

## Voice for Rebellion and Relief

As the Arab Spring revolutions escalated over the spring and summer of 2011, the Libyan regime battled NATO-backed insurgents in a fight to the death; the Syrian regime waged a scorched-earth campaign against rebelling cities as foreign extremists declared war on all sides; and regime loyalists attacked peaceful protesters and fought with defectors in Yemen. As each revolution became prolonged and increasingly bloody, these conflicts and ensuing humanitarian crises presented a unique opportunity for anti-regime diaspora activists to intervene in their home-countries. For newly invigorated anti-regime activists in the American and British diasporas, mobilizing for the Arab Spring did not simply involve protesting on the weekends or issuing Tweets during passing moments of distraction. Instead, they wielded voice against authoritarianism in order to fuel rebellion and relief using a common tactical repertoire, summarized in Table 5.1.

Activists' first type of intervention was to *broadcast* revolutionaries' grievances and demands through protests, online, and other awareness-raising efforts. Second, they *represented* the cause abroad by acting as formal delegates and informal proxies of revolutionary organizations to outside audiences, especially through lobbying. Third, they *brokered* between insiders at home and outsiders abroad to channel attention and resources to their allies. Fourth, they *remitted* tangible and intangible resources homeward to rebels and civilians under siege. Fifth, activists *volunteered* on the front lines as humanitarian relief workers, interpreters, citizen journalists, fighters, and leaders. Many of them combined overtly political activism with relief work, since the regimes blocked aid delivery to liberated areas. Others focused primarily on relief efforts due to their unique skills, as in the case of doctors who volunteered in field hospitals.

The first part of this chapter elaborates on this repertoire, demonstrating how activists worked creatively across a variety of venues to help their comrades. Because not all diaspora groups gained the capacity to fulfill their goals

TABLE 5.1. *Typology of diaspora interventions in the Arab Spring*

Broadcasting	Disseminating facts and claims for a shared cause through protest, online activism, and by holding awareness-raising events.
Representing	Serving as formal delegates or informal proxies for home-country causes and organizations to outside audiences and decision-makers, including through lobbying and in the policymaking process.
Brokering	The linking of previously unconnected actors and entities inside and outside of the home-country for the purposes of facilitating anti-regime mobilization and relief on the ground.
Remitting	The channeling of tangible and intangible resources to the home-country for the purposes of rebellion and relief.
Volunteering on the front lines	Traveling to the home-country and its border areas to participate directly in rebellion and relief efforts.

consistently over time, the second part explains how diaspora movements' collective repertoires varied (see Table 1.3). As I illustrate here, only Libyan movements in the United States and Britain were able to meet the needs of their compatriots and enact what I call a *full-spectrum repertoire* of interventions over the course of the revolution. Syrians and Yemenis, on the other hand, faced a number of challenges and obstacles in doing so. Chapters 6 and 7 then explain how this variation was determined primarily by two causal factors: the different capacities of diaspora movements to *convert resources* to the revolutions and relief efforts, and the varying degree of *geopolitical support* they received from states and other third parties. When resource conversion and geopolitical support were absent or died off over time, activists became disempowered to do much more than voice their solidarity and support from afar.

### 5.1 BROADCASTING

In the wake of the Egyptian revolution's ousting of President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, respondents across the three diasporas were both buzzing with anticipation and gravely concerned. While the protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square were broadcast live on Al Jazeera day and night, the only media allowed to operate in Libya and Syria in 2011 were state-controlled. Yemenis had more press freedoms, but their people had a long history of being neglected in the international media. Movements outside of the capital Sana'a were also prone to being ignored. Furthermore, internet penetration, particularly in Yemen, was spotty at best. As a result, observers in the diaspora worried that movements following in Egypt's footsteps would be crushed in the dark.

### 5.1.1 Disseminating Facts and Movement Claims

In light of these concerns, longtime regime opponents prepared themselves to remedy their compatriots' isolation and neglect on the world's stage. Brainstorming privately with family and friends, many reported setting up social media accounts dedicated to publicizing events underway at home. Libyans in Enough Gaddafi! (the US-based youth activist network founded in 2009) worked to relaunch their anti-Gaddafi information campaign days before the planned Day of Rage on February 17. Raucous protests erupted in Benghazi on February 15, however, and within days, rioters had liberated the city from regime control, prompting soldiers to defect or flee. As protests spread like wildfire from the east to the western capital of Tripoli, Gaddafi's stronghold, and confronted a media blackout, diaspora activists took up the task of broadcasting events on the ground via the Internet. Ahmed of Enough Gaddafi! explained, "We knew that in Libya there was no such thing as an independent media that could effectively report on what was taking place." He continued,

We understood our role in the beginning to be the media team. We needed to do whatever we can to make sure that the world knows about what's going on. We [planned] to essentially flood all media outlets with as much information as we possibly could to bridge the gap between [them and] the credible on-the-ground presence. So we thought of our role as being the bridge. We could report [through] our networks on the ground what was happening [until] the time when somebody from those Western or other media outlets could actually be on the ground reporting in the first person.

His colleague M. echoed, "Information is key. And whenever it's able to be disseminated, the situation becomes a global issue – no longer just something that happened in Libya that was wiped off the face of the planet." Abdullah attested that this "bridging" work was vital if "people on the inside were going to stand a chance." Libyans outside of the United States had the same idea. Ayat, a Libyan Canadian from Winnipeg, launched *Shabab Libya*, the Libya Youth Movement, with activists across the United States and Britain to broadcast on behalf of the revolution. "Obviously, we *had* to," she recounted,

because there was nobody [inside the country] who's going to put Libya on Al Jazeera for twenty-four hours and show us what's happening. We worked primarily in English. What we wanted to do was tell the world to help those people making decisions to make decisions in our favor.

To undertake broadcasting, Enough Gaddafi! activists established a "central place on the Internet to get news" about Libya, according to Hamid, by launching the website Feb17.info. Assia, one of their longtime friends who was living in Dubai at the time, recalled, "We were all around the world. We would run it in four-hour blocks to keep it twenty-four hours. Our houses were newsrooms." M., who was working with the Enough Gaddafi! team from her home in Pennsylvania at the time, recalled, "I remember the first week, there was no sleep. We literally overnight just became like a source of information for the outside world." Hamid also contacted activists in Cairo over social media

who had done similar work during the Egyptian revolution for help in getting around Libya's internet blackout. His colleague, Abdulla Darrat, Abdulla's spouse and media professional Sarah Abdurrahman, and a Senior Researcher at the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab, John Scott Railton, build @feb17-voices (Railton 2012). This platform allowed Libyans to call a phone number and record their eyewitness accounts in English and Arabic, with translation provided by Abdulla and Sarah; Hamid also linked this information to Enough Gaddafi's website. According to Railton, after the media "showed up in Benghazi," they switched to broadcast from more isolated places such as Misrata and the Nafusa Mountains.

A youth named Haret worked simultaneously and independently from Birmingham, England, to set up a Twitter account and website called LibyaFeb17 to "translate and transcribe" all news coming out of Libya in Arabic to English. Haret said,

I wanted to make that media window for the international world to look at what's happening without any bias. I say the word bias loosely, because I was really focusing on the pro-revolution events. But without any additions from myself.

A handful of Libyan American women activists in the Washington, DC, area also formed a group called Libya Outreach that issued regular "situation reports" about the uprising and emailed them to government bureaus and think tanks.

Assia recalled that a key part of their work in the early days of the revolution "wasn't just spreading information but capturing misinformation and labeling it as misinformation." In doing so, activists worked to monitor and triangulate reports and counter rumors. Ayman in Oklahoma took it upon himself to post near-hourly updates about the situation on the ground on the website of the National Conference for the Libyan Opposition, "in Arabic – so targeting the Libyan people." By broadcasting information abroad and into the home-country, activists combatted regime propaganda. Tasbeeh of Los Angeles recalled, "It did feel like we were *transistor radios* because there was no one else to take up this mantle. We felt a responsibility to transmit those voices."

Like their Libyan counterparts, Syrians who dared to resist the Assad regime inside the country faced extreme risks for participating in pro-Arab Spring candlelight vigils and filming protests on their cell phones. In response, Syrians abroad broadcast information coming from the ground to global audiences in the hopes of gaining outside sympathy and support for the cause. Razan, daughter of an exiled Syrian dissident in London, worked directly with a network of activists on the ground on Twitter to do just that. Her responsibilities included

live-tweeting their protests, for example. I had a lot of contact with people on the ground. We had online meetings. Several would tell me, "I'm going out on protest now, please tweet it." That was probably the best work I ever did, being in contact with people on the ground, translating for them. [They produced] a magazine and I was also part of the translating team. The Arabic one was distributed inside Syria – a very dangerous business – and the English one was online.

In addition to criticizing the Assad regime by publicizing videos showing acts of defiance and state violence, activists also worked to name and shame entities who

supported the dictatorship. Kenan, a Syrian American law student from Chicago, helped to launch an awareness project on Twitter called “The Syria Campaign.”

It was a core group of seven or eight or so Twitter users who were Syrian, and we would come up with a hashtag and try to do whatever we could to get that hashtag to trend. We had a few really memorable ones. I remember we did a campaign in summer of 2011 against Shell Gas because they were still operating in Syria. So we got an audience in the media because the media was following [our] weekly Twitter campaigns, and we were able to deliver messages.

Respondents who participated in the Syrian uprising on the ground testified to the importance of this broadcasting work. Ibrahim al-Assil, a student in Britain at the time that the revolution broke out, returned to Damascus in the summer of 2011 to join protests and organize what became known as the Syrian Nonviolence Movement. He attested how Syrians abroad played a pivotal role in helping publicize their amateur videos of protests.

They were in the US, the UK, Qatar and the UAE and other countries as well. I used to ask for a lot of help from them, especially because they have faster [internet] connections. In Syria, we used a kind of VPN to be secure, which made the connection even slower. So for anything that needs to be done online, anyone outside Syria was very helpful – and also to get in touch with the media. So for example, when civil disobedience took place in Syria in December 2011, the majority of the work [publishing] documentation of it and getting in touch with the media was done *outside* Syria.

