces from playing an active political role in the consolidation of the new democracy, regardless of their genuine democratic ambitions. Obviously, Egypt's civil society was able to force a democratic transition during the Arab Uprisings, but democratic consolidation after such a transition is a different story. In addition to those domestic factors, there was a lot of turbulence in the region. The Arab Uprisings in Libya and Syria ended in a brutal civil war. Furthermore, the Islamic State was on the rise in Syria and Iraq, resulting in a lot of fear and violence. These developments also led to massive migration flows to Europe. As a result of the above points, the EU started to perceive authoritarian rule in Egypt as "less evil when contrasted with potential turbulence, state failure and radicalism" (Hatab, 2018, p. 31). As a result, the EU remained rather passive to the military coup by Sisi and did not even describe the event as a 'coup' in order to secure a stable alliance with this new authoritarian regime (Hatab, 2018).

Since the military coup, the EU has noted that democratic governance and human rights in Egypt have deteriorated. Nevertheless, it still has strong relations with the regime of Sisi. To give a few examples, the EU's bilateral assistance to Egypt between 2014 and 2020 amounted to €756 million (European Commission, n.d.). Furthermore, the EU and Egypt are partnering in combatting terrorism. For example, the EU initiated a joint bid with Egypt to co-lead the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum in the beginning of 2022. The Global Counter-Terrorism Forum is a multilateral platform with influence on global counterterrorism policies (Francavilla, 2022). This is a remarkable move by the EU given Egypt's misuse of counterterrorism to engage in repression. In addition, many EU countries, including the Netherlands, are supporting Sisi's regime with weapons and military equipment (Roelants, 2021). At the same time, the EU is

urging Egypt to engage in democratic reform and to stop the human rights violations. However, despite the lack of democracy and the severe human rights violations in Egypt, the EU keeps its cooperation with Egypt going. Furthermore, it hardly applied conditionalities to the above described financial assistance. Such conditionalities could have been used to force better human rights and democratic reform. However, instead, the EU justified Egypt's lack of democratic reforms and human rights due to domestic violence by militant groups, the rise of Islamic State in the region and the civil wars in Libya and Syria (Dandashly, 2018).

2.6 Academic knowledge and policy making

What we see, then, is that although academic researchers increasingly point to the falseness of the democracy-security dilemma and suggest instead that democracy is in fact key to ensuring security, these insights do not appear to have found their way into policy. This raises the question of what determines whether academic knowledge is translated into policy. Although this is not the central focus of this thesis, this paragraph will briefly discuss some key literature regarding this question in order to shed light on the interface between academic scholars and policy makers. In particular, the focus will be on factors that complicate this interface.

Caplan (1979) described academic scholars and policy makers as two communities living in separate worlds which rarely interact with each other. Policy makers are largely unaware of academic work and the influence of academia on policy making is limited. Mead (2015) states that policy makers *are* aware of academic insights. Nevertheless, similarly to Caplan (1979), he states that academic scholars still have limited influence on policy making and lists a number of factors of why this is the case. First, academic research gives little attention to politics. Whereas academic insights are often clearly and linearly stated, the political process is anything but clear and linear and policy officers face many political constraints. They have to reconcile what they want to do, what legislators will approve and what administrators can execute. Second, academic scholars often describe a problem but do not concretely state how to solve the problem. If they state how to solve the problem, by providing certain recommendations for example, often little is mentioned to help policy makers implement these ideas. Third, academic insights are often not described in the institutional terms that policy makers know best. Concretely, policy makers simply do not always understand what is written in academic papers.

Newman and Head (2015) reply on the work by Mead (2015). Whereas they acknowledge that the influence of academic research on policy making is limited, their arguments for why this is the case differ. They do not agree with Caplan's (1979) 'two

communities' approach nor with Mead (2015) that policy makers do not see academic research as useful or that policy makers simply do not understand insights from academia. In fact, they argue that most policy makers certainly consider academic research as useful for policy making but provide alternative explanations on factors that complicate this interface. An important reason is that, for policy makers, responding to day-to-day and short-term issues often takes the precedence over long-term thinking. High quality academic research about the long-term will be left aside if quick decisions are to be made and when there is short-term uncertainty. In addition, even if policy makers want to implement (long-term) academic research, policy making is a 'political process'. In part, this is in line with Mead (2015) who stated that policy officers have to reconcile what they want to do, what legislators will approve and what administrators can execute. Newman and Head (2015) extend this and also mention the importance of taking into account other stakeholders. For example, given that a government wants to be re-elected at the next elections, their voter base³ is important to consider. Policies that are beneficial for the short-term are then preferred. In addition, stakeholders outside the government, such as multinationals, all have certain demands and objectives which influences policy making. Thus, even when policy makers ideally want to implement academic research, the complex web of interests in politics can act as an obstacle.

To sum up, the interface between academic research and policy making is complicated. The main factors that complicate this interface have to do with 'politics'. Even if policy makers want to implement academic research, they face a lot of political constraints, such as short-term versus long-term issues and many different stakeholders with competing objectives.

2.7 Sub-questions

All in all, one could draw a few conclusions from the above literature review. The West is interested in promoting democracy and human rights across the globe. Nevertheless, in practice, the West has chosen to take limited action towards undemocratic and repressive authoritarian regimes in order to keep stability and thereby security. The literature is increasingly acknowledging that this sole emphasis on stability and security is problematic, not only because it comes at the expense of democracy and human rights, but also because it seems to exacerbate rather than reduce security threats. These academic insights seem not to be reflected in actual Western policies. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to qualitatively explore whether

³ Note: a government is not the same as a political party. Still, Newman and Head (2015) argue that a government takes into account a particular voter base because they want to be re-elected. Consequently, they will provide policy makers with certain directions.

current Western policies towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. More concretely, the Netherlands will be studied on its foreign policy towards Egypt. In line, this thesis tries to answer the research question: *How does the Netherlands deal with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt?* Based on the above literature review, a number of sub-questions can be formulated which will help to answer this research question, namely:

- *How does the Netherlands look at 'democracy' and 'security' with regard to Egypt?*
- *To what extent is the Netherlands aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise?*
- *If the Netherlands is aware of these academic insights (i.e. that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise), to what extent is the approach of the Netherlands towards Egypt changing in view of these developments?*
- *What are the obstacles to translating academic knowledge that suggests that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise into policy?*

3. Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to provide an outline of the methodology used in the present study. First, a short overview of the methodological approach will be provided, followed by a short description of the case that will be studied. Then, the approach for data collection will be shown, followed by the approach for data analysis. Finally, some notes on quality criteria and research ethics will be provided.

3.1 Methodological approach

The aim of the present study is to explore whether current Western policies towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. As a case study, the Netherlands will be studied on its foreign policy towards Egypt. In line, this thesis wants to answer the research question: *How does the Netherlands deal with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt?* To answer this research question, and thereby to fulfil the research aim of the study, qualitative research will be conducted. Qualitative research allows a researcher to gain a deep understanding of a social and complex phenomenon (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2012; Bleijenbergh, 2016). Dutch foreign policy making towards Egypt is obviously a social and complex phenomenon, given that there are many stakeholders with different interests and objectives. Furthermore, qualitative research allows to take the context of a phenomenon into account (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2012). For the present study, it is important to take the context in which the Netherlands is formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt into account. For example, Dutch foreign policy makers act in a context in which they have to deal with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma and with many different stakeholders. Furthermore, one could also expect that the Netherlands is dealing in a European context as it is part of the EU. Being part of the EU possibly influences the Dutch foreign policy. In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research tries to quantify data to conduct a numerical analysis (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2012) and is suitable to examine relationships between variables (Bleijenbergh, 2016). This thesis does not try to quantify data and is not trying to examine relationships between variables which makes that a quantitative research method is less suitable.

When conducting social science research, a researcher is often engaging in either theory-testing or theory-building. Theory-testing is the process of testing and validating whether a certain existing theory is plausible whereas theory-building is the process of attempting to explain a phenomenon that is still obscure (Noor, 2021). The present study tries to explore whether current Western policies towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the

democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. This is a phenomenon that is still obscure. As mentioned in the literature review, Western policies towards the MENA region have diverged from what is recommended in the academic literature. Furthermore, these policies have been counterproductive, given the falseness of the democracy-security dilemma. It is however still unclear whether current Western policies towards the MENA region reflect this understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. In addition, possible reasons of why Western policies are perhaps not reflecting this understanding are still to be investigated. This thesis therefore tries to build theory to understand and explain this obscure phenomenon.

3.2 Case study: Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt

In aiming to understand the policies of Western countries towards the MENA region, the present study focuses on the foreign policy of the Netherlands towards Egypt. The study can thus be named a case study. A case study can be defined as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). Due to the limited time and resources available to conduct this thesis, it is not possible to explore Western policy making towards authoritarian regimes in the MENA region as a whole. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the case of Egypt and the Netherlands in particular. Furthermore, a case study is appropriate when you want to gain an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon and when the purpose of research is exploratory rather than confirmatory (Gerring, 2004). The present study, as mentioned, wants to gain a deep understanding in the phenomenon of foreign policy making while dealing with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma. Furthermore, the purpose of the study is exploratory rather than confirmatory, as the study wants to explore how the Netherlands is dealing with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt.

This thesis selected the case of Egypt and the Netherlands in particular for multiple reasons. To start, Egypt is a textbook example of an authoritarian regime in the MENA region that is engaging in repression and the shrinking of civic space (Youngs & Echagüe, 2017). Furthermore, the case of Egypt is a perfect illustration of how a lack of democracy and human rights can contribute to security threats like radicalism and terrorism (Abozaid, 2020). In other words, the case of Egypt illustrates that the Western approach of prioritizing stability and security (de facto meaning keeping Sisi in power) over democracy and human rights is likely to be counterproductive. Due to the limited time and resources available to conduct the present study, and to provide the necessary focus, this thesis will only focus on Dutch foreign policy to

examine ‘Western’ foreign policy towards Egypt. The Netherlands is chosen because its foreign policy with regard to supporting better human rights and democratic reform is largely in line with EU foreign policy (Rijksoverheid, 2020). Therefore, Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt will be somewhat representative of EU policy, and thus to a certain extent of Western policy. Moreover, the Netherlands is chosen because of data availability. The researcher of this thesis has most access to Dutch data resources such as policy documents and policy makers.

