

Gaining Geopolitical Support

Social movements do not operate in a vacuum, and they do not fulfill their goals on their own. As a number of pioneers in the field of movement studies have demonstrated, activists operate in contexts populated by a range of political players, including government officials and the media, who have the potential to help or hinder the realization of their goals (Lipsky 1968; McAdam 1999 [1982]; McAdam et al. 2001; Meyer 2004; Tilly 1976[1964]). Accordingly, while the process of *resource conversion* discussed in Chapter 6 is necessary for diaspora intervention against authoritarianism, it will only get activists so far. This chapter demonstrates that just as local- and national-level social movements are bolstered by the backing of their proximate governments, the media, and civil society (Amenta 2006; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; McAdam and Boudet 2012), so too is transnational diaspora activism facilitated by the *geopolitical support* of international actors such as states, media, international NGOs (Keck and Sikkink 1998), and multilateral bodies dedicated to regulating the behavior of states.

Geopolitical support is necessary for diaspora activists to fulfill their goals for several reasons. First, even if activists return home to instigate insurgency or channel weapons homeward (Anderson 1998; Hockenos 2003), they cannot take down powerful authoritarian regimes on their own. Instead, they need the backing of states and institutions with the capacity to counter authoritarian regime violence and support rebel groups directly (Betts and Jones 2016). Second, diaspora members are literal outsiders to the homeland, separated from their allies by borders and distance. Activists who seek to intervene in their home-countries by remitting and volunteering are therefore reliant on gatekeeping authorities who control the movement of people and resources in geographical space. Of course, activists can often find a way around these gatekeepers through smuggling and circuitous routes. Nevertheless, states can

significantly hinder remittance-sending and cross-border travel by making it an illegal or otherwise impossible ordeal for ordinary people.

Geopolitical support is of particular importance for groups that have become stereotyped as threats to national security, as with Libyans, Syrians, and Yemenis in the United States and Britain (Godwin 2018; Shain 2007: 49). When activists seek to fundraise for insurgencies and regime change – as when Golda Meir raised \$50 million from her supporters in the United States in 1948 to purchase arms in Europe for Haganah militants in Israel (Shain 2007: 50–51) – their actions will be greatly facilitated by a permissive political environment. Otherwise, movements seeking to amass resources for radical change overseas may pay a steep price. For Arabs, Muslims, and many South Asians, the transfer of funds to the region for political change, or even simply for charity, has been another story altogether. As sociologist Ali Chaudhary's (2021) research on Pakistani immigrant organizations across the United States, Britain, and Canada reveals, remittances for charity have been caught in the war-on-terror dragnet, which has imposed significant burdens and barriers on cross-border relief efforts.

For Middle Eastern emigrants, both clandestine and legal measures have prevented the channeling of funds to insurgents categorized as inimical to host-country interests since at least the 1960s (Pennock 2017). While persons of Arab heritage have not been the only activists targeted by state surveillance and harassment for their ties to foreign liberation struggles, historian Pamela Pennock (2017: 143) observes that “The government’s persecution of Arab Americans [has been] unique in its aim to link their activism to foreign terrorism.” Furthermore, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, security agencies in the United States and Britain paid even more scrutiny to funds moving from diasporas to Islamist actors and networks at home (Horst and van Hear 2002: 49). Today, as members’ home-country ties render them as suspects in the war on terror, “the voice of Arab Americans is muffled or magnified” according to host-country geopolitics and its interplay with events in the region (Pulcini 1993: 59). Because Middle Easterners in the West are particularly vulnerable to scrutiny by security agencies for channeling resources homeward, they require a significant degree of geopolitical support to help level what is a deeply unequal playing field for transnational activists.

In light of the importance of geopolitical support for diaspora activism, this chapter demonstrates how two kinds of geopolitical support, in conjunction with resource conversion, facilitated diaspora movement interventions in the Arab Spring. The primary form of geopolitical support that facilitated activists’ transnational interventions was the backing provided by *states*, and especially activists’ host-countries, via their foreign policies and practices in activists’ homelands. Diaspora movements that gained the assistance of powerful states during the Arab Spring acquired unique kinds of leverage, including policies aimed at protecting their allies and sanctioning their enemies, the provision of

intelligence and logistical support, and favorable votes in the UN Security Council, as the Libyan case shows. As Betts and Jones (2016: 9) argue, host-country support “animates” diaspora movements by elevating their voices in the political arena. I also argue that friendly states other than the host-country – such as Libya’s border-sharing neighbors of Egypt and Tunisia – also facilitate the literal movement of diaspora movements by leaving border crossings open, or by turning a blind eye to the movement of people and resources across borders. As transnationalism scholar Thomas Faist (2000: 218) argues, remittances may appear ubiquitous, but they do not flow over a “magic carpet” in deterritorialized space. Accordingly, state support is key in fostering activists’ abilities to remit and volunteer on the ground.¹

This chapter also demonstrates how assistance by influential third parties in geopolitical conflicts and crises – including the media, international NGOs, and multilateral bodies – further facilitates diaspora activism. For instance, when media organizations deploy reporters to cover activists’ home-countries, journalists are more likely to grant diaspora members a voice as translators, interpreters, brokers, and experts. While much of this work may occur from behind the scenes, the adoption of activists into the process of media coverage elevates their abilities to channel favorable attention to their allies. Another important form of third-party support stems from international bodies and organizations that aid dissidents and civilians in need (Keck 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998; J. Smith 2004; Tarrow 2005; Tsutsui 2018), such as Amnesty International, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the International Criminal Court. Agencies such as these create political opportunities for movements by defining, recognizing, and adjudicating transnational rights (Kay 2011). Such organizations can also go a step further by making demands on states and other decision-makers to change their policies and practices. Moreover, when these agencies take steps to intervene in a diaspora’s home-country, diaspora activists gain transnational political opportunities to work with agencies as remitters and volunteers, as well as to pressure relief providers to do more for activists’ constituents.

