

## OPINION

### The Syrian Crisis: a systemic framework

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There is as yet no framework for understanding the Syrian Crisis (herein referred to as ‘the Syrian Crisis’; the Syrian Crisis or simply ‘the Crisis’) or more generally the Arab Spring. There are many arguments that are often inconsistent. A framework can help further socio-political and economic analysis and synthesis and will facilitate the convergence of conflicting views on a solution. This article is intended to provide a systemic framework for the Syrian Crisis that can be extended to other Arab experiences. Syrians have split into three main categories vis-à-vis the Crisis: pro-government, pro-revolt and a silent middle. The contention here that, regardless of classification or intentions, events on the ground and the accompanying political manoeuvres point collectively to the conclusion that the revolt became a tool in the toolbox for Syrian realignment ideologically and geopolitically under the pretence of a just revolt. The argument advanced is that there is a plan for the realignment of Syria that uses the revolt as an entrance point and a tool in this strategy – whether the Syrians engaged in revolt know it or not. The Syrian people, the Syrian government and the rebels have borne the entire risk throughout the induced Crisis with no control over aspects of its trajectory. The complexity of the Syrian Crisis comes from two simultaneous confluences: an ideological confluence and geopolitical confluence. In his exposition of this strategy the author posits that, for the plan to succeed, it may be necessary to destroy the fabric of Syrian society by discrediting Syrian nationalism, Arab nationalism and moderate Islamism through supporting sectarianism, subnationalism, regionalism and Islamic fundamentalism to achieve the desired realignment under the banner of humanitarian intervention. The course of action adopted by the external opposition does not align with a revolution for the people of Syria. The sponsors of the plan discerned here deployed Islamist Jihadism as a universal catalytic enabler of Syria’s destruction without appearing to be supporting terrorism for regime change in Syria. The losers are the Syrian people, their infrastructure, their unity and possibly their statehood, and many innocent lives. The author introduces two new analytic tools to facilitate the discussion: the ‘ideogram’ and the ‘geogram’.

**Keywords:** Syrian Crisis; Arab Spring; ideology; Syrian geopolitics; sectarianism; Islamism; ideogram; geogram; humanitarian intervention

### Introduction

The Syrian Crisis has attracted tremendous international attention along with the other Arab uprisings, which are referred to henceforth as ‘the Arab Crises’. The attempts to pass United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions on Syria failed by virtue of three successive vetoes by Russia and China; the third, British-sponsored, draft

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resolution came in July 2012 and called for economic sanctions on Syria under Chapter 7 and essentially authorized military intervention to enforce the resolution. Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the UN, said that the veto signified that ‘two permanent members of the Council are prepared to defend Assad to the bitter end’ (Gladstone 2012). Sergey Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, commented that ‘advancing democracy with iron and blood just does not work’ (Russian TV 2013). The Syrian Crisis has generated contradictory political positions, e.g. those of the Georgetown Law Center (2012), descriptions of bloodshed and atrocities from Human Rights Watch (2013), and accusations of the most primitive and savage practices (*Hurriyet Daily News/*AFP 2013).

The Syrian Crisis has produced heinous crimes, terrorist acts, intentional humiliation of Syrians, oppression and torture, targeted misinformation, deception, and uncountable psychological abuses, manipulations (Weaver 2013), and the claimed use of chemical weapons (UNifeed-UN Multimedia 2013). There are enough contradictory reports to make any case against participants in the conflict. The Syrian Crisis is a highly complex socio-political problem developed by a combination of truly dissatisfied and angry Syrians, Western powers disgruntled and frustrated with Syrian government policies and its allies, an opportunistic and sympathetic ‘East’, vengeful Arabs, and thousands of Jihadists, opportunists and professional criminals. All basically agree on nothing, be it ideological or political. Yet what is indisputable is that, prior to the Crisis, Syria was a peaceful and functioning sovereign state, albeit in need of deep reform, and that the Syrian upcoming elections are scheduled to take place in 2014.

