

# **The Language of dodging Performative Expectations**

*A rhetorical analysis of normative language in presidential speeches of Barack Obama in the cases of Libya and Bahrain*



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## **Abstract**

The US government has intervened in the Arab Spring as a champion of universal rights. However, the Obama administration did not act as swiftly in all cases. This research focuses on the cases of Libya and Bahrain, in which the US government was criticised for its hesitant behaviour. As a frontrunner of universal rights, the Obama administration has to proclaim certain norms. However, these norms are not always adhered to. Targeted activism holds up a mirror to governments and pressures them to act accordingly to those norms. In cases of political hypocrisy, politicians dodge their performative expectations by focusing on norms instead of performance. The theoretical frameworks show that normative rhetorics can be complicated due to embeddedness and asymmetrical expectations. A deductive linguistic analysis of presidential rhetoric has shown that normative sentences do outperform the performative sentences in case of political hypocrisy. I would recommend incorporating media attention as a mediating effect in the future.

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## Introduction

On the 23th of February 2011, at the peak of the conflict in Libya, president Obama conveyed to the American people that: “We condemn the use of violence in Libya” and that “The United States also strongly supports the universal rights of the Libyan people” (New York Times, 2011). However, humanitarian intervention was still endured. Even with the United Nations (UN) Security Council openly condemning Qadhafi’s violence against his own citizens, the United States (US) still chose to withhold. Early stages of diplomatic action and multilateral cooperation were taken (New York Times, 2011), however the administration seemed hesitant in comparison to the conflicts in Tunisia and Egypt in the well-known Arab Spring. This brings up the question in what way the administration justified promises that it did not want to keep. This organised hypocrisy comes up as a response to conflicting ideational and material pressures (Lipson, 2007). This raises the question of where this pressure comes from, or more so, in what way the administration justifies its ignorance towards the pressure. Remarkably, the Obama administration did eventually approve an intervention, even though it wanted to take the diplomatic route. The hesitance made it seem like the administration muddled its way through an intervention. Nonetheless, this questions the way they justified their former nonaction to latter intervention to the American citizens.

Moreover, later that year, the Arab Spring continued with Bahraini protests being shut down by Saudi military intervention. The protesters demanded political reform and job opportunities (Al-Rawi, 2015). The predominantly Shi’ite population felt that their conditions were not being met by the Sunni monarch. (Nuruzzaman, 2013). The protests were inspired by the successes of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt. With Bahrain being home to the fifth largest US fleet, normative and military interests have intertwined. This conflict is characterised by its nonmilitary business relationship of the US with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, but more importantly the lack of US action in the conflict after Bahraini citizens’ demand for universal rights. Here, the Obama administration chose the sanction route – by introducing an arms embargo – instead of diplomacy or intervention. However, this was seen as weak by human rights organisations and the Bahraini population (Atlas, 2012). Especially since earlier protests in the Arab Spring did get requested aid. The size of Bahrain could be an issue with a population of just over one million people, however, the country ‘makes up’ for it because of its financial importance and the connection with the US military. Concisely, the Bahraini citizens felt betrayed by the lack of US action compared to other cases of the Arab Spring.

The Obama administration was criticised for its cautious yet inconsistent approach during the Arab Spring (Pinto, 2012). The administration quickly went back to a traditional strategy of compelling economic, energy and security interests. From a historical perspective, Arab nationalist movements mainly combined with Muslim fundamentalism had often challenged the US hold over oil resources. Therefore the US government was already situated in a historical disregard towards the Middle East. However, in the first stages of policy during the Arab Spring Obama clearly ideologically sided with reform (Pinto, 2012). US exceptionalism, in that way, can aspire to global leadership and democratic values in foreign policy (Atlas, 2012). Therefore the Obama administration tried to incorporate both realism and idealism in foreign policy. The Egyptian revolution caught the Obama administration by surprise, however, the emphasis on the norm of universal rights eventually caused a quick response from normative frontrunners – including the US. Nonetheless, this did not seem the case for all Arab Spring protesters. Many had voiced their discontent with the authoritarian regime in hope of international aid in universal rights. Domestically, politicians needed to explain the choices they made in either intervening or in their ‘hands-off’ approach. Nonetheless, the norm seemed to stay the same;

the US helps those in their fight for universal rights. The hands-off approach and aid, however, indicate a separate course of action. This research, therefore, focuses on the rhetorical justification on the US foreign policy during the Arab Spring.

*In what way did Barack Obama's rhetoric convene in normative logic to uphold performative expectations in the cases of Libya and Bahrain ?*

### *1.1 Research Puzzle*

The analytical puzzle does not necessarily lie within the policy itself, but more in the rhetoric the president used towards his citizens. According to Lim (2002), the rhetoric of modern presidents is characterised by de-intellectualization. Consequently, the president's rhetoric has become more informal. References of formal power and judicial terms have decreased, and so casual 'slang' has found a way into the rhetoric. Anti-intellectualization is combined with a hint of abstraction to make ideational or poetic references. This can create a dramatic effect, which could speak to the voter. Remarkably, presidential rhetoric has also become more assertive. Over the years it has taken a more activist stance (Lim, 2002). This is shown in the use of words with governmental energy, like 'reform' or 'goal'. This demonstrates a new found confidence in the rhetoric accompanied by this so-called 'can-doism'. Moreover, presidential rhetoric has become more people-orientated by addressing the fundamental characteristics of US' democracy. Presidents display themselves as defenders of the people (Lim, 2002). Within the defender framework, presidential rhetoric has also become more conversational. Speeches are nowadays more directed to plural pronouns combined with recognizable anecdotes. Altogether, these developments show signs of making communication more accessible for the voter. However, this increases the pressure on public officials to verify their actions or extensively their nonactions. Moreover, rhetoric can be used for an activist goal – e.g. mobilising the people – which in itself can be an unwilling side effect. Nonetheless, individual public officials can feel pressured in presenting ethical foreign policy as result of the accessibility of the newfound de-intellectual rhetoric. In short, the new-found informality in the speech act consequently created a gateway for actors to execute social control.

Foreign policy is seen as an inherently moral activity, however foreign policy itself is almost never ethical. Moral reasons are mostly made up *ad hoc* as ethical justification for a certain policy (Welch, 2000). For decades human rights have been the fundament of ethical justification in foreign policy. However, this does not imply that this justification is grounded in every case or that human rights are enough justification in some cases. However, O'Neill (2003) argues that there are no arguments against the capacity for states to uphold ethical standards, therefore in a liberal international order states are expected to act morally. Moreover, this narrative mainly focuses on the prevention of human suffering and the doctrine of the international community, which is made clear through the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). However, these expectations are far more challenging than they seem considering they interfere with state sovereignty (Bulley, 2010). Furthermore, the expectation of ethical foreign policy comes with some hypocrisy. This organised hypocrisy is characterised by decoupling of organisational structure and behaviour (Lipson, 2007). This implies that an administration can uphold certain values, whilst not always acting according to them. This does not necessarily become a problem. Internal structures within organisations can still symbolise conformity, yet inherently they are a facade. The clarification lies within public rhetoric considering this is the main source of information of the common voter. Argumentation is a meaningful element in the transfer of information, even though more importantly is the linguistic way these arguments are communicated.

The relationship between verified action and rhetoric is visible, however the relation to rhetorical change and the aforementioned pressure is still quite unclear. One of the drivers behind foreign policy change can be activism. Mass media, public opinion or even individual public officials are storytellers in the values of the targeted activism (Olsson & Hysing, 2012; Soroka, 2003). Foreign policy attitudes are grouped into particular partisanship, ideology and demographic characteristics, however a group with a certain combination of factors can feel the need to voice their opinion on a foreign policy issue. Mass media can influence the way these public officials are judged by issue-priming, which inherently creates a lot of external performative pressure on these officials (Soroka, 2003).

Targeted activism deliberately engages in pressure increasing strategies, which is defined by Hintz (2018) as outsider activism. New technologies have created a new form of activism through the internet. This type of activism is more transparent than it has ever been before. Different modes of activism like dialogue and publication can impose a whole new kind of pressure on public officials by advocacy groups. Au contraire, this type of activism can be prone to fake news or alternative facts. Beyond this aspect, public officials are pressured to counter this information, especially because activists can benefit from the great number of internet users (Denning, 2001). Consequently, public officials adapt their rhetoric in the hope to contest this disruptive activism. This research will test the rhetorical change in presidential speeches, presumably as a consequence of the pressure from targeted activism.

### *1.2 Scientific & Societal Relevance*

Krebs & Jackson (2007) argue that rhetorical interplay can provide leverage for analytical outcomes. This language-focused mechanism can show steps behind political influence. Rhetoric as political analysis can both focus on the transition of values and the transition of power, which exceed boundaries of mainstream theories. Public rhetoric was always seen as a casual consequence from the top-down (Krebs & Jackson, 2007). However, political drivers behind foreign policy can break with this perspective and show that rhetoric can be a reflection of the bottom-up (e.g. social movements which mobilise support). Furthermore, the maintenance of power relies on its legitimacy, and that legitimacy itself can only be established through rhetoric. Rhetorical analysis has hardly induced any causal status, except for constructivist literature. However, the main puzzle here has been why norms emerge and actors might obey them, to which they develop shared understandings and consequently normative claims (Checkel, 1998; Finnemore & Sikkenk, 1998). Here, the particular role of rhetoric in the causal mechanism can be groundbreaking, considering this is not a mere analysis of norms but more a linguistic perspective on researched territory. Moreover, the current analytical arena of rhetoric mainly focuses on the strategic uses, however the mechanism can be far more than that (Krebs & Jackson, 2007). The exposed mechanism could both be used for political gain and to embrace political concerns that arose through targeted activism.

This research can aid in finding recurring patterns and if necessary break with them. Both activism and presidential campaigning can gain from these insights. Mediated messages seem to have little effect of issue-priming, so this research could guide targeted activism in messages that initiate rhetorical change. This way targeted activism has a greater voice in the political debate, and consequently can ask questions that are sometimes overlooked in political institutions. Moreover, presidential campaigns can analyse which changes had the most effect, and so implement them into their campaigning strategy (Zarefsky, 2004). This can indirectly influence popularity ratings of a president or presidential candidate. The focus of this research lies within the rhetorical debate and can therefore assist settling part of the rhetorical transformation. The unit of analysis is relatively specific, however can be a piece in the puzzle for the larger picture.

### *1.3 Research Design*

The research will be based on language philosophy, political hypocrisy and presidential rhetoric. Habermas' theory of communication will be taken as a baseline combined with contemporary insights on political speeches. Thereafter, methodology will be outlined together with further operationalisation for analysis. This research takes a deductive coding approach to establish the linguistic distribution in the units of analysis. The next chapters proceed to investigate two cases – Libya and Bahrain – considering rhetorical change during the Obama administration. This chapter includes the effectiveness of targeted activism and the distribution of normative language in Obama's speeches. I fill the scientific gap by including a multi-case analysis within the time frame of one administration. This type of research would increase the knowledge in the credibility of presidents during periods of crisis/conflicts. The relationship between activism and rhetorical change could be more broadly laid out as a result of multi-case research. The last chapter will conclude my findings and discuss opportunities for further research.