When Ibrahim was forced to return to Britain, he then took up this work himself, hoping that diaspora campaigns to name and shame the regime would prompt their host-country governments to intervene.

Syrians also held “teach-ins” and other awareness-raising events at universities and places of worship. Haytham, leader of the Rethink Rebuild Society in Manchester, held a tribute to a British doctor named Abbas Khan who worked as a medical volunteer in Syria before he was tortured to death in a regime prison in 2013 (Siddique and Borger 2013).

His two brothers came here, and [one] gave a very emotional speech. Three members of Parliament, the Greater Manchester Commissioner, and the mayor of Manchester were there also. It was a memorial for Dr. Abbas, but we also told the audience, look, he is just one example of tens of thousands killed in Syria and tortured. We called on the UK government to act on [behalf of those inside] Syrian prisons.

Meanwhile, as Yemen’s revolution evolved into a series of prolonged and predominantly peaceful urban sit-ins across the country, Yemenis in the United States and Britain also worked to broadcast the claims of independent protesters to the public and the press. This was important because although freelance journalists and some Al Jazeera reporters managed to evade the regime’s deportations of journalists in March, these brave individuals faced numerous obstacles to reporting on events outside of the main protest encampment in Sana’a. Yemenis initiated broadcasting work on social media, posting updates on forums such as the London-based Yemen Revolution UK’s Facebook page. Ahlam, an activist in New York, worked with her colleague

and friend Atiaf, a Yemeni American then working in Sana'a, to publish photographs of the protests on a website called Yemenis for Justice. Atiaf recalled that while she was in Change Square,

We would send Ahlam the photos, the information, and the idea was to have an interactive map of where the protests are, reports related to the revolution, things like that. A bunch of them [abroad] were also very active on Twitter, sending information. Specifically, I had given Ahlam my number, [telling her] "in case something happens, I will message you immediately so that you can tweet it." Once or twice she tweeted for me while I was at a protest; I texted her, international texts.

From her home in New York, Summer also received information from her relatives in Aden about events on the ground and published them on her blog. In light of the near absence of independent media outside of Sana'a, she recalled,

[Information was] hard to verify. If I'm hearing about shellings or things like that, I would call back home [to family in Aden] at the time and be like, did you hear this, did you hear that? Are there people in the hospital dying of sniper wounds? And then I'd confirm [through them].

Yemenis also broadcast information about the revolution by putting on photography-based events in Washington, DC, and San Francisco. Some also gave talks about their experiences, as when journalist-intern Abubakr talked about his experiences participating in Change Square at universities and think tanks in London. With these strategies, diaspora members enacted voice against the regime in new ways.

### 5.1.2 Holding Demonstrations and Protests

As discussed in Chapter 4, the breakdown of transnational deterrents to mobilization enabled Libyans and Syrians abroad to express their voices openly for the first time en masse and hold protests against the regimes. This form of broadcasting attempted to signal to the public, the media, and policymakers that regime atrocities warranted outside attention and support.

Libyan activists held several notable gatherings at the White House and outside the Libyan consulate in Washington, DC. Residents of Manchester and London also demonstrated outside the BBC building and the Libyan embassy regularly. Syrians held demonstrations outside the Syrian embassy (before its closure by the Obama administration), on the Washington, DC, National Mall, and in other city centers. As a participant-observer of these protests in Southern California, I spent Saturday afternoons driving from my home to places such as the shopping district of Costa Mesa, the Little Arabia section of Anaheim, and the Chinese Embassy, the Federal Building, and City Hall in Los Angeles to attend demonstrations for the Syrian revolution. Whereas we usually chanted slogans and sang songs in Arabic, I was sometimes asked by participants to write placards in English. Others had pre-printed posters that were carted by organizers from one event to the next bearing slogans such as "Save Syrian Children" and "Shame on CNN" for its perceived

neglect of the crisis. Organizers aimed to broadcast these events into Syria in order to lend moral support to their allies. As Firas recalled, “We chanted in Arabic. We feel we have to do the same as Syria. We know everything is getting recorded, so it will reach over there.” A. A. in Michigan also recalled,

The most important thing that really moved us to do some demonstrations here is for us to take videos of us demonstrating and to send it to our people in Syria to encourage them that you have people supporting you from outside of Syria – to say that we are all in this together, [to provide] emotional support. When I echoed the same chants that I used to hear from videos on YouTube of people back home in Syria, it gave me the feeling that I’m there, I’m actually part of this whole thing. This was, we would say, the happiest days of the revolution.



FIGURE 5.1. Syrians and their allies gather in Costa Mesa, California, during a “Global Walk for Syria” on November 17, 2012. This event, co-sponsored by the Syrian American Council and the Karam Foundation, raised proceeds for internally displaced children in Atmeh, Syria.

(Photo credit: Dana M. Moss)

Syrians in the United States also counter-demonstrated against pro-regime events hosted by home-country elites, loyalists, and pro-regime spokespersons. Firas, who was then a member of the Southern California Coordinating Committee for protests and fundraising, recalled that events held by pro-regime groups, often referred to as *al-Shabiha*,



bring us all together. In front of the Federal Building, it was like hundreds of people against the *Shabiha*. And in front of the hotel where Bashar Jaafari<sup>1</sup> came, all organizations decided that we're going to go over there. The enemy was bringing us together, unifying us.

Hussam of SAC attested that it was easier to bring people to protest against a specific pro-regime target "because you're channeling anger at the regime," rather than in an "open-ended" way to the public at large.

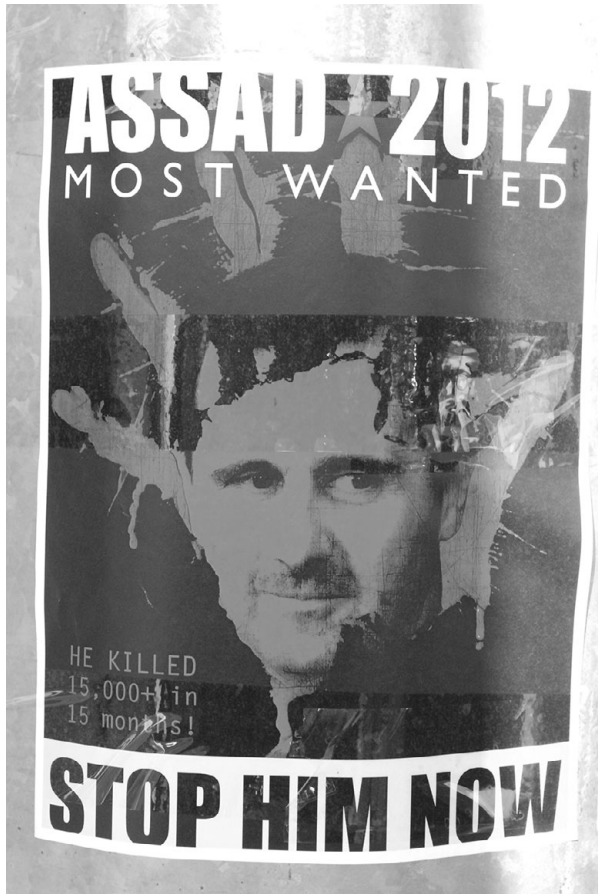


FIGURE 5.2. Anti-Assad posters adorned poles around the Federal Building in Los Angeles in 2012. This was a common site of protest for pro- and anti-Assad diaspora members to face off against one another from different sides of the intersection at Wilshire and Veteran avenues. The small print of the poster reads, "He killed 15,000+ in 15 months!" (Photo credit: Dana M. Moss)

<sup>1</sup> Bashar Jaafari was the permanent representative of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Assad regime to the United Nations in New York from 2006 until 2020.



Activists also lobbied locally against individuals affiliated with the regime to pressure them to resign and to shame their affiliated sponsors and organizations. For example, Syrian American students and local activists launched a campaign against Dr. Hazem Chehabi, the Syrian Consul General in Newport Beach, California, and president of the University of California Irvine Foundation. They organized these events in conjunction with other student groups at UCI to pressure Chehabi to resign from his post. As I observed firsthand, our silent demonstration during a UCI Foundation fundraiser caused a significant disturbance in the proceedings as guests in their black-tie attire gawked and pointed at us from the red carpet.<sup>2</sup>

Other Syrians got creative in their broadcasting work after weekly and monthly protests died down in 2014. Lina Sergie of Chicago launched the One Hundred Thousand Names Project to communicate the extreme costs of regime repression during the third anniversary of the revolution. Partnering with activists in SAC, she recounted,

I saw this video online that had a graphic visualization of different facts about the Syrian revolution. One of the facts in that video says, if you were to read one hundred thousand names of the people who have died in Syria so far, it would take you seventy-two hours. So I emailed [my colleagues] and I told them, let's read the names of the dead for March 15 [2014 anniversary] in front of the White House for seventy-two hours. We got tons of media. We repeated this again in June in front of the UN. It was a global reading. And in several cities, including inside Syria, the hundred thousand names were read in twenty-four hours during the "election" of Bashar al-Assad, the reelection. We did it again in August 2014 in front of the White House where we read fourteen hundred names [of the chemical weapons' attack victims from August 2013]. There are two components of the memorial: the Oral Memorial for Syria, the actual reading of the names. Also, the book of names. We printed out fifteen copies. We hand delivered them to the fifteen ambassadors of the UN Security Council in coordination with the Syrian National Coalition. Not everybody accepted the book, but we tried to take it to everybody. [US Ambassador to the UN] Samantha Power still has the book, according to Qusai Zakarya,<sup>3</sup> on her desk.

Yemenis also staged regular demonstrations. Activists in the United States gathered regularly in front of the Yemeni embassy and White House, the United Nations in New York, and in their local communities in Dearborn and San Francisco. As a New York-based organizer named Rabyaah recalled, "We were like, as long as there are people on the streets every day in Yemen, for

<sup>2</sup> Chehabi later resigned from his post as Consular General after the United States and other governments, including the Cameron administration in Britain, expelled diplomats in response to the Houla Massacre of May 2012. During this terrible event, more than one hundred civilians, including families with their children, were slaughtered at close range by regime forces.