Based on volumes of contradictions and multiple perspectives, it is natural that there has been controversy about what to call the events in Syria. These have been referred to as a revolution, international conspiracy, uprising, armed insurgency, religious rebellion, democratic reform movement, civil war, terrorist attacks, a form of coup d’état, or a deliberate plan of destruction. Taking into consideration the relative nature of such assessments, there are some actions that cannot be a matter of perspective. Such actions and patterns conform with aspects of one classification but simultaneously negate others. For example, blowing up a school bus full of children cannot be a matter of perspective – it is terrorism regardless of the reasons behind it. Killing or torturing prisoners is not a matter of perspective – but to say so smacks of aspects of a revolution. Supporting terrorist organizations on the border of a neighbouring country to cross those borders and blow up people, hospitals and army soldiers is also not a matter of perspective – but an illegal interference in the interior affairs of a neighbouring country, borne of intentions more in line with the destruction of a country, not the promotion of freedom and democracy. Oppressing Syrian people who do not agree with a particular point of view is not a matter of perspective – it constitutes a rebellion against oppression only if the opposition would respect other points of view, which has proven not to be the case. Changing the flag of a sovereign country without reference to the people is not a matter of perspective – but rather a call for neo-colonial occupation, subdivision and loss of Syria’s sovereignty. Giving away a seat in the League of Arab States (LAS) is not a matter of perspective – but a conspiracy to destroy the Syrian state and Arab unity. Most importantly, steering away from putting into effect mechanisms by which to discern what the Syrian people really want, and avoiding the Geneva II accord on Syria, makes this a plan to perpetuate the internal fighting as long as possible.

In general, based on observable trends, revolutions follow three distinct stages that can be summarized as *politicize*, *radicalize* and *militarize*. The process of making a group of people revolt, for their own good or bad, seems to follow similar stages regardless of the intentions behind a revolt. In this contemporary era of super-connectivity it is

possible to induce a revolt based on socio-political intelligence and engineering. Some basic ingredients are needed to effect that inducement. The most common and basic ingredients are *poverty, illiteracy, injustice, corruption* and *tyranny*. Without any external complications in a country, an increase in the intensity of some or all of these basic ingredients would indeed be a cause for a natural revolt. So why make this seemingly superfluous distinction between induced revolution and spontaneous revolution? The answer is simple: an induced revolution is an intentional external act that leverages internal dissatisfaction for a purpose that may or may not achieve the interests of those who rise up. On the other hand, a spontaneous revolution by the people should be mostly for the people. It is a matter of who the stakeholders are and what the governance of a revolt is that distinguishes it as induced or spontaneous. A useful spontaneous revolution needs free and liberating leaders and followers while an induced revolution, by contrast, needs workers, employees, payrolls, managers, weapons and sponsors who have bigger plans.

Arab Crises are accompanied by the absence of a frame of reference and ensuing chaos and Syria is no exception. However, chaos itself is not new to mass mobilizations as John Keep put it: ‘Chaos and anarchy [ . . . ] best describe the state of Russia during 1917’ (Keep 1976; Suny 1983). The Arab Spring can be seen as a realization of the political ‘creative chaos’ delineated by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2005 – wherein creative chaos is posited ‘as a revolutionary end-game for the Middle East’ (Al-Sharif 2011) – and her July 2006 statement on the destruction of Lebanon as the ‘birth pangs’ of a new Middle East. In the face of such transformation, according to Rice, ‘whatever we do, we have to be certain that we’re pushing forward to the new Middle East, not going back to the old Middle East’ (Karon 2006).

In the words of Michael Ledeen, ‘creative destruction is our middle name’ and ‘[F]reedom is our most lethal weapon, and the oppressed peoples of the fanatic regimes are our greatest assets’ (Ledeen 2001). The ingenuity of the creative or constructive chaotic approach is that it transfers the cost and risk of war by traditional means of invasion to the host country while keeping the regional geopolitical balance under control throughout the intended internal ideological/geopolitical transition. There is no need for the use of formal armies or external intervention until all effective military forces of the targeted country have been neutralized internally. The carnage is totally Syrian.