## Theoretical Framework

The introduction has shown that, presumably, activism does pressure governments in committing to norms by taking action. Moreover, in some cases the government does not take action, however, still incorporates those values incorporated in the targeted activism. This research will focus on the rhetoric of presidents in those cases. The theoretical framework is based on the theory of communicative action by Habermas (1989). Furthermore, I will show how political hypocrisy is like a continuum and in what way political hypocrisy is embodied in presidential rhetoric. This literary overview is finalised with my own argument for cases of nonaction considering that the scientific literature shows a puzzle in typical validation of nonaction. In what way the literature can be empirically tested, will be discussed in the next chapter.

### *2.1 Linguistic Validity & The Moral Authority*

Habermas begins his analysis by discussing the foundations of theory of communication in a dialogue between Mead and Durkheim. According to Mead (1934, 40), language is a medium for the rule of social behaviourism, which expresses itself in the sociocultural form of life. The differentiation in language does both create a different type of individual as a different type of society. The foundation for his theory lies within linguistic interactions – in which two parties react to each other and behave according to their relation to one another – combined with symbolic behaviour, which asks for a reconstruction of the traditional perception of language. With his nonreductionist approach, Mead shows that language can turn into behaviour, primarily based on the idea that language is publicly accessible – e.g. broadcast of presidential speeches. Language coordinates goal-directed activities of different subjects along with indicating a form of socialisation of those same subjects. However, not all interactions are merely on the level of complicated language. Signal language – like one-word expressions – do not influence behaviour as much as Mead implies. On the contrary, gestures seem to release a greater ‘trigger’ mechanism. Language is a complex medium, which can create different paradigms. Habermas points out that the system of language is differentiated, which indicates that interactions can be characterised by complex combinations of symbols and linguistic content – so-called symbolic structures<sup>1</sup> – these characteristics in themselves can vary independently from their linguistic features. Language should, therefore, be interpreted as a distinction between a medium for reaching understandings and a medium for coordinating actions (Habermas, 1989, 23).

Moreover, extralinguistic concepts – like identity and social integration – can be adopted into behavioural schemes by symbolic structures, especially those of the self and society (Mead, 1934, 152). This process goes beyond language as a medium for reaching understandings, but looks into socialisation as well. For example, ‘A requests something from B’. This implies that (1) A is entitled to make this request and (2) B is obligated to lend assistance. This type of interpersonal relationship is characterised by its asymmetrical form of power. B is, in his own way, free to respond both negatively and positively to A’s request, however A’s request does imply a binding factor. The responding party (B) could question these expectations by also questioning its validity. Essentially, the questioned validity claim of the binding power is subject to the sense of reason; if reason argues in favour of the request the response will be positive, and vice versa. The sense of reason in interpersonal relationships is not an empirical matter, but more a matter of morality. For example, many individuals do condemn whale hunts without knowing the ecological consequences, however, purely because it strikes as unethical. The responsive party – in the interpersonal relationship – understands its role in comparison with the normative claim that members of a social group can have different expectations; one is

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<sup>1</sup> Physical combinations of realised patterns via symbols.

entitled to request something and one is obligated to meet legitimate expectations. Thus, communicative acts can coordinate actions via a rationally motivated agreement (Habermas, 1989, 30). These intentional sentences do not directly align with communicative goals. Their messengers are primarily competent speakers, who announce their own actions and additional – positive or negative – consequences. The mere function of the hearers is to draw personal conclusions and predict changes from the message of the announcement. For instance if activist groups announce public protests, the responsive party can decide to either take part in the protest or stay home. Either way, the conclusion is based on the validity of the announcement and the prediction on the protest's effectiveness. This mode of language does not have a direct binding effect considering the speaker cannot guarantee the hearer's actions following the message, however the validity claim also relies upon normative rightness and not the truth alone. According to Mead, norms can take effect in the form of social control. This depends on the degree to which the messengers can predict the attitude of the others. The normed expectations determine the interpersonal relationship, even more, the ability of someone to conform to those expectations. Additionally, the posttraditional understanding of norms does imply that the structure of the lifeworld<sup>2</sup> is differentiated and therefore individual interests can be diverse. Besides, Habermas' perspective mainly focuses on the interpersonal relationship between individuals. This raises the question in what way communicative action is representable on the group-level.

Durkheim's theory of religion, contrariwise, focusses on collectiveness of different groups. This theory does not cover the mere day-to-day communicative action, even so, it does elaborate on the group structure that is absent in Mead's theory. It also identifies a prelinguistic root of communicative action with a symbolic character (Habermas, 1989, 46). This would imply that language developed from nonverbal action, like hand gestures. Mead, as previously mentioned, implies that in the case of interpersonal activities cooperation requires a measure of social control. However, norms in these cases do not claim validity just because of the threat of sanctions; those sanctions would force the hearers into submissiveness instead of normative rightness. Here is when Durkheim's theory comes into play. In this theory, the symbolic interaction – as in the aforementioned prelinguistic root – develops into grammatical speech; both grammatical speech and normed expectations complement each other to produce linguistic structure and the foundation for normatively guided interaction (Durkheim, 1953, 73-79). This will be the starting point for all sociocultural development. The relationship between the normed expectations and their consequences is a positive one, which means that behaviour conforming to the norms is rewarded and behaviour opposing the norms is condemned. The disapproval is often followed by sanctions given by the moral authority. Therefore, politicians fear disapproval of the moral authority for this could reposition their place within the social group. The moral authority is a rather vague concept, however the key here is that they adhere to moral facts, which are (1) a mark of the impersonal that is inseparable from the moral authority and (2) a trigger of conflicting feelings in the individual (Habermas, 1989, 48). Morally normed expectations are directed at all members of the community and so this universality can make them seem impersonal. Therefore, public officials could dodge justification by hiding behind this universality. Moreover, the individual who acts morally has to submit to this moral authority, which causes ambivalent feelings between the obligation and the pursuit of the morally good (Durkheim, 1953, 70). This structure is what Durkheim calls 'the Sacred'; the normed expectations are combined with a certain authority and therefore creates a collective identity – also explained in the following quote. The theory, however, only applies to religious groups, nonetheless it could also be implied to other sociocultural groups.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The lifeworld may be conceived as a universe of what is self-evident or given, a world that subjects may experience together.

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary groups often have religion-like structures considering that they pursue a common belief.

“Collective representations originate only when they are embodied in material objects, things, or beings of every sort – figures, movements, sounds, words, and so on – that symbolise and delineate them in some outward appearance. For it is only by expressing their feelings, by translating them into signs, by symbolising them externally, that the individual consciousness, which are, by nature, closed to each other, can feel that they are communicating as a unison. The things that embody the collective representations arouse the same feelings as do the mental states that they represent and, in a manner of speaking, materialise. They, too, are respected, feared and sought after as helping powers.” (Durkheim, 2005, 42)

I would argue that the main difference between Mead and Durkheim consists of the path to normative consensus. Mead, on the one hand, argues that the normative authority is a representation of the concept of ‘me’, which, as mentioned before, is a very basic sense of expectations to one another (Mead, 1934, 195-200). However, this concept pushes both participants into a deterministic role; the ‘me’ is expected to maintain its communicative role and the other is compelled to uphold the former expectations (Habermas, 1989, 59). This performative attitude is not a rule of thumb in communication – for example, both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ can be seen as valuable answers without upholding the expectations of the ‘me’. Durkheim, on the other hand, focuses more on the group identities than on individual expectations. The normative authority, here, is a representation of the structure of the group, which are – as quoted out of Durkheim – cumulative external expression of feelings converted to symbolic interaction (Durkheim, 1953, 78). Nonetheless, this does not explain the multiplicity of institutions that the world knows as consequence of symbolic interaction. Durkheim argues that the collective identity is a consequence of religious symbols and rituals that are characterised as unity-bringing. However, situational interpretations of the group identity are fed by worldviews and not exclusively religious symbols (Habermas, 1989, 56). Still, I would argue that Mead and Durkheim have one major similarity; they both proclaim that the normative authority executes social control. Communicative interaction and the threat of sanctions carries out this social control. I would like to open up their theories to new perspectives – like the way worldviews influence interpretations of the group. For example, patriotism in the US is not merely the attitudes of multiple individuals, but an expression of a group identity. Nonetheless, this identity is not rooted in religious rituals, but more in tribal history. Most of all, behaviour – that is in disagreement with patriot norms – is frowned upon and responded to by sanctions considering the individual’s position in the group.

In a basic sense, normative language considers a distinction of members of the group and others – so-called us versus them. The relationship between normative authority and their social control have been exposed, however, for the sake of politicians committing to norms they do not enforce, I must take a look in what way this is expressed in a linguistic manner. According to Habermas (1989, 61-72) normative language is delivered by (1) normative, (2) evaluative and/or (3) expressive sentences. These are nondescriptive sentences that reproduce the content of a descriptive sentence. Normative sentences are characterised by the application of a norm in a situation, also known as an ought-sentence. These sentences can only preserve meaning by implementing the speaker-hearer relationship. Moreover, they mostly display the group identity, for example: ‘We are *ought* to carry out A in situation x’ or ‘I am proclaiming the *norm* that we have to do B’. These examples show that norms are carried out by the first – singular or plural – person and therefore members of the group. Evaluative sentences consist of a past verb or particle, looking back on the descriptive sentence. The speaker can express an attitude towards the descriptive sentence by manifesting some internal connection to the norm, for example: ‘It *was* wrong how we handled A’ or ‘We regret we have *done* B

in situation x'.<sup>4</sup> Expressive – or performative – sentences, on the contrary, imply that the speaker performs a speech act together with the hearer(s), which in itself is related to social norms like orders, warning, privileges, etc. These sentences consist of (a) a first-person pronoun, (b) a performative verb and (c) an indirect object – probably a personal pronoun in the second person. Expressive sentences likewise show group identity of us versus them by talking in the first-person. Many of these sentences can be found in electoral campaigns, because they are made to show the expression or performance of the electoral candidate, for example: “I like Ike” (Eisenhower, 1952), “Yes we can [do it]” (Obama, 2008) or “I’m with her” (Clinton, 2016). However, one cannot ascertain that the speaker truly believes what he/she is saying, which creates a problem in sincerity of the speech act.