The challenge for diaspora movements in gaining geopolitical support is significant, however. As political scientist Clifford Bob (2005) argues, movements do not automatically receive support from international actors merely because they mobilize on behalf of the right causes, such as humanitarianism, freedom, and democracy. Instead, they have to market themselves to fit with the goals, agendas, ideologies, and interests of competing actors in the international

¹ Of course, external state support causes its own problems. It can compromise the legitimacy of local movements and channel mobilization into serving the interests of great powers; see Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) discussion at the end of chapter 5 and in the conclusion in *Activists Beyond Borders*. That said, during periods of crisis and contention, the more support movements receive from states, the more formidable they become in fulfilling their short-term goals. See also Hironaka (2005) for the effect of external support on civil wars.

community. Research shows that activists can influence this process by deploying discursive frames and messages that resonate with trending geopolitical interests and values (Bob 2005; Koinova 2010a; Shain 1999). Yet, even when activists do all the right things, positive attention is far from guaranteed. The reception of states, media, and international bodies to revolutionary situations and humanitarian crises in today's world is embroiled in long-standing geopolitics that lie outside of activists' immediate control. Furthermore, international organizations like Human Rights Watch, which goes to admirable lengths to address abuses underway, simply do not have the capacity to channel attention and resources to all causes equitably. Diaspora advocates can certainly coax and cajole their elected representatives to pay attention to them, particularly when presenting themselves as voting constituents. However, activists do not themselves generate major shifts in foreign policy, reporting, or aid simply by virtue of their strategic savviness. Instead, the extent to which they do depends in large part on the *long-standing geopolitical orientation* of outside actors to the home-country, the interests and arguments that win out *internally*, within institutions, and the *adaptive responses* of political actors to emergent conflicts over time. It is only after diaspora movements are invited "in" by powerholders that they gain a seat at the table to weigh in on coverage, policy, and aid delivery. Those who are left out will instead face steep challenges – if not outright blockages – in mobilizing for rebellion and relief at home.

This chapter demonstrates how Libyans in the United States and Britain gained strong and sustained geopolitical support in 2011 that facilitated their full-spectrum intervention at home. Syrians faced more obstacles in intervening because geopolitical support was far weaker in Britain than in the United States initially. These obstacles increased for Syrians across both host-countries, however, after geopolitical support for regime change declined across the board and shifted to priorities dictated by the war on terror. In contrast, Yemenis gained only weak geopolitical support for their cause from each host-country and other third parties for the revolution's duration. Low-level assistance significantly limited these activists' efforts to represent the cause to outside decision-makers and remit aid. This chapter explains these dynamics in detail below.

7.1 STRONG GEOPOLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

The progress that the Libyan regime had made in rejoining the international community by 2010 – giving up weapons of mass destruction, paying a settlement to the Lockerbie victims, and participating in the US-led war on terror – was lost after Gaddafi and his son Saif refused to budge on protesters' demands during the early days of the Arab Spring. In light of Gaddafi's disproportionate response and threats against external powers (Bassiouni 2013; Noueihed and

Warren 2012; Pargeter 2012), the emergent revolution gained geopolitical support for intervention on the basis of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, which legitimizes intervention in order to stop genocide and mass killings. World powers imposed sanctions on the regime almost immediately after Gaddafi's forces began killing protesters, and the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1970 on February 26, 2011 to condemn the killings. Leaders of the revolution's newly formed and underequipped National Transitional Council (NTC) called on the international community to impose a no-fly zone, and the European Parliament called for the NTC to be recognized as Libya's legitimate government. The Arab League followed suit, excluding Libya from its meeting to decide on their position and agreeing to back the Security Council's decision.

On March 17 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973, which demanded a ceasefire and authorized the international community to use any means short of a ground occupation to protect civilians. No country opposed the measure, though five members, including Russia and China, abstained from voting. The resolution also authorized NATO forces to launch the first-ever intervention explicitly based on the Responsibility to Protect doctrine to stop atrocities. As Gaddafi's forces shelled Benghazi, French fighter jets helped launch an international offensive to push regime loyalists back. NATO subsequently took command of multilateral naval and air operations. By the end of March, the NTC published a manifesto for liberal democracy in Libya, and France recognized this body as Libya's legitimate government-in-waiting. The rebels now had the support needed to defend themselves and win the ground war against Gaddafi's forces.

The role of diaspora movements in the revolution was bolstered by this geopolitical support because US and British government officials not only met with diaspora members to listen to their grievances, but invited them into the intervention and policymaking process and relied on them in an advisory capacity for the duration of the war. These working relationships brought outside activists in and deputized them as representatives and brokers almost immediately. Sarah, a member of the Libyan British Relations Council, recalled,

We did lobbying in Parliament, we'd see 10 Downing Street, MPs [members of Parliament]. *Every week* there were meetings. They were asking about [the revolution], they wanted to see what was going on, briefings. It was amazing. We had a lot of support from that side. The MPs, they were more interested in the information gathering, and things that we talked about were creating humanitarian corridors, getting aid in. They wanted information and we were happy to provide it or provide them with contacts. So we definitely had support in the political establishment.

Mohammed in London also attested how the sympathies of the British government enabled them to work with officials on related issues. This allowed activists to suggest favorable policies and actions in line with governmental agendas.

The Foreign Office took us seriously. They were quite helpful. The fear I had is that I would call them and say, look, we have someone who wants to defect within the embassy but he needs certain guarantees, and I thought [this one important official] would not reply to me. But actually he would say, okay, come over, let's discuss it. And that's why I say I think they made a decision early on that Gaddafi's time was up. What we did wasn't to make the decisions *for* them, but make it easier for them to connect all the dots.

Thanks to the British government's geopolitical support, Mahmud A. also worked closely with a high-level British official to track down regime assets and transfer them to the NTC.²

[One official] was sort of the go-between for us and the Foreign Office, and he came to be very close to the Libyan community. That's why we came to him, and we start offering him every help they wanted from us. We worked as a team with all of them because we were trying to monitor the movement of money and companies linked to certain [Libyan] assets. We Libyans were aware of all these things – they don't know everything. So I was contributing mainly by giving them information. We didn't want the assets getting in the wrong hands at the time of the confusion.

On the US side, Rihab of the Libyan Emergency Task Force (LETF) reported that, initially, the response of officials was that they had no interest in Libya. However, after the situation on the ground escalated, departments across the broader establishment became eager to meet, receive information, and hear activists' arguments for intervention. Rihab said, "We didn't strategize for these things to happen. These people emerged as being interested in this issue naturally. We didn't line it up that way." Tamim of the LETF echoed this point, expressing how the support they received was widespread across different government branches and institutions.