Chaos can be spontaneous or induced as well. This author contends that in the case of Syria, chaos was induced to achieve Syria’s geopolitical realignment or else destroy it. This is one of the reasons that the revolt in Syria lacked a declared intellectual direction. The Syrian revolt does not seem to be in need of national thinking or thinkers. It does not seem to need national intellect or intellectuals, it does not need a sufficiently clear path of change and it certainly does not need a destination. It is a change from a state of dissatisfaction to an unknown state of randomness wherein the *scavengers of chaos* can create new opportunities – monetary, economic, geopolitical and vengeful. This set up is a necessary condition to justify humanitarian intervention.

### **A theoretical framework for the Syrian Crisis**

One of the purposes of any theory is to interpret past events and predict, with reasonable accuracy, future events. As a result, it can also be a valuable tool for finding solutions, effective strategies and management. In the case of Syria a theoretical framework is even more needed due to the complexity of the Syrian Crisis and in order to analyse and synthesize its events. The framework, introduced in this paper, can deconstruct

the complex scene *ideologically and geopolitically* and can help explain the following points or contentions:

- The scale, timing, patterns and nature of killing, destruction, sectarian overtones, targeted personal vendettas, and involvement of terrorist groups, and intelligence agencies from all over the world, in combination do not point to only a Syrian revolution and cannot be interpreted as a mere struggle for freedom.
- The unachievable demand for regime change was the only constant throughout the crisis without ever presenting an alternative for governance.
- Moderate Syrian voices were silenced throughout the Crisis.
- There is a plan to achieve either a regime change or Syria's self-destruction.

The theoretical framework proposed in this paper follows a systemic approach and can be extended, quite readily, to other Arab countries.

### ***There is a plan***

In November 2011, *Foreign Policy* carried a piece stating that in Libya the case for humanitarian intervention, or its contemporary version, formally known as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and rather more aptly, in the Libyan case, dubbed 'the Responsibility to Act' (Obama 2011), was swiftly prepared, argued and executed (*Foreign Policy* 2011). Similarly in the case of Syria, the expectation was for the speedy formulation of a similar plan. The plan uses legitimate elements of a revolt as a *pretext to prompt humanitarian intervention*, as advocated by Bernard-Henri Lévy, (Lévy 2013), and as successfully executed in Libya. The application of humanitarian intervention is further explained by Henry Kissinger's statement that 'the diplomacy generated by the Arab Spring replaces Westphalian principles of equilibrium with a generalized doctrine of humanitarian intervention' (Kissinger 2012). In this context, he went on: 'civil conflicts are viewed internationally through the prisms of democratic or sectarian concerns'. Thus, 'replacing Westphalian principles' amounts to a licence to destroy nation-state sovereignty for geopolitical and economic purposes. In order to justify humanitarian intervention, a civil conflict has to be present or, alternatively, manufactured.

There is a loosely defined threshold that a country has to cross in order for humanitarian intervention to be justified. Cases in point are the genocide in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, as mentioned by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan: 'If humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica, to gross and systematic violation of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?' (United Nations 2013) What Annan's challenge does not address are the checks and balances preventing humanitarian intervention from becoming a tool for interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states to effect a geopolitical realignment sponsored by regional and global powers. How does the international system prevent the abuse of humanitarian intervention by the leading member states?

Syria, prior to the Crisis, was not a country to which the criteria for humanitarian intervention apply, despite its dire need of reform on all levels. As late as 27 March 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared Syria's president a *reformer* (Kessler 2011). In addition, there were no sectarian conflicts or violence in Syria prior to March 2011. Despite the presence of oppression and injustice, there was no

context for humanitarian intervention under any stretch of the criteria. A pretext was needed urgently, given the designation of Assad as a ‘reformer’ by Clinton, which was questioned vociferously in the US media. In July 2011, the same Secretary of State Clinton said, referring to the Syrian president, ‘From our perspective, he has lost legitimacy’ (Gaouette and Derhally 2011). With this reversal of position, democracy (or its absence) was declared as the pretext for intervention. However, using democracy alone as a pretext for humanitarian intervention in Syria could not work essentially because the major sponsors of the revolt on the Arab side are Qatar and Saudi Arabia – both of which do not have credibility to speak about democracy or advocate a regime change based on lack of democracy. Moreover, success in achieving democracy in Syria would make Syria stronger without necessarily changing its geopolitical alignment, especially if the government responds positively to the democracy call.