<sup>3</sup> Qusai Zakarya is the nom de guerre of Kassim Eid, a Palestinian Syrian activist from the Damascus suburbs of Mouadamiya, Syria. He gained international attention with the help of diaspora activists during his hunger strike against regime violence from his home. He was gassed during the August 21, 2013 chemical weapons attack by the regime; he eventually escaped Syria as a refugee. See Eid (2017) and Eid and di Giovanni (2018) for his personal account of these trials.

us, the only practical way to support is at least once a week we have to hold some sort of rally or town hall meeting.” Participants traveled on charter buses from cities such as Dearborn and New York to converge on Washington, DC, for mass rallies on several occasions, including the weekend following the Friday of Dignity Massacre in March. Likewise, respondents in Britain organized weekly protests in London, busing in hundreds of participants from cities such as Liverpool and Birmingham. They also demonstrated outside the Yemeni embassy and in front of 10 Downing Street and the US embassy to protest US and Britain’s financial support of the Saleh regime. Occasionally, Yemeni diaspora events were coordinated across countries. Mazen O. from the DC area recalled that their group held demonstrations with Yemenis in Germany on one occasion. Activists from Britain also used Skype to share their experiences with their US counterparts during a town hall event in Dearborn, Michigan.

Yemeni activists worked proactively to draw media in advance of these events. Mahmoud of Sheffield attested, “We knew journalists, we had a good list of journalists from all channels, from the BBC to Al Jazeera to Al-Hiwar. And we informed them in advance that we are moving and we make our point clear and publicize it.” After sending press releases to different channels, respondents such as Safa in London reported garnering BBC, Al Jazeera, Press TV (an Iranian international satellite channel), and Al-Hiwar coverage (a London-based satellite channel). Abubakr in London stated that they worked to gain the sympathy of bystanders as well, recalling that the conversations they initiated with passersby “felt good” because “it wasn’t just about shouting Arabic chants. It felt like we were actually doing something” to educate the public about the cause. Morooj of the DC-based movement also made short films of their protests and posted the videos on YouTube “to try and get the word out there.” Ahmed of San Francisco emphasized the importance of this broadcasting work for their compatriots and in the political arena.

It’s a small thing, but we used to contact people from there, from Change Square in Sana’a. And those small things for them were big. First of all, they see that their families outside Yemen, they’re supportive of whatever they’re doing there. They know that they’re not alone in this struggle. Second, the regime used to say that those people who are protesting there in Yemen, they’re just odd voices there, trying to make the international community think there is nothing there in Yemen. We wanted to show that, no, it’s *not* just people who are there. Even Yemenis who are *outside* Yemen are protesting. Yemeni people deserve to live freely just as the American citizens do. There was a lot of aid going to the Yemeni government which was used to kill the Yemeni people. We wanted that to be stopped, too.

Arwa in London also described the importance of demonstrating their support to Yemenis back home by sending them videos of their protest events: “The most way we were connected to the Yemenis there, after we made the videos of the demos, we made sure that the Yemenis know that we are with them and that we are making *their voices heard*.” In these ways, the literal voicing of revolutionary chants, slogans, and demands in the diaspora diffused the revolution abroad.

## 5.2 REPRESENTING

While the broadcasting of facts and claims online, in the streets, and in public forums was a key component of diaspora mobilization for the Arab Spring, activists sought to do much more than act as “transistor radios” for the revolution. They also worked to *represent* the revolution directly by lobbying for outsiders to take action, joining revolutionary groups and leadership cadres, and acting as spokespersons for the cause in the media.

### 5.2.1 Lobbying outside Powers

Libyans served as representatives first by lobbying their host-country governments for limited military intervention. They did so because even though Libya’s military members began defecting en masse immediately during the uprising, loyalist brigades buttressed by mercenaries from neighboring countries began to retake towns one by one and moved to launch a major offensive against Benghazi in February using airpower and tanks (Bassiouni 2013). In the view of revolution supporters abroad, these threats warranted militarized counter-measures to save lives. Second, Libyans in the diaspora echoed calls from Libyans on the ground for protection and support in the fight against Gaddafi. Third, diaspora members viewed limited military intervention in the form of no-fly zones as distinct from Western interventions undertaken in Afghanistan and Iraq; no one wanted a ground occupation, they emphasized to me repeatedly. At the same time, stopping Gaddafi from obliterating entire liberated zones (as Assad has done since) was mandated, in their view, by the UN’s Responsibility to Protect doctrine and international law.<sup>4</sup>

To that end, Libyan representatives on both sides of the Atlantic advocated for a no-fly zone using congruent framing strategies, arguing that intervention was in their governments’ economic and security interests. They also contended that democratic Western powers had a moral responsibility to intervene and prevent a massacre in Benghazi. Mazen R. from Seattle, who lobbied his US congressional representatives before joining the National Transitional Council (NTC) himself, explained that in order to get anti-war Democrats on board, “You had to shape it or frame it in an American way. Explain Gaddafi, how horrible he is and that he’s *killing* people. This is the humane thing to do. And explain that it’s not going to cost the US lives as well.” To that end, the Libyan Emergency Task Force in Washington, DC, worked with the report-issuing group Libya Outreach and other activists to lobby officials. Parallel efforts were established in Britain by longtime dissidents like Mahmud, who had been shot in the leg protesting against Gaddafi

<sup>4</sup> See my earlier work (Moss 2016a, 2017) for a more detailed analysis of Libyan and Syrian demands for limited military intervention from the West. These works explain why activists viewed outside military intervention pragmatically as the best bad option available and necessary to save lives in the short term according to the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (see also Nahlawi 2019). According to testimonials, missives, communiqués, and their personal relations with activists on the ground, such as Raed Fares of Kafranbel, Syria, respondents also argued that it was what Syrians and Libyans themselves were calling for from the front lines.

in 1984, a group of young professionals who organized themselves at the onset of the uprising to form the Libyan British Relations Council. Dr. Abdul Malek of Libya Watch in Manchester also met with various European governments to convince them to recognize the NTC, Libya's government-in-waiting, as the legitimate representative of the home-country.

Even after winning support, which I discuss at length in Chapter 7, A. R. of the Libyan British Relations Council recalled the strategic importance of wielding voice through lobbying over time:

Before [the intervention], people had no idea what was going on. After, Parliament wanted to make sure that they were fighting a good fight, and we knew that NATO's involvement was vital. So the main purpose was to keep them *committed* to the fight at the same level of operations and not to feel under political pressure to withdraw. The other purpose was that we wanted to be an alternative face of Libya. Because you had the diaspora here, educated people, speaking the language of the country they live in. The only thing that was known about Libya was created in Gaddafi's image, and we wanted to show people that, no, Libyans are a well-educated people who can *speak*.

Lobbying efforts were also initiated by exiled Syrians who were already public in their anti-regime sentiments prior to the Arab Spring, such as Marah Bukai and Dr. Radwan Ziadeh in the United States. After newcomers to activism began to organize and come out publicly for regime change for the first time, these efforts expanded and grew to be represented by such organizations as the Syrian American Council, the DC-based Syrian Emergency Task Force, and the group British Solidarity for Syria by the end of 2011. Dr. Ziadeh and Marah reported that their earliest meetings with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were productive. They presented several requests, according to Ziadeh.

The first meeting we had was with Secretary Clinton at the State Department. This was in June 2011, before any of the opposition organizations had been established. At that time, actually, the meeting was very good. We requested from Secretary Clinton four things: for President Obama to ask Bashar al-Assad to step aside, which he did not do until August; to increase the sanctions on oil companies; then to work with the UN Security Council to [pass a] resolution condemning the violence in Syria; and to work on the sanctions against people in the Syrian government, ban them from traveling, stop giving them visas. Secretary Clinton, at that time, took things very seriously. My focus at that time was to get any kind of international support. Because we know what's happened before in Syria in the '80s when there was no reaction from the international community. My focus at the time was to get a special session on Syria with the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. We had many meetings at the State Department to convince them to request special meetings. That was in April 2011.<sup>5</sup>

After the regime escalated its violent response over the course of 2011, many activists also came to advocate for the implementation of a no-fly zone to stop the regime from bombing liberated and civilian areas. Activists argued that this was both necessary and obligatory under the principles of the Responsibility to

<sup>5</sup> The UN Human Rights Council held a special session on the "Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic" on April 29, 2011.

Protect doctrine, a global agreement reached by UN member states in 2005. As Y. of Manchester, an activist and scholar of international law, argued,

The idea behind this principle is that where there's a mass atrocity situation as in Syria, the international community has a responsibility to step in if the government is failing to protect its people. You can find a lot of differences between Syria and Libya that would make intervention less favorable in Syria. Okay, fine. That doesn't mean that the international community no longer has a responsibility.

By the end of 2013, however, it became clear to activists in the United States and Britain that their governments were not going to intervene decisively against Assad by enforcing a no-fly zone or by launching punitive strikes against his use of chemical weapons. Nevertheless, they continued to lobby for more effective assistance to vetted units in the Free Syrian Army, to request funding for civil-society-building initiatives in Syria, and for expanded humanitarian aid. Syrians attested that their lobbying work also included arguments about how regime violence enabled the spread of extremists like Ahrar al-Sham and the Islamic State (ISIS, referred to by President Obama as ISIL). As Hussam, national chairman of the Syrian American Council, recalled,

Early on, I will say until [2013], we focused on pressuring and convincing the Obama administration to arm and train the Free Syrian Army. The argument is that unless we do so, Assad will continue to engage in murder, shootings, sending barrel bombs, missiles on people. And as the regime weakens, that vacuum would be filled by extremist groups such as ISIS. So there's a threat in allowing for the FSA to be weak. As of 2014, we're focusing on reminding the Obama administration that as they're engaged in defeating ISIS, there is no solution to the threat of ISIS *without* the elimination of the Assad regime and the establishment of a strong, democratic Syria. Otherwise, the conflict with ISIS will go on indefinitely – and Assad is actually benefiting from this targeting of ISIS. Our argument is that ISIS is a result of Assad's oppression and a result of the vacuum created through repression by Assad's regime. So that is our main focus. Other areas include pressuring the administration to increase their foreign humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees around the world.