## 2.2 Political Hypocrisy

This raises the question in what way one can distinguish sincerity from a facade. Insincerity does not automatically imply falsehood, but more an indifference to truth. Language is multi-interpretable and in its way, as previously discussed, connected to the individual’s perspective guided by the group identity. Inventive images can trigger one’s imagination, however from an Orwellian perspective this is mere ‘gumming together’ of certain sections of words that in their translation have lost their realistic pattern – e.g. analogy, metaphor. Political language is often too brutal for hearers to receive, therefore the speaker tries to distance himself by using vagueness and euphemisms (Orwell, 1968). Still, not all political language consists of insincerity. Chandler (2003) argues that certain policy fields ask for a sense of responsibility; a finger to point to. If there is no clear assigned governmental body, consequently, the rhetoric will be without responsibility. In the last few decades, governments have introduced new foreign policy initiatives to act in the interests of others, instead of national interests. This shift can firstly be identified in the US intervention in Kosovo in 1999, but is continued in other major international involvements like Iraq and Afghanistan. These claims to fight for individual rights rather than state sovereignty have introduced a new discourse for moral grounding. The idea that individual rights are a moral duty implies that it is a responsibility of everyone (Chandler, 2003). Consequently, this has led to an interventionist approach, which involves simplistic perspective of Western states as the liberator and non-Western states as a predicament. Moreover, international organisations are rather vague – like Orwell predicted – in their moral responsibility. Although human rights are seen as moral duties, there is no political institution actually accountable. Additionally, this ‘ethical’ foreign policy is based on moral recognition rather than moral responsibility, which leaves it open to hypocrisy.

Finnemore (2009) argues that this new focus on morality in the international realm is rather strange, given that international politics were always immune to norm internalisation. However, globalisation and the digital age have made it more difficult to turn a blind eye. Unipoles, like the US, have the urgency to make proclamations of moral values to legitimise their policy. This *ad hoc* approach creates an inconsistency in promises and policy – e.g. democracy promotion, human rights. Pronounced strategies of moral values, too, seem to contain inconsistency; in their entrepreneurial role, unipoles can claim morality, however, they do not always like the outcome of the associated policy (Finnemore, 2009). In the case of democracy promotion, Western states do not always like the outcome of elections in newly founded democracies, like in the case of Palestine in 2006. Here, the Western states were faced with a dilemma: either uphold their moral stance and be discontent with the outcome of the elections or take a hypocritical standpoint and create an inconsistency between their rhetoric and actions. This inconsistency is a key element in hypocrisy. Moreover, the urge for personal heroism to take the lead in national elections also plays a crucial role (Runciman, 2010, 217). The

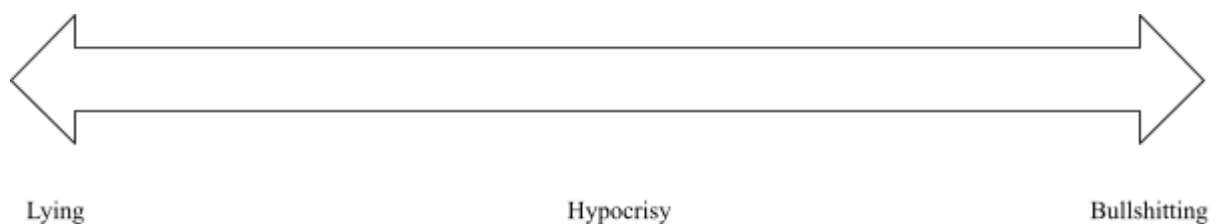
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<sup>4</sup> In Italics by Habermas.

opposition, as well, likes to portray hypocritical personal failings of the executive power for their own electoral gain. Therefore, hypocrisy – in the domestic sphere – can be seen as an aspect of the political game, which is a rather new perspective on the matter.<sup>5</sup>

I have established that political hypocrisy is an active part in domestic rhetoric, which mainly focuses on foreign policy. Strategic hypocrisy can also be seen as a continuum consisting of (1) lying, (2) hypocrisy and (3) bullshitting (Graph1). Firstly, lying is a speech act to deceive the audience into thinking the act is based on truthfulness (Mearsheimer, 2011, 17). Rhetoric and policy, in this case, can be aligned. Nonetheless, the rhetoric does not always refer to a certain policy but can be a fictitious story to amplify parts of the speech act – e.g. Halbe Zijlstra & the dacha of Putin.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, I have established that hypocrisy is the discontinuity between rhetoric and policy. Here, the state has failed to live up to its moral proclamations (Glaser, 2006). The moral claims are seen as superior to the associated action, therefore – according to Habermas’ normative language – normative sentences will be in abundance compared to performative sentences. This will be to cover up the lack of action. Thirdly, bullshitting can be seen as no clear boundaries between deceptive representations and sincere representations; in some cases, neither for the audience nor for the individual speaker. This deceptive behaviour responds to the ignorance of reality rather than a misinterpretation of reality (Seymour, 2014). The main goal of the government is to ‘fake’ their way through this inconsistency, and therefore it is assumed that performative sentences will increase to imply that everything is under control. In some cases, politicians spin their story to fit the normed expectation. The distinction between the concepts of hypocrisy simply exists of (a) only a fictitious speech act, (b) an equal speech act that hides the actual action or (c) an equal speech act that lacks moral justification for the action. The continuum therefore starts at falsity and makes its way up to substantial deceit, therefore I argue that the inclusion of that deceit is a main element in modern presidential rhetoric. The deceit, in a way, gives a free pass to dodge genuine criticism by blaming incomplete factors. Moreover, the audience can lose themselves in this alternative linguistic reality that is created by the individual speaker, however this does not imply that the inconsistency is unanswered by all parties in the domestic sphere.

**Graph 1. The Continuum of Political Hypocrisy**



<sup>5</sup> In the international sphere, hypocrisy can have major consequences that can take people’s lives, however this research only focuses on the communication between the political leader and his citizens. Nonetheless, the gravity of these consequences should not be waived. See also; Egnell, R. (2010). The organised hypocrisy of international state-building. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 10(4), 465-491.

<sup>6</sup> For the completeness of the continuum, lying has been introduced, however, is in this research irrelevant for analytical purposes and can therefore be set aside.

### *2.3 The Influence of Targeted Activism*

A clear moral stance on the international level can distract from domestic issues. The domestic sphere is characterised by negative attitudes towards the government created by polarisation, declining party membership and falling turnouts at the polls and elections (Burden, 2000; Pharr et al., 2000; Chandler, 2003). Focus on foreign policy can distract from failing domestic policy and create a sense of agreement and a sense of purpose. Opinion studies have shown an increase in foreign interests since the mid-nineties. They try to demonstrate that public opinion established pressure on the sitting government, considering that the left/right framework has collapsed and so demand for universal moral values has increased. However, these opinion polls further show that the interest in foreign policies is mostly based on national interests instead of cosmopolitan beliefs that their political leaders ethically claim (Chandler, 2003). Moreover, polls after 2002 have shown a decline in wanting 'to take an active part in world affairs' and more importantly show an increase in 'staying out of world affairs' (The Chicago Council, 2012). Therefore the mechanism behind the pressure on political leaders for a more 'ethical' foreign policy must lie elsewhere.

Otherwise, critics of hypocrisy do actually use a method of pursuing disagreement with the current policy or governmental body. Here, the government is seen as a moral opponent that is in need of a morality check, and therefore pressure is added to speed up the process (Glaser, 2006). Activists have held the state and their citizens accountable for their lack of action in transnational networks, and have, therefore, created a separate transnational network of their own. These activist groups are highly motivated by values instead of professional norms or 'constraints' that politicians often declare. Moreover, they strategically 'frame' certain issues while simultaneously blurring boundaries between the domestic sphere and the international realm, repeatedly claiming that the multilateral order eases transnational action (Keck & Sikkenk, 1998, 199). Non governmental organisations (NGO) have taken over the human right discourse and, frequently, hold up a mirror to policy makers reminding them of their moral stance. However, they do see their own work as non-political, because they are only describing information of rather disturbing facts – e.g. abuses, seal hunt, etc. Through this method, universal moral values are presented as independent, nonetheless NGOs have publicly asked the government to act. This has led to an inequitable perspective of condemnation and punishment that has been translated into foreign policy – e.g. the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Other factors in an interventionist approach have, consequently, been ignored compared to the human rights discourse, like economic integration or political stability. Activist groups openly try to pressure politics by implying threats of sanctions or leverage if norms and action do not align. Moral leverage, for example, holds politicians accountable for their actions in the past, and so compels them to act accordingly in the future (Keck & Sikkenk, 1998, 201). Therefore, activist groups see their own work as meaningful by implementing ethics into the political game.

The niche of activism is targeted towards governmental bodies. This raises the question in what way these NGOs implement pressure on the government. For years, activists have devoted their time to collecting great amounts of data, which was compiled and rephrased into human rights principles. The media and politics caught up on those reports and used them as evidence for their arguments. This information exchange is a core element in the relationship between former actors (Keck & Sikkenk, 1998, 2). However, human rights principles are not always rigorous, and therefore NGOs felt the need to report their data into clear principles. The campaigns themselves are essentially new ideas, however NGOs frame them so that they fit into universal beliefs – e.g support human rights, save the environment. They support their data with visual representations and as a result they create a 'compassion fatigue' with the audience. This visual rhetoric is borrowed from the advertising industries and has since the 1990's consciously been used as a public strategy (McLagan, 2003). This

so-called 'witnessing' creates moral authority on the claims that were made by the activists, and so politicians do not call the shots on what is shown to the public and what is not. This creates pressure on those politicians to react to the disturbing images that the activists have made public. Therefore the activists create salience in the political arena instead of a mere public opinion. These campaigns are successful due to the open domestic structure. For example, the human rights movement has successfully convinced the government of the US to increase human rights concerns in military and (international) economic policies. However, framing is quite difficult as an international movement because the 'witnessing' strategy has to speak to a variety of political and cultural communities. Nonetheless, this universalizability is also a component of the success of targeted activism.

#### *2.4 Validating Nonaction*

As previously discussed, both politicians and activists take a part in communicative action. Especially activists, create public pressure to uphold international norms, therefore adopting the role of moral authority. Via their normative language and universal principles they asked the government to act. The government, however, does not always agree with these principles or suggested action. I have established that if the principles and governmental actions do not align it can be labeled as political hypocrisy, which is executed by rhetorical hypocrisy or bullshitting. Up until now, it was given that the government always takes action, even if they do not agree with the principles of targeted activism. In those cases, an increase in performative sentences is shown. This research, however, focuses on the cases in which the government did not budge under the pressure of targeted activism. Nonetheless, they do uphold the same principle but have for reason(s) decided not to take action. According to Habermas (1989, 31-40), announcements are a mere instrument to influence actions or intentions of the hearers. Political announcements, like presidential speeches – in contrast to the first concept of communicative action – are not intended to motivate mutual understandings. A political speech act can rather be seen as a power claim. Thus, norms within these speech acts need to take into account every member that is involved. Importantly, the norms in question should protect the interests of those involved, so that there is as little contestation as possible. Only with a thorough consideration, norms can be seen as valid. Thus, politicians are pressured to elaborate on their choice of nonaction. I argue that they use normative language in the same way. However, they emphasise more on the normative sentences than on the performative sentences, considering that there is little to no performance to refer to.