We started setting up a strategy and working on developing relations with the White House, with the State Department, with Congress, the House and Senate, and with other organizations that could support and help our effort. It must be said that the welcome and the open arms that we received from all of these entities – NGOs, think tanks – there was some great people who helped us out, organizations as well as individuals. First of all, they opened their doors to listen. Second, they opened their doors to ask how can we help, how can the US government help Libyans? What is needed on the ground? Tell us. And that was at all levels. *At all levels*. This was an amazing experience for me.

² Colin Warbrick's (2012) research on Britain's response to the NTC reveals that even though the Cameron administration did not officially recognize the NTC as Libya's government-in-waiting until July 28, 2011, this was a highly unusual gesture of support for a government that did not yet represent or have control over a state. He writes, "After 1980 until the Libyan case, there were no examples of the Government making a statement recognizing a government in even the most intractable civil war, though forms of words were often found to indicate clearly where the Government stood" (2012: 51). Legitimation of the NTC by the British government therefore represented an exceptional showing of support for the anti-Gaddafi cause.

Tamim also affirmed that the support of Samantha Power – a former journalist and advocate for humanitarian intervention, advisor to President Obama, UN Ambassador, and member of the UN Security Council – elevated their voices in policymaking. Tamim became the contact person for Power during the intervention, and the group continued to meet with White House staff and kept in regular contact with the Libya desk at the State Department over the course of the conflict. Through their working relationships with these foreign policy elites, Tamim recalled that “Eventually we found doors open with the State Department, doors of communication open with the command center with Germany with NATO. And everyone wanted to help, [asking] *how can we coordinate, how can we solidify our position?*” They were also given opportunities to weigh in on the administration’s options, as when the White House considered an offer by the Gaddafi government to split the country into east and west during the Nafusa stalemate in the summer of 2011. The LETF was invited to the White House to discuss this proposal, which they vehemently opposed.

The interventions by NATO after March 19 further accentuated activists’ voices by turning information on the ground into potential intelligence to be used in the war effort. Mohammad in Sheffield recalled that through satellite phones,

We were talking to the people on the ground in Misrata and Brega, and we had different eyes on the ground. We used people we trust and we know because Gaddafi was dying to pass the wrong information and NATO will act on it, and then NATO will hit the target when the target is civilian. So we were so careful. We tried to make sure twice, three times, ten times, it’s the right location, the right source. Otherwise, we will not pass it [to NATO].

Another respondent in Leeds who was incorporated into the war effort showed me the emails that she sent back and forth to her NATO contact containing the coordinates of enemy movements,³ which were reported through her contacts on the ground and obtained through Google Maps. Abdo G. of Libya Link likewise attested that Google Maps was vital to this work, as it allowed members of the diaspora to pinpoint the precise coordinates of reported enemy locations. As Cardiff-raised Niz of the Free Generation Movement, the underground resistance in Tripoli, explained,

[NATO] would never tell me if the information I was providing was useful or was used. My understanding, having spoken to lots of people after the revolution, is that they were just gathering information from many different areas and seeing how it corroborated with their own intelligence.

Geopolitical support from third-party states was also vital in enabling the diaspora to move themselves and their resources across state lines. No

³ This interviewee showed me her email communications with her contact in NATO. See the Methodological Appendix on the exchange of personal archival materials during interviews.

respondents who traveled to Malta, Egypt, or Tunisia to get into Libya from the United States or Britain reported being hassled or prevented from traveling beyond the additional scrutiny that Arabs and Muslims have commonly received in airports since September 11, 2001. For these reasons, activists were able to participate directly in the resistance and move resources homeward (see Chapter 5) without the obstacles commonly posed by border agents and travel embargoes. Furthermore, the fact that authorities along the bordering countries of Egypt and Tunisia allowed Libyans to travel back and forth to move supplies and help refugees also facilitated direct action. As Salam recalled of his experience traveling back and forth between Tunisia and Libya, “The amount of times we crossed the border, I was a familiar face. Sometimes it was multiple times a day.” Activists’ access to liberated space protected by outside states and the tacit permission they received to cross borders was fundamental in enabling them to volunteer on the ground.

Other respondents traveled from the neighboring island-nation of Malta to Misrata after the worst of the fighting to assist in the recovery. Taregh, a mental health expert from Oxford, recounted,

A psychiatrist friend and myself decided to go into Libya in June 2011. Misrata was under siege at the time, so we were smuggled in via one of the fishing boats. Our primary object was a needs assessment [of] the distress and trauma, because the city was under siege for so long. So I went around all the different hospitals, spoke to different mental health workers who had absolutely no training or experience in working with trauma. After about a week or ten days, I came back to England to raise money for a training program.

The Tunisian border region became a hub for diaspora relief work as well. After international organizations began to step in to assist Misrata, Rihab and other expat volunteers turned their focus to “support Libyan women off of the border” with Tunisia. After assembling private donations, they opened a center for women and their children in a local grade school in the Tunisian city of Tataouine to hold classes and provide social support.

This is not to say that moving supplies into Libya was easy. Assad of the London-based World Medical Camp for Libya attested, “With certain big shipments and sensitive equipment like satellite phones or internet satellite systems,” he said, “we had to personally go so we could deal with the paperwork. It was logistically a very difficult situation. Some equipment you have to go and present papers and beg, and in some cases bribe.” Despite these difficulties, no respondents recalled being blocked at any border crossings by authorities in the United States, Britain, Tunisia, Egypt, or Malta over the course of the revolution.

Media attention also elevated the anti-regime diaspora’s role in the revolution for the duration of the conflict. Because the independent foreign press lacked contacts of their own and a presence in Libya before 2011, they relied heavily on diaspora activists to help make insider contacts and facilitate access

to Libya. M. of Enough Gaddafi! recalled that soon after initiating the website Feb17.info, “We started getting phone calls from CNN, from BBC, can you get me someone to do an interview?” After journalists such as CNN’s Anderson Cooper took a special interest in the Libyan revolution, Dina, a Libyan American with media expertise, was recruited by the network as a consultant to provide contacts. And even after members of the media began to communicate with Libyans inside the country independently of brokers like Dina, journalists nevertheless relied on bilingual activists from abroad to translate on the front lines. Haret, who had been working from Doha with the Libya AlAhrar satellite station, decided that he did not want to spend the entire revolution behind a computer in a nice hotel in Qatar. “It was too comfortable,” he said. “When you’re reporting about people who are in hell, it just didn’t seem right.” He decided to quit Libya AlAhrar in July and travel to Zintan, where his British Libyan father was volunteering in a hospital. After meeting journalists from Agence France-Presse and the Associated Press, he volunteered to be their interpreter. “Every morning, we’d wake up, we’d jump on the first truck heading to the front line,” Haret recalled.