Abdulaziz likewise attested that members of Britain's Syria Parliamentary Affairs Group, which was formed in late 2013, did the same.

We are trying to do our best to show, look, what's going on in Syria is mainly caused by Assad, and that the extremism is because of the lack of action from the international community. I mean, if you look at ISIS, they just appeared about fourteen months ago. And the Syrian revolution has been going on more than three years and a half. If the international community, the UN Security Council, [upheld] their responsibility, we wouldn't have reached the point where we have this extremism.

Around the time that some politicians in Washington, DC, and Britain were suggesting that their governments partner with the Assad regime against ISIS, the DC-based Syrian Emergency Task Force helped to launch a major campaign to pressure foreign governments into rejecting this option. This effort, referred to by Mouaz as the "Caesar file," publicized the testimonials and evidence of a regime defector who had photographed thousands of deceased detainees murdered by torture and starvation in regime prisons. The task force brought Caesar to testify at hearings in Congress (much to the consternation, he added,

of certain US officials who did not want these atrocities to be exposed) in order to pressure the US government not to ally with the regime.<sup>6</sup>

The Caesar file is unprecedented in that it's something that can start tying the noose around Assad's head – not for the legal process, which is important for accountability and justice. But more important for me is how we can use that politically to prevent any thought of [the US government] working with the regime. It would just be embarrassing for President [Obama] – impossible – if he knew everything [in the Caesar file] and still worked with Assad.



FIGURE 5.3. Mouaz Mustafa, head of the Syrian Emergency Task Force (left), speaks with unnamed Syrian regime defector “Caesar” (right) while waiting to brief the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in Washington, DC on July 31, 2014. Caesar smuggled fifty-five thousand photographs out of Syria that document the torture and killing of more than ten thousand detainees by the Assad regime. Some photographs depicting the corpses of starved prisoners have been enlarged and are displayed behind Chairman Ed Royce. Mouaz has worked as Caesar’s partner and broker across a range of venues to publicize these atrocities, including in Congress and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. (Photo by Erkan Avci/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

<sup>6</sup> As articles by Simon and Bolduan (2019) and Kossaiy (2020) explain, Caesar’s defection and testimonies in front of Congress, which displayed photographic evidence from more than fifty thousand images of Syrians who had been starved and tortured to death in regime prisons, was shepherded by Mouaz Moustafa of the Syrian Emergency Task Force. This broadcasting work



The task force also established a partnership with the Holocaust Museum in DC, which publicized the Caesar photographs and hosted events featuring prominent members of Congress, Syrian prisoners-turned-refugees, and Holocaust survivors.<sup>7</sup> Activists like Ayman Abdel Nour of Syrian Christians for Democracy (later changed to Syrian Christians for Peace) also worked to combat regime propaganda that Assad protected minorities by informing “the West and the leaders that the Christians are not as the regime is trying to portray.” This was especially notable due to the regime’s long-standing and utterly false declarations that Assad is the protector of Christians and minorities in Syria.<sup>8</sup>

Yemeni respondents served as representatives of the revolution by meeting on several occasions with a range of officials in the US and British governments to express their grievances and lobby on behalf of their demands. These included asking their host-country governments to voice stronger support for the revolution, to pressure Saleh into halting attacks on protesters and to resign, and to cut financial backing of the regime. As Faris, spokesman for the DC-based Yemeni Youth Abroad for Change, recalled,

The only thing we really wanted to do for [the revolution] was to vocalize, or at least show support, or put some type of pressure on the Yemeni government to try to stop the killing and the oppression that was occurring at that time. So we wanted to put pressure [on the US government] to put boundaries on the violence that was taking place.

To this end, organizers from a cross-community delegation met with officials in the White House, the State Department, the National Security Council, and various congressional representatives to put forward these demands. London-based activists calling themselves the Yemen Revolution Support Group also delivered written demands to the Prime Minister’s office and to the Home Secretary, members of Parliament (MPs), Foreign Secretary William Hague, the Department for International Development, and the Saudi embassy “to say that you need to be more serious about what’s happening in Yemen,” according to Haidar in Birmingham. Safa, who was responsible for writing for this group, attested that she worked up draft template letters for community members to send their MPs and petitioned the Department for International Development (DFID) for emergency humanitarian aid.

was eventually used as the basis of bipartisan legislation sanctioning the Syrian regime and individuals and entities for working with Assad. The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, which Moustafa helped to draft, was in the works when I spoke with him in 2014, but it only gained bipartisan support after Obama’s second term in office. President Donald Trump signed it into law in late 2019 and it became effective in June 2020.

<sup>7</sup> The Washington, DC-based Holocaust Museum has featured a number of exhibits on mass killings in Syria, the first of which featured photographs from regime-defector Caesar and was coordinated in conjunction with the Syrian Emergency Task Force (O’Grady 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Members of Syrian Christians for Peace and SAC penned a compelling opinion-editorial for *The Hill* refuting this myth. See Yamin et al. (2017).



### 5.2.2 Joining Revolutionary Groups and Cadres

Activists also represented the revolution by serving as delegates for the various arms of the Libyan and Syrian opposition in an official capacity. For Libyans from the diaspora, much of this work took place while volunteering in the Gulf region or within Libya itself. After the regime severed communications between Benghazi and Tripoli, a number of respondents were recruited by newly appointed NTC information minister Mahmoud Shamman to launch a pro-revolution satellite station. Broadcasting in Arabic out of Doha, the station was dubbed Libya AlAhrar. Shamman designed this station as an alternative to Libya's state-run channel and to promote the revolution in coordination with the NTC. Shahrazad, who had traveled to Washington, DC, during the first week of the revolution to participate in protests and lobbying, was one of the many diaspora members who helped to run the station in Qatar. She explained,

Our TV station became the focal place for people to look for information. We were trying to connect with the east and the west because Gaddafi controlled the west side of Libya at that time. I had a program called *Libya al-Naas*, Libya The People, targeted to Libyans. My show was in the Libyan dialect [because] I was trying to get in touch with the common Libyan person and bring people together. Gaddafi at that time was trying to divide the people and say that the west is doing this and the east is trying to confuse you, the east is this and the east did that. So every night, I showed a map of Libya with the green flag on it and the new flag closing in on the green to show people visually how things are liberating and progressing in the different parts. Because they would not get the news [otherwise].

Syrians too came to represent their revolution as long-distance members of Local Coordination Committees (LCC), an anti-violence activist network based in Syria. Others joined the Syrian National Council, formed in August 2011 in Istanbul to represent the revolution to the international community, before it was subsumed by the Syrian National Coalition the following year. Playing a role as representatives was critical, recalled Marah in Virginia, because, "We have the opportunity to go on TV, to communicate with the international community and to deliver their message." Mohammad al-Abdallah, a civil society activist who came to the United States in 2009 as a political refugee and headed the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre as of 2014, recalled,

I started working with a group of activists trying to organize activities on the ground. After the Local Coordination Committees emerged, I became one of their spokespersons for six months, from almost April to October in 2011, to communicate some of the demands of Syrians to the [US] government. I *had* to do it, because there was a vacuum. After that, I joined the Syrian National Council when it started.

Rafif Jouejati, founder of FREE-Syria, a humanitarian organization and think tank in Washington, DC, also came to translate and speak for the Local Coordination Committees.

I responded to a Facebook post that was asking for someone to translate some news of what was happening on the ground, and I responded; they invited me to join the translation team. This was back before every news bureau had a correspondent either on the ground or near Syria. When the LCC spokesperson left to do other things, they asked me to take on that job, so I did. [In addition] to posting on YouTube and Facebook, we developed an impressive media list. There was an email service that went out, and the daily summary of the death toll, the destruction. We posted everything to the LCC's Facebook page where we uploaded videos. Anybody who wanted to receive the news had access. Our goal was to make sure that the average reader or listener had access to information about what was happening on the ground. It was very important to us – and it still is – that events in Syria don't go unnoticed.

Activists likewise served as informal representatives in the media by holding press conferences, giving interviews, and helping the revolution with its public relations. Malik, co-founder of the Syrian Justice and Development Party, recalled being catapulted into the position of unofficial spokesperson for the revolution from London.

After the protests [first] happened, [a journalist] called me straight away and got me an interview on Sky News, and that was the start of probably hundreds of interviews. I'm not exaggerating. Everyone from BBC World, BBC News, ITN, Channel 4 News, CNN, you name it, all wanted someone who speaks English and who can put some context. So I was kind of like a de facto spokesman for the opposition even though I never had any kind of official role.

Similarly, Haytham represented the anti-regime cause from Manchester by giving the media information and testifying about his experiences as a former political prisoner.

We addressed the media [by] responding to their requests. When they needed somebody to talk about refugees, to talk about the peace conference in Geneva, they call us. We are one of the resources to talk about the Syrian cause. Second, we advocate the Syrian cause doing work with ordinary people. We go to places like mosques, churches, universities. About twenty times we have given a talk called "Voices from Syria." The first [part] is about the situation in Syria, the political situation before the revolution, why the revolution happened, what was the response of the regime. I [also] give my personal story – why they imprisoned me, what happened to me in prison.

A. A., a youth from Michigan, worked as a volunteer for the Shaam News Network, which was founded by Bilal Attar (Conduit 2019) to act as a global network of citizen journalists and volunteers dedicated to promoting international publicity.

We were contacting [American] news channels urging them to cover demonstrations back home in Syria. All of this was done under the Syrian American Council. A couple of months later, through some connections of Syrian friends here [in Michigan], I started working with Shaam News Network, which is a news channel run [from Syria] using social media websites. It's one of the sources that the media here in the US and international media used to start covering what's happening in Syria. The media used a lot of the materials that

Shaam News Network would provide on their Facebook page and YouTube channels. My involvement was to moderate their English channel on Facebook and translate the Arabic news into English news, and post all of this on Facebook.