## Operationalisation & Research Design

In the last chapter it was established that targeted activism creates pressure on the government to act and that the government reacts by validating their nonaction via normative language. The increase in pressure from targeted activism, the way normative language is structured in presidential rhetoric and the case selection will be discussed in this chapter. This will be specified on the basis of concepts that were already discussed in the theoretical framework. Moreover, the three types of sentences in normative language will be operationalised together with linguistic components. These components could be possible deceptions. However, these deceptions will be recognised by incorporating them into the coding scheme. The theoretical concepts will be operationalised with clear demands for our data analysis.

### *3.1 Pressure from Targeted Activism*

The theoretical framework established that targeted activism creates pressure upon the government to act. Therefore it is crucial to know if in our cases there was successful campaigning to create salience. Keck & Sikkink (1998, 201) distinguish five elements for activist networks to succeed; (1) framing debates and getting issues on the agenda, (2) encouraging discursive commitments from states and other policy actors, (3) causing procedural change at the international and domestic level, (4) affecting policy, and (5) influencing behaviour changes in target actors. Only (1) and (2) will be relevant for this research, considering that it only focuses on the input of activism and not procedural outcome. Framing can be done by transforming other actor's understanding of their identities and interest towards the issue. This implies that issue campaigning does not solely contain new cases but can also reframe old ones. The key element, here, is information. Nonstate actors usually consult alternative resources compared to governments, giving a new perspective on the issue. Activists generate media attention to create awareness towards certain issues. From that position, the activist network tries to persuade governmental actors by influencing their discursive position (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, 17-25). The largest global human rights organisations are Amnesty International and Human Right Watch. They both have a large group of financial supporters based in the US (Amnesty, 2011; Human Right Watch, 2011). Moreover, they serve as independent and transparent NGOs, which makes them applicable for this research. Considering that the effect on the dependent variable – presidential rhetoric – needs some time to develop after the independent variable – pressure from targeted activism – and that the period between these two variable must be close to each other for optimal analysis, only campaigns with a maximum of one year prior to the first presidential speech will be taken into account. Moreover, Wayback Machine (2023) shows that the structure of the websites – with the topics of Libya and Bahrain – are only online from 2021. Nonetheless, both organisations show that they were campaigning during the Arab Spring (Amnesty, 2023; Human Right Watch, 2023). This implies that this research will not test the amount of campaigns, but the effectiveness of campaigns via salience that they presumably create. Thus, the Google searches for the cases of Libya and Bahrain by the American citizens will be tested. The following chapter will show Google searches within our time frame and discuss possible assumptions. However, this research does not analyse the concept of campaigning as a whole, which presumes that the variable is included in the research yet not tested as a hypothesis.

### *3.2 Normative Language in Presidential Rhetoric*

The theoretical framework has shown that normative language consists of three types of sentences: (1) normative sentences, (2) evaluative sentences and (3) expressive or performative sentences. These types of sentences are nondescriptive sentences, which refer to descriptive sentences and reproduce

their content. Descriptive sentences can be seen as a nonjudgmental statement – a mere description of the obvious. The evaluation or moral value is added later on in the nondescriptive sentences. For example, saying ‘the ball is red’ has no moral judgement on either the ball or the colour red. One could probably argue that the sentence is stating a fact. However, that would refer to the extralinguistic concept of truthfulness, and considering that this research focuses on different perspectives of what is truthful it should reject such a simplistic claim of descriptive sentences. Taking a Wittgensteinian perspective, descriptive sentences can be characterised by an ‘already solved problem’ that is arranged in such a way that the information is previously known (Gert, 1997). Nonetheless, descriptive sentences are also subjects of the validity claim mentioned in the theoretical framework. The sentences must be comprehensible with reason for them to claim validity (Papastephanou, 2004)<sup>7</sup>. For example, ‘the sky appears pink’ will be contested, because any well thinking being can come to the conclusion that the sky is actually not pink. However, in the case of presidential speeches, it could be concluded that the goal of the speech act is to present (possibly) valid information, therefore the analysis will not focus on a test of validity but more of a linguistic approach of the speech act.<sup>8</sup> I would argue that, in their simplistic way, descriptive sentences always describe what is or was, and therefore contain a nonfuture verb. Nonetheless, descriptive sentences can describe a future scenario, as long as they do not contain any expression or norm in the description. In this case, the descriptive sentence does contain a future tense. The dimension of descriptive sentences does also include a unique form of description; describing about describing. These sentences do contain a future tense, however, describe the descriptive sentences that will later occur in the communicative action. For example, ‘I am going to show you how *S* is occurring’. This does not comply with the simplistic definition of descriptive sentences considering the description is yet not occurring. However, I would argue that this can be labelled as metadescriptive since the sentence is describing what is going to be described. This exception will also be labelled as a descriptive sentence in the analysis. In short, descriptive sentences can be recognised by their nonjudgement, in a way that describes the states of affairs occurring in the world. These sentences must be distinguished from nondescriptive sentences, however have no further purpose for the analysis.

Nondescriptive sentences, on the contrary, do contain normative language, which is formed by the normative authority. Firstly, (1) normative sentences use language in a prescriptive manner. It contains an ought-verb that refers to the social norm. For example, ‘We must do x’ and ‘We should do x’ both refer to the same social norm even though they have a different verb. The finite verbs have a simple past future tense and consequently emphasise a norm. These normative speech acts preserve their meaning by asserting an interpersonal speaker-hearer relationship (Habermas, 1989, 65). Both the speaker and the hearer expect each other to uphold the norm, and therefore implement it in their communicative action. Presidential speeches do not have this interpersonal relationship as a result of their monological nature. Nonetheless, it could be argued that these speech acts indirectly react to the pressure by targeted activism as mentioned in the theoretical framework. Thus, the government and the activist both create a mutual expectation to uphold the norm, which creates normative sentences in their speech acts – apparent by their normative verbs, like ‘ought’, ‘should’, and ‘must’. (2) Evaluative sentences, in a way, are an extension of normative sentences. Like all nondescriptive sentences, they refer to a descriptive sentence. However, in contrast to normative sentences, they

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<sup>7</sup> See also; Habermas (1979) on ‘descriptive fallacy’ in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>8</sup> I understand that a certain political group claims ‘alternative facts’ and in that way contest the validity of public information that the government puts out. Nonetheless, considering this is a small number of citizens that contest this validity claim, I will disregard the ‘alternative facts’.

contain a past verb or particle. This verb reflects on the situation in the descriptive sentence – e.g. ‘We have done a good job’. The evaluation can be seen as an internal connection with a norm. The norm is not excessively mentioned in the sentence, however is implied in the sentence. For example, in the case that a government wants to protect noncombatants and they (un)purposefully harm them in battle, they will consequently show regret in their communicative action. Moreover, (3) expressive or performative sentences are (semi-)equally structured like an evaluative sentence, however they present what is or will be instead of what was. They start with a first-person pronoun, and are further constructed by a performative verb and indirect object. Later on, I will argue that not all performative cases start with a first-person pronoun but also with its transformation, however this will be a sufficient starting point. Here, the speaker fulfils or represents a fulfilment of a norm - e.g ‘I love x’. Performative sentences are not a part of the true-false framework considering actions that are carried out are seen as commands. These sentences describe the present or future and thus have an internal connection with the intention and meaning of the norm, which is demonstrated by the first-person pronoun (Habermas, 1989, 63). Up until now, this research has taken a simplistic approach towards sentences in normative language, nonetheless there are some components that can trouble the analysis at first sight.

All normative language can be subjects of (a) proportional, (b) expressive<sup>9</sup>, and/or (c) illocutionary components. (a) Proportional components are characterised by asymmetry. All nondescriptive sentences – which are inherently connected to a descriptive sentence – refer to the same pronouns. Proportional components, however, can transform the pronouns to create ‘superficially’ new linguistic content (Habermas, 1989, 65). For example, ‘I like to do y’ and ‘She likes to do y’ can refer to the same person. Here, the pronouns were transformed from first-person singular to third-person singular. This can be expanded further while preserving the propositional content, for example ‘I am reporting to you that she likes to do y’. The great question with any pronoun would be: to whom is the original pronoun referring? Moreover, this can be open to any embedded content. For example, in the sentence ‘A always goes jogging on Saturdays’ and ‘If A goes jogging on Saturdays, you cannot have seen A in the supermarket that day’ the assertion of the former is embedded in the latter. This example implied the embeddedness of a descriptive sentence, however can also be implied in proportional normative language – also explained in the following quote.

“Proportionally differentiated language is organised in such a way that everything that can be said at all can also be said in assertoric form. Thus even those experiences of society that a speaker has in a norm conformative attitude, and those experiences of his own subjectivity that a speaker has in an expressive attitude, can be assimilated to the assertorically expressed knowledge that comes from an objectivating treatment of external nature.” (Habermas, 1989, 66)

(b) Expressive components are a structure of emotional experiences. The integration of expressions, like regret or promises, actually are an assimilation of norms. These express themselves in the sense of obligation. For example, with the assertion ‘x’, someone will tell them they *believe* in ‘x’, and if someone *regrets* ‘y’ then they will *apologise* for ‘y’.<sup>10</sup> These expressive components can be found in normative language, especially performative and evaluative sentences. However, this assimilation only works if there are clear boundaries between the internal and external world – the distinction between the beliefs of someone that asserts facts and the facts themselves (Habermas, 1989, 67).

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<sup>9</sup> From now on, every ‘expressive’ will refer to the component and every ‘performative’ will refer to a sentence containing normative language.

<sup>10</sup> In Italics by Habermas.

Facts, like aforementioned, are a perception of truth and can only be tested by the validity claim. However, these sentences are not descriptive sentences subservient to the validity claim, yet more a nondescriptive sentence disguised as a descriptive sentence. In some cases, a norm is implied in the sentence. The normative verb is missing from the sentence considering that the norm is stated as a fact or description. In that case, the normative verb can be added as a finite verb; transforming the former finite verb into a past participle. This should not change the essence of the sentence considering that the implied norm is now exposed. This test can only be done with sentences that include a present tense. Later on, I will discuss implied norms in past tenses. These sentences will also be labelled as a normative sentence. In this case, as the speaker does not immediately communicate the essence of the sentence and therefore blurring the boundary between the internal and external world, I will categorise it as 'subtext'. (c) Furthermore, illocutionary components are a representation of intent, therefore often combined with performative sentences. Most of the time, they are recognizable by the first-person pronoun, however, they can describe a double meaning. For example, 'Are there any napkins?' implies both the knowledge on the amount of napkins and the intent to request a napkin. This can be distinguished from 'subtext', because it does not imply a single meaning of the sentence but more an intent along the essence of the sentence. The purpose of illocutionary components is to produce utterance by expressing desires, requests and intentions. It is a form of self-presentation that displays a linguistically explicit manner that normative speech acts have a relation to social norms via warning, orders, concessions, etc (Habermas, 1989, 68). In this way, the speaker can – depending on the normative context – motivate the hearer to accept his offer through the so-called illocutionary force. Especially in monological speech acts, the speaker can use these components to reach a rationally motivated understanding with the hearer. This is essential in validating nonaction considering that the speaker tries to uphold valid arguments for nonaction while still supporting the social norms. The components can deceive from the actual responsibility that politicians have as a member of the social group. They can use components as signs of 'togetherness' to include the group as a whole, and therefore share their responsibility. One could argue that this definition of illocutionary components comes close to that of expressive components. Concurrently, I would argue that both could be present in the same sentence. This operationalisation should not link one component with one type of sentence. They can appear both individually and simultaneously. The structure of components in normative language have presented the problem of embeddedness. By recognizing these components, concepts like optically assertoric sentences, subtext and double meaning have deepened the analysis of normative language.