The pattern of events in the Crisis point to the role of the Syrian opposition in providing both the context and the pretext for humanitarian intervention in exchange for its recognition as the leadership of Syria following regime change. Initially, the Syrian National Council (SNC) was formed in Istanbul in November 2011 from a coalition of seven opposition factions as ‘an independent group personifying the sovereignty of the Syrian people in their struggle for liberty [...] the SNC Charter lists human rights, judicial independence, press freedom, democracy and political pluralism among its guiding principles’ (BBC News 2011). Obviously such principles, if successfully applied, would lead to a stronger Syria not to an intervention. The SNC made it clear that there would be no dialogue with the Syrian government, which, to the surprise of many, did not fall.

A year later, in July 2012, two major events took place: the 18 July blast in Damascus that killed the top security officials in Syria and, the very next day, the other major event, the Russia–China veto of the British-sponsored UN Security Council resolution that would have given justification for military interference in Syria (Naharnet Newsdesk 2012). Russia and China did not budge after the blast. In November 2012, ‘host nation Qatar, backed by the United States [...] pressed the Syrian opposition to form a united front to pursue its war against Bashar al-Assad’ (Doherty and El Gamal 2012). According to the same source, ‘the SNC has been concerned that it might be sidelined in a new broad coalition [...] it would be a last chance before the opposition figures behind the US-backed initiative go ahead without the SNC.’ With US leadership, the pretext for humanitarian intervention seems to have shifted from democracy-based to sectarian-based and from the Syrian National Council to the Syrian National Coalition. This alternative pretext is to capitalize on sectarian crimes and turn the crisis into a sectarian conflict in which both Qatar and Saudi Arabia (along with Turkey, Jordan, ‘North’ Lebanon and later Egypt) can fuel and mobilize enough Islamists to participate against the Syrian regime and its allies in resistance, including Iran. This shift immediately alienated some secularists in the opposition and increased the weight of the role of Islamists, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, in the opposition, and opened the door for the Nusra Front to participate. The *fatwas* of Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, based in Qatar – a major spiritual and intellectual leader in the Muslim Brotherhood movement – were the driving force for legitimizing the sectarian fight in Syria including calls for *Jihad* (Gulf News/AFP 2013), that gave free licence for the wholesale killing of anyone, civilians and military, who sides with the Syrian government. The key *fatwa* was aired on Al-Jazeera in January 2013 (Eretz Zen Channel 2013). Based in Damascus, Sheikh Saïid Ramadan Al-Bouti explicitly refuted all

*fatwas* calling for *Jihad* in Syria, including that of Al-Qaradawi and sided with the Syrian armed forces. Dr Al-Bouti was assassinated in Damascus on 24 March 2013 at the age of 84 (Mourtada and Gladstone 2013).

It is worth noting that just prior to shifting the pretext for humanitarian intervention from democracy to sectarian strife and as of June 2012, unilateral military intervention was ruled out as:

the Obama administration argues that the same criteria [applied to Libya] don't apply to Syria [...] and] there's consensus that military action in Syria would be far riskier than it was in Libya, thanks to Syria's more sophisticated military forces and air defenses. (Crowley 2012)

In effect the Syrian opposition and its military factions and helpers shifted their role from providing the pretext for intervention to becoming the intervention itself.