When the fight for the Nafusa Mountains was won in July, the final push for Tripoli began. Rebel forces drove into the capital city during Ramadan in late August to cheering crowds. Despite intermittent battles with the last of the loyalists, Libyans converged in Tripoli’s main square to welcome the *thumar* forces, celebrate their victory, and grieve their losses. Gaddafi’s forces fled to Sirte before he was killed in October, and the National Transitional Council assumed control. Victory had been achieved, but at a high cost (and only temporarily, as a civil war broke out in 2014). By the end of the eight-month-long war in August 2011, at least twenty-five thousand Libyans had died, with many more tens of thousands displaced, missing, and injured.

Libyans from abroad recalled their work for the rebellion and relief with tremendous pride, and often in tears. They had indeed shared in these struggles and in collective jubilation and grief, mourning the sacrifices of their compatriots, the years spent in exile, and the losses endured in their families. Some shook their heads in recounting these events, as if they still could not really believe that the uprising – the dream that so few believed would ever happen – had been real. Those I interviewed in Tripoli marveled over the simple fact of being home again, talking openly in outdoor cafes about a tyrant who had once spread dread and terror across thousands of miles. As more than one activist said, “All of the stars had aligned” for their cause in 2011. My Libyan respondents added that, sadly, their Syrian friends and colleagues had not been so fortunate.

7.2 FROM VARIED TO WEAK GEOPOLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE SYRIAN ARAB SPRING

The emergence of protests and civil disobedience in Syria’s 2011 uprising accomplished what was previously thought impossible. Not only did Syrians

refute the assumption that they were too loyal or complacent to rebel, but revolutionary collective action created space for dissidents of all types – including ethnic and religious minorities, Islamists, feminists, anarchists, and leftists – to speak out against oppression (Al-Haj Saleh 2017; Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami 2018). However, as discussed in Chapter 4, as protesters were gunned down and detained by the thousands, the Assad regime's disproportionate response produced a predictable backlash. As members of the military defected and civilians mobilized to defend themselves, the rebellion took up small weaponry made available by defections and shadowy patrons from the Gulf region. The militarization of the rebellion was the subject of intense debate among Syrian activists, but the decision to take up arms by many was barely a choice (Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami 2018). Various units comprising a resistance force known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) emerged across Syria in early 2012 to protect their kin and liberate towns and villages from regime control and brutal retaliation. Revolutionaries also formed local councils to coordinate security, provide services, and even hold local elections in the wake of security vacuums and encroaching extremist movements.

By August, the UN Human Rights Council issued a damning report on the Syrian government's crimes against humanity, and a joint statement presented on August 18 by US President Barak Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for Assad to step down (Myers 2011). In 2012, the United Nations and the Red Cross dubbed the Syrian revolution a civil war (Charbonneau and Evans 2012), which angered many Syrians by mischaracterizing what was a disproportionately one-sided bombardment. The regime was especially brutal in dismantling the civic sector by killing, imprisoning, and forcing into exile progressives with nonviolent, democratic ideals. Nevertheless, "nobody could deny that a cycle of mutual violence had taken root" (Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami 2018: 78). The rebels' desperate need for weapons and cash led to heightened competition between groups, and only some FSA brigades received nonlethal aid from the United States. This was followed by "light" lethal aid (Cornwell 2013), but nothing that could help the rebels actually win against their enemies. Weapons and funds from Gulf allies were also inconsistent. FSA troops often went hungry and lacked bullets with which to load their guns. Calls for a Libya-esque no-fly zone were raised by Syrian activists and rebels, but went unheeded by the international community (Moss 2016a).

Differences in geopolitical support between activists' host-countries produced variation in their abilities to serve as auxiliary forces for the Arab Spring. In the US case, host-country support for the rebellion was moderate after the Obama administration imposed sanctions against the Assad regime in 2011 and security agencies supplied and trained selected rebel groups in 2012. During this period, diaspora lobbyists gained the geopolitical support needed to serve as representatives and brokers with various congressional committees, security and defense agencies, and political elites. Activists also gained an

elevated role in representing the revolution in comparison to their British counterparts. This was evidenced by Syrian Americans' working relations with an amalgam of allies in Congress and other political elites, including members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, prominent senators such as Lindsey Graham and John McCain, and former State Department officials such as Frederic Hof and Robert Ford, according to interviewees. As brokers between rebels and establishment representatives, activists forged connections by introducing Syrian rebels to government representatives, as Maher Nana recalled, and facilitated visits by officials such as Senator John McCain to liberated Syria (Kalin and Lukacs 2014).

The British government, on the other hand, lent weak support to the rebellion. While the Cameron government was involved in covert operations with the CIA from behind the scenes, the reticence of officials to acknowledge government involvement restricted British activists' capacities to serve as representatives and brokers in the political arena. MPs and other officials appeared hesitant to push the government into a leading role in intervention. This was likely due to popular fatigue over the Libyan intervention and wariness about following the United States into yet another unpopular conflict in the Middle Eastern region. Thus, British Syrians were largely excluded from consulting with the government on matters related to Syria because, despite officials' rhetorical condemnations of Assad, neither the Cameron administration nor any political party mobilized openly to support the revolution in a substantive way. British Syrian activists thus reported lacking a voice in the foreign policy-making process and receiving weak political support for their claims.