H1. Presidential speeches, that mainly try to cover nonaction by hypocrisy or bullshitting, will contain more normative sentences than performative sentences.

### *3.3 Case Selection*

Importantly, this research must consist of cases in which the government did not take action or hesitated to take action in the early stages. This will create a suitable environment for the analysis. The cases selected are the aforementioned Libya and Bahrain in the timeframe of the Arab Spring, which – as mentioned in the introduction – both raise questions in US (interventionist) foreign policy compared to other cases of the Arab Spring. Their similarity makes them applicable for a Qualitative Case Analysis (QCA). However, given that the cases do not concur at the same time, it must be considered that one can influence the other – in this case the speeches on Libya can influence the speeches on Bahrain. The problem of internal validity can be corrected by implying the difference in H1. will be less significant for the latter case. Moreover, it can be assumed that data quality is high considering that these speeches are a primary source, and in particular meet the conditions described in the theoretical framework. Obama has mentioned Libya in four speeches, which all have a short

time frame between each other (Obama, 2011a; Obama, 2011b; Obama, 2011c; Obama, 2011e). Still, he only mentioned Bahrain in two cases (Obama, 2011d; Obama, 2011f). Nonetheless, this data does concur within a short time frame compared to the Libya case, and it contains a substantive speech at the United Nations. The time frame ends with a White House statement as a secondary source. For the integrality of the research that will be considered the end of our time frame. All data will be analysed by a linguistic content analysis, taking into account the conditions as mentioned above.

## Historical Overview

In the last chapters, an outline for analysis was shown. The theory of communicative action has shown that norms are created by group identity, which, in its way, is controlled by moral authority (Habermas, 1989). Linguistically, this is expressed in normative language. I presume the emphasis lies on the normative sentences instead of the performative sentences considering that the US president ‘makes up’ for failed foreign policy by ‘bullshitting’. To analyse the presumptions, this research has taken two cases in a period of conflict that were seen as unsuccessful – Libya and Bahrain. These cases both have a unique relationship with the US, however, both ended up as ‘failures’ in the US’ fight for universal rights. This chapter will lay out the relationship between the US and the cases prior to the conflict and in what way targeted activism pressured the US government into taking action. Moreover, this chapter will give background information on the US foreign policy in the Middle East.

### 4.1 Conflict in Libya

In 2004, Muammar al-Qadhafi and Tony Blair had sent an international message shaking each other’s hand in Tripoli, to make an end to the diplomatic warfare between Libya and the Western World. This was received as a triumph considering that business was possible with the cooperative autocrat (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). Qadhafi had declared himself commander-in-chief decades earlier, which had made an end to the Libyan monarchy. In the 1970s, the pan-Arab ideology was in an uprising. However, Qadhafi has developed his own ideology for the state of Libya. His ‘Green Book’ was meant to directly rule the masses. It implied the so-called ‘collection of republics’, which contained a form of democracy that Qadhafi called *Jamahiriyah*. The ideology would include citizens’ congresses at different levels of governance and a nationalised – self-sufficient – economy (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). However, his ideas were mostly led by fear. Gaddafi created a large-scale military apparatus and evicted any Western military presence from Libya.

In 2011, the Arab Spring began with two states – Tunisia & Egypt – successfully ousting their former rulers. Nonetheless, in the case of Libya, similar protests were followed by quick repression of the authoritarian leader. Qadhafi ruled Libya for decades with an Italian fascist-like structure (Anderson, 2011). Private ownership, free press and retail trade were prohibited. This, combined with artificially induced scarcity, created circumstances for immense corruption. Qadhafi reacted to the protests by distributing the armed forces. On 21 February 2011, Libyan pilots flew to Malta claiming that they were ordered to bomb the protesters in Benghazi. Later, the French president Sarkozy sided with the Libyan government claiming that ‘we recognise states, not parties’ (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). However, his popularity plummeted in the polls and, consequently, the French president allowed an intervention in Libya. The geopolitical arena was also in distress with Libya’s neighbouring countries – Egypt and Tunisia – both preoccupied with their domestic shifts. Moreover, Arab countries were hesitant in supporting a Western-led intervention. However, the unpleasant relationship between Qadhafi and wealthy members of the Arab League pushed them into approving a no-flyzone in March of 2011 (Noueihed & Warren, 2012).

Domestically, the state of affairs was still unstable. The missing rule of law and governmental cohesion would complicate the transition towards democracy (Anderson, 2011). Libya needed to first form the basic principle of a state before implementing any further political agenda. Qadhafi’s policy and international sanctions had isolated Libya from any democratic linkages. Moreover, the void that Qadhafi left behind created a power vacuum for new leaders to ‘misrule’ the state. Moreover, the lack of institutions has complicated the process of constitutionalization. In its authoritarian rule, Qadhafi

did not only construct the weak political framework, he was the framework itself (Boduszyński & Pickard, 2013), therefore leaving nothing behind after his exclusion. The Libyan transition is characterised by its weak institutions or even more by the absence of international democratic frontrunners. So, the question arises why the global hegemon, the US, did not intervene as would have been thought.

The Obama administration refrained from intervening until there was no choice. At first, the administration preferred diplomatic means and economic sanctions. However, the isolated regime along with Qadhafi's readiness to initiate artificial scarcity made the sanctions have little to no effect. Qadhafi threatened to harm his own civilians. So, Qadhafi and the West had implemented a cease fire, nonetheless Qadhafi went against this agreement. The West followed with a warning of military intervention on the rebel-held city, Benghazi, nonetheless Qadhafi's forces were still closing in on the city (Pinto, 2012). The UN Security Council demanded both a cease fire and a no-flyzone. The Obama administration needed to rebalance their foreign policy as it was focused on the Arab Spring as a whole instead of the specific case of Libya. The president himself noted that the international community fell short, and therefore the US needed to intervene to prevent thousands of Libyans from being slaughtered (Pinto, 2012.). This foreign policy was characterised by a new doctrine of international consensus and multilateral action. However, this cannot be the only factor in the so-called 'sluggish' intervention (Pinto, 2012). The protests made clear that Qadhafi was not afraid to use violence against his own people. This raises the question why the US had rapidly intervened in cases like Egypt and Tunisia in contrast to cases like Libya.

#### *4.2 Conflict in Bahrain*

The citizens of Bahrain – inspired by the successful protests of the Arab Spring – took to the street on 14 March 2011 to mourn Hani Abdulaziz, who had been shot by the police. The protesters demanded the abdication of the Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalid. Not more than a week later Saudi Arabian troops were instructed to contain the protests, representative of the Bahraini-Saudi powerhouse of Sunni Islam (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). Doctors were forbidden to treat the wounded activists. Any Shi'ite citizens with small ties to the protests got fired or suspended from their job. Bahrain seems like a relatively small country with not more than 1,5 million citizens, however – next to the aforementioned religious power relationship – Bahrain also has a financial advantage with its seat in the geopolitical oil region. The US has tried to uphold strong ties with Bahrain to influence the region, which layers the interests of the conflict. Historically, the Bahraini Sunni monarchy has treated its Shi'ite citizens as inferior. Bahrain Shi'ites have long voiced their discontent, however – with Iran being the only Shi'ite state in the region – their protest gets connected to the Iranian regime. Bahrain, has known a strong Shi'ite citizens group long before the rise of Iran's theocracy. They call themselves *Baharna*, which means 'of Arab descent and followers of Shi'ism since the early days of Islam' (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). The *Baharna* narrative was suppressed during the colonisation by Portugal from 1529 till 1602 and never completely found its way back.

Bahrain's economy had quickly diversified in the 1970s considering that the state – compared to the region – struck oil quite early, and so ran out of oil quite early too. Bahrain had to invest in other economic assets, which made them the Middle East's financial capital before Dubai (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). Moreover, political awareness was very common in Bahrain, which has known political and labour activist uprisings every decade in the twentieth century. In 1973, the ruler of Bahrain even experimented with parliamentary politics. However, this project was shut down two years later, considering that the outspoken elected politicians were a threat to Al Khalifa's continuity. Consequently, the ruling family implemented a State Security Law, which contained political freedom

and jailed thousands of Bahraini. The request for support by the Al Khalifa family has created a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, who both try to expand their religious and geopolitical influence (Noueihed & Warren, 2012).

In 2000, the Bahraini ruler introduced the National Action Charter (NAC) with a rather vague set up, which did not explicitly define the roles of the introduced bicameral system. Nonetheless, the reform was seen as a reconciliation between the government and the Shi'ite, which led to the endorsement of the NAC by referendum. This raises the question how the NAC could have led to the overall discontent as the basis for the protests in 2011. In 2002, the main opposition party – Al Wefaq National Islamic Society – had boycotted the elections, because they were dissatisfied with the role of the National Assembly in the legislation. Moreover, in 2006 a scandal came out that displayed the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs accepting bribes to ‘manipulate the outcome of the elections’ (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). This was a major issue at the time that had led to the results of the election of that year. Al Wefaq National Islamic Society had, remarkably, chosen to participate in this election. Most of all, because the party needed formal registration to be acknowledged as a legal entity. This created discontent among voters for the reason that the discontinued boycott was seen as support for the new constitution. Moreover, the attention going towards the scandal and party protests was distracting from the ‘real’ problems going on in Bahrain – e.g. poverty, unemployment (Wright, 2010). In 2011, the financial crisis had created a dilapidated housing environment for the Shi'ite communities. What once started as a reconciliation with the NAC, did not seem to have unified the country but instead created discontent with the majority of the population. Therefore, the news of protests in Tunisia and Egypt had created a framework for disapproval in an already unstable political environment (Noueihed & Warren, 2012).

The Bahrain-US relationship dates back to the end of the second World War. Bahrain preferred a strong international ally considering the regional threats – e.g. Saddam Hoessein's Iran. The US, themselves, saw an advantage in installing their naval headquarters in Bahrain, which based the relationship on security and defence interests. In 1991, the US and Bahrain signed a ten-year defence pact that was renewed in 2001, which was further extended with five years due to 9/11. This shows the strength and confidence in the relationship that the states had to one another. Moreover, Bahrain had deployed forces to help the US' mission in Afghanistan. This shows that both states openly support each other on a military basis. Remarkably, this strong relationship did not eventually push the US in responding quickly after the Arab Spring protests. Especially since the involvement of Saudi Arabia made it into a proxy conflict. ‘Stopping terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons’ was a priority to the US foreign policy. However, Iran had both presumably possessed nuclear weapons and aided the Shi'ite protesters in Bahrain. The involvement of a Western country would presumably intensify the conflict. The focus on the Arab Spring at first had an optimistic narrative of democracy promotion. However, by the time Bahrain came into the uprising, the US had already failed in its mission, and US – foreign policy – values were questioned (Atlas, 2012).