3.3 Data collection

The present study collected data by two different means. First, policy documents were collected to gain a first impression of how the Netherlands is dealing with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt. Collecting documents is however a very broad task given that there is often a wide range of documents available (Bleijenbergh, 2016). Therefore, Bleijenbergh (2016) recommends to use certain criteria in order to determine which documents are relevant. First, it is important to select a time range relevant to your research. For the present study, this was in particular important given that it would be impossible to study all historical documents related to Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt. Therefore, a time range from the 1st of August 2013 until the 1st of May 2022 was selected. The starting date 1st of August 2013 is relevant for two reasons. First, this date is shortly after the military coup lead by the current Egyptian President Sisi. Since then, repression in Egypt has even deepened. Second, this starting date allows to explore whether Dutch policy towards Egypt reflects the *rather new* academic insights saying that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. Collecting older documents would not be relevant given that these academic insights did not exist yet. The end date is the 1st of May 2022 because the researcher of this thesis started with the data analysis afterwards. The second criteria of Bleijenbergh (2016) relates to the type of document, meaning that the researcher has to decide what type of documents to use (e.g. news articles, blogs, surveys). For the present study, only formal documents of the Dutch government were selected because it would provide the most reliable data on Dutch policy. All documents were retrieved from the official website of the Dutch House of Representatives. Using the filter function on this website, the time period of the 1st of August 2013 until the 1st of May 2022 was applied. Then, ‘Egypt’ was typed in the search bar. Consequently, a total of 1.949 documents were found. To filter these documents, the third criterion of Bleijenbergh (2016) was applied. This criterion is that the content of the documents should be relevant. For the present study, this meant that the documents should contain information on how the Netherlands is dealing with the (perceived) democracy-security

dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt. The researcher of this thesis skimmed through the 1.949 documents and considered a total of 40 documents relevant for analysis. These 40 documents could be placed into two broad categories. First, 28 documents were documents from the Dutch House of Representatives, such as answers to written questions and motions, reports of consultations, and transcripts of debates. The other 12 documents were formal letters by the government, most often from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition to these 40 documents, the government coalition agreements of 2012⁴, 2017 and 2021 were considered to be relevant because they contained information on Dutch foreign policy regarding the topic of this thesis. In chapter 4, in which the results of this thesis are presented, the documents from the Dutch House of Representatives will be referred to as (HOR, year, page), the formal letters by the government will be referred to as (LG, year, page) and the government coalition agreements will be referred to as (CA, year, page).

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper impression of how the Netherlands is dealing with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt. A semi-structured interview means that the researcher works from a guide with certain themes and key issues that need to be addressed during the interview. These themes and key issues then lead to a couple of open interview questions. The interviewee is asked to reflect on these open questions. On the one hand, this allows the researcher to ask questions on certain topics that he or she wants to investigate. On the other hand, given that there are only a limited amount of questions asked and that these questions are open questions, this allows to get answers that are not steered into a particular direction and leaves room for any new knowledge or ideas the interviewee comes up with. This does not mean that the researcher cannot ask any steering questions. If necessary, the researcher might ask a steering question based on findings in the literature review (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2012; Bleijenbergh, 2016). To link these notions to the present study, the semi-structured interview allowed to generate knowledge on pre-selected themes, such as the Dutch perspective on the democracy-security dilemma, and allowed to ask steering questions, such as to verify information retrieved from the policy document analysis. The interview guide that was used can be found in appendix 2.

Given that this thesis tried to explore Dutch foreign policy, it was essential to speak to Dutch foreign policy makers. However, although a lot of time and energy was spent on trying to arrange interviews with such policy makers, this proved difficult due to the sensitivity of the

⁴ The formal start date of the document collection was set at August 1, 2013. However, given that the government coalition agreement of 2012 consists of plans for the future, it was considered to be relevant for analysis.

question at hand. Eventually, two policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs were interviewed. On their request, due to the political sensitivity of the interviews, they remain anonymous and details about their functions are left out. However, the two interviewees are in relevant positions and possess high expertise on the topic. Additional complications were that the two policy makers did not want to be cited directly and also requested that some sensitive information retrieved from the interview could not be used. The interview transcripts are therefore excluded from the appendix. It is important to note that this did not affect the results of this thesis. In other words, including this information would not have *altered* the results.

To add to the perspective provided by the two policy makers, further respondents were sought outside of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs with expertise on Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt. This was seen as valuable because it allowed to gain objective insights on the topic from an outsider. First of all, prof. dr. Ko Colijn was interviewed. Colijn is a former senior research fellow of Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations) with a lot of knowledge on Dutch foreign policy towards the MENA region, including Egypt.

Initially, the present study only searched for respondents with expertise on Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt. However, given a lack of available respondents with expertise on Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt, it was eventually decided to interview two Egyptian experts on EU foreign policy towards Egypt. First, prof. dr. Amr Hamzawy was interviewed. Hamzawy is the director of the Carnegie Middle East Program (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) and is specialized in the democratization of Egypt. Second, Maged Mandour was interviewed. Mandour is a political analyst and writer, specialized in post-Arab Spring Egypt. Although these interviews were not specifically about Dutch foreign policy, they were deemed as relevant because Dutch foreign policy regarding the topic is quite similar to EU foreign policy (Rijksoverheid, 2020). After the interviews, it appeared that the results were indeed very similar.

The interview with Ko Colijn was conducted via e-mail, while the interviews with the two foreign policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amr Hamzawy and Maged Mandour were conducted via Zoom. The two foreign policy makers were interviewed together in one interview.

All in all, despite their limited number, the interviews were still considered to be useful to answer the research question of this thesis. All interviewees were experts on either Dutch or EU foreign policy towards Egypt. Furthermore, the wide variety of respondents allowed to gain a broad perspective on the topic. In addition, combining the data from the interviews with the

data from 43 policy documents enhanced the possibility to answer the research question of this thesis.

3.4 Data analysis

The documents and transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were coded and analysed simultaneously. A combination of a deductive and an inductive approach was used to code and analyse the documents and interview transcripts. The deductive approach to data analysis means that you code and analyse the collected data based on pre-determined key concepts and codes, whereas the inductive approach to data analysis means that you code and analyse the collected data without any pre-determined key concepts and codes. The deductive approach to data analysis is more suitable for theory-testing, whereas the inductive approach to data analysis is more suitable for theory-building (Bleijenbergh, 2016). Given that the present study tried to develop theory on whether current Dutch policies towards Egypt reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise, the inductive approach to data analysis seemed to be most suitable. However, Bingham (2022) describes how a combination of deductive and inductive analysis can lead to a more organized, rigorous and analytically sound qualitative study. The deductive approach to data analysis can be used to organise the (often) unwieldy qualitative data at the start, followed by an inductive approach to really understand what is happening in the data.

Using the work of Bingham (2022), the present study first used the deductive approach to data analysis in order to organise the collected data. This means that a couple of broad topical categories were formulated based on the sub-questions of the present study. These categories can be found in appendix 3. The collected data was then sorted into these categories, after which the inductive approach to data analysis was used to make sense of the data. The data in each category was first coded using ‘open coding’ which means that codes were applied to any topics or themes that were identified. Then, ‘pattern coding’ was done to identify patterns across and within different data sources. All data coding and analysis was done manually. Given that the present study had a limited amount of collected data, manual coding and analysis was suitable (Bleijenbergh, 2016). The coded documents can be found in appendix 4 and the coded interviews can be found in appendix 5. If interested, the list of all identified open codes can be found in appendix 6. The full interview transcripts, excluding the interview transcript from the interview with the two foreign policy officers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, can be found in appendix 7.

The main results of the above described data analysis are presented in chapter 4. Throughout chapter 4, the most important quotes from the documents and semi-structured interviews are presented to support the results. All quotes that were initially in Dutch (e.g. Dutch policy documents, interview with Ko Colijn) are translated into English. To ensure accuracy, all translations of these quotes were independently checked by a fellow master student. It is important to note that quotes from the interview with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs are excluded, as requested by the interviewees.

3.5 Quality criteria

The present study strived for high reliability. Reliability means that the study can be repeated (i.e. replicability) and will end up with the same research outcomes (Yin, 2014). However, ending up with the same research outcomes is difficult for qualitative research, given that the researcher is often part of what is being studied and therefore possibly influences the research outcomes (Grossoehme, 2014). Nevertheless, the present study aimed to achieve high reliability by offering full transparency through its entire research process. In line, all steps taken to collect and analyse the data are described earlier in this chapter. By doing this, another researcher would be able to replicate my study to a large extent (Grossoehme, 2014).

Next to reliability, the present study also strived for validity. The concept of validity is divided into three components: construct validity, internal validity and external validity (Yin, 2014). Construct validity entails that a study has the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin, 2014). To enhance construct validity, the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were sent to the respondents so that they could validate their answers. If necessary, the respondents could correct any misinterpretations of questions and adapt his or her answer likewise. If the respondent corrected his or her answer in the transcript where necessary, the chance that the concepts being studied were correctly measured would be enhanced. Consequently, this process could enhance the construct validity of this thesis. None of the respondents had any comments on the transcripts. Internal validity means whether a causal relationship can be established (Yin, 2014). The aim of this thesis was not to establish a causal relationship, internal validity was therefore not the largest ambition. External validity means whether the research outcomes of a study can be generalized (Yin, 2014). Ideally, the research outcomes of the present study (i.e. Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt) would be generalizable to Western foreign policy towards the Middle East and North Africa region. In a qualitative case study, however, obtaining external validity is very difficult as the results apply to a particular case (Bleijenberg, 2016). Nevertheless, given that Dutch foreign policy regarding

this topic is quite similar to EU foreign policy, this thesis still tried to generalize its findings to a certain extent. The discussion in chapter 5 will elaborate further on this point.

3.6 Research ethics

Besides reliability and validity, ethical issues are equally important to consider when conducting research. Therefore, a researcher should strive for high ethical standards while doing research (Yin, 2014). The present study therefore strived for the highest ethical standards in two ways. First, the study realized the importance of protecting its respondents. All respondents were informed about the research aim of the study before the interviews. In addition, they were asked permission to record the interviews. Full anonymity could be provided if desired by the respondent. Eventually, only the two policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested anonymity. It is also important to note that all respondents participated voluntarily. Second, the present study realized the importance of academic integrity. The study followed the standards of the American Psychological Association (APA) with regard to in-text citations and references. In addition, full transparency with regard to the obtained data and results is provided.