In this sense the Syrian opposition groups, including their military wings, did not seem in charge and they were not in the decision-making seat in this Crisis. That aspect of *incapacity to make decisions* nationally rules out use of the term 'revolution' to refer to the Syrian revolt and turns it into an armed disturbance to effect a regime change whose other geopolitical objectives happen to meet with those of the sponsors of the bigger project. Essentially there must be a plan in place – or as some would have it, a conspiracy. And to be clear, the difference between a conspiracy and plan is irrelevant – since a conspiracy is really a hidden plan, often associated with malicious intent. It would be negligent to think that countries that have interests in Syria do not have plans to participate in changing Syria to align it better with their interests.

The genius of the plan in this case is that all the destruction committed is both self-inflicted and self-contained. The Syrian opposition forces were used as a facade that was conveniently placed and moved around first to *politicize* the Syrian population (the democracy phase) and present a case to the wider world, and then to *radicalize* Syrians (the sectarian phase). The drift of Syrian opposition, from the espousal of a peaceful revolt to the point where it was decided to militarize their base, was not a natural transition. It was a purposeful transition that took no regard of the Syrian government response, including calls for reform and dialogue. The Syrian government realized immediately the need for reform or it would face its own demise. The opposition had two possible choices at that time: the first was to accept the reform path while keeping up the pressure for more reform, or adopt the second choice, namely to insist on regime change regardless of cost. However, the first choice, to adopt the path of reform, would not allow external stakeholders to exercise a dominant role in shaping the outcome. The second choice, i.e. regime change, had to be the only choice, regardless of efforts by the government to reform, for several reasons, namely:

- Regime change is not achievable by the opposition on its own, which forces the opposition to seek regional and international help, in preparation for humanitarian intervention.
- Pursuit of regime change could evolve into a militarized and sectarianized conflict and thence allow for the formation of paramilitary forces, thereby pitting the Syrian armed forces against rebellious Syrians.
- Regime change, if successful, with the help of regional and international support, allows for the sponsors to have more say in the decision on 'who rules Syria'.

- Regime change, by dictation from outside Syria, destroys Syria's sovereignty and independence – a strong reason to politicize and radicalize the population.
- Regime change, if not successful, will lead to a civil war in which all the risks are borne by Syrians. It is known that there are as many Syrians who support the regime or support reform as those who are seeking regime change. And the probability of a critical balance of forces can easily be achieved by increasing arms supplies to the rebel forces as needed, until self-destruction is reached.

The opposition militarized and founded the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as early as July 2011 (Landis 2011). Judging by the outcome, however, this militarization has served the objectives of the sponsors more than those of the SNC for freedom and democracy. On 22 February 2012 the Middle East Channel website quoted Steven Heydemann warning that, 'If the militarization of the Syrian uprising is not managed, the hope for meaningful change in Syria may be lost' and 'it would be a mistake to view the FSA as having control over the militarization of the Syrian uprising' (Heydemann 2012). Evidently, the militarization was indeed mismanaged to the extent that Saudi Arabia would ask Jordan to spearhead its drive to channel arms into Syria in support of the FSA to stop the increased threat of al-Qaeda-linked groups (Chulov and Black 2013). Then:

Splits in the Syrian opposition were highlighted when four opposition factions – the Syrian Revolution General Commission, the Local Coordination Committees, the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union and the Supreme Council for the Leadership of the Syrian Revolution – issued a statement complaining about the Syrian National Coalition ... [saying] The Syrian National Coalition has failed to fulfill its responsibility to represent the great Syrian revolution at the organizational, political, and humanitarian levels. (Owen and McCarthy 2013)

Senator John McCain, a vocal advocate of military intervention (Feldman 2013), paid a visit to the FSA and held talks with the Asifat al-Shamal brigade on the Syrian–Turkish border (Bab Salameh). Salim Idriss, Chief of Staff of the Supreme Military Council of the FSA, asked McCain for weapons and ammunition, including anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles and he said that 'we want a no-fly-zone and we ask for strategic airstrikes against Hezbollah both inside Lebanon and inside Syria' (Pearce 2013). Senator Rand Paul, on the other hand, declared to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: 'You will be funding, today, the allies of al Qaeda' (Wolverton 2013).