Yemeni respondents also served as representatives of the revolution in the media when invited to do so. Mazen O. of Washington, DC, recalled that “because we’re basically the voice of the peaceful protesters here in the US [in] the local media, to the American public,” the Yemeni Youth Abroad for Change group appointed a spokesperson, an activist named Faris, to speak on networks such as Al Jazeera and MSNBC. He explained that their roles were to transmit the general grievances and claims of anti-regime youth, who were consciously leaderless and anti-hierarchical. As Ahlam of New York attested, “What we were doing – or what we thought we were doing – was amplifying the voices of the people in Yemen. Simply amplifying.” However, unlike the Libyan and Syrian cases, no Yemeni activists in the United States or Britain reported acting as deputized representatives of any revolutionary groups in Yemen.

### 5.3 BROKERING

Activists worked as brokers – intermediaries who linked together previously unconnected entities – for the purposes of channeling attention and resources to the Arab Spring. They did so in two main ways: (1) by connecting revolutionaries and aid workers on the ground with geopolitical actors such as host-country policymakers, journalists, NGOs, and international agencies, and (2) by connecting rebels at home with one another. Libyans and Syrians reported engaging in both sets of actions; for Yemenis, rare instances of brokering involved connecting outside journalists with Yemenis in the sit-in movement in Sana’a.

#### 5.3.1 Brokering between Revolutionaries and Geopolitical Actors

Activists worked as *brokers* for their compatriots – what Tasbeeh, a Libyan American, called “remote fixers” – to connect them with journalists for major networks, governments, and donors. Heba, for instance, put a cousin and a friend living in Benghazi in touch with CNN and Al Jazeera for interviews since they were “not afraid to talk” and could communicate in English. Likewise, Ahmed of Enough Gaddafi! contacted a Libyan American named Rahma, then living in regime-controlled Tripoli with her family, over Facebook, and (with her permission) introduced her to a news organization. This single connection, they attested, snowballed into regular calls from NPR, the BBC, Al Jazeera English, and the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>9</sup> This kind of brokerage enabled Libyans

<sup>9</sup> Eventually Rahma and Ahmed were married. This echoed many stories I heard during my fieldwork of how the Libyan revolution had forged new ties between conationals who were previously estranged from one another because of Gaddafi’s repression.

to “speak for themselves,” Abdullah of Enough Gaddafi! affirmed. Farah from London similarly emphasized that while diaspora voices were important, they were not the most important voices. “I did *not* want to be the voice of the revolution in Libya,” she exclaimed. “That was really important to me.” To that end, brokerage enabled revolutionaries and relief workers on the ground to speak to the outside world directly.

Ayat additionally attested that an important part of brokerage included vetting her contacts to cultivate trust with journalists and prevent the spread of misinformation. “People I was talking to [in Libya] just kind of assumed that I was a journalist,” she mused. “And I said, no, I’m the middleman here, I just basically have to vet you.” Anna from Manchester reflected that some of her relatives in Libya “were surprised at how much we actually knew. I don’t think they realized that a lot of the information that was in the media was actually [from] the Libyans who were abroad, getting the information from Libya, and sending it across.” The preexistence and expansion of activists’ transnational network ties, as I detail further in Chapter 6, proved vital for brokering work.

Syrians reported that connecting insiders with outsiders was important for overcoming a deficit in outside awareness about how bad the situation had become in besieged areas. Writer-activist and Karam Foundation founder Lina Sergie reported that in the early days of the uprising,

We really were in the mindset that “the media doesn’t know what’s going on, nobody knows the truth. If only they knew more, then there would be a change.” We felt it was our duty to tell people what was going on, circulate the videos, and connect the media to different people like doctors and activists and fighters on the ground. I got connected with people in Homs, during the Baba Amr siege [in February 2012]. That was the moment when journalists were looking for people on the ground constantly; I would connect journalists and the media to the activists all the time.

Haytham in Manchester likewise attested that this work was vital in empowering Syrians to speak for themselves whenever possible. “When the media called me,” he explained, “I said, okay, you want somebody from Homs? I will bring somebody from Homs. It’s not *me* who gives the information [about Homs]. It’s about *linking*.”

Maher Nana, a Miami-based doctor and co-founder of the Syrian Support Group, further reported that brokerage was predicated on facilitating trust and understanding between insider and outsider political forces.

We were actually bringing and introducing people, officers from the Free Syrian Army, to the US government and helped with vetting them. I mean, the most important thing that we did really was making the connection. So our role mainly was two things. Number one, to present the US side to the Free Syrian Army and let them know the United States stands for freedom, liberty, democracy, equality. We were raised [in Syria] on conspiracy theories – on the belief that the United States and Israel are evil, the sources of all the problems in the world. So when the Free Syrian Army was formed, we really wanted to let those guys know that this is not true. They were hopeful that the United States was going to provide support. We wanted to assure them that we live here,

we are American citizens, we know how the system works, we know what the United States stands for, and all of those myths are incorrect. So we were trying to present the US side of the equation. At the same time, we wanted to connect those FSA members to the United States administration and tell them that those guys are really freedom fighters, they really have a cause, and they are fighting for that cause. They are not warlords, they are not gangsters. We helped in making that connection, basically.



FIGURE 5.4. Syrian peace activist Kassem Eid presents a talk about the Assad regime's siege on his hometown of Moadamiya, Syria, with organizers from the Syrian American Council (April 25, 2014, the University of Southern California). He had met with US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power on April 14 to testify about the regime's sarin gas attack on August 21, 2013. This attack, which nearly took his life, killed more than one thousand seven hundred civilians.

(Photo credit: Dana M. Moss)

Complementing these efforts, the Syrian American Council brought nonviolent figureheads of the anti-regime movement, such as civil society champions Raed Fares and Razan Ghazzali, to the United States to give a speaking tour to the media and meet with members of Congress.<sup>10</sup> They also brought victims of

<sup>10</sup> Syrian activists Raed Fares and Razan Ghazzali went on a speaking tour co-sponsored by SAC in 2013, which I had the privilege of attending in Los Angeles. During Fares' radio interview with National Public Radio, his dear friend Kenan Rahmani, a Syrian American activist, provided

regime violence and chemical weapons to the United States, such as Kassem Eid, a peaceful activist known by his nom de guerre, Qusai Zakarya.<sup>11</sup> The talk of his that I attended at the University of Southern California with SAC members and student activists on April 25, 2014, moved me to tears. Eid almost died from the sarin gas attack in the Damascus suburbs in August 2013. In addition to describing his experience of being gassed, which stopped his heart, Eid's talk detailed the relentless siege underway in Moadamiya at the time. He also spoke about his experiences at the United Nations and his meetings with US Ambassador Samantha Power, which gained national media attention. These efforts, supported by diaspora activists, provided important counter-evidence to Syrian and Russian regime propaganda that the rebels had been the ones to perpetuate chemical warfare.<sup>12</sup>

Diaspora activists like Ibrahim al-Assil of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement reported that brokerage put Syrians in touch with potential international donors as well.

When some groups became more mature, they were asking more to get in touch with international NGOs. Not only those who work in humanitarian aid but also those small groups in Syria who were trying to spread awareness inside Syria and to help some development of projects. At that time, they realized they needed to get in touch with international NGOs, to know how to register their NGOs, to get funds for their organizations, for their managerial expenses, to get trained so they can grow more in a professional way. So mostly these were the tasks of all members in the US and the UK, to expand our network with the media and to get in touch with international NGOs to help (them) grow and develop strategic planning for the future.

In contrast, Yemenis reported a few, albeit rare, instances of brokering with the media. Fathi, a London-based journalist with the BBC, served as a broker by sharing a database of activist contacts in Yemen with other journalists. Atiaf, who was in Yemen at the time, said that her New York-based colleague

“voice” on the program through interpretation (Gaylon 2013; National Public Radio 2013). Fares was gunned down in his hometown of Kafranbel in 2018, a most tragic end to his courageous commitment to civic activism.

<sup>11</sup> I had the privilege of attending Eid's speaking tour, which was also facilitated by SAC, at the University of Southern California in April 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Kassem gave testimony at the United Nations about being the victim of the Assad regime's sarin gas attack on August 21, 2013. During this visit on April 14, 2014 he met US ambassador Samantha Power. His testimony was vital in refuting Syrian, Iranian, and Russian regime propaganda that the rebels had perpetrated the attack. He later lambasted Power for “lying to my face” about wanting to help Syrians, given her later defense of President Obama's reticence to intervene. He writes,

Caesar also gave Ms. Power a handwritten note to deliver to President Obama, but he never received any response. I also requested a meeting with President Obama as a survivor of the war crimes in Syria on multiple occasions, through the White House, the State Department, and Ambassador Power, but all of my requests were also denied. Neither Ambassador Power nor President Obama wanted to acknowledge the truth. (Badran 2018)

Ahlam contacted her to facilitate the entry of journalists into Yemen. However, this activity was rare when compared to broadcasting for Yemenis in the two host-countries.

### 5.3.2 Brokering between Allies on the Ground

Libyans and Syrians additionally worked to connect various parties of the conflict inside their respective home-countries to one another. This coordination was crucial, as Abdo G., a British Libyan, told me, because ad hoc revolutionary forces were often disorganized and isolated from one another. For example, Monem, who was living in San Jose, California, at the start of the revolution, heard from contacts in his parents' hometown of Khoms, Libya, that "all political activists and people that were doing activities in Khoms were being killed." In response, he sought to help the resistance movement by asking his brother to deliver satellite phones to trusted contacts in Tunisia for delivery to Khoms. Using his smartphone, Monem "connected them with the central command in Misrata and Benghazi. One of the guys in Misrata was the point of contact with NATO," he explained, "and I said, please, I have information for you because the cells in Khoms could not communicate with Misrata directly." In this way, Monem helped to link these fighting forces to one another.