#### *4.3 US Foreign Policy in the Middle East & Public Awareness among American Citizens*

Modern US foreign policy usually develops along two dimensions: cooperative and militant internationalism. Cooperative internationalism is orientated towards common goals, and with whom those common goals can be achieved. The key element here is global solidarity. On the other hand, militant internationalism concentrates on reaching certain foreign objectives, either peacefully or by force. This assertive position reasons that weaknesses and lack of credibility can create challenges by aggressive opponents (Rathbun et al., 2016). However, values are trans-situational, which implies that experiences in our personal lives could influence judgement in political domains. Therefore, less

proximate values could shape policies in international affairs. Value centrality in political judgement can mobilise the people, therefore it is common for politicians to include them in political speeches. Furthermore, Rathburn et al. (2016) found that personal values play a role in understanding world politics, especially values that are connected to a broader group. However, other literature emphasises the dependency of civilians on elite politicians to shape their judgement (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005; Sobel, 2010). One of these actors to shape judgement of politicians is targeted activism.

The operationalization explained that there is little to no accessible data in the campaigns of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Therefore, this research assumes that the campaigns influence public awareness and so citizens' curiosity in the conflict. The literature showed that an increase in salience takes place before the so-called 'bullshitting'. Any increase after the start of our speech data can be influenced by the presidential rhetoric itself. The analysis looks at the two cases separately instead of cumulative considering that the two cases have a different time frame. Remarkably – in the case of Bahrain – the increase in Google searches takes place a significant amount of time before the first introduction by Obama on 19 May 2011. This increase peaks at 13 February 2011 – more than three months before the aforementioned speech (Appendix 2; Graph 3). The number of Google searches steadily goes down after the 13th of March of that year. It can be assumed that in the case of Bahrain, this idea does uphold. In the case of Libya it is rather complex. The data shows that the first and largest peak takes place three days before the introduction by Obama on 23 February 2011. This does comply with the assumption. However, it could be argued that the short timeframe between that peak and the first speech is caused by the prior media attention about Obama's speech. This aspect will be discussed in the last chapter. Still, there are some smaller peaks later in the time frame. Most of these increases are caused by the presidential rhetoric itself considering they take place on the day or the day after the preceding speeches. Moreover, the other peaks could be explained by the continuous media attention. However, this research does not examine the relation between media and public opinion. In short, both cases show an increase in Google searches prior to the first document in the data. This abides by the presumed correlation of targeted activism and public pressure on the US president.

The US and the Middle East have had a long and rocky relationship that is characterised by military intervention, anti-islamism and proxy wars. Ever since 9/11, US foreign policy drastically took an interventionist turn. The national trauma has led to an international war on terror, which in many cases had multiple reasons for intervention – e.g. oil, threat of nuclear weapon (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). The US had chosen new top priority enemies leading up to the intervention of Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases, US foreign policy was driven by - what later on was called – deceiving information, with the US imposing its Western ideas into the Arab world. The relationship with the region was damaged, which had led to anti-Americanism. The democratic administration from 2008 was bound to repair this by implementing idealist elements to US foreign policy. However, the focus on democracy promotion and universal rights asks too much from the US considering the domino effect that is the Arab Spring. The Obama administration had to choose their battles. In what way they rhetorically validate their choice by still upholding those values, will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Research Findings

The theoretical framework has shown that normative language is formed by the group identity, which is in itself controlled by the moral authority. However, not all language comes from sincerity. This political hypocrisy can be distinguished in two ways; (1) political leaders agree upon certain norms and they take action inappropriately to those norms, or (2) political leaders agree upon certain norms and they do not take action according to those norms. This latter asymmetry causes political leaders to produce a validation of nonaction in their rhetoric, which is the object of interest in this research. The last chapter assumes that targeted activism generates this political hypocrisy. Moreover, the operationalisation presumes that the political hypocrisy can be measured by the construct of the normative language; in other words, an increase in normative sentences over performative sentences. This chapter will summarise the findings of our data. The findings will go through the distribution of type of sentences in Obama's speeches on Libya and Bahrain to create a content framework. Moreover, the speeches will be compared to one another to test H1. Conclusions will be made in the following chapter.

### *5.1 Rhetorics in Obama's Speeches*

The data selected for this research all takes place in the year 2011. That year is characterised by a great awareness of the Arab Spring and therefore it is included in the presidential rhetoric. The data is coded via a deductive approach according to the coding scheme (Appendix 1). This research will compare the distribution of descriptive sentences to nondescriptive sentences. Accordingly, the distribution of the nondescriptive sentences – or normative language – will be analysed to test H2. The first speech is a national press release on 23 February 2011, in which the president is accompanied by secretary Clinton. Her function in this conflict is described in the communicative act, especially in relation to the president. President Obama refers to the secretary of state solely as a colleague, who engages in decision, or an inferiority, to which he issues commands (Obama, 2011b). This is shown by the position of Clinton in the sentences as either the subject or the object – e.g. “Secretary Clinton and I” (Obama, 2011b). This is quite an interesting dynamic, which is seen as hierarchical yet cooperating. Therefore, secretary Clinton is posed next to the president to show a solid bloc, yet she is hardly the visual material. This press release is characterised by its remarkable descriptive/nondescriptive distribution. There seems to be a majority of nondescriptive sentences (Obama, 2011b). However, this can be explained due to an absence of US intervention in the cases of Libya and Bahrain. Simply said; there is not much to describe yet. Normative sentences and performative sentences are almost evenly distributed, which is expected at the rhetorical start of the conflicts. Looking at the details, the performative sentences show a large amount of proportional components. “The United States will continue to stand up for freedom, stand up for justice, and stand up for dignity for all people”, does not include a first-person pronoun like described in the basic sense of a performative sentence. However, ‘the United States’ as a third-person pronoun does proportionally represent the ‘we’ in the first-person, and therefore this sentence can be coded as a performative sentence – with a proportional component. Further documents will also show this construction with references like ‘the American government’ or ‘my administration’. Concisely, this document will function as a baseline for the upcoming data.

On 18 March 2011, the US president put out a presidential remark on the conflict in Libya. Obama emphasised a contrast between the ‘peaceful protesters’ and Qadhafi’s ‘path of aggression’. Moreover, he highlights the US’ cooperative position by mentioning allies and international organisations – e.g. Arab League. The second speech does show an increase in descriptive sentences, as expected, by

21.43 percentage points (Obama, 2011a). Furthermore, the distribution of normative and performative sentences does seem quite similar. In both the first and second speech, the normative sentences do outperform the performative sentences. Nonetheless, the absolute difference is rather small, which means that the variation can be seen as insignificant. However this speech does show relatively more performative and normative sentences in their basic sense. “Humanitarian assistance must be allowed to reach the people of Libya” and “we will continue to help the Libyan people”, are both examples of those sentences. This bold emphasis on norms and performance could be compensation for the ‘uninformative’ White House press releases prior to the presidential remark (Wintour et al., 2011). Nonetheless, Obama’s rhetoric itself had little adjustment so far.

**Table 1. Descriptive & Nondescriptive Sentences in Obama’s Speeches on Libya and Bahrain**

	Obama1 Gr=45	Obama2 Gr=70	Obama3 Gr=23	Obama4 Gr=161	Obama5 Gr=257	Obama6 Gr=253	Totals
Descriptive Sentences Gr=511; GS=3	18	43	12	106	166	166	<b>511</b>
Evaluative Sentences Gr=33; GS=4	2	5	2	12	3	9	<b>33</b>
Normative Sentences Gr=149; GS=4	13	12	1	23	47	53	<b>149</b>
Performative Sentences Gr=116; GS=4	12	10	8	20	41	25	<b>116</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>809</b>

The third speech is a rather short document containing a low unit of analysis – N=23 (Table 1). However, it likewise contains an expected increase in descriptive sentences by 12.17 percentage points compared to the first speech. This presidential address on 19 March 2011 is characterised as a straightforward communicative act. Obama has switched in his framing of Qadhafi by calling him a ‘tyrant’. Moreover, there is an emphasis on performance, which – by Obama’s logic – is caused by the norm that ‘actions have consequences’ and so these consequences ‘must be enforced’. Thus, the performative sentences outmatch the normative sentences with an internal nondescriptive distribution of 72.73% to 9.09% (Obama, 2011e). This data does not comprehend with H2., however, it can be argued that the political hypocrisy had not kicked in yet. The linguistic focus on performative sentences assumes that the norms and actions do still align. Moreover, the US government is, so far, committed to the idea of intervention in the case of Libya. Additionally, there is no so-called ‘failure’ to rhetorically dodge considering that there is yet to be an evaluation of the intervention.

Halfway through seems to be a turning point in the data. The descriptive sentences take up 65.84% of the overall document – 25.84 percentage points higher than the baseline document and overall higher

than the previous speeches. From now on the descriptive sentences stay in a range of 64% to 66%, which will be expanded, later on, in the chapter. On 28 March 2011, Obama addressed the nation to ‘update’ them on the conflict in Libya and the US policy so far. The president is still straightforward in his performative logic considering that most performative sentences are still in their basic sense – e.g. “We will deny the regime arms” (Obama, 2011c). However, most normative sentences seem to be implied sentences – coded as ‘subtext’. In this case, a normative sentence is disguised as a fact or descriptive sentence – either because the norm is seen as obvious or to cunningly increase the rhetorical validity. Sentences like: “We have a responsibility to act”, “The United States of America is different” or “change cannot be denied”, all are structured like facts (Obama, 2011c). However, in context they present a certain norm, therefore an ought-like verb can be introduced without changing the essence of the sentence, like ‘We *should* have a responsibility to act’, ‘The United States of America *should be* different’ or ‘change *should* not be denied’. This way implied norms are exposed within the speech act. The increase in these implied norms can be clarified by the ‘justification’ of his military attacks already in play (Harris, 2011). This could either be the *ad hoc* approach or muddling through approach as described in the theoretical framework. The latter seems to be true considering that Obama does not introduce new norms in comparison to the other documents, which implies an emphasis on norms to cover up the bullshitting. The internal distribution of the nondescriptive sentences show a contribution of 36.36% of performative sentences and a contribution of 41.82% of normative sentences (Obama, 2011c). This does imply that H2. could be accepted. However, considering that this comes down to an absolute difference of three sentences, it is assumed that this document alone is not significant (Table 1). Nonetheless, it could be a starting point for the expected rhetorical change.