At the same time, Syrians in the United States and Britain – like their Libyan counterparts – worked closely with other geopolitical actors, such as members of the media and international sponsors of relief work, for several years. These agencies facilitated activists' interventions as representatives, brokers, remitters, and volunteers on the ground. Diaspora activists also capitalized on the support lent by Turkey, for example, which gave them a second hub from which to mobilize and cross into liberated Syria. All of the significant opposition groups formally representing the Syrian revolution met in Istanbul and Gaziantep, including the SNC,⁴ the Syrian Interim Government, and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's coordinating offices (Conduit 2019). This support enabled respondents to move supplies through Syria's northern border and distribute resources on the front lines. Ousama from Bristol, for example, drove ambulances into Syria this way as part of a volunteer convoy several times. Others, such as New Jersey mayor Mohamed Taher Khairullah, delivered aid through an accredited organization to the internally displaced. After hitting a wall in

⁴ As mentioned above, the SNC was later refashioned as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.

lobbying for decisive forms of intervention, activists such as Dr. Radwan Ziadeh of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies and Mouaz Moustafa of the Syrian Emergency Task Force set up shop in Turkey to order to contribute to the revolution more directly. During our conversation in 2014, Mouaz explained,

Lobbying wasn't panning out, so I went down to the border and opened an office in Antakya [in 2012]. Because first of all, to see if I can do something that helps people where I can *see* it translated into something [for myself]. Now we have an office in Antakya, four offices, and expanding inside liberated areas in Syria.

Mouaz also described in *Red Lines*, a documentary film about these activities (Kalin and Lukacs 2014), that he and an activist named Razan Shalab al-Sham from Homs worked in the liberated areas to establish civilian police forces and judicial councils. These projects were designed to fill the security vacuum left in the wake of war, as well as to serve as a model for civil governance in a post-Assad Syria. This project required going back and forth into Syria across the less-regulated northern border with Turkey on a regular basis.

Turkey's geopolitical support of the revolution meant that the Syrian-Turkish border became a hub for Syrians from across the world interested in assisting the revolution. Sabreen, who worked in Turkey for many months, said, "In every hotel in Gaziantep, you can walk in any day and find a training happening. No joke." During this period, Sabreen worked for the Syrian Interim Government as part of their Assistance Coordination Unit. This team organized the flow of aid into Syria to fill the gap left by the insufficient response of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Sabreen's work in Turkey involved working as a broker between outside donors and needy insiders:

[In 2012], there was basically no coordination in Turkey among NGOs. So the opposition created this unit to fill that role, and I started working with them as a project coordinator for eight months. I was working with international donors and developing projects for them. I would do is talk to local Syrian NGOs and develop projects. I did a lot of grant writing. I was handling all donor relations, all external stuff . . . because they had no one who knew English. That's the reason why I was there. Donors, they have no connection to the inside and they also have a language barrier. So it's like nobody knows how to talk with anybody. There's a lot of international people, but they're in one world. And then there's people who are in-between, [like] me.

In response to gains made by the rebellion in the Damascus suburbs, the regime launched the world's worst chemical weapons attack in recent history on August 21, 2013. The attack killed approximately 1,730 Syrian civilians, including hundreds of children. A survivor of this attack, an activist named Kassem Eid later testified to the United Nations about the horrors of witnessing mass death by sarin (Eid and di Giovanni 2018; see also Chapter 5). This put an earlier claim by President Obama – that the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime constituted a "red line" – to the test. These words proved to be

empty, however, which further discredited the United States in the eyes of the Syrian opposition. After the British parliament voted against retaliatory strikes on August 29, the United States agreed to a Russian proposal that would allow Assad to remove his chemical arsenal over the course of the next year. This not only reaffirmed the regime's legitimacy in international relations, but also enabled the Syrian army to continue launching gas attacks, most notably in the form of chlorine, and killing civilians by barrel bombs and other extraordinary means.

The influx of Islamist fundamentalists into the war also drained outside geopolitical support for the anti-regime effort over time. In 2011, Assad released fifteen hundred Salafis from the nation's prisons, which a regime defector testified was a deliberate strategy to justify a violent response and to scare the country's minorities into remaining loyal. Not coincidentally, Assad's early claims about the revolution being the work of foreign conspirators came to fruition. Syria became a draw for jihadists from places such as Chechnya looking to fight infidels in the Alawite-dominated regime. The Al Qaeda-affiliate *Jabhat al-Nusra* (Al-Nusra Front) also joined the fight in the summer of 2012, bringing with them discipline, fighting experience, and resources from private donors in the Gulf region. Some extremist groups also stepped in to provide services to the population suffering from shortages of basic resources. Many were more disciplined, organized, and motivated to die in martyrdom in accordance with their apocalyptic beliefs than their FSA counterparts (Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami 2018).

Having split from Al Qaeda over differences in how to establish an Islamic Caliphate, foreign fighters under the black banner of the "Islamic State" (ISIS, or *Da'esh*) flooded into Syria from Iraq in 2013. After being initially beaten back by FSA factions, they resurged with a vengeance following a successful assault in June 2014. Armed with American-made weapons and cash pillaged from Iraq, ISIS fighters opposed everyone, killing Syrians, beheading foreign journalists, and destroying the country's cultural heritage. Yet, the Assad regime maintained a nonaggression pact with ISIS at this time, bombing the FSA instead and using ISIS's presence to bolster the regime's standing in the international community. In November 2013, another faction called the Islamic Front was formed as a coalition that included the *Jaysh al-Islam*. This front, which was later accused of being involved in the disappearance of civil society activists in the Damascus suburbs, engaged in a fierce, win-or-die competition with the likes of Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS.

In light of these shifts, activists from both the United States and Britain reported that geopolitical support for their cause waned. As a result, their roles as auxiliary forces for the rebellions declined. The first reason for this change was that the Obama administration's failure to punish Assad for the chemical weapons attacks – the regime's crossing of the "red line" – diminished Syrians' trust in the US government. By proxy, this refusal also chilled Syrians' trust in diaspora representatives and brokers. Dr. Ziadeh explained how the United

States' refusal to strike in August 2013 significantly strained his relationship with Syrians on the ground.

This was very disappointing and difficult to explain to the Syrians. Now I still have the same difficulties – to convince the Syrian people how it's important to work with the administration to fight against the ISIS because this is the only way you can [eventually] get rid of the Assad government. But the people in Syria have been frustrated because they're hearing from the media, the officials, the only focus was the ISIS, the terrorists. And everyone knows that the Assad machine has killed far more than what the ISIS killed among the Syrians.