4. Results

Following the data collection and data analysis, the present study is able to assess whether current Dutch policies towards Egypt reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. In line, the results of the data collection and data analysis will be elaborated on in this chapter. The results will be organised along the sub-questions that were formulated in chapter 2 (i.e. theory).

4.1 How does the Netherlands look at ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ with regard to Egypt?

4.1.1 Democracy

The Netherlands is interested in supporting better human rights and democratic reform across the globe. This goal is specifically stated in the coalition agreements of 2012, 2017 and 2021. For example, the coalition agreement in 2012 mentions that *“the foreign policy is aimed at promoting and protecting the international legal order and human rights (...) via bilateral and multilateral cooperation and contacts we promote human rights”* (CA, 2012, p.14). Also the coalition agreement of 2017 states that *“via active foreign policy, the Netherlands is committed to universal human rights”* (CA, 2017, p.47). In the coalition agreement of 2021, the Dutch government even mentions that the contribution to its human rights fund will be increased, *“we express our concerns and stand up against human rights violations (...) We increase our contribution to the human rights fund”*⁵ (CA, 2021, p.38).

These statements about supporting better human rights and democratic reform across the globe in general are translated into country-specific policies. Policy documents collected for this thesis state that the Netherlands is interested in supporting better human rights in Egypt specifically. Furthermore, it is stated that the Netherlands is interested in supporting democratic reform in Egypt.⁶ In 2014, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans stated that *“human rights such as freedom of association, freedom of speech and freedom of press”* were essential for democratic elections in Egypt and thereby for stabilizing the country (HOR, 2014a). The next Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders stressed in a written letter that *“the Netherlands and the EU should continue with their programs that promote the legal order and democratization”* (LG, 2013, p.3) In line with this, Koenders stated that *“the importance of*

⁵ The human rights fund of the Netherlands subsidizes organizations that are committed to promoting and protecting human rights. The human rights fund subsidizes these organizations in three ways: via Dutch embassies in foreign countries, via subsidy tenders in The Hague, via international organizations.

⁶ As stated in chapter 2, ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ are interrelated. The terms will therefore be used interchangeably in the remainder of this chapter.

democratic elections and respect for democratic rule of law” was central to the bilateral contacts with Egypt. Furthermore, he stated that the Netherlands was pushing for “*putting freedom of press, freedom of association and implementation of the Egyptian constitution and international human rights declarations on the agenda at the EU-Egypt sub committee for human rights, democratization and good governance*” (HOR, 2015e, p.3). The Netherlands also stimulated that the EU-Egypt partnership priorities, which were established in 2017, were mainly focused on “*the promotion of sustainable stability, whereby it is central for the Netherlands and the EU that this is based on inclusive development, democratization, respect for human rights, good governance and accountability. In this context, the Netherlands, together with other EU countries, is raising its voice for an agreement with Egypt, in which the importance of the civic space for democratic governance and the sustainable development of Egypt is being stressed*” (HOR, 2017a, p.2). Similar statements about the EU-Egypt partnership priorities were made in multiple other documents (HOR, 2016c, p.8; LG, 2017a, p.2). Also then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister Stef Blok stressed in 2018 that “*human rights are, and remain, a cornerstone of Dutch foreign policy. Room for civic space is a general requirement to be able to practice and promote rights and for the execution of human rights policy worldwide. Therefore, the Netherlands tries to keep this space open and tries to increase it where possible. The Dutch embassy in Cairo is in close contact with a number of organizations that are striving for such goals*” (HOR, 2018b, p.2). In a written letter, in which the human rights situation in countries like Egypt was discussed, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok and then-Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Sigrid Kaag stressed that “*the Kingdom views human rights as a cornerstone of its foreign policy*” (LG, 2020a, p.5). The above findings still seem to be topical today. In January 2022, current Minister of Foreign Affairs Wopke Hoekstra mentioned that the conviction of an Egyptian human rights activist “*fits in a trend in which the room for the civic space in Egypt is declining and where civil freedoms are more and more under pressure. The Netherlands thinks that journalists, human rights defenders and other people that are peacefully using their freedom of speech, should be able to do that without criminal consequences, intimidation or other reprisals*” (HOR, 2022, p.3). The data collected from the interviews are partially in line with the above claims. The two interviewed policy makers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly stated that the Netherlands aims to support better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt. The long-term goal would be a democratic, responsive and inclusive Egyptian government with respect for human rights. Also Amr Hamzawy of the Carnegie Middle East Program stressed that the ideal ambition of, in this case the EU, is to have a “*politically*

democratically governed” Egypt which would mean that *“human rights violations become less, restrictions on freedoms become less, and excessive state power becomes less as well”*. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that political analyst Maged Mandour was a bit more cautious. He mentioned that *“in connection to Egypt, there is the view that that’s the regime that is there and that’s the regime that we need to deal with. So, there is no real appetite for pushing for democratic change”* and that the EU *“is not going to do anything”*. Clingendael expert Ko Colijn, too, was more cautious. He stated that *“the promotion of human rights and democracy come second”*.

4.1.2 Security

The Netherlands perceives several security threats coming from Egypt. A first security threat that comes out of the data is ‘migration’. The coalition agreement of 2017 states: *“the migrant flows and asylum issues in combination with integration problems is putting the relationships in the Dutch society and between European countries under pressure. Mutual trust and social cohesion threatens to diminish when there are too large migration shocks”* (CA, 2017, p.50). This statement from the coalition agreement is more about migration in general, but migration from Egypt specifically is definitely an often named security threat in the data. For example, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders stated in 2016: *“issues that affect the Netherlands and Europe”* include *“migration”* (HOR, 2016c, p.8). The next Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok often mentioned *“the controlling of migration flows”* as a top priority for Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt as well (HOR, 2019c, p.1; LG, 2018, p.3). In addition, all interview respondents mentioned migration as a key security threat coming from Egypt. On the question *“what are the main (perceived) security threats coming from Egypt?”*, Ko Colijn answered *“one defines migration as a security issue”*. Amr Hamzawy answered *“the threat of illegal migration (...) it is a key European policy priority to contain waves of illegal migration coming from the Southern Mediterranean”*. Maged Mandour answered *“migrant flows to Europe”*. It is important to note that there are in fact different types of migration flows. On the one hand, there are Egyptian people trying to migrate to Europe. This group is however limited according to the two policy makers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They mentioned that the biggest security threat with regard to migration comes from non-Egyptian refugees that are trying to move to Europe via Egypt. Amr Hamzawy mentioned the same, *“migrants coming from other African countries crossing Libya and Tunisia via Egypt sometimes to go to Europe (sic)”*. Egypt has currently closed its borders between Egypt and Europe for migrants. According to the two policy makers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, a security threat would be if Egypt opens up this border, given that this will lead to massive migration flows to Europe and the Netherlands.

A second security threat is ‘terrorism’. Terrorism as a security threat was in particular mentioned in the period 2015-2018. For example, in a written letter, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders stated that *“the recent attacks in (...) Egypt (...) show again that the threat of terrorism is a threat which hits our society and civilians in different countries”* (LG, 2015d, p.4). Documents in later years also stressed that *“issues that affect the Netherlands and Europe”* include *“the fight against terrorism”* (HOR, 2016c, p.8). Then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok described *“the fight against terrorism”* as a top priority for Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt (HOR, 2019c, p.1; LG, 2018, p.3). Furthermore, based on a report by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), the Dutch government stated that *“the perspectives for Northern Africa are gloomy and the security of Europe, and thus also of the Netherlands, is being threatened. Terrorism (...) has increased a lot due to the current instability in the region”* (LG, 2017b, p.1). Ko Colijn also named *“terrorism”* as a security issue coming from Egypt. Furthermore, Amr Hamzawy explained that terrorism is a security threat because *“terrorist activities (...) have not been contained to Iraq and Egypt for example, no, they have been spreading elsewhere and also to EU countries. These EU countries have been targeted, have been victims to terrorist attacks”*. The two Dutch policy makers however mentioned that terrorism as a security threat is currently less prevalent. Nevertheless, terrorism is always on the radar and is monitored frequently.

A third security threat is related to terrorism and is the threat of ‘radicalism’. The two policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that areas where the government is absent, with Northern Sinai as example, are breeding grounds for radicalism. These are also places where foreign terrorist fighters are stationing themselves. Maged Mandour stated that upheaval and civil unrest in Egypt could lead *“to the rise of very radical groups”*.

A fourth security threat is more an ‘economic threat’. The two Dutch policy makers mentioned the importance of the Suez Canal for example. Given that a large share of global trade is passing the Suez Canal, it is important that there is security and stability around it.

The above four security threats are the main security threats that came out of the data. However, it is important to note that it also appears from the data that those security threats do not happen in a vacuum. Instead, those security threats arise in a particular context. In particular the threat of migration seems to have multiple underlying causes. For example, the two policy makers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs identified the current conflict around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam as an indirect threat. Escalation of the conflict could create

instability which in turn can lead to massive migration flows to Europe. Furthermore, the two policy makers identified the current war between Russia and Ukraine as an indirect threat. The Russia-Ukraine war has a big economic impact on Egypt which is creating unrest among society. In turn, this unrest could lead to instability and thus to migration flows to Europe. This is in line with the statements by Amr Hamzawy, who also identified the Russia-Ukraine war as an indirect threat. The Russia-Ukraine war leads to *“food insecurity, rising economic crises, poverty, inflation rates in a place like Egypt (...) and is deteriorating human development and living conditions”*. Another indirect threat to migration that was named is the huge population of Egypt. Hamzawy mentioned that *“(...) it is the most populous country in the MENA region (...) exactly that the Egyptian President keeps saying, you guys are Europeans, you do not want to see thousands of boats with illegal immigration coming from Egypt to your shores. Egypt is not like Tunisia with 20 million people or Libya with a limited population, but it has over a 100 million people. So, that dimension is scary”*. This is in line with Maged Mandour, who stated that Egypt as a big country, with over a hundred million people, can be a big security threat towards Europe with regard to migration.

4.2 To what extent is the Netherlands aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise?

As explained in chapter 2, the classical view to the democracy-security dilemma means that the two concepts of ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ are at odds with each other. Security interests might be threatened by democratization due to ‘destabilization by democratization’. This made Western foreign policy makers hesitant to support democratic reform. More recent literature, however, states that the two concepts are not as opposite as often thought. In fact, the two concepts may strengthen, rather than oppose, each other. The Western emphasis on security is therefore problematic, not only because it comes at the expense of democracy and human rights, but also because it seems to exacerbate rather than reduce security threats. In other words, the democracy-security dilemma is said to be a false premise.