Syrians in the United States and Britain also brokered between dissidents inside of Syria to help them coordinate civil disobedience. Ala'a Basatneh, a Syrian American college student who became the subject of a documentary called *#ChicagoGirl: The Social Network Takes on a Dictator* (Piscatella 2013), performed this work from the Illinois suburbs. She assisted activists in Syria by serving as an intermediary between clandestine organizers, helping to plan protests and plot escape routes using Google Maps. This brokerage enabled activists inside of Syria to keep their identities hidden from one another for protection. Nebal in London, co-founder of the group British Solidarity for Syria, explained how he also came to be a middleman for the Syrian Revolution General Commission in Aleppo. After going on British television to discuss the revolution at a time when "not a lot of Syrians were speaking out in the media," he recalled,

I was contacted by people from Aleppo saying that we need a contact from outside Syria and we've seen you on TV, and we think that we can trust you. We'll provide you with photos, we'll provide you with videos. It was me and another girl in Saudi Arabia, working with these guys inside Aleppo, a core of five people from different areas who don't know each other. And they should *not* know each other so that if one is caught, he can't tell about the others. This happened in another [case] – one was caught, and all the nine working with him were caught because he had no choice but to tell about it. So that's why it was our duty to connect them, to agree about the timing and the place of the demonstrations and then spread it to all other activists inside, so that if one of them was caught, he doesn't know any other ones. They were providing me with information



about how many people had been killed, what's going on inside Syria. We pass [that information] to the media, because at that point, the media didn't have those contacts.

Brokerage between insiders thus helped rebels to continue resisting in the face of extreme threats and brutality.

#### 5.4 REMITTING

Diasporas are well-known for remitting resources homeward to crises and conflicts in their homelands, and many diaspora groups for the Arab Spring mobilized to do just that. Libyan activists channeled resources that included satellite phones, bulletproof vests, medical aid, and cash homeward from the first week of the revolution to its conclusion. Ayman, founder of the US-based organization Libyan Humanitarian Action, attested that they worked to send the rebels communications equipment before NATO stepped in to fill this role.

The Libyan freedom fighters didn't have material support or weapons before the March intervention of NATO and other countries, so I did fundraising to buy some equipment and logistical stuff, like military-grade Iridium satellite phones. We had a hard time convincing the Iridium company to [let us] buy them, because they have restrictions on what you're going to use them for. But finally I was successful in buying a good amount of them, and we sent them to the Libyan Transitional Council. These phones were sent to the freedom-fighter leaders in Misrata, Benghazi, and the Nafusa Mountains. After that, in March, they got a lot of support. At the beginning, it was a small amount – it's not like a country is supporting them, it's just *people* supporting them – but we tried our best.

The need for tangible remittances also increased as the war left thousands of casualties and displaced people in its wake. Women's participation in remitting was vital, since the humanitarian aid assembled for the revolution included supplies that “the men weren't thinking of,” Rihab from Washington, DC, noted. Heba of the Libyan American Association of Ohio echoed,

One of the number-one things needed was feminine products, and because of the psychological trauma, a lot of the adults were needing adult underwear. We went out to get the products, and also bought bottled water and non-perishable foods that we could send without a problem. Our forty-foot shipping container was filled to the end.

Ayman from Oklahoma also channeled funds to Libya and Tunisia using global wire transfer services. These methods enabled activists to get money into areas beyond their reach. “When the Gaddafi brigades were sanctioning the Nafusa Mountain area, people suffered from hunger and misery there,” he grimaced. “They needed money to buy food, so I sent money through a MoneyGram. It was quicker.” Salam, a Libyan American who spent most of the revolution mobilizing from within Tunisia and Libya as part of a diaspora-founded charity called Libya AlHurra, also set up a system whereby donors in the diaspora could purchase mobile service for the rebels' satellite communications. He said,

“We posted a list of satellite phones, I think a hundred and fifty of them, that we as a charity had donated. I posted it in a Facebook group. I was like, if you have ten bucks, go online and [purchase] credit for it. And that’s what Libyan Americans did.” By purchasing essential items, diaspora donors helped to pay for the supplies and fuel that kept the revolution running.

Other forms of aid that activists sent to Libya included basic necessities such as maps. Mohamed of Manchester explained, “I attended a meeting and there was a request for a satellite up-to-date picture of Misrata because missiles were being fired from certain locations, but they could not pinpoint where they were coming from.” As Gaddafi’s forces pummeled Misrata and the Nafusa Mountains, activists also mobilized to assist the harder-hit areas that lay outside of the NATO-protected zone. Assad of London’s World Medical Camp for Libya recalled,

We started initially on the eastern side. That was liberated very quickly, so we only sent one shipment of food and medicine to that side, because after that, the big organizations got involved – the big charities and United Nations. So we moved to the west. We sent two people at the charity’s expense to Tunisia and to Malta. These guys were in charge of receiving the goods that we sent and finding a way to send them into Libya. From the Tunisian border, we used to smuggle from there into Libya. In Malta, we hired some fishing boats and some of the Libyans who came in fishing boats as refugees to Malta. We filled them with as much as we can. After that, there was a boat we used to charter to take the stuff out into Libya. We sent food, medicine, and either satellite phones or satellite-based internet systems to some of the hospitals, and we carried on doing that the whole time.

For Syrians, the revolution and subsequent humanitarian disaster, which escalated into the largest refugee crisis since World War II, led diaspora activists to remit a range of resources to the revolution and humanitarian relief. Initially, as in the Libyan case, these remittances included communications equipment, such as satellite phones and covert recording devices, for the purposes of exposing events on the ground. Mohammad al-Abdallah, director of the DC-based Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, affirmed,

One of the earlier strategies the government did inside Syria was when they surrounded and besieged a city, they basically stopped the communications. The response from the community here was let’s equip the activists there with satellite phones and satellite internet so they can reach out to TV stations and to media and to human rights groups and tell them about how Syria was. So that was one of the main activities that happened in the beginning, mid-2011 to early 2012.

Dr. Nana of the Syrian Support Group went to Aleppo in June 2011 to observe what was going on for himself (Ward 2012). After joining the protest movement there, he recalled,

I came back to the States and at that time all our activities were how to send hidden cameras in pens or in glasses or in the shape of a lighter or a watch, banners, computers, laptops, satellite phones, satellite internet, and so on.

As more and more Syrians were forced to flee their homes, activists also fundraised for aid. A member of Syria Relief in Manchester recalled,

Initially it was informal. We recognized there were a large number of people who tried to flee from Syria into Turkey and were stuck at the borders. They were sleeping on the ground and when it rained, they had to sleep in the trees. It was just awful to hear about that. We didn't even see it at that time because there wasn't footage or reports, but we heard about it from contacts and friends and families and what have you. So at that time we decided amongst us to raise as much as we could. It was all done on trust. We'd ring people and say we need money for this purpose. We can't really provide a receipt or confirmation where the money went for but if you trust me, please do send the money. [Some] guys who went over bought tents and blankets and clothing, and got it across the border to these people that were displaced.

Nebal in London echoed that remitting was often learned on the fly. "I was a PhD researcher," he said. "I had no idea about how to do charity work. It wasn't organized work in the beginning. We were just sending the money straight away to the activists inside Syria." As the number of refugees swelled into the millions and they grew increasingly fragmented, apolitical humanitarian aid became the major focus of the diaspora. Though the exact figure has been impossible to track, the US and British diasporas have donated anywhere from tens of millions of dollars to over half a billion US dollars to the humanitarian effort alone since 2011 (Alloush 2018; Svoboda and Pantuliano 2015).

Activists also founded professional organizations during the revolutions to assist with humanitarian aid delivery and reconstruction. Syrian American engineer Khaled, for example, founded the Syrian American Engineers Association to work on near- and long-term rebuilding projects. Khaled said that by searching for like-minded organizations on the Internet in Arabic, he located engineering groups dedicated to rebuilding and supporting liberated areas around Damascus and Dara'a. To begin helping them, he said, "You contact them, you send them your name. Usually they are skeptical, but once you have their trust, then you'll start working with them." In so doing, Khaled assisted by "planning out what areas they need help in so you can alleviate those needs and help them work through those issues." As a result, Khaled transferred his expertise to help with rebuilding infrastructure, including the installation of water purification systems and the building of flour mills in areas facing aerial bombardment and widespread hunger.

Others worked to advise the Free Syrian Army and various military and political leaders at the forefront of the anti-regime insurgency. Dr. Nana of the US-based Syrian Support Group worked in an advisory capacity to help bolster the practices and legitimacy of the armed resistance.

When the Free Syrian Army was formed, which was defected soldiers who refused to fire on civilians basically, me and a bunch of guys thought that the Free Syrian Army is made of people who are not really organized. They don't have a long-term plan, they don't have experience in organizing or leadership or how to run a country. We helped them

develop what is called the *Proclamation of Principles for the Free Syrian Army*. I put it online. It's twelve points talking about liberty, democracy, freedom, equality of treatment to all citizens, condemning revenge killing, condemning use of chemical weapons or weapons of mass destruction, [having] peaceful relationships with neighboring countries, restoring order and peace in Syria. The people there, the officers there, they were very receptive. They were very enthusiastic that they are doing this because they really believe that this is what they stand for, and they signed on it. They formed what is called the Military Councils for each province that were supposed to lead the effort and the organization among the fighters and prevent them from those battalions turning into gangs or warlords.

Syrians also traveled to opposition hubs in Turkey or Qatar to deliver workshops on political leadership, human rights, international law, and citizen journalism, as well as on how to “document all of the crimes and human rights abuses,” according to Ahmed from London. Ammar Abdulhamid of the US-based Tharwa Foundation established an initiative to work on transitional planning for a post-Assad Syria in partnership with the Public International Law and Policy Group. Dr. Radwan Ziadeh, head of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Washington, DC, reported undertaking a similar initiative. In these ways, Syrians in the diaspora worked to channel their professional experience and expertise to the revolution, the humanitarian crisis, and into short- and long-term development and political capacity-building.