The lack of US government support for the rebellion also led to the demise of the Syrian Support Group, an organization dedicated to supporting the FSA. Dr. Maher Nana, one of its co-founders, explained,

The lack of support, lack of arms, lack of money, lack of everything – [because of this], none of our work reached any [of its goals]. All the aid that has been sent has been given to small groups, very randomly distributed. Even the people there inside, their moods start turning against the United States and they were actually *blaming us, that we were the ones who let them down*, basically. And at that point, we really didn't have any leverage. *There's no reason for them to talk to us*. Even though we are Syrians, they still look at us as Americans. So we lost that strong relationship. Even I remember, I would talk to my family there and they would tell me, why should we keep talking to you? You disappointed us for two years. I left the Syrian Support Group almost a year and a half ago [in 2013]; it lasted for almost another year and it closed [in 2014] because of lack of funds, lack of anything, lack of purpose, basically. *The trust was broken, number one. And number two, there was no meaningful assistance*. The only assistance that was presented was the meal ready to eat [MRE] and the medical emergency kits to the Free Syrian Army. Now you go there and meet with people and they tell you, we have missiles coming on top of our heads and you're giving me meals? It was pathetic to them.

So too did Syrian American activist Yisser Bittar report that her journey into a town north of Aleppo under Free Syria Army control in December 2012 was a heartbreaking experience. She attested that the violence the Syrian people face on a daily basis makes them “feel and know [that] they have been abandoned. Whether it is by the diaspora, the Arab states or the West” (Bittar 2013).

Weakened support by the US government also damaged diaspora activism by stoking disillusionment with advocacy itself. As Dr. Ziadeh stated,

The special session requested [in 2011 by the United States at the UN Human Rights Council] issued a resolution requesting a fact-finding mission on what's happening. I testified on that session to send a strong message at that time to the Syrian government that things are not like in Hama in the '80s. Now you have Human Rights Council and the international community built a different system to not allow what's happened in the past to repeat again. But now we discover all of that is useless. Now, the UN confirmed the number of the victims exceed one hundred ninety thousand, [not to mention] the number of the mass atrocities, war crimes and crimes against humanity. And that affects, of course, the mobility of the Syrian diaspora. In the beginning, it was very active,

mobilized. They tried actually to do very much lobbying pressure on the US government. But right now, it's less and less.

Marah Bukai also attested that protests came to be perceived by many community members as pointless because “by the third or fourth year, nothing has happened.” She added, “I don't believe there is any reason to go shout next to the White House or embassy.”

After the proliferation of religious extremist groups designated as terrorist organizations by the US and British governments, diaspora activists reported that the growth of these groups in Syria significantly damaged their abilities to support the vetted Free Syrian Army and civilians alike. Activists in both countries reported that donors had raised significant concerns about their remittances being tied in any way to the support of activities or groups deemed illegal by their host-countries. Aware that the security apparatuses in the United States and Britain were monitoring donations to Syria, fears of being caught in the war-on-terror dragnet stoked widespread worry and deterred community members from sending fungible aid to their allies. Furthermore, proving that resource deliveries were *not* going into the wrong hands placed an additional burden on Syrian activists abroad (Chaudhary and Moss 2019).⁵ A member of Syria Relief remarked that concerns by governments and donors increased dramatically after the emergence of ISIS in Syria in 2013. He recalled,

In the beginning, the charity commission was a little bit more lenient with us. [Before], I really couldn't tell you the name of the person who received the food parcel. They wanted details, but when we said we gave it to *this* group of workers we have and they distributed it in *that* village, that was fine, they were happy with that. And they would even allow cash transactions, which are even more difficult to trace. Now, the instructions are if you cannot give us the name of the very final destination of your donation, don't do it. You can't even go there because they're so worried about money going into the wrong hands, going into aiding terrorism, going into buying arms. We have to be absolutely clear to the nth-degree as to where the money had gone. Otherwise, we'll be closed down, and we can't afford to have that happen because lots of people rely on us. We have schools that need to be funded, salaries of teachers that need to be paid, books and school equipment that have to be bought, et cetera – and that's only schools. There are hospitals and there are the food parcels and all that kind of [aid]. It all relies on the fact that we are functioning, and we cannot let them down.

Omar, a board member of the Syrian American Medical Society, also described the post-ISIS climate as “scary” because activists and donors could potentially be “considered terrorists.” He added, “If you look at the history of some organization who were doing good work, later on, the US government changed the way they treat it and they consider them a terrorist organization.” Ousama of Bristol attested that he had been questioned by the British police over his

⁵ For a related analysis of the burdens placed on Pakistani charitable transnational organizations caught in the war on terror, see Chaudhary (2021).

volunteer activities such as driving ambulances into Syria. Respondents also affirmed that doctors they knew who had gone into Syria to do volunteer medical work had been hassled at airports.

Respondents likewise reported facing discrimination when attempting to register their organizations and wire funds to Syria. In one example, an activist working for the Syrian Legal Development Programme in Manchester told me that their group had difficulties opening a bank account, despite being an incorporated organization, because of their Syria-specific designation. This was not paranoia, as the British bank HSBC had closed down Syrians' personal bank accounts in 2014 (Bachelor 2014). For this reason, Haytham of the Rethink Rebuild Society decided not to put the word "Syria" in his organization's name because he worried about facing institutional and legal discrimination. Dr. Jundi of Manchester attested that local Syrian families faced additional difficulties sending remittances directly to their family members "because of the restrictions on money transfers, the sanctions that banks are imposing on bank accounts and what have you, even that simple process of family helping family has been crippled to a large extent." Mohammad al-Abdallah of the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre said that Syrian Americans were generally fearful of "getting calls from the FBI or other agencies saying, hey, your money ended up in terrorism and elsewhere," for obvious reasons.

The precariousness of liberated space within Syria, left undefended by outside powers, and ever-increasing restrictions on movement across borders into the country, significantly constrained the diaspora's abilities to serve as a volunteer force on the ground by 2014. Unlike in Libya, where liberated territory was protected and expanded by NATO forces, liberated Syrian territories were subjected to bombardment by the Assad regime and its allies, as well as constant power struggles between rebel groups and extremists. Most respondents had therefore stopped going into Syria in or by 2013 due to the threat of kidnappings (by either the regime, corrupt members of the Free Syrian Army, or criminal gangs), the expansion of extremist groups such as ISIS, and the retaking of territory by the regime. Rafif of FREE-Syria explained,

At the beginning, we used to be far more able to deliver humanitarian relief. We have more constraints now with ISIS operating as well as the regime. We were a little bit more optimistic about some women's initiatives earlier on. Those are now impossible. We're finding a lot of constraints and challenges.