When looking at the coalition agreements of 2017 and 2021, it shows that the Netherlands is aware that security threats like terrorism and migration have certain root causes. For example, the *“development cooperation is, as integral part of the foreign policy, focused on combatting the root causes of poverty, migration and terrorism”* (CA, 2017, p.48) and *“there should be investments in removing the root causes of migration”* (CA, 2021, p.51). These statements are obviously very general, but if we take a closer look at the other collected data, the Netherlands is very well aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false

premise. First of all, the Netherlands is aware that the concepts of ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ should go hand-in-hand with each other. As we have seen above, the Netherlands is interested in supporting better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt. The main reason for this ambition is that democracy and human rights can lead to sustainable stability in Egypt. In 2014, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans stated that respect for human rights is essential for a sustainably stable Egypt, “*respect for human rights is inseparable from a sustainably stable society*” (HOR, 2014b, p.11). When the D66 fraction asked the Dutch cabinet to respond on the question “*does the cabinet share the opinion that an important lesson of the Arab spring is the fact that the stability offered by Arab dictators was just window dressing? That the Arab spring showed exactly what the consequences of decades of dictatorship were?*”, the Dutch cabinet answered “*the cabinet thinks that human rights, democracy and stability are inseparable. Repressive dictatorships where human rights are severely being violated cannot guarantee peace and sustainable peace*” (HOR, 2015a, p.6). Also then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders stated that sustainable stability in Egypt is not only based on, but is also a result of “*inclusive development, democratization, respect for human rights, good governance and accountability*” (LG, 2017a, p.2). Similar statements were made in multiple other documents⁷. This point was also stressed in the interview with the two policy makers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the question “*what are the ideal ambitions of the Netherlands with regard to democratization in Egypt?*”, they answered that the core principle for this is ‘stability’. They explained that a better functioning rule of law and a different relationship between civilians and government will contribute to sustainable stability, instead of stability from which it is unknown how long it will last. In other words, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs views supporting better human rights and democratic reform as essential for sustainable stability in Egypt.

In addition, the Netherlands has not only stated that the concepts of ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ should go hand-in-hand with each other, but has also recognized that ‘security’ problems may even be exacerbated when there is a lack of ‘democracy’. For example, when then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders was asked to respond to the question “*do you share the opinion that the repression of fundamental freedoms like the freedom of speech and press by the Egyptian authorities is a ‘recipe for radicalism instead of the solution for it’ like the chairman of Freedom House states?*”, he answered “*the Dutch cabinet thinks that the fight against terrorism should go hand-in-hand with respect for human rights. A policy where human*

⁷ (HOR, 2015b, p.2; HOR, 2015c, p.3; HOR, 2017a, p.3; HOR, 2018a, p.3; HOR, 2019c, p.1; LG, 2017b, p.2-p.10; LG, 2017c, p.4).

rights are undermined can marginalize and suppress groups, which can in turn enlarge the breeding ground for terrorism” (HOR, 2015b, p.2). Furthermore, based on a report by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), the Dutch government stated that “terrorism is in part the result of failing political systems that are not inclusive” and “in many of the countries in question (...) including Egypt (...) the security problems are a direct result of failing and fragile states with bad functioning state institutions” (LG, 2017b, p.5). Finally, a plea by then-member of parliament Michiel Servaes is a perfect illustration of why the Netherlands is clearly aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. Servaes stated: “you can do two things when you are confronted with authoritarian leaders. You can either say: we have to make the best of it. Or: you take an extra step. I think that the minister perfectly illustrates why the latter is so important. Human rights and security policy are not two different things, there exists an essential relationship between the two. The minister writes: oppression leads to a false sense of security and eventually to instability, conflicts and people that flee their country. If we do not do anything with this situation, if we tolerate that authoritarian regimes as in Egypt keep people under the thumb, then that will lead to even more misery (...) there is no choice between human rights and security. The latter is impossible without the former. That is a crucial point⁸” (HOR, 2016b, p.7).

The conducted interviews confirm the above findings that the Netherlands is aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise to a large extent. Ko Colijn stated that the Netherlands is aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise, “one recognizes that”. Also the two policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly stated that they are aware of these academic insights. As mentioned above, they described that sustainable stability in Egypt can be reached via supporting better human rights and democratic reform. They even explicitly stated that ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ are not seen as two opposite concepts. Instead, the two can reinforce each other and both of them should be part of policy making. Also Maged Mandour mentioned that “Western diplomats (...) seem to understand this”. It is however interesting to note that Amr Hamzawy is a bit more cautious. He stated: “I do not think that they are aware of it. Or, if they are aware of it, I do not think that they are prepared to take it seriously”. We will return to this latter point shortly.

To sum up, the Netherlands is aware of the academic insights that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. The Netherlands thinks that supporting better human rights and democratic reform is crucial for sustainable stability in Egypt. In other words, the

⁸ The official nota by then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders could not be found. The present study therefore relied on the quote by Michiel Servaes.

Netherlands realizes that democracy and security are not two opposite concepts but that the two may strengthen each other. Furthermore, the Netherlands recognizes that security may even be exacerbated when there is a lack of democracy. Nevertheless, the just mentioned statement by Amr Hamzawy, saying that policy makers are not prepared to take these academic insights seriously, brings us to the next sub-question of the present study. Namely, given that Dutch policy makers are aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise, to what extent is the approach of the Netherlands towards Egypt changing in view of these developments? The results are presented below.

4.3 If Dutch policymakers are aware of these academic insights (i.e. that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise), to what extent is the approach of the Netherlands towards Egypt changing in view of these developments?

Looking at the above results, it is clear that Dutch policy makers are aware of the academic insights that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. The follow-up goal was then explore to what extent the approach of the Netherlands towards Egypt reflects this awareness. After all, the literature review demonstrated that while Western states have been negative in their rhetoric towards repressive authoritarian regimes, this negative rhetoric did not translate into concrete actions to change the behavior of these regimes. The reason was that the West perceived that it was facing the democracy-security dilemma. Given the possible security threats due to ‘destabilization by democratization’, the West took limited action towards repressive authoritarian regimes. Thus, the literature review stated that the West had limited ambitions with regard to the democratization of Egypt. The ‘destabilization by democratization’ frame was dominant. Nevertheless, when looking at the above results, it is clear that the Netherlands *is* interested in the democratization of Egypt. As described earlier in this chapter, an important reason for this interest is that the Netherlands realizes that democratization and respect for human rights is crucial for a sustainably stable Egypt. In other words, *“the cabinet thinks that human rights, democracy and stability are inseparable. Repressive dictatorships where human rights are severely being violated cannot guarantee sustainable peace and stability”* (HOR, 2015a, p.6).

In line with this, the two policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt is really based on the idea that sustainable stability can be reached via the democratization of Egypt. Therefore, Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt tries to *“contribute to the development of democratic states which are based on the principles of inclusivity and pluralism”* (LG, 2017b, p.7). To fulfil this aim of democratizing Egypt, the

two policy makers stated that the Netherlands has a two-fold policy. First, the Netherlands invests a lot in development cooperation to stimulate bottom-up democratization. Second, the Netherlands engages in (critical) dialogue with Egypt to discuss the human rights and democratic situation. Regarding development cooperation, an important program is 'Shiraka'. The Shiraka program tries to support democratic transition in the Arab region and to create a society which accepts cultural and religious differences, a rule of law which protects civilians, human rights and minorities and to stimulate economic growth and employment opportunities (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). In addition, the Netherlands has a human rights fund in Egypt which is designed to support local NGOs and organizations to improve the human rights situation in Egypt. Furthermore, the Netherlands also tries to support democratization indirectly via other programs. For example, the Netherlands is helping Egypt with themes like water management and agriculture. The goal is not only to improve Egypt's capabilities on these themes, but it also offers the opportunity to include local people into the process. Local people are stimulated to think about policy making on these themes, which allows them to develop democratic capabilities. To avoid that the financing of development cooperation is used by the Egyptian regime to sustain its authoritarian regime, the financing directly goes to international and local NGOs as much as possible. The document analysis reveals similar results. *"The Netherlands offers Egypt bilateral support, among other things this includes this is includes promoting socio-economic conditions, inclusivity and the support for the civic space and human rights organizations. Next to that, the Netherlands is cooperating with Egypt on themes like water and agriculture. Netherlands supports in particular those aspects to positively contribute to the development of Egypt. That is important in order to keep stability at the Southern borders of Europe. The Netherlands makes sure that their support does not contribute to repression"* (HOR, 2017a, p.3). *"The Dutch efforts in Egypt include themes that support the inclusive and sustainable development of the country, in particular in the areas of water management and agriculture, but also on socio-economic improvement"* (HOR, 2019c, p.2). It is important to note that the Netherlands is not only investing in Egypt to stimulate bottom-up democratization, but also because it allows it to engage in a critical dialogue with Egypt. *"Our bilateral support offers the opportunity for a critical dialogue about aspects that we are worried about, such as freedom of speech in Egypt"* (HOR, 2018a, p.3). In other words, the bilateral support offers the opportunity to have a strong relationship with Egypt. In turn, this strong relationship gives the Netherlands room to engage in a critical dialogue with Egypt. Then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Halbe Zijlstra mentioned in 2017, *"they have to take you seriously so that the uncomfortable message is being received. One of the first things that I did in Egypt was to criticize them on*

the fact that they detained a human right activist. But that is only effective if you have a relationship with them, only then they listen to you. If you only criticize regimes on their bad behavior, their receiving-modus will decline” (HOR, 2017c, p.6). Two years later, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok stated, *“if you only say from outside ‘I want you to change your policy’ without having a trade or development relationship with the country, that country will make a cost and benefit analysis and will say: I do not like that I am being criticized, but I have nothing to do with the Netherlands. Thus, by having a strong relationship with Egypt, you can be effective*” (HOR, 2019d, p.45). This is in line with the findings from the interview with the two Dutch policy makers. They stated that the Netherlands values strong relationships with Egypt because this allows for a critical dialogue about their democratic and human rights situation.