In contrast to the aforementioned interventions, I did not find any evidence that Yemeni movements worked *collectively* to channel resources to the rebellion or its medical volunteers during the main Arab Spring period, which lasted from January to November 2011. No diaspora movement leaders report fundraising for Sana'a's field hospital, for instance, or sending donations to any of the other protest sites. Instead, interviewees like Adel in Michigan attested that some individuals and families channeled funds to victims of regime violence in Change Square by wiring money to people they knew on the ground.<sup>13</sup> One Yemeni American reported sending several cameras to Change Square, but he never received confirmation of whether these cameras ever reached their intended recipients. From London Safa, Awssan, and several others shipped a container of food, clothes, medicine, and medical equipment to Aden, Yemen's southern port city. They did so by partnering with an Aden-based charity, *al-Firdos*, whose head arranged to receive the shipment. Awssan said that the community's response to this project was “excellent.” This charitable initiative occurred after the Arab Spring had waned, however, and the aid was intended for Yemen's needy writ large, rather than for anti-regime protesters.

<sup>13</sup> When I visited Sana'a's field hospital in June 2012, the head doctor attested that his team had received donations from abroad. However, it is unknown how much money was channeled to the field hospital from various sources overseas.

### 5.5 VOLUNTEERING ON THE GROUND

Libyans widely reported volunteering on the ground in order to contribute to the rebellion and relief directly. Volunteers initially flocked to Cairo to amass supplies and drive them into Benghazi as it was being liberated and faced regime shelling. Amr Ben Halim recalled, “We would travel fifteen hours by car to drive all the way into Libya [to make] deliveries [from Egypt], but also we wanted to see what’s going on and see what help we could offer.” Assia from Kentucky echoed that many volunteers, including her brother, went to Benghazi to “fill the gaps” of what needed to be done. Ahmed of Enough Gaddafi! attested that he and other volunteers filled these roles on the fly in order to help the effort.

From Cairo, there just happened to be this team of journalists who were looking to get into Libya. We were like, well, let’s go! We started as their translators and their fixers. We got to Benghazi on the twenty-fifth or the twenty-sixth of February to see what we could do to better coordinate a couple different things. Number one, when medical supplies came into the country, we made sure that they actually got to where they were supposed to go to different hospitals in Benghazi. The other things were to try to make sure that different journalists who came in actually had an appropriate understanding of the context that they were reporting on. We did our best to set up the right interviews for different folks, and tried to translate as much as possible.

Libyans also worked within regime-controlled territories. Dr. Niz Ben-Essa, a young Libyan doctor from Cardiff, managed to catch what he attested was the last flight into Tripoli to join the protest movement. After demonstrators were mowed down by live ammunition and arrested en masse, Niz joined an underground resistance unit called the Free Generation Movement.<sup>14</sup> Their clandestine group undertook a number of activities that included stealing Internet and satellite-based communications equipment from regime installations for the resistance. Niz explained that they did so because they knew that “If we don’t have a means of communicating with the outside world, much of what we do here is going to be fruitless.” The Free Generation Movement also facilitated independent media reporting from inside Gaddafi’s stronghold by helping foreign journalists escape their government-enforced lockdown. He recalled,

We were smuggling out the international media, who were effectively under arrest in the Rixos Hotel, to demonstrate that there was resistance and opposition to Gaddafi in Tripoli. Because Gaddafi was spinning the idea that everyone in Libya loved him and that there were no protests in Libya, no problems in Libya, it was just Al Qaeda elements causing trouble. We were taking journalists to speak to people and see sporadic small protests happening in Tripoli.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Niz communicated with journalists via Skype during his time as a leading dissident in the Free Generation Movement, which worked underground in Tripoli during the Libyan revolution to sabotage regime censorship and infrastructure; see Kofman (2011) and McKenzie (2011).

<sup>15</sup> Having visited the Rixos Hotel during my fieldwork in Libya, I asked Niz how it was possible that he and his colleagues smuggled journalists out past the hotel’s fortifications, which included

In addition to facilitating relief, diaspora activists also helped to monitor the work of international aid organizations. After visiting one UN Refugee Agency campus, Abdo G. of Libya Link attested that the conditions were appalling. Libyans lacked food, toilets, and supplies for basic hygiene. His group responded, pressuring officials by threatening to report the conditions to the press unless the situation improved. Likewise, Salam, a Libyan American, addressed this problem by supplementing services and negotiating with the managing officials.

I thank the UNHCR for everything they did, but the amount of care that I thought was humane was very different from what they thought was humane. I understand, as an agency their resources are limited. So as a charity, we did what we could. We provided a mobile hospital and a refrigerated pharmacy. My role fit in with trying to coordinate with the internationals because I speak English.

He also rented apartments for Libyan refugees in Tunisia, negotiated with Tunisian authorities to allow Libyan fighters to receive medical treatment, bought fuel to send into Libya, and purchased walkie-talkies and “all types of communication devices.” Salam stressed the fact that “it was a free for all. Whichever way we can help, we were going to help.”

As the Free Libya Army and NATO liberated additional territory over the summer, other members of the diaspora went home to help their compatriots directly, and even to join the fight itself. Adam of Virginia recalled that in addition to his combat training in Benghazi,

We were helping with the journalists, doing translations. There were also a few startup newspapers and they were all [run by] young guys. We were helping with the English side. This is all going on while we were training. Finally, once we were done training, my brigade leader was like, all right, you're going over to the western mountains. And it was literally like taxi drivers, students, doctors, regular bakers-turned-soldier. It was college students like me who are now holding an AK and we're in charge of five other guys.

a long driveway and a gate. He said that by communicating with journalists via email and using moles who worked within the hotel, they would make arrangements for the journalists to venture outside the gate, ostensibly for a cigarette, and then jump into a waiting car (Many journalists got deported after their escapes were discovered). Niz explained that the poor training of the security services provided opportunities for them to exploit as a guerilla movement:

You have to understand something, I'm not trying to belittle what we did or what anyone did, and I'm not trying to belittle what the risks were, but Libya has been very neglected for forty-two years. Not only from an education or healthcare or infrastructure point of view, from every aspect you can think of, but also the quality and the standard of training and expertise of the intelligence service. And the security services. Put bluntly, I think there were a lot of them, they were brutal, they were aggressive, but they weren't intelligent and they weren't well-equipped and they weren't well-trained.

This situation made such high-risk resistance possible. See Bassiouni (2013) for more information on the lack of preparedness and investment in the Libyan Army by the Gaddafi regime.





FIGURE 5.5. Two men walk past a mural in Tripoli, Libya, paying homage to Libyans from Manchester, England, who joined the revolutionary brigades in 2011. (Photo credit: Joseph Eid/AFP via Getty Images)



FIGURE 5.6. The Martyrs' Museum in Zawiyah, Libya, photographed here in 2013 by the author, displayed photographs of Libyan Americans, including a father-and-son pair, who had died fighting in the 2011 revolution. The upper floors of the building were destroyed by the fighting in 2011. (Photo credit: Dana M. Moss)



Some volunteers arrived to help the Free Libya Army break the summer stalemate. Abdulsalam, then in his fifties and living in California, arrived in Benghazi from Cairo using his American passport, to join the *thuwar* (revolutionary forces) to “pay my share for the revolution.” His brother, who had been living in Libya, connected him with the Libyan Martyrs Militia.

They took my name and said they would call me when they were ready. One day early in the morning, [my brother] called me and said go to the airport, there was a flight that was going to take me to Nalut. With no training, nothing – zero. It took us about five hours to get permission to fly, because of NATO. Then we went to Misrata. At that time there was heavy fighting. We landed on the road, on the highway. You’re scared, you don’t know what’s going to happen.

Members of the diaspora also became members of the “supporting cast” for the National Transitional Council, as Fadel from Washington, DC put it. Dina from California volunteered as the press coordinator for the interim prime minister. Mazen R. from Seattle joined the NTC to help with logistics, as he explained with a wave of his hand, because “wars *are* logistics.” He ran the NTC’s Oil and Finance Department and coordinated the Temporary Finance Mechanism, which enabled the NTC to receive outside funding by borrowing money against frozen assets to keep the country functioning during the war. As the finance mechanism coordinator under NTC minister Ali Tarhouni, Mazen R. worked to keep oil and electricity flowing to Benghazi and distributed cash in the Nafusa Mountains. He said, “I was a volunteer the whole time, so there was no salary or anything. I had three phones that wouldn’t stop ringing, each for one area: One for the Temporary Finance Mechanism, one for the fighters, and one for the administrators.”

Like Mazen R., Syrians from the United States and Britain ventured across state lines to volunteer in Syria and its border zones. Dr. Nana from Miami, for instance, escorted journalists into Syria, as when he brought reporters from CBS’s *60 Minutes* team into Syria in the fall of 2012 (Ward 2012). “We went inside Aleppo,” he said. “I hosted them in my family’s house with all my family members and we showed them the city, we show them the destruction. We also introduced them to those leaders of the Free Syrian Army.” In addition to working on the front lines as brokers and interpreters for journalists, others participated directly in protests. Ibrahim al-Assil of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement traveled from Britain back home to Syria in 2011 in order to participate in civil resistance before being forced to escape through Lebanon that same year. He said, “In mid-2013, I started to visit Syria again from the north. Going to Aleppo and at that time even to Raqqah before it was occupied by the Islamic State.” He and his colleagues from the Syrian Nonviolence Movement did so because,

We had different goals. One of them to coordinate and to meet people we work with inside Syria. For me personally, I felt that after being outside Syria for a year and a half, it became more difficult for me to understand what is going on. If you are Syrian and

even if you are in the US or UK, you *are* part of what's going on, but being geographically far away is not helpful for understanding what's going on. From another side, activists and people on the ground aren't always willing to listen to people who have been outside Syria for a long time because they feel that [those outside] are emotionally disconnected. Many of them started to say, you don't feel us – especially when you are asking them to stay peaceful. They say you don't know the brutality we face, you don't know the horror of the Syrian army, the Syrian *Shabiha* [loyalist militias and thugs]. So I felt that I need to start to go back to Syria to understand what's going on. That will help us to plan for our movement in a better way and to get more in touch with other activists, to rebuild the trust with people on the ground and to be more effective.

For physicians like Dr. Ayman Jundi in Manchester, going home also enabled volunteers to lend their labor and expertise in medicine.