L., who had fought on the front lines, also recalled that increasing desperation and criminality among opposition groups had made this work doubly dangerous. After explaining how two of his European aid worker friends had been kidnapped and ransomed by a corrupt FSA member, he remarked,

Now you can't trust anyone. Once they find out you're American – bare minimum, [that can get a ransom of] ten thousand dollars to any group. Imagine how fucked up that is.

Even though you're a Syrian, because you're American born, you're a target now – and people are greedy and desperate, so why not!

Over time, activists found that Turkey was the only country allowing relatively safe passage in and out of Syria; Jordan and Lebanon were reported to be far less accommodating for those seeking to volunteer to assist refugees or smuggle supplies to the front lines. Even the Turkish regime's support for cross-border movement became temperamental, however, with the rise of ISIS and terrorist attacks in Turkish cities, as well as the government's escalating belligerence against Kurdish factions in northern Syria. Even though activists could smuggle themselves in, this process became increasingly precarious.

In conjunction with declining resource conversion (see Chapter 6), diminished geopolitical support – which shifted in the United States from strong to weak and in Britain from moderate to weak – had a significant negative effect on diaspora activism by 2014. Despite the admirable efforts by Syrian organizations with the resources to sustain full-time activist work, the situation looked increasingly bleak as time ticked by. Backed by Iranian manpower and Russian airstrikes, the Assad regime remained intent on destroying what was left of the country in order to save it for itself. International actors, from Russia to the UN to the United States and Britain, came to agree that Assad must be a part of Syria's future even though mass killings continued. By the end of 2014, four million refugees languished in camps or risked death to reach Europe, over seven million Syrians had been displaced internally (a combined total of half of Syria's population), and at least two hundred and twenty thousand Syrians had been killed.

At the time of this writing, the Assad regime has produced the worst refugee crises since World War II, and while international agencies have stopped counting, it is likely that well over a million Syrians have been killed. More than one hundred fifty thousand prisoners face unspeakable treatment in prisons, an estimated eight hundred thousand Syrians have faced starvation, and major outbreaks of disease have occurred in towns and cities from Yarmouk to Madaya. The Syrian regime and Russian forces continue to bomb the last revolutionary strongholds in Idlib to dust, including its hospitals and schools. The resistance at home and abroad continues to suffer irreparable losses, muting the voice that Syrians had gained after the emergence of the "impossible revolution" (Al-Haj Saleh 2017).

7.3 WEAK GEOPOLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE YEMENI REVOLUTION OVER TIME

Yemen's revolution began with street protests in January 2011 and evolved to include tens of thousands of Yemenis in mass sit-ins, protests, and strikes across the country. As I described in Chapter 4, the Friday of Dignity Massacre on

March 18 marked a turning point after plainclothes regime loyalists, *al-balti-jyyah*, opened fire on unarmed demonstrators in Sana'a's Change Square. The killing of approximately fifty demonstrators stoked the defections of regime elites such as General Ali Mohsen, who brought his First Armored Division to defend the square. The defections of these elites and members of the Islah Party caused significant friction within the revolution and undermined its previously nonpartisan character. Other protest encampments in cities such as Ta'iz and Aden were also subjected to intermittent attacks over the following months.

By April, domestic and international efforts were underway to convince Ali Abdullah Saleh to agree to a peaceful transfer of power. The Joint Meetings Parties, Yemen's coalition of legal opposition parties, convened to offer Saleh a deal to transfer power to his Vice President, Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi. The Gulf Cooperation Council (comprised of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) backed this idea, proposing their own agreement – what would come to be known as the “GCC agreement” or GCC deal – offering Saleh and his family immunity from prosecution in exchange for a gradual transition of power.

As Saleh stalled, hoping to win the standoff in the end, his attacks continued. These incidents prompted officials in the United States, Britain, the UN, and the European Union to make statements condemning the violence and calling for a transition of power. Saleh agreed to the terms of the GCC deal in late April but was given thirty days to sign it. He used this time to try and force protesters from their tents. On April 28, the crisis escalated when loyalist forces again shot at demonstrators in Sana'a, killing at least a dozen demonstrators and injuring approximately two hundred. Yemenis across the country launched coordinated strikes in response. Saleh's forces continued to try and disband the protest movement, cutting electricity to Change Square.

After Saleh refused to sign the GCC deal by allowing the thirty-day signing period to expire, Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar of the influential Hashid tribal confederation moved his fighters into the capital city. A street battle against loyalist forces ensued with artillery and mortars, claiming the lives of approximately 120 soldiers, tribal militia, and civilians. Six days later, Saleh's forces launched an operation to crush the protest encampment in Ta'iz known as Freedom Square using live ammunition and water cannons, killing dozens of unarmed civilians. Tribal leader and Islah Party member Sheikh Hamoud al-Mikhlaifi, a powerful elite with his own formidable militia, mobilized to defend the square and forced loyalists to retreat.

These attacks prompted US President Barack Obama to call on Saleh to fulfill his commitment and sign the GCC deal at a joint press conference with British Prime Minister David Cameron in London.⁶ But back in Sana'a, the street battle continued. On June 3, a bombing (for which no party claimed

⁶ See the statement published by the White House's Office of the Press Secretary (2011).

responsibility) hit the presidential palace, badly injuring President Saleh and killing several guards. Saleh was flown to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment, and Vice President Hadi assumed office. This attack temporarily ended the street battles in Sana'a, but the standoff continued as anti-regime protesters occupied the streets.

Having survived the attack, Saleh issued a decree on September 12 from Saudi Arabia for Hadi to take up some of his presidential duties and authorized him to negotiate a transfer of power based on the GCC deal. However, a renewed crisis broke out on September 18 after government and *baltijiyah* forces opened fire on protesters across Yemen in a series of coordinated attacks, resulting in the deadliest day of the revolution in months. More than fifty people were killed over the next several days, and Saleh's military forces fired rockets at Change Square in the capital, prompting General Mohsen's First Armored Division to strike back. Saleh returned to Yemen in October to the continuation of intermittent clashes. On October 21, the UN Security Council voted unanimously for Resolution 2014 that condemned the violence and called for an immediate transfer of power under the GCC deal. After an envoy to the UN worked to restart negotiations, Saleh signed the deal on November 23 and was granted full immunity.