This critical dialogue is the second part of the Dutch democratization policy towards Egypt. The two Dutch policy makers stated that a (critical) dialogue is complementary to development cooperation. The Netherlands closely monitors the situation in Egypt and has frequent contact with Egypt. This involves trying to seek common ground with Egypt on points to improve, but also asking the Egyptian regime what they need from the Netherlands in order to help them to democratize. The document analysis also illustrates that the Netherlands frequently engages in dialogue with Egypt. *“A critical dialogue with the Egyptian authorities, about the developments that inhibit the way to a free and inclusive society in Egypt, forms an important aspect of the efforts by the cabinet*” (HOR, 2019c, p.2). Therefore, *“the Netherlands is frequently in contact with the Egyptian authorities to transfer concerns on the deteriorating human rights situation*” (HOR, 2015b, p.2; HOR, 2019b, p.2) This dialogue with Egypt is both bilateral and multilateral. A bilateral dialogue means that the Netherlands directly speaks with the Egyptian authorities. *“The Netherlands is continuously addressing the worrying human rights situation towards the Egyptian authorities. This happened during conversations with the Egyptian minister of Foreign Affairs (...) also the Dutch minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Dutch human rights ambassador spoke to the Egyptian minister of human rights about the worrying developments*” (HOR, 2019b, p.2). Other moments where the Netherlands expressed their concerns via bilateral dialogue came back in multiple documents⁹. A multilateral dialogue means that more countries are involved, and in this particular case often the EU. This happened in 2017 for example, when the EU, supported by the Netherlands, expressed its concerns towards Egypt about disappearances and torture

⁹ (HOR, 2015b; HOR, 2015c; HOR, 2017b; HOR, 2017c; HOR, 2018a; HOR, 2019a; HOR, 2019c; HOR, 2021a; HOR, 2021b; HOR, 2021c; HOR, 2022)

practices in Egyptian prisons. *“The human rights situation in Egypt is continuously being addressed by the EU by their contacts with the Egyptian authorities (...) With active support of the Netherlands, the EU has addressed its concerns about forced disappearances and torture in Egyptian prisons. The cabinet will keep expressing its concerns, including the torture and forced disappearances, at EU-level and multilevel fora, and will keep underlining the necessity for improvement”* (HOR, 2017b, p.2). Other moments where the Netherlands expressed their concerns via multilateral dialogue came back in multiple documents¹⁰.

In the light of the above points, at first glance it seems that the foreign policy of the Netherlands is focused on supporting better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt. The Netherlands is aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise and therefore aims to support better human rights and democratic reform. However, taking a closer look at the collected data, one could question whether the policy of the Netherlands is really reflecting this ambition. In other words, to what extent are they *really* pushing Egypt to reform? When looking at the document analysis, it is clear that concerns for the democratic and human rights situation in Egypt have been on the agenda for many years. One of the first coded documents shows that the Netherlands was concerned about the human rights situation in Egypt because a number of journalists were sentenced to death. Consequently, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders expressed his concerns towards Egypt both bilaterally and multilaterally (HOR, 2015b). The last coded document, almost seven years later, basically shows exactly the same. The Netherlands was concerned about the human rights situation in Egypt because a human rights activist was sent to prison. Current Minister of Foreign Affairs Wopke Hoekstra stated, *“it important to maintain an open dialogue with Egypt, in a bilateral and multilateral context, and in this way trying to improve the human rights situation in Egypt”* (HOR, 2022). Thus, in a time period of seven years, it seems that the Dutch response towards Egypt has hardly changed. Until today, the ongoing human rights violations and the lack of democratic reform are only addressed by expressing concerns via bilateral and multilateral dialogue.

Members of the Dutch parliament have been challenging the government frequently on this topic. For example, when the Egyptian regime sentenced a journalist to death, then-member of parliament Sadet Karabulut asked then-minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok, *“do you share the opinion that the human rights situation in Egypt does not leave any room for closer relationships between the Netherlands and the EU with Egypt? If not, why not?”* Blok answered, *“the cabinet thinks it is important to maintain good relationships with Egypt (...) by*

¹⁰ (HOR, 2015b; HOR, 2015c; HOR, 2016a; HOR, 2017b; HOR, 2019c; HOR, 2021a; HOR, 2021b; HOR, 2022)

having good relationships, in which there is room for dialogue and critique, we can deliver a positive contribution to the improvement of human rights in Egypt” (HOR, 2018c, p.3). Furthermore, some members of parliament have asked the government whether Egypt should be sanctioned or whether there are other measures needed against Egypt (HOR, 2019b; HOR, 2022). However, the Dutch government answered that *“sanctions against Egypt are not applicable. The Netherlands focusses on an open and constructive engagement with Egypt, in which there is room to express our concerns and to push for improvement”* (HOR, 2019b, p.3) and *“it is important to maintain an open dialogue with Egypt, in a bilateral and multilateral context, and in this way trying to improve the human rights situation in Egypt. Applying sanctions is not considered opportune in this situation”* (HOR, 2022, p.3). A final document that is interesting to highlight is a debate in the Dutch House of Representatives in 2020. In this debate, member of parliament Kirsten van den Hul asked then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Sigrid Kaag: *“we are in a crisis (...) two weeks ago, human rights defenders in Egypt were arrested. The situation is becoming worse every day (...) my question to the minister is: could she do more than what is happening now in a European context? Are we on the same page? (...) It is also a diplomatic issue, which obviously has a trade component to it as well. I would like to hear what the minister is going to do now that we are witnessing that the civic space is shrinking more and more”*. Kaag answered, *“yes, I definitely think that we can and should do more at a European level (...) We can also do more, I am putting it on the agenda at every Council. Later, in the same debate, Kaag stated “there is always a balance. Human rights are universal and are ideally central in everything we do. In reality, in the execution, there is always a weighing of different interests. That has been the case for decades. I agree that it should be sharper, but the execution is a different issue. If we look at the EU, then we see very quickly, in the case of Hongkong for example, that countries issue a political statement, but at the same time start a trade mission with China. That is saying one thing, but doing the other. That is a big dilemma and it is no surprise that China feels that. But, I fully agree that we have to be sharper on this”* (HOR, 2020b, n.p.). Although the latter example is about China, Kaag implied that there are certain Dutch interests that inhibit effective support for better human rights and democratic reform. What those interests are will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

In line with the above points, all three respondents from outside the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs were skeptical towards the Dutch human rights and democracy supporting efforts. As mentioned earlier, Ko Colijn stated that *“the promotion of human rights and democracy are of secondary interests”*. Furthermore, Colijn said that despite the Dutch awareness that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise, these insights are

“hardly” translated into policy. Colijn even stated that *“the Netherlands prefers to look away”* with regard to repressive authoritarian regimes. Amr Hamzawy was also skeptical, in his case about the EU as a whole. He stated that *“it is security number one, democracy is not part of the equation”*. The only thing that the EU does is *“some improvement in human rights conditions and freedom conditions, but different from pushing for a political opening or a democratic opening”*. Furthermore, later in the interview, Hamzawy stated that Europe does only little with regard to democracy, *“the little Europe does, the little, I stress the very little Europe does with regard to democracy”*. Also Maged Mandour was skeptical towards the democracy and human rights promotion efforts of the EU. He stated that the EU has no appetite for pushing for democratic change and that it is unlikely that this will change soon. Mandour stated that there might not even be a solution from outside and that Egyptians have to change the situation themselves. However, *“Europe is not facilitating the process. They are making it very difficult (...) because of their economic support and all the arms deals, like surveillance equipment, it is not helping *laughs*, it is definitely not helping”*. A more detailed explanation of why this inhibits the democratization of Egypt will be provided later in this chapter. As an example of European inaction, Mandour mentioned an Italian PhD student of Cambridge University who was doing his research in Egypt. In 2016, the PhD student was murdered by the Egyptian security forces. However, until now, there are no sanctions towards Egypt. Mandour stated: *“if Sisi can murder a European citizen openly and they know the names of the people, they know the five suspects who murdered him, but they cannot even get them to hand them over. Come on *laughs*. Come on. Like. (...) there is no political will to do that”*.

To sum up, Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt tries to support better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt. This policy is based on the idea that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. More concretely, better human rights and democratic reform is essential for a sustainably stable Egypt. To fulfil this goal, the Netherlands invests in development cooperation to stimulate bottom-up democratization and engages in (critical) dialogue with Egypt. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether these are game changing policies that are *really* pushing Egypt to reform. Despite Egypt’s ongoing human rights violations and lack of democratic reform, the Netherlands is not doing much more than ‘expressing its concerns’ and continues to work closely with Egypt. In other words, whereas the Netherlands ideally wants to see a democratic, responsive and inclusive Egyptian government with respect for human rights, this is hardly reflected in their current actions towards Egypt. This ambiguity can be explained by certain obstacles that inhibit the Netherlands from formulating policies that *really* support better human rights and democratic reform. These obstacles are presented below.

4.4 What are the obstacles to translating academic knowledge that suggests that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise into policy?

So far we have seen that whereas the Netherlands ideally wants to see a democratic, responsive and inclusive Egyptian government with respect for human rights, this is hardly reflected in its current actions towards Egypt. This seemingly contradictory finding can be explained by certain obstacles that inhibit the Netherlands from formulating policies that *really* support better human rights and democratic reform.

At first glance it seems that the classical notion of the democracy-security dilemma, meaning that short-term security is preferred over an unstable democratization process, inhibits the Netherlands from *really* pushing Egypt to reform. For example, Ko Colijn stated that *“migration and security are first, while democracy is being put on the backburner after the failed Arab Spring. Thus, one ignores the literature that might count for the long-term, but not for the short-term”*. Amr Hamzawy made a similar comment. He stated that the EU is afraid of democratization because it can be costly: *“there is a price to be paid for democratic transitions. There is a domestic price to be paid, there is a regional price to be paid and an international price to be paid. The question is, are you willing to pay that price or not?”* He then stated that when the Arab Spring failed, policy makers felt that they were not willing to pay the price for a democratic transition and returned to the *“let’s stabilise”* premise. So, *“there was basically a reconfirmation of the democracy-security dilemma after the upset of the democratic uprisings. And that has been the case since then and up until today. So, it is security number one, democracy is not part of the equation (...) the European policy makers are back under the full sway of the democracy-security dilemma in favor of security and against democracy”*. In other words, *“European politics is favoring security over democracy, and seeing no way to mediate the two”*. So, *“there is definitely a short-term and a long-term. (...) I mean security kicks in right away and democracy is for the future, but it is a challenge, it contains immediate risks from a security perspective”*.