On 19 May 2011, president Obama was introduced by secretary Clinton in front of the State Department. This major policy speech incorporates the Middle East and North Africa as a whole, while including highlights of the cases of Libya and Bahrain. This is the first remark on Bahrain by the US president himself, instead of his press secretary or any other member of the White House or Democratic party. The fifth speech has a slight, almost negligible, decrease in the descriptive/nondescriptive distribution of 1.25 percentage point for the descriptive sentences compared to the previous document. However, as mentioned before, this is still relatively higher than the baseline document. This communicative act does have a slight evaluative nature. The president starts his speech by thanking secretary Clinton for her achievements these last few months and then starts ‘evaluating’ the Arab Spring up until that point. He began describing it as: “Two leaders have stepped aside” (Obama, 2011d). However, using past tense in the US interventions does not always imply an evaluation. Many sentences in the past tense lack an expressive component for it to be coded as evaluative, therefore the resolved<sup>11</sup> conflicts are indicated by descriptive sentences. The cases of Libya and Bahrain, however, are not resolved and therefore are significantly included in the normative language. The normative sentences still outmatch the performative sentences with an internal distribution of 51.65% to 45.05% (Obama, 2011d). The percentage difference between the normative sentences and the performative sentence has also increased by 1.14 percentage points compared to the previous document. This speech is the starting point for the inclusion of our second case; Bahrain. Assuming that the previous speeches can semantically influence the speeches of Bahrain combined with the lack of action on the case, it is probable that the case of Bahrain does not ‘start over’ in its rhetorical distribution. Moreover, this communicative act does incorporate sentences with double meaning. Normative language with an illocutionary component is difficult to distinguish from subtext. However, subtext is a misrepresentation of a fact, which is not always the case with an illocutionary

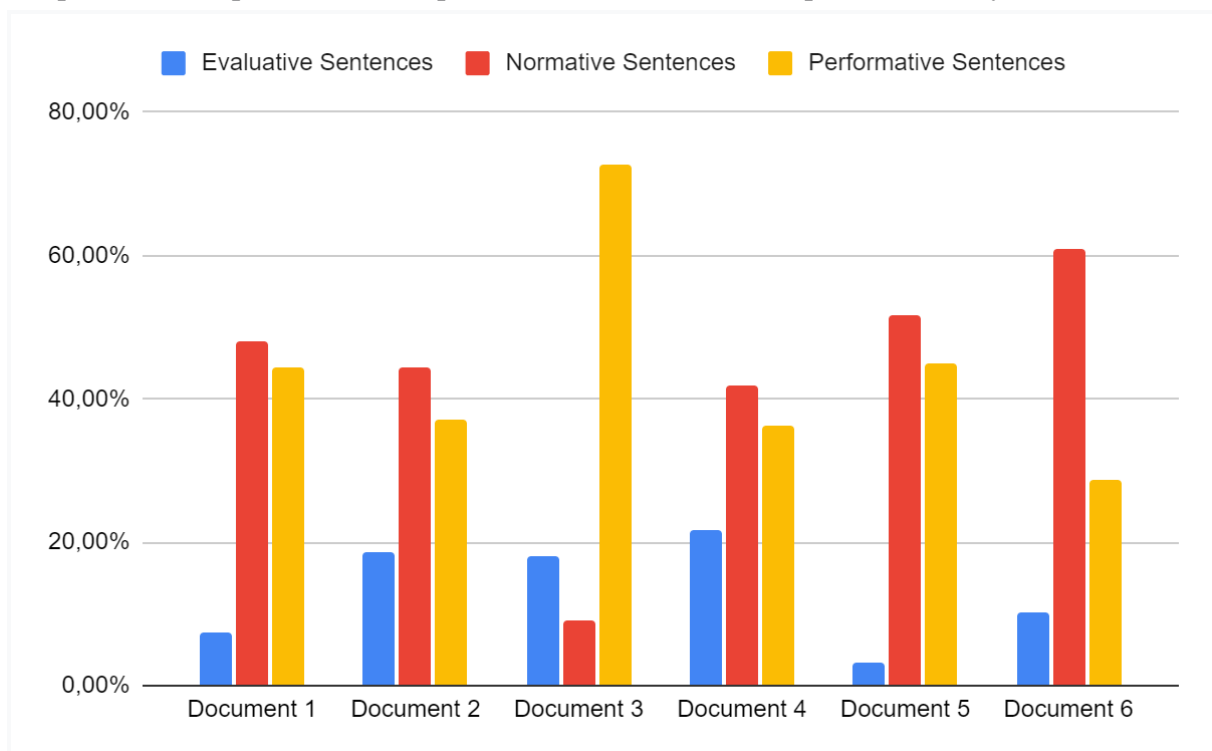
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<sup>11</sup> Resolved in the perspective of the US.

component. In the case of: ‘The question before us is what role America will play as this story unfolds’, implies both what role it *will* take and what role it *should* take. The norm, here too, is implied, however, the first question still remains after exposing the norm.

On 21 September 2011, president Obama addressed the General Assembly of the UN. This speech act is not simply directed to the American people, but also to all delegations of the UN. This international organisation does have a common goal towards peace – as Obama mentioned himself – which implies there will be an emphasis on those norms supporting the institution – e.g. “peace is more than just the absence of war” (Obama, 2011f). The last document stays within the same range of descriptive sentences with a contribution of 65.61% (Obama, 2011f). Remarkably, the data shows an extensive increase in normative sentences with addition of 60.92% . However, what is rather striking is the major decrease in performative sentences with 16.31 percentage point difference compared to the previous speech. The overall internal distribution of the normative language has a difference between normative sentences and performative sentences of 32.18 percentage points. This is a significant increase that is mostly consisting of normative language in their basic sense – e.g. “And together, we must insist on unrestricted humanitarian access so that we can save the lives of thousands of men and women and children” (Obama, 2011f). This increase in normative sentences shows there is little to no action left. Moreover, the low frequency in evaluative sentences shows that there is no expression on the action (not) taken. The administration is neither proud nor regretful on the cases of Libya and Bahrain, which assumes that political hypocrisy was at play. Furthermore, bullshitting can also be assumed considering that the performative sentences are barely linked to the normative sentences.

**Graph 2. Bar Graph on Nondescriptive Sentences in Obama’s Speeches on Libya and Bahrain**



### 5.2 Correlation Normative Language & Political Hypocrisy

The overall range of descriptive sentences reaches from 51% to 66% with a positive trend later in the time frame. This does not come as a surprise considering there is more to describe about the conflict the morer the US government is invested in it. Moreover, the evaluative sentences do not show any

significant direction in either a positive or negative trend. Both performative and normative sentences, however, do describe a certain behaviour. Normative sentences do have an overall absolute dominance over the performative sentences, but most importantly they seem to increase in percentage later in the time frame (Graph 3). The theoretical framework has shown that these norms are formed by the group identity and controlled by the moral authority. The moral authority can implement praises or sanctions according to those norms – e.g. public humiliation. I have established that targeted activism could be one of those moral authorities to which the US government adheres. Therefore, the US government will change their rhetoric to dodge judgement of the moral authority and hide their lack of justification for either action or nonaction. In the case of nonaction or ‘failures’, the US government will lay an emphasis on normative sentences considering there is little to no performance to refer to. As shown in Graph 3, the normative sentences do (1) outmatch the performative sentence in all but one document, and (2) increase over time to presumably muddle their way through a foreign policy issue.

There is a clear anomaly in the third speech. This document displays a significant predominance in performative sentences. However, performative sentences can outmatch normative sentences in cases of valid action, according to the theoretical framework. The conditions for political hypocrisy are either cases in which norms and actions do not align, or cases in which politicians do not take action for their pronounced norms. This can be expressed in hypocrisy or bullshitting. This document describes governmental action in the present or future tense with sentences like “my administration will keep the American people fully informed”, and “we are acting in the interest of the United States and the world”. (Obama, 2011e). The emphasis on valid action implies that the communicative act does not contain ‘bullshitting’ or any political hypocrisy for that matter. Moreover, the rather small frequency in performative sentences –  $N = 8$  – and normative language overall could imply that this communicative act has a more ‘announcing’ nature. Announcements – as discussed in the theoretical framework – are intentional sentences, which do not react to social control. They are a mere construct of a loose combination of words that do not assert the binding effect of the communicative act. The emphasis is not on the norms that characterise the relationship between the moral authority and its group – in this case the US government and its citizens. Announcement can be seen as ‘just putting information out there’ without the moral judgement, which does not imply without moral justification. Bullshitting does contain moral judgement by the pressure of the moral authority and is, therefore, not applicable in this situation. This document can be compared to communicative acts like White House press releases, considering they use a similar structure of language (BRON). The overall distribution bounces back to the outperformance of normative sentences in the following document assuming that the governmental action did not have contented results (Appendix 2, Graph 4). This could explain the recalled emphasis on normative sentences, considering that the government feels pressured to hold on to its norms. Therefore, it is important to take a look at the documents one by one instead of searching for a trend. With the exception of the anomaly, all documents show a dominance of normative sentences compared to performative sentences. Overall, this research can accept the H1. with the condition that the anomaly of the third speech is caused by the lack of political hypocrisy.

## Conclusion

This research started by introducing the foreign policy of the Obama administration during the Arab Spring. Their policy was characterised by the pursuit of universal rights and, paradoxically, inconsistency. The policy choices were made apparent via the speeches of the president. According to Welch (2000) foreign policy is inherently a moral activity, therefore, the choices in foreign policy are often based on ethical arguments. Nonetheless, these arguments can be made up *ad hoc*, which can create inconsistency in the speech act of the selected official. Therefore, this research has focused on the rhetoric of the communicative action instead of the policy itself. Presidential rhetoric is often characterised by informality and de-intellectualisation of the particular case (Lim, 2002). Presidents display themselves as ‘defenders’ or ‘saviours’ of common values. However, those common values are not always achievable with the current resources. This creates an inconsistency in the pursuit of values and substantial action – so-called political hypocrisy. Rhetorically, political officials have to defend that hypocrisy considering that the citizens demand transparency. According to Finnemore (2009), unipoles – like the US – have an urgency to proclaim morality to validate their actions. This research has assumed that targeted activism holds up a ‘moral mirror’ to politicians reminding them of their proclaimed morality. Political hypocrisy – as aforementioned – can be seen as a continuum of lying, hypocrisy and bullshitting. The latter is especially applicable for our research. Bullshitting is characterised by deceptive behaviour to distract the lack of morality for the action or nonaction that was taken or will be taken (Seymour, 2014). This research has chosen two cases that have shown lack of action and inconsistency in US foreign policy during the Arab Spring. Moreover, it has taken a hard look at the implementation of normative language in presidential rhetoric.