How did these developments impact diaspora activism? Despite the valiant efforts of Yemeni activists to broadcast the demands of the youth movement, their voices fell largely on deaf ears due to weak geopolitical support from both host-country governments. Both the United States and Britain used a soft strategy of political pressure to convince Saleh to sign the GCC agreement in a clumsily designed effort to put Vice President Hadi in place as the new president. This effort, which was designed to *stabilize* the country through political continuity rather than induce radical democratic change, backfired after Saleh joined with northern rebel forces known as the Houthis to launch a coup d'état and instigated a devastating civil war. So while activists in the US and British diasporas reported that host-country officials were willing to *listen* to their grievances, they were not treated as partners or advisors in decision-making processes. Thus, unlike Libyans and Syrians who were treated as brokers and representatives on matters of policy, Yemenis were not treated as such by any sectors of their host-country governments.

Furthermore, as with their Syrian counterparts, the US' and Britain's war-on-terror security environment hampered organizers' potential to remit home-ward on a collective scale. These countries had long partnered with the Saleh regime, supplying him with weapons and cash to fight Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and viewed Yemen primarily through the lens of terrorism and national security (Brownlee et al. 2015; Day 2012). Saleh, in turn, often diverted these funds to contest his domestic enemies (Knickmeyer 2010). Because Yemeni communities in places like New York had come under increasing scrutiny after the attacks on September 11, 2001, community members were logically fearful about sending remittances to anti-regime causes at home. Ibrahim, an organizer

in New York, explained that without official guidelines on how to remit aid, their movement lacked a way to safely assist revolutionaries.

When a lot of people were being murdered in the squares, we wanted to provide medicine and food. But we can't do it because we have concerns about the US policies when it comes to sending that kind of aid. They can prosecute anyone, saying that the food fell in the wrong hands. And the government did not provide us with guidelines or ways to send medicine and food. There is no designated list of organizations that we can work with on the ground, and no US organization that is willing to do that. So we had great difficulties trying to do that throughout the whole year. And it would be great if the US somehow, maybe through USAID program or another program, [could facilitate that] because the Yemeni community can contribute a lot in supporting the needy. I would say that the Yemeni community, especially in New York, is so wealthy. But our hands are very tied. Yemen needs food and medicine, and as Yemeni Americans – and even as *Americans* – we are very cut off in trying to send support or do fundraising for Yemen.

Accordingly, diaspora movements in both the United States and Britain lacked the geopolitical support needed to collectively remit to their compatriots at home.

In line with weak state support, foreign media penetration in Yemen was moderate in comparison with the rush of reporters to the front lines in Libya and Syria. Prior to the revolution, journalists had easy access to Yemen relative to other countries undergoing the Arab Spring, but a near-total lack of demand for coverage on Yemen on the part of media organizations meant that few foreign reporters were there at the start of the protest movement in January 2011. Most who came to report of the protests thereafter were expelled by the regime by March. Nevertheless, journalists from Al Jazeera English remained, along with a small cadre of Western freelancers and stringers – brave individuals like Laura Kasinoff, Iona Craig, Adam Baron, Jeb Boone, and Tom Finn – who managed to stay on and undertake important coverage from inside the revolution. That said, coverage remained limited outside of Yemen's capital, and unlike in Libya, journalists could not as easily smuggle themselves into the country.

Weak geopolitical support for the uprising by international organizations also limited diaspora activism during the uprising. No humanitarian agencies that I could locate mobilized to assist victims of regime violence inside the encampments during the revolution. Despite the presence of some international NGOs in Yemen, such as Islamic Relief, many activists did not perceive these groups to be trustworthy or useful. Because these organizations had to operate with the regime's permission, respondents noted that the aid would not reach revolutionaries. As Faris of the Washington, DC-based diaspora movement explained,

As far as NGOs, we were trying to reach out. We tried to go through them, whether it was Islamic Relief or other aid organizations that were already in Yemen – but there was an issue of actually distributing the supplies out to the people there. You have global NGOs that have been established for decades and the branches that were present in Yemen were being run by pro-Saleh officials. So in a sense, even well-noted NGOs were

not able to distribute the funds that were allocated and for the people on the field, because of the fact that those people were anti-Saleh.

As discussed in Chapter 6, this problem was combined with the shortage of insider contacts available to receive humanitarian remittances. Thus, if activists did not have familial contacts in these places, they lacked the means to send help to protesters and the field hospitals. It is very likely that the individual donations made through personal contacts, such as those wired to Yemeni-American Atiaf in Sana'a, represented only a tiny fraction of what the pro-revolution diaspora could have contributed had they had state-sanctioned channels to do so.

Saleh's resignation on November 23, 2011, was a cause for celebration for some, while others in the encampments remained in their tents. Nevertheless, calls for the fall of the regime – now headed by the former Vice President Hadi – ceased at this time, signifying the end of Yemen's 2011 revolution. Saleh traveled to the United States for medical treatment at the end of January and returned to Yemen for the February 21 election. Vice President Hadi was the only candidate on the ballot and won easily, marking the official start of Yemen's transitional government. Yemenis residing in the United States and Britain had come out in force to show their support and viewed this time as a profound showing of newfound community empowerment. However, weak support by geopolitical powerholders had left them with few ways to facilitate rebellion and relief on the ground.

7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated how geopolitical support from states and other third parties fueled transnational auxiliary activism during the Arab Spring, and how unevenly diaspora movements against authoritarianism gained such backing. Even though all of the Libyan, Syrian, and Yemeni movements discussed here advocated for democracy, human rights, and humanitarian relief, favorable attention from key actors varied significantly. While Libyan activists in the United States and Britain gained overwhelming support for the revolution's duration and geopolitical backing for the Syrian cause started off strong in the United States, other groups struggled to make their voices heard. British officials were reluctant to publicly support anti-regime interference in the Syrian conflict; assistance for the Syrian anti-regime cause declined across the board over time; and Yemenis across both host-countries received low-level support for revolutionary democratic change. When geopolitical support was weak, activists faced significant hurdles in gaining voice, and their resources were more likely to remain caged in their host-country communities. Correspondingly, this chapter demonstrates that the potential of transnational movements to undermine authoritarian regimes is – in conjunction with resource conversion, discussed in Chapter 6 – largely dependent on the support of states and geopolitical powerholders.