However, when looking at the other collected data, the reasons for why the Netherlands has taken limited action towards Egypt go further than just a short-term versus long-term stability issue. Instead, there are two main obstacles that inhibit the Netherlands from *really* pushing Egypt to reform. The first obstacle is related to the economic interests of the Netherlands. The two policy makers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Netherlands takes into account certain other interests next to supporting better human rights and democratic reform. One of such interests are economic interests, and in particular Dutch trade and economic investments. This means that it is important that the Netherlands is able to

export its products to Egypt and that Dutch companies can be based in Egypt. To achieve these economic interests, a strong bilateral relationship with Egypt is necessary. Pushing too hard on better human rights and democratic reform might damage the (currently strong) bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Egypt. In turn, this damaged bilateral relationship can result in fewer opportunities for Dutch trade and economic investments. In other words, Dutch economic interests might be damaged if the bilateral relationship with Egypt deteriorates. Therefore, the Netherlands tries to balance between pushing for a better human rights situation and democratic reform on the one hand, and Dutch economic interests on the other hand.

Ko Colijn also noted these economic interests. He stated that *“one of the main goals of Dutch foreign policy is the promotion of Dutch trade interests”*. Furthermore, he stated that the Netherlands is interested in keeping strong relations with Egypt despite the presence of President Sisi. These relations will give *“advantage in negotiations about trade”*. Moreover, when asked about possible obstacles to changing the Dutch policy towards Egypt, Colijn responded *“(…) the recent weapon export case (the German frigates with Dutch equipment) and the relatively easy export of second hand army material (and training!), the Netherlands prefers to look away”*. Amr Hamzawy similarly mentioned that *“the Europeans (...) are happy to keep economic and trade relationships with Egypt, they benefit from it as well”*. Maged Mandour was perhaps the most clear about the economic interests of, in this case, the EU. He stated: *“the first thing is massive arms deals from the European Union (...) here we are talking about billions (...) second of all, there are quite large European investments in the oil and gas industry (...) third of all, there is a debt policy. So, the regime has been borrowing from the financial markets, very heavily at very high interest rates. Mandour then explained that this inhibits supporting better human rights and democratic reform in two ways. First, the arms deals and the possibility to borrow money from the financial market can be used by the Egyptian regime for their internal repression. Secondly, the EU is not interested in putting too much pressure on President Sisi because there is ‘money to be made’. To cite Mandour, “so, the combination of those factors means the survival of the regime in its current form is interconnected to European financial interests and global financial interests. So, that creates from my perspective clear barriers to democratization (...) So, if we are talking about what can Europe do, Europe can do a lot actually. So, stop the arms deals, stop the financial investments, stop lending him money for example. All that stuff can really create meaningful pressure but in reality, this is not being done because there is a lot of money to be made” and “this is just how it is, because there is money to be made. There is ridiculous amounts of money to be made”*. In fact, Mandour even stated that *“Europe is profiting from the situation”* given that they are

earning money on the authoritarian regime in Egypt. Finally, it is interesting to note that Mandour explicitly stated that these economic interests go beyond the obstacles from the classical view of the democracy-security dilemma, saying that democratization leads to short-term instability and insecurity, *“so, that’s of course beyond the classical dilemma (...), it is not as simple as just security versus democratization. In the case of Egypt, there are clear economic interests that are at play here”*. So, this means that the EU is not hesitant to democratize Egypt because of short-term instability, but because there is money to be made with the current authoritarian regime.

The second obstacle has to do with migration. Similarly as described above, the two Dutch policy makers stated that the Netherlands takes into account certain other interests next to supporting better human rights and democratic reform. One of such interests is to prevent migration flows from Egypt towards Europe, including the Netherlands. The two policy makers stated that many Libyan refugees are trying to migrate to Europe via Egypt. Furthermore, Egypt is currently also hosting refugees from other countries in the region. The Netherlands does not want to see too many of these refugees crossing the Egyptian border towards Europe. The two policy makers stated that they have a strong and positive bilateral relationship with Egypt on this issue. Egypt has currently closed its borders with Europe for refugees and therefore fulfil the interests of Europe and the Netherlands: they aid in preventing migration flows to Europe. Similarly as described above, pushing too hard on better human rights and democratic reform might damage the bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Egypt. In turn, this damaged bilateral relationship can result in Egypt changing their position on the migration issue. Ko Colijn also stated migration as an obstacle. He described that policy makers are sceptical about the democratization of Egypt, especially since the Egyptian *“bargaining position has increased due to migration (...) Brussel has strict agreements with Egypt about the anti-migration mission respectively the Libyan situation”*. When Colijn was asked whether this bargaining position is caused by the danger of migration from Libyan refugees to the EU via Egypt, whether this bargaining position strengthens the regime of Sisi and whether this bargaining position limits the possibilities of Europe to push for democratization and human rights he answered: *“Yes, yes, yes”*. Amr Hamzawy also named migration as an obstacle, but related it more to the ‘classical’ democracy-security dilemma: democratization can cause instability in Egypt, which in turn can cause mass migration flows of Egyptian people to Europe. This is in particular a threat given the huge population of Egypt. Therefore, the EU perceives democratization as too costly because Egypt is the most populous country in the

MENA region. If democratization destabilizes Egypt, millions of Egyptian refugees will come to Europe.

Clearly then, the Netherlands tries to balance between pushing for a better human rights situation and democratic reform on the one hand, and other Dutch interests, such as economic interests and the prevention of migration flows, on the other hand. To achieve these interests, the Netherlands values a strategic partnership with Egypt and wants to maintain a strong bilateral relationship with President Sisi. These findings also come out of the coded policy documents. For example, *“the cabinet sees Egypt as an important regional power. Cooperation with Egypt is of great importance for many strategic issues that affect the security of the Netherlands and Europe ((...) migration (...))”* (HOR, 2016c, p.8). However, when looking at the policy documents, there are some additional topics on which the Netherlands values a strategic partnership with Egypt. Multiple policy documents stated that cooperation with Egypt is of great importance for strategic issues that affect the security of the Netherlands, including the Israel-Palestine peace process, the conflicts in Libya, Syria and Yemen, the fight against terrorism and the management of the consequences of climate change (LG, 2015b, p.24; LG, 2018, p.3; HOR, 2016c, p.8).

Finally, it is interesting to note some obstacles that were named by only one respondent but did not appear in other data sources. First, Ko Colijn mentioned that the Netherlands, and perhaps the West in general, does not have a lot of *“leverage”* towards Egypt. In other words, he doubted whether the Netherlands has any *“independent influencing power”* in order to influence Egypt’s democratic and human rights situation. Second, Colijn argued that the Netherlands is *“sceptical”* about whether Egypt will ever democratize. Furthermore, the *“realistic thoughts that we (i.e. the Netherlands) cannot do anything about it is dominating”*. In other words, it seems that even if the Netherlands ideally would like to push for democratization and human rights in Egypt, they are ‘skeptical’ and ‘realistic’ about whether it will ever succeed. This is in part related to a statement by Maged Mandour, who stated that domestic factors in Egypt make it hard to democratize the country. *“Sisi was able to decimate the opposition completely. So, it appears that there is no alternative. So, if he goes, who is going to take his place? Like, he has destroyed everything so bad that it is hard to kind of imagine somebody else taking over”*. Furthermore, Western efforts to support local NGOs or any political opposition towards President Sisi will be difficult. Mandour stated, *“there are very strong limits to what they can do because the regime has very strict legal frameworks on money and Western NGO’s from working in the country. Like, they simply won’t let you. They are not stupid. So, yes, at theoretical level that is assuming that there is no resistance from the ground.*

But of course, there will be very stiff resistance. They won't let you put in the seeds that might eventually bring them down". Finally, Amr Hamzawy argued that there are certain "external actors" that act as an obstacle towards the democratization of Egypt. These external actors are Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Russia and China, and are interested in "autocratising Egypt, so, having an autocratic government in Egypt. That is their preferred solution, even for the future in 10 years". On the question "how do those external actors like the UAE, Saudi, Russia and China then inhibit European democratizing actions?", Hamzawy responded, "think of arms sales from the U.S. and the EU to Egypt. They are always, or at least to an extent, to some democratic conditionalities. So, our weapons should not be used to kill civilians indifferently for example. But, Egypt can always turn, and that has been the case a lot since 2014, that Egypt has turned to Russia to get weapons with no democratic conditionality. (...) Egypt can turn to China for investments and infrastructure help who couldn't be less interested in human rights violations. Egypt is now building a new administrative capital city, and that is basically with Chinese and Gulf money with no conditionalities. So, when it comes to trade and economic relations that is much easier". Thus, these regional actors can upset EU democracy promotion efforts.

To sum up, there are several obstacles that inhibit the Netherlands from formulating policies that *really* support better human rights and democratic reform. At first glance, it seems that the classical notion of the democracy-security dilemma, meaning that short-term stability is preferred over democratization, inhibits the Netherlands from *really* pushing Egypt to reform. However, when taking a closer look at the collected data, the main obstacle comes from the fact that the Netherlands has other interests next to promoting democracy and human rights in Egypt. These interests are in particular Dutch trade and economic investments and the prevention of migration flows. The perception of the government is that these interests can only be met if the Netherlands has a strong bilateral relationship with Egypt, and thus with the current authoritarian regime. In turn, this limits the possibilities to push for better human rights and democratic reform.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Following the results stated in chapter 4, this thesis will end with a discussion and conclusion. The discussion will describe the major findings of the study and the meaning of those findings, in particular when related to the literature review presented in chapter 2. The conclusion will then reflect on the research question and the research aim of the present study. In addition, the academic and practical contributions of the study will be covered. The conclusion will then address the limitations of the study, followed by some suggestions for further research.

5.1 Discussion

The results described in chapter 4 illustrate that the Netherlands is interested in promoting better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt. This goal is mainly based on the idea that respect for human rights and democratic governance is essential for a *sustainably* stable Egypt. The term *sustainably* is italicized because this is the key issue underlying the Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt. It is argued that the current Egyptian regime that tries to create stability by repression cannot guarantee sustainable stability. Human rights, democracy and sustainable stability are inseparable. One can only reach sustainable stability in Egypt when the country is governed by a democratic, inclusive and responsive government with respect for human rights. The Netherlands therefore has a two-fold policy by which they try to promote better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt. First, the Netherlands is investing in development cooperation to stimulate bottom-up democratization. Via programs specifically designed at democratization, such as the Shiraka program, but also indirectly via programs on water management and agriculture, the Netherlands tries to improve the democratic capabilities of the Egyptian people. Second, the Netherlands frequently engages in dialogue with Egypt. On the one hand, this dialogue can be critical, meaning that the Netherlands expresses its concerns about the human rights and democratic situation in Egypt. On the other hand, this dialogue can also be constructive, meaning that the Netherlands tries to seek common ground with Egypt on points to improve and to discuss how the Netherlands can help them to support better human rights and democratic reform.