We went down [to Syria] and did a few courses. We've been organizing trips for people to go and operate in field hospitals. That kind of activity started very early on. Very quickly, the [Syrian British Medical] Society became *seen* as an arm of the revolution, but it's *not* a political organization. It's just, as it happened, the medical need is in the areas that are being bombed by the regime. The regime's hospitals are still functioning, they're still working, they're getting their supplies – not so the hospitals on the other side! So the emphasis of the Society has been where the need is.

Others transported medical aid and equipment to liberated zones. Ousama of the Syrian Bristol community, for example, drove ambulances as part of a volunteer convoy into Syria several times, which he arranged in coordination with medical councils.

We used to take the powder called Celox, very famous in Canada, used by loggers who cut trees using chainsaws. It stops bleeding straight away. In the city of Aleppo, they formed the medical council and they started coordinating all the activities, overseeing about eighteen hospitals in the north. So we found that the best way is to take everything to them. They sort it out and they see where everything is needed and they divert it. Because there are a lot of amputees as well, one of the things we concentrate on taking is wheelchairs and crutches.

Mohamed Taher Khairullah, an activist and the mayor of Prospect Park in New Jersey, also began to travel into Syria in December of 2012 to deliver humanitarian relief. He said,

It started as an individual effort and it developed into joining an organization. Right now I work with Watan USA, which is a 501(c)(3) organization. We're approved by the IRS and we're tax deductible. I've been to Aleppo and many villages in the governorate of Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, mostly to deliver aid and to make contacts on the ground for future projects. Because the needs are rapidly changing, I stay in touch with people who do work on the ground, and through them we assess what we need to do. Obviously, as an organization, we also have projects that are consistently running such as school and two bakeries.

Only one Syrian I interviewed attested that he had fought with the Free Syrian Army before 2013. He did not come from a political family or have any experience in political activism before the revolution. This interviewee first

traveled into Damascus in 2011 in order to understand what was happening in Syria for himself. Going against his parents' wishes, he then joined the protest movement and worked with the anti-regime Damascus Media Center. As the revolution escalated, this respondent reported undertaking aid delivery and weapons smuggling, as well as fighting on the front lines with an FSA brigade in Aleppo. Unlike my Libyan interviewees, however, he did not report fighting alongside other members of the Syrian diaspora during this period.

Several respondents also reported volunteering in Yemen during the revolution, although this was not a part of activists' collective strategies of intervention. Some simply decided to put their lives on hold to venture home and see what they could do. Raja, a student in New York, for example, was motivated by the Friday of Dignity Massacre to take a leave from her university and become a citizen photojournalist in Sana'a. Because the regime deported many foreign journalists the week before the massacre, these circumstances gave her a unique opportunity to document the violence. Armed with her Yemeni residency card and her camera, she recalled,

I don't need a visa to get into Yemen, and at that point they weren't issuing visas to anyone, especially from the US. So I went, it was pretty easy to get in. I can blend in and integrate and report. I speak English, I have media contacts, so my added value was sky rocketing at that point.

Raja went as an independent observer and published her photographs and writings on her blog and on social media. She remained in Yemen from March through August. Lacking a journalist's background, she learned how to document the conflict on the fly.

Summer from New York also returned to her family's residence in Aden several times during the revolution. She avoided joining the protests, however, because she did not want to become embroiled in the controversy surrounding southern separatism. Instead, Summer worked to document stories and events on her blog. In one other case, I found that a London-based journalist named Abubakr joined his family in Sana'a during the revolution for about a month in April, working as an intern for the *Yemen Times* during the day and participating in the sit-ins at night. That said, Yemeni diaspora movements did not incorporate volunteering on the ground into their tactics or goals. Instead, activists made the decision to participate directly in Yemen's Arab Spring on a selective, individualized basis.

## 5.6 VARIATION IN DIASPORA INTERVENTIONS

As illustrated above, diaspora movements from the United States and Britain performed a range of critically important roles in Arab Spring. When compared by national group and host-country, these roles varied widely, as summarized in Table 1.3 in the Introduction. The riots that kick-started Libya's revolution escalated into a national revolutionary war that "needed *everything*," as one

respondent recalled, and Libyans abroad took up the call, becoming a *full-spectrum auxiliary force* for rebellion and relief as broadcasters, representatives, brokers, remitters, and volunteers on the front lines for the duration of the revolution, as Table 5.2 illustrates. Activists also frequently reported swapping indirect, lower-risk forms of support (like broadcasting) for direct, higher-risk ones (like volunteering on the front lines) over time. All respondents were keen to point out that the true sacrifices were those of their allies at home. Nevertheless, by undertaking a full-spectrum intervention consistently over time, Libyan diaspora activists from both the United States and Britain became an important transnational source of support from the first hours of the riots in Benghazi through the liberation of Tripoli in August 2011. As one Libyan American activist attested, “Not a single thing was left undone by Libyans abroad.”

In contrast, Syrian interventions were far more variable by host-country and changed significantly for both diaspora groups over the course of the revolution and internationalized civil war. Although Syrian activists initially undertook the same repertoire as their Libyan counterparts to bolster a badly outgunned insurgency and escalating humanitarian emergency, their roles differed in two main ways. First, their collective interventions differed by host-country in that Syrian activists in the United States played an elevated role as *representatives* who lobbied consistently over time, while their British counterparts rarely reported doing so. Second, Syrian activists in both the United States and Britain faced significant challenges in sustaining their respective repertoires as revolution wore on. Both sets of respondents overwhelmingly reported a steep decline in their broadcasting, representing, brokering, remitting, and volunteer work by 2014. Although some efforts continued – and still do today at the time of this writing – Syrians’ voice for regime change was largely *muted* by the time I conducted interviews in 2014.

As in the Libyan and Syrian cases, Yemeni activism in the United States and Britain also marked an unprecedented shift in the voice and visibility of their members for liberal change at home. However, efforts to broker, remit, and volunteer on the front lines were not a part of the diaspora activists’ *collective* tactics. Instead, Yemeni activism focused primarily on broadcasting and representing the independent youth movement from their places of residence. Thus, in contrast to the full-scale interventions of Libyans, the repertoires of Yemeni movements in both host-countries remained *selective* over time.

Of course, it is important to note that the Yemeni revolution had different needs than the Libyan and Syrian insurgency. Yemenis, having successfully launched a durable, peaceful, popular uprising, did not rely on activists abroad to augment a war effort or a government-in-waiting. Yet, it was also the case that the Yemeni revolution was hugely under-resourced. For example, the Sana’a field hospital, which I visited during a trip to Yemen in 2012, was little more than a shed – the size of a walk-in closet with the sparest of equipment. The protest encampment in Ta’iz also faced violence by regime forces and arson

TABLE 5.2. *Collective tactics to support rebellion and relief during the Arab Spring (→ refers to change over time)*

National Group	Host-Country	Broadcasting	Representing	Brokering	Remitting	Volunteering on the Ground	Voice in the Arab Spring
Libyan	USA	X	X	X	X	X	Full-spectrum
	Britain						
Syrian	USA	X →	X → Declined	X → Declined	X → Declined	X → Declined	Full-spectrum → Muted Constrained → Muted
	Britain	Declined	–	X → Declined	Declined		
Yemeni	USA	X	X	–	–	–	Selective
	Britain						

a number of times, but had essentially no outside support. So too were southerners in places such as Aden coming under constant attack. In light of these disparities, organizers in the diaspora often expressed frustration that they and their fellow Yemenis lacked a concrete way to help their compatriots beyond holding protests and lobbying from afar. As Shaima from Birmingham lamented,

Even though I want to help Yemen, I just don't know how I would. Here, we're educated, we have resources, we have activist resources. So what I want to know is how we can use these resources and *get them over to them*. I don't know how! . . . Even if you're not educated to a certain level, there's opportunities here. It's about just being able to pick it up and move it. But *how do you do that?*

This dilemma was echoed by respondents across the diaspora. Omar from Liverpool too reflected on their movement's inability to tangibly help the revolution after the Friday of Dignity Massacre.

We were more saddened on an individual level. But we thought, they died, what can we do? We can't do anything particularly for them. All we can do is give them our emotional support. It brought their reality of the revolution home to *us* more than anything. The diaspora was very much on the back foot. We didn't quite know what to do, to be honest with you.

Other participants expressed skepticism about the utility of protests. For example, Afrah of Liverpool mentioned,

I think even sometimes it's not even about getting [a] reaction. I think *we* felt a bit better. We felt that at least *we've* done something, *we* worked on something. Because sometimes we're looking at the news and thinking, *what can we do?* We live so far away from it. We want to show and let them know that we are there, we are listening and we are proud, so I think it's as much to make us feel better as well as [showing] our support.

This gap in their response left many respondents feeling that the diaspora had failed to meet its mobilization potential. As Ahlam of New York lamented, "At a point you realize, what is there that you can do, you know?" Many of Sheffield surmised,

It was good in the sense that it's woken a lot of people up. It's good in the sense that it brings out this new talk, how we can improve Yemen, as opposed to just complaining. It gave us a platform to talk about and deal with issues now. But I don't think it's manifested as much as we have wanted. There's a lot more that we can do – and that we need to do.

In all, by the end of the Arab Spring period in Yemen, activists from the United States and Britain were both proud of the work they had undertaken and deeply perplexed about why they could not do more.

## 5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter explained how and to what extent Libyan, Syrian, and Yemeni groups across the United States and Britain contributed to the Arab Spring

revolutions in their home-countries. However, it leaves unanswered why diaspora movement interventions varied significantly when compared by national group and host-country. The following two chapters provide the answers by demonstrating how the additive processes of *resource conversion* and *geopolitical support* shaped diaspora mobilization for rebellion and relief. In so doing, I show that the emergence of voice, as explained in Chapter 4, does not in-and-of-itself transform diaspora activists into interventionists. Instead, their interventions vary according to whether members have the respective network ties, wealth, and skills to convert to a shared cause and whether activists gain the backing of geopolitical powerholders, such as government leaders, the media, and international bodies. The remaining chapters demonstrate how these processes transform anti-regime movements from long-distance supporters into a transnational auxiliary force for change.