*In what way did Barack Obama's rhetoric convene in normative logic to uphold performative expectations in the cases of Libya and Bahrain ?*

### 6.1 Conclusion

Both Libya and Bahrain have a unique relationship with the US. Different in various ways, however, they both experienced the lack of US action in the quest for the same universal rights. For decades, Libya was ruled by the authoritarian, Muammar al-Qadhafi. He had created his own philosophy for the Libyan state polity in his ‘Green Book’. The political developments were mostly led by fear considering that Qadhafi increased his military and security apparatus. Moreover, the missing rule of law and governmental cohesion made Libya into a ‘failed state’ (Anderson, 2011). Internationally, Qadhafi has made a name for himself becoming a member of the African Union and the Arab League. Still, these relationships were characterised by unpleasantness (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). The artificially induced scarcity and the lack of human rights ignited the protest in 2011. The Libyan citizens demanded a stable state in which universal rights were implemented. Qadhafi, however, reacted by bombing the protesters in Benghazi. France directly reacted to the conflict, however, the US remained hesitant. Later on, the UN Security Council agreed to a no-flyzone. Nonetheless, the post-Qadhafi state still remained unstable and the Libyan citizens did not get the universal rights that they asked for. Contrariwise, Bahrain did have an amicable relationship with the US. The US had installed their naval headquarters in Bahrain. Moreover, their relationship was endorsed by a bilateral defence pact. Domestically, Bahrain has an uncommon religious distribution; a Sunni monarch and an overall Shi’ite population. Multiple actions were taken to engage the Shi’ite representation in government. However, the Al Khalifa ruler repeatedly saw this as a threat to his continuity. The Shi’ite community was suppressed, which combined with large unemployment had led to protests later in the Arab Spring. Additionally, the case of Bahrain was also characterised by the hesitant

reaction of the US, which is remarkable considering their strong relationship. The US had chosen to take a role in the background to not further intensify the conflict. Regional powers – like Iran and Saudi Arabia – had taken over. Nonetheless, the protests were about the demand for universal rights. The US stayed behind in their pursuit for universal rights, especially compared to other Arab Spring cases – e.g. Egypt & Tunisia. The intention of this research is to outline Obama's speech acts for these cases.

The research based its theoretical framework around the theory of communicative action by Habermas (1989). Simply said, language is structured to reach mutual understandings. However, this does not explain the use of extralinguistic concepts into behaviour and communicative actions. Linguistic expectations are a consequence of interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the overlap between interpersonal relationships can create a group identity. Durkheim (1953) elaborates that the relationship between normed expectations and consequences within the group is positive, therefore creating sanctions and praises. In what way each action coherents to the group norm, is determined by the moral authority. This representation of the structure of the group shows which norms should be confirmed – e.g. targeted activism to policymakers. Nonetheless, these universal concepts can be quite vague and not directly visible in the lifeworld. Therefore, all language is subjected to the validity claim; a speech act must be logical with reason for it to be accepted. Politicians, that contain bullshitting into their speech act, are masters in playing on the validity claim. This research presumes that targeted activism and the US government do confirm the same principles yet not the same action, even more, that targeted activism pressures politicians in acting upon those principles. Still, action is not always taken, and this must regardless be validated to the rest of the group – the American population. The effectiveness of campaigns by targeted activism is measured to confirm the relationship between targeted activism and the pressure on the Obama administration. This is done via Google searches on the cases of Libya and Bahrain, assuming that the searches increase as a consequence of campaigning. Moreover, Habermas (1989) shows that normative language consists of different sentences: (1) normative sentences, (2) performative sentences and (3) evaluative sentences. Each sentence has a unique linguistic structure defined by their tense and subject/object relationship. All these sentences can be restructured into proportionally different-looking sentences – e.g. subtext, double meaning. However, in their essence they produce the same semantic content. Assuming that bullshitting deceives from the lack of morality in the action by the Obama administration, (H1.) this research makes the assumption that those documents contain more normative sentences than performative sentences. Consequently, the sentences and their possible components are coded like in Appendix 1. All sentences in the speeches by Obama containing the cases – Libya and Bahrain – have been coded and grouped by document.

Remarkably, both cases show an increase in public awareness before the first unit of analysis in the time frame. Google searches on the case of Bahrain, especially, showed a significant increase almost two months prior to Obama's remarks in his speeches. Likewise, Libya also showed a significant increase in Google searches, however, within a closer time frame compared to Bahrain (Appendix 2; Graph 3). Increases in Google searches later on in the time frame can be explained as an increase of salience from the national speeches by Obama. The graph shows that any peaks in Google searches after 23 February 2011 are clustered within a week after the selected speeches. The distribution of language within the documents is tested via deductive coding. Overall, the majority of the text is coded as descriptive sentences. These are irrelevant for the analysis. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that these descriptive sentences slowly increase considering that there is more to describe later in the time frame. For (almost) every document, the normative sentences outmatch the performative sentences; some more significant than the other. The difference in percentage points

does also increase, which implies that normative sentences slowly take up a larger space of the normative language. However, this was already expected considering that the first case can influence the second case. Both cases did not occur separately, because the time frames overlap. Worth mentioning is the third document in the series. This document shows a significant use of performative sentences compared to normative sentences. After a content analysis of the document, it is shown that the linguistics is focused on performances that are actually happening or are going to happen. This implies that the Obama administration took a turn by aligning their rhetoric with their action, which implies that there was no bullshitting in that case. Nonetheless, the document taking place after the ‘exception’ does show signs of bullshitting, which means that the performative expectations were not upheld. In short, H1. can be accepted considering that the third document did not meet the standards of bullshitting. This research has shown that targeted activism does create pressure on the Obama administration during the Arab Spring. Moreover, the Obama administration responded by emphasising their performative expectations and universal values with normative logic.

## *6.2 Discussion*

Considering the time frame of this research, it embraced an operationalisation of campaigning as the effectiveness of human rights organisations by public awareness. Unfortunately, this does not directly measure the pressure of targeted activism on the US government. This can be resolved in two ways. Firstly, to take a deep dive in the archives of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. They do have campaigns documented, however, these were not easily accessible. This will take up more time yet will increase the internal validity of conception of pressure by targeted activism. Secondly, as mentioned in the analysis, media attention can influence the Google searches that were measured. The amount of time that a case is mentioned in – for example – the news can spark the citizen’s curiosity in the matter. From another perspective, targeted activism can also influence awareness, and so, increase its media attention. Therefore, I would argue to incorporate media attention as a mediator variable to create a complete picture of the scientific puzzle. Other variables could also be controlled for – like political preferences and age. Here, I am assuming that certain voters are more ‘interested’ in foreign policy considering that those universal norms are coherent with their political ideology – e.g. Democrats. Moreover, age does influence the way media is used – for example, social media is mostly used by younger generations while traditional media is consumed by older generations. For H1., it can be argued to increase the sample size for an improved external validity. The sample size must fulfil similar requirements like the Arab Spring; considerably a domino-effect-like series of conflict with an emphasis on or demand for moral values. I would argue to expand the sample with documents/speeches from other democratic presidents considering that they include elements of idealism in their foreign policy. This research has given an overall insight in presidential rhetoric that validates nonaction, however, more insights lie on the horizon for further research.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1: Code Scheme*

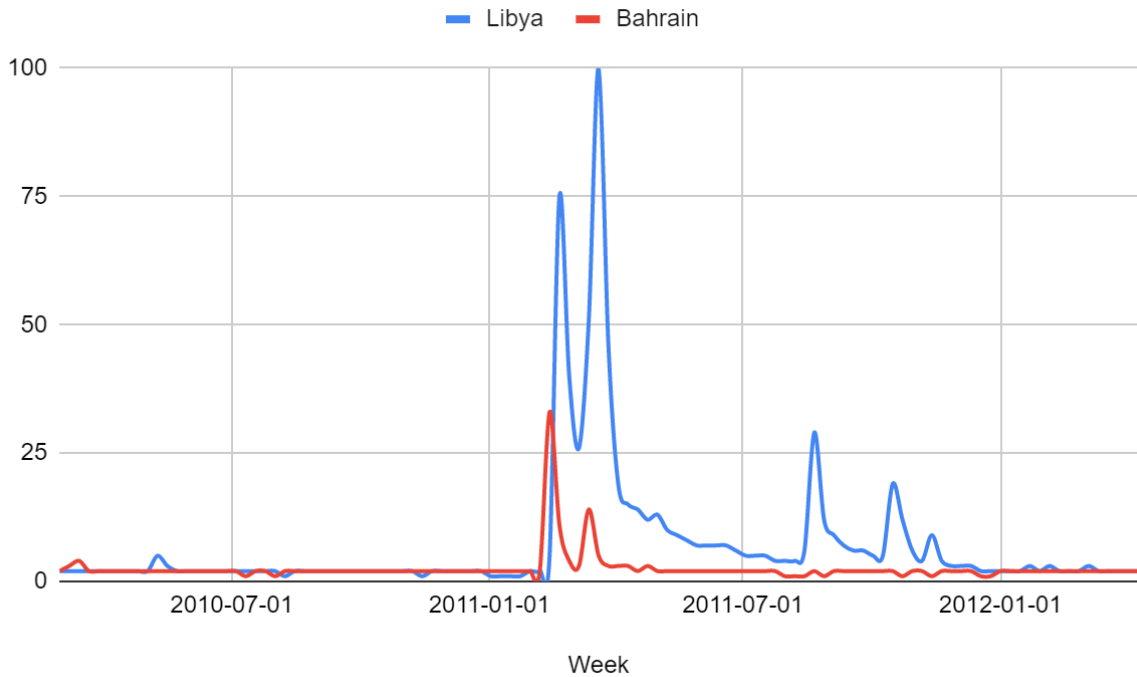
**Table 2. Coding Scheme of Descriptive and Nondescriptive Sentences**

<b>Code Group</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Descriptive Sentences	Descriptive Sentences	Des_Sen	A descriptive sentence in its basic sense
	Meta-Descriptive Sentence	Des_Meta	A descriptive sentence describing a descriptive sentence
	Hypothetical Descriptive Sentence	Des_Hypo	A descriptive sentence containing a future tense
Evaluative Sentences	Evaluative Sentences	Eva_Sen	A evaluative sentence in its basic sense
	Proportional Evaluative Sentence	Eva_Prop	A evaluative sentence containing a proportional component
	Subtext Evaluative Sentence	Eva_Sub	A evaluative sentence disguised as a descriptive sentence
	Double Meaning Evaluative Sentence	Eva_Dub	A evaluative sentence containing an illocutionary component
Normative Sentences	Normative Sentence	Norm_Sen	A normative sentence containing a proportional component
	Proportional Normative Sentence	Norm_Prop	A normative sentence containing a proportional component
	Subtext Normative Sentence	Norm_Sub	A normative sentence disguised as a descriptive sentence
	Double Normative Sentence	Norm_Dub	A normative sentence containing an illocutionary component
Performative Sentences	Performative Sentence	Perf_Sen	A performative sentence containing a proportional component
	Proportional Performative Sentence	Perf_Prop	A performative sentence containing a

		proportional component
Subtext Performative Sentence	Perf_Sub	A performative sentence disguised as a descriptive sentence
Double Performative Sentence	Perf_Dub	A performative sentence containing an illocutionary component

Appendix 2: Graphs

**Graph 3. Google Searches of Libya and Bahrain in the United States from 23 February 2010 to 11 April 2012**



**Graph 4. Difference in Normative and Performative Sentences expressed in Percentage Points**