However, these policies are no game changing policies that are *really* pushing Egypt to reform. For example, despite Egypt's ongoing human rights violations and lack of democratic reform, the Netherlands is not doing much more than expressing its concerns. Furthermore, it continues to offer financial support, to invest in Egypt and to trade with the country. Notably, this includes arms deals that can be used for repression. Thus, whereas the Netherlands ideally

wants to see a democratic, responsive and inclusive Egyptian government with respect for human rights, this is hardly reflected in their current actions towards Egypt.

The explanation for this ambiguity is not that the Netherlands is unaware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. Although the classical notion of the democracy-security dilemma, meaning that short-term security is preferred over an unstable process towards democratization, is often given as an explanation for this ambiguity, the explanation goes further than this. Namely, there are two main obstacles that explain why the Netherlands is not *really* pushing Egypt to reform. First, the Netherlands has economic interests, in particular with regard to Dutch trade and economic investments. This means that it is deemed important that the Netherlands is able to export products to Egypt and that Dutch companies can operate and invest in Egypt. Pushing too hard on democratic reform might damage the (currently strong) bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Egypt. In turn, this damaged bilateral relationship can result in less opportunities for Dutch trade and economic investments. Second, the Netherlands wants to prevent migration flows from Egypt to Europe. This in particular means preventing non-Egyptian refugees trying to migrate to Europe via Egypt. Egypt has currently closed its borders with Europe and therefore aid in preventing migration flows to Europe. Again, pushing too hard on democratic reform might damage the bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Egypt. In turn, this damaged bilateral relationship can result in Egypt changing their position on the migration issue.

Clearly then, the Netherlands tries to balance between pushing for better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt on the one hand, and other Dutch interests, in particular economic interests and the prevention of migration flows, on the other hand. A strong bilateral relationship with Egypt, and thus with the current authoritarian regime, is deemed important for these other interests. De facto, this leads to the above statement that the current Dutch policies towards Egypt are no game changing policies that are *really* pushing Egypt to reform. Implementing game changing policies might weaken the (currently strong) bilateral relationship with Egypt, which will in turn damage the economic and migration interests of the Netherlands.

How do these major findings relate to the literature review presented in chapter 2? To start, one can find some interesting similarities between the literature review and the results. First, as mentioned above, the Netherlands is interested in promoting better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt because this is essential for a sustainably stable Egypt. This is in line with the literature review, which showed that the West has been interested in supporting better human rights and democratic reform (Olsen, 1998). Supporting better human rights and

democratic reform was seen as valuable because non-democratic systems with a lack of freedom, political opportunities and socio-economic deprivation could stimulate conflict, extremism and terrorism and thus (global) instability (Powel, 2009). Therefore, the West wanted to support better human rights and democratic reform in the Middle East and North Africa region in order to make the world more secure and stable (e.g. Monten, 2005; Biscop, 2008; Dandashly, 2018). These insights from the literature are thus in line with the results of the present study, given that the Netherlands wants to promote better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt because this is essential for a sustainably stable Egypt. Ideally, the Netherlands therefore would like to see a democratic, responsive and inclusive Egyptian government with respect for human rights. Nevertheless, as shown above, the policies of the Netherlands to achieve this aim are no game changing policies that are *really* pushing Egypt to reform. In other words, limited action is taken towards Egypt's repressive authoritarian regime. These results of the study are also in line with the insights from the literature review, as the literature stated that despite the Western rhetoric on supporting better human rights and democratic reform, this has barely been translated into policy. However, the reasons described in the literature review for *why* this rhetoric is barely translated into policy partly differ from the main reasons that are found by this thesis. In other words, some results of this thesis cannot be explained by the literature review and therefore give rise to further development of the theory.

In the literature review, we have seen that the West has taken limited action towards authoritarian regimes because the West is confronted with the democracy-security dilemma. This dilemma means that the willingness of Western states to support better human rights and democratic reform runs up against the reality of countervailing security interests such as terrorism, radicalism and migration flows to the West (e.g. Scott & Scott 2020; Börzel, Risse, & Dandashly, 2015; Faustini-Torres, 2020). It is argued that even though democracy is ideally the best form of governance to ensure global security and stability, promoting democracy in authoritarian countries can cause instability in the short-term, which can in turn trigger the just mentioned security threats. This is named 'destabilization by democratization' in the literature (Eder, 2011). Given that the West is confronted with this dilemma, they have to establish which of the two they prioritize. The past has shown us that the West in the end has always prioritized security over democracy (e.g. Roccu & Voltolini, 2018; Dandashly, 2018). This prioritization of security over democracy has particularly occurred since the chaotic aftermath of the Arab Spring, given that democratization attempts lead to the rise of Islamic parties (e.g. Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt), created power vacuums that were breeding grounds for terrorism and civil wars (e.g. Libya, Syria), and consequently lead to massive migration flows to Europe. One

could therefore expect that this is the reason why the present study has found that the Netherlands is not *really* pushing Egypt to reform. The results from the interview with Ko Colijn and Amr Hamzawy are in line with these insights. To cite Amr Hamzawy, “*policy makers are under the full sway of the democracy-security dilemma (...) democracy is for the future, but it is a challenge, it contains immediate risks from a security perspective*”.

However, as mentioned, the reasons for why the Netherlands has taken limited action towards Egypt go further than this. In other words, the main focus of the democracy-security dilemma, saying that the fear of short-term instability inhibits democratization, is not enough to explain the findings of the present study. First of all, the Netherlands is very well aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. In other words, the Netherlands realizes that the above mentioned security interests such as preventing terrorism, radicalism and migration flows are no ‘countervailing interests’ towards democracy. In the analysed policy documents, it is explicitly stated that sticking to authoritarian regimes is short-term thinking. In contrast to the ‘destabilization by democratization’ frame, the Netherlands has argued that it is authoritarian governance that leads to security threats like terrorism and radicalism. In addition, when the two policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs were asked about obstacles that inhibit them from pushing Egypt to reform, security threats like terrorism and radicalism were not mentioned¹¹. The Netherlands is not afraid of ‘destabilization by democratization’ and the main focus of the democracy-security dilemma can therefore not explain why the Netherlands is not *really* pushing Egypt to reform.

The latter is namely the case because, as mentioned, the Netherlands has other interests next to supporting better human rights and democratic reform. These interests are to stimulate Dutch trade and economic investments in Egypt and the prevention of migration flows coming to Europe and the Netherlands. It is important to note that, in this case, the prevention of migration flows has a different meaning than the classical notion of the democracy-security dilemma would suggest. This classical notion suggests that democratization leads to destabilization. This instability then leads to security threats like terrorism and radicalism, which in turn leads to migration flows to Europe. In the case of the Netherlands, however, the prevention of migration flows relate to non-Egyptian migrants that are trying to move to Europe via Egypt. Thus, to stress, the Netherlands is not afraid of Egyptian migrant flows coming to Europe as a result of destabilization by democratization in Egypt. As mentioned, a strong bilateral relationship with Egypt is necessary to secure these two interests. Pushing too hard on

¹¹ Migration flows as a security threat was mentioned, however, with a different meaning. This will be explicated further in this chapter.

democratic reform might weaken this bilateral relationship and in turn damage these Dutch interests. So, the reasons for why the Netherlands has taken limited action towards Egypt go further than the main focus of the democracy-security dilemma would suggest (i.e. the fear of instability). This is also stressed by Maged Mandour, who stated that economic interests create clear barriers to putting meaningful pressure on President Sisi. He even explicitly stated that this goes further than just the classical democracy-security dilemma. To cite, *“so, that’s of course beyond the classical dilemma (...), it is not as simple as just security versus democratization. In the case of Egypt, there are clear economic interests that are at play here”*.

Given that the main focus of the democracy-security dilemma cannot fully explain the findings of this thesis, saying that in particular economic and migration interests inhibit the Netherlands from really pushing Egypt to reform, it is interesting to look at whether there are alternative theories that might explain these findings. An alternative framework can be found at the end of the literature review in chapter 2. Here, some insights on the interface between academic scholars and policy officers are discussed. Two important points can be linked to the results of this thesis. First, Mead (2015) and Newman and Head (2015) state that academic research gives little attention to politics. Whereas academic insights are often clearly and linearly stated, the political process is anything but clear and linear because policy officers have to deal with a lot of political constraints. In particular, they have to take into account many stakeholders with different objectives. Second, Newman and Head (2015) state that academic research is often about the long-term whereas policy makers face short-term pressures. Academic research is therefore often left aside by policy makers as responding to day-to-day and short-term issues takes the precedence over long-term thinking.

Linking this to the present study, one could argue that the insights from literature review are indeed clearly and linearly stated: one should support better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt because it will lead to sustainable stability. However, although Dutch policy makers agree with this statement, they have to deal with a lot of different stakeholders that have other interests than supporting better human rights and democratic reform. In this case, think of Dutch companies that want to be able to invest in Egypt or a certain voter base that does not want to see migrants coming to the Netherlands. Furthermore, these interests that inhibit democratization are short-term interests, given that they cannot be achieved if the situation in Egypt deteriorates. To cite Abozaid (2020, p. 13), the regime of President Sisi is “crushing its country’s future” because it stimulates security threats like terrorism and radicalism. Consequently, Dutch economic interests will be hard to achieve if security threats like terrorism and radicalism in Egypt increase. Furthermore, the current approach to achieve the migration

interests, meaning a strong bilateral relationship with Egypt to prevent non-Egyptian refugees trying to migrate to Europe via Egypt, is also short-sighted. In other words, if security threats like terrorism and radicalism in Egypt increase, one can expect massive *Egyptian* migration flows to Europe too. The theories on the democracy-security dilemma that were discussed in the literature review mainly focussed on the fear of instability (i.e. destabilization by democratization) and less on other short-term interests, such as economic interests and migration interests¹². Therefore, the researcher of this thesis decided to have another look at the literature to see whether there is existing research on these specific (short-term) interests.

Looking at the literature, one can indeed find that economic and migration interests can be barriers to democratization. For example, Brechenmacher and Carothers (2019, p. 13) state that exerting pressure on authoritarian regimes can be inhibited due to the “fear of damaging (...) economic interests”. Also Koch et al. (2018) states that economic interests, but in particular migration interests, have limited European efforts to support better human rights and democratic reform. President Sisi threatens Europe that he will open up the Egyptian borders if he is being pushed too much for better human rights and democratic reform. Then, refugees that are currently hosted by Egypt (e.g. from Libya, Sudan) will migrate to Europe. In other words, “President Sisi conditioned its migration policy towards Europe in order to consolidate his own power” (Koch et al., 2018, p.64).

5.2 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to qualitatively explore whether current Western policies towards the Middle East and North Africa region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. More concretely, the Netherlands was studied on its foreign policy towards Egypt. In line, the following research question was formulated: *How does the Netherlands deal with the (perceived) democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt?* Looking at the major findings presented in the discussion, it is clear that the Netherlands is aware that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. Nevertheless, despite the Dutch ideal vision of a democratic, responsive and inclusive Egyptian government with respect for human rights, this is hardly reflected in its current actions towards Egypt. The main reason for the latter is that the Netherlands also has other interests next to supporting better human rights and democratic reform. These interests are in particular

¹² Again, to stress, migration interests are discussed by theories on the democracy-security dilemma but its meaning differs from the ‘migration interests’ found by this thesis.

economic interests and the prevention of migration flows. To achieve these interests, a strong bilateral relationship with Egypt is necessary. Pushing too hard on better human rights and democratic reform might weaken this bilateral relationship, which in turn can damage the two Dutch interests. In the light of the above points, one can therefore answer the research question of this thesis as follows. At first glance, the Netherlands seems to deal well with the democracy-security dilemma when formulating its foreign policy towards Egypt. In fact, they clearly realize that the democracy-security dilemma is not a dilemma, given that democracy and security may strengthen, rather than oppose one another. In addition, the Netherlands is not afraid of ‘destabilization by democratization’ as would be expected from the classical notion of the democracy-security dilemma. Therefore, the Netherlands tries to support better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt via development cooperation and engaging in (critical) dialogue. The core Dutch argument for these policies is: only if better human rights and democratic reform is achieved, sustainable stability in Egypt can be guaranteed. Nevertheless, we have also seen that these policies to support better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt are no game changing policies. More concretely, the Netherlands is not *really* pushing Egypt to reform because this could damage the Dutch economic and migration interests.

As a result of the above discussion and conclusive remarks, the present study makes three scientific contributions. As mentioned in the introduction, the study’s aim in terms of scientific contributions was twofold. A first aim was to shed light on whether Western policies towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. This research aim is fulfilled, given that the present study explicated whether, in this case Dutch policies towards Egypt, reflected the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise. Though the Dutch government is aware of the falseness of the democracy-security dilemma, it prioritises other short-term interests over supporting better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt.

The second aim of this study was to contribute to the discussion on the relationship between academic knowledge and policy making. In relation to this aim, the study has confirmed that it is hard for policy makers to translate academic insights into practice because they have to deal with multiple other (short-term) interests. In this case, economic and migration interests complicate efforts to implement the awareness that the democracy-security dilemma is a false premise, meaning that better human rights and democratic reform can contribute to sustainable stability and security.

This thesis has also made a third scientific contribution. Namely, it has shown that the main focus of the democracy-security dilemma, saying that Western states are afraid of

destabilization by democratization, is not enough to explain why the Netherlands is not *really* pushing Egypt to reform. The Netherlands is not afraid for short-term instability as the democracy-security dilemma would suggest. More concretely, the results showed that the Netherlands is not afraid of ‘destabilization by democratization’, which in turn could lead to security threats like terrorism and radicalism. In fact, the Netherlands is very well aware that it is not democratization that leads to destabilization, but that authoritarianism leads to destabilization. In contrast, the real reason for their limited actions towards Egypt is that Dutch policy makers have economic and migration interests in the short-term. This is in line with Mead (2015) and Newman and Head (2015) who stated that policy makers often ignore academic research because of other (short-term) interests. Thus, short-term interests prevent the Netherlands from really pushing Egypt to reform. However, in contrast the classical view of the democracy-security dilemma, it is not related to avoiding short-term instability, but to be able to trade with Egypt and to prevent migration flows. This finding is an important scientific contribution. While short-term interests are still a major obstacle to pushing Egypt to reform, it is not about short-term security interests such as terrorism and radicalism following instability, but about short-term economic and migration interests.

Following this third scientific implication, this thesis also has a practical implication, meaning that it can provide a policy recommendation to Dutch foreign policy makers. As mentioned, the Netherlands is currently balancing between supporting better human rights and democratic reform on the one hand, and economic and migration interests on the other hand. In practice, these economic and migration interests prevent the Netherlands from really pushing Egypt to reform. A policy recommendation would be to review this balancing act and to focus more on supporting better human rights and democratic reform. The literature review, and in particular the scholars that revisited the democracy-security dilemma, showed that authoritarian regimes cannot guarantee sustainable stability. The results of the present study illustrate that the Netherlands agrees on this point. Concretely, the policy recommendation of this thesis entails that the Netherlands should focus more on supporting better human rights and democratic reform. The arguments that economic and migration interests inhibit this can be countered because they are short-sighted. As mentioned above, these interests cannot be achieved if the situation in Egypt deteriorates because of its repressive authoritarian regime. An increase in security threats like terrorism and radicalism due to repression will damage the economic interests and will exacerbate the problem of migration given that Egypt has a population of over a 100 million people. In addition, apart from all these rational aspects, the Netherlands is also morally obliged to act. In a debate in November 2017, then-member of

parliament Joël Voordewind asked then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Halbe Zijlstra: “*are we now in favor of human rights because it provides stability? That would be in favor of the Netherlands. Or is there also a sense of involvement with foreign countries, even if this might not be related to the stability of the Netherlands?*” Zijlstra answered “*Let’s be clear: we do not have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for nothing. Human rights are universal (...) So, it is in our interest, but it is also in their interest*” (HOR, 2017c, p.3). It is now time to act on this rhetoric. The Netherlands should prioritize supporting better human rights and democratic reform, not only because it will be advantageous for the Netherlands in the long-term, but also because the human rights situation in Egypt is deteriorating.

Although this thesis has made some important theoretical and practical contributions, four limitations are worth mentioning. First, due to a lack of respondents with knowledge on Dutch foreign policy towards Egypt, two respondents (Amr Hamzawy and Maged Mandour) were interviewed and asked about *European* foreign policy towards Egypt. Nevertheless, the results of these interviews were still used to answer the research question of this thesis, which was about *Dutch* foreign policy towards Egypt. One could therefore question whether it was appropriate to use the results of these interviews. However, the results of these interviews were compared to the results of the other interviews and the document analysis. It appeared that the results between EU policy and Dutch policy were very similar, meaning that the just mentioned limitation is largely mitigated. Second, Amr Hamzawy and Maged Mandour are both Egyptian. Furthermore, they are currently in exile because of their criticism towards the Egyptian regime. Therefore, one could argue that they are biased regarding Western foreign policy making towards the regime that forced them to leave their country. On the other hand, one could also argue that they offer a ‘fresh’ perspective, given that the two policy makers of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs might also be biased. In other words, one could doubt whether these two policy makers will be completely objective, or perhaps negative, about their own policy. Third, in aiming to examine whether the policies of Western countries towards the MENA region reflect the understanding that the democracy-security dilemma may be a false premise, this thesis focused on the foreign policy of the Netherlands towards Egypt. Thus, a qualitative case study was conducted. As briefly mentioned in chapter 3, obtaining external validity (i.e. generalizability) is difficult for qualitative case studies as the results apply to a particular case (Bleijenbergh, 2016). One should thus be careful to generalize the results of the present study. Nevertheless, results from the interviews with the two Dutch policy makers, Ko Colijn and the document analysis revealed similar as the results from the interviews with Amr Hamzawy and Maged Mandour, while Hamzawy and Mandour were asked about *EU* policy instead of *Dutch*

policy towards Egypt. Although no definitive conclusions can be reached on this point based on the limited number of interviews, the similarities in these results suggest that it may be possible to generalize the results of this thesis to some extent to EU level. Generalizing the results of this thesis to the broader MENA regions is even more difficult. As mentioned, the main reasons for why the Netherlands has taken limited action towards Egypt is because of certain economic and migration interests. One could doubt whether these interests also apply to other countries in the MENA region. Furthermore, when looking at the Dutch Shiraka program, this program is limited to ‘only’ 10 countries in the MENA region.¹³ Therefore, it seems that the Netherlands is not targeting all countries in the MENA region with regard to supporting better human rights and democratic reform. Consequently, it is hard to generalize the results of the present study to the broader MENA region. Fourth, the two employees of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that not all information of the interview can be made public. This is a limitation for two reasons. First, the present study was not able to use some interesting information for its results. Especially in shedding light on why Dutch policy makers expected that pushing Egypt too much on its human rights record would damage the bilateral relations, it could have provided further depth to the findings. It is important to note, however, that including this information would not have *altered* the findings as presented. Second, given that the interview transcripts could not be included in the appendix, other researchers cannot cross-check the results section with the interview transcripts if needed.

Finally, several suggestions for further research can be presented. First, as indicated above, it is difficult to generalize the findings of a case study. Therefore, a suggestion for further research would be to research the policy of more Western countries, or the policy of the EU for example, towards Egypt. In addition, a suggestion for further research would be to research the Dutch policy towards other countries in the MENA region. In both cases, it is interesting to research if the patterns and dynamics that occur are similar to the results of this thesis. A second suggestion for further research would be to replicate the present study in five or ten years’ time. The literature on the democracy-security dilemma has developed over the years. Whereas ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ were first seen as opposite concepts, it is now widely acknowledged that the two are actually reinforcing each other. The latter is understood by policy makers, but it is still hard to translate these insights into policy because of the mentioned other interests. However, given that the literature has developed, policy making will perhaps develop too. It would therefore be interesting to replicate the present study in the future to see

¹³ Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia

if policy making has developed. Third, Amr Hamzawy stated that external actors such Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Russia and China are interested in autocratising Egypt. They provide Egypt with arms deals, infrastructure and investments without any democratic conditionalities applied to it. This inhibits the possibilities of Western countries to support for better human rights and democratic reform in Egypt, because Egypt can always turn to these external actors. It would be interesting to research how the West is perceiving these developments and how, if applicable, they try to deal with these developments.

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Appendix

Available upon request.