The role of misleading reports put out by Arab media like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia and international media like CNN, and most French media, was certainly a factor and will require further scrutiny to establish their exact impact. Meanwhile, as reported on the BBC website on 14 September 2011 (Husain 2011), social networking was also instrumental in coordinating efforts and spreading rumours.

***Politicize, delegitimize, radicalize, militarize, intervene***

It was in July 2011 that Secretary of State Clinton said, referring to the Syrian president, 'From our perspective, he has lost legitimacy' (Gaouette and Derhally 2011). Subsequently, in October 2011, President Barack Obama reaffirmed the view that 'Syria's leader has lost his legitimacy to rule', according to a Reuters report dated 20 October 2013 (Reuters 2013). These statements of delegitimization are the building blocks of radicalization to make the shift to militarization – both have been realized.

In order to militarize the conflict, the ‘Friends of Syria’, in the meeting in Tunisia in February 2012, had to prepare to recognize the SNC as ‘the legitimate representative of the Syrian people’ (CBS News 2012) without actually consulting with the Syrian people, and, according to the same source, ‘Saudi Arabia called for weapons and ammunition to be sent to the opposition.’

From the Syrian government perspective, its supporters and supporters of the Syrian state, the use of this terminology and the attack on the legitimacy of the Syrian president was seen as an attack on the Syrian state, its independence, its alliance with resistance movements over time, and not just on the regime alone. Notwithstanding their myriad of disagreements with the government, Syrians who refused to use the illegitimacy argument voiced their respect for the existing constitution, the institution of the presidency, government institutions, and the Arab Syrian Army (Syrian armed forces) and, most of all, asserted their support for the sovereignty of the Syrian state and the peaceful transition of power. Syrians who adopted the delegitimization argument took to denigrating everything that relates to the government; rejected any affiliation with institutions that belong to the government; and withheld recognition of the legitimacy of the existing institutions of governance. This approach was encapsulated in the decision by the opposition to revert to use of the flag of 1932–58. Some went as far as calling for foreign troops to invade Syria to change the regime, and some even seemed not to mind the loss of independence or even Syria’s subdivision that could ensue. Upon the conclusion of Annan’s mission as UN Special Envoy to Syria, in June 2012, CNN was reporting SNC officials calling on the UN Security Council to consider a resolution allowing the use of force in Syria (CNN 2012) and Tommy Vietor, a spokesman for the SNC, was saying: ‘the sooner this transition takes place, the greater the chance of averting a lengthy and bloody sectarian civil war’ (CNN 2012). Most of the rebellious Syrians had turned into anarchists.

The plan for intervention was the answer to Syrian government policy and its rejection of geopolitical realignment and the surrender of power to a new leadership. So the bigger issue is not oppression, reform, democracy or chemical weapons for that matter. The pattern of developments and the methods adopted portray a lack of concern for the Syrians themselves and an acceptance of the geopolitical realignment of Syria, regardless of who might rule Syria, how they might rule or how they might kill Syrians.

### ***The ideological diagram***

This paper introduces the *ideogram* for the first time as a geometric tool to represent conceptually the ideological ‘content’ that exists in a society at a particular moment in its history, using a simple spider diagram. It simplifies multidimensional issues by disaggregating them, while also understanding the interconnectedness of the dimensions measured. The word ‘content’ refers to specific metrics by which a researcher may be able to assess the *relative strength* of competing ideologies in a given society. The relative strength of an ideology in a given population can be measured by normalization relative to the entire voting population. The ideogram is a snapshot in time describing the ideological composition of a society. For example, the simplest and most reliable metric utilizes the number of citizens subscribing to an ideology based on a national ideological census whenever available. Assume that the voting population in Syria is 10 million. Given the necessary data (on which more below), upon applying a reliable statistical method, it is possible to map the ideological distribution of the voting population along the following lines: 1 million identifying with



Syrian nationalism, 4 million identifying with regionalism and another 4 million identifying with Arab nationalism. And the remaining 1 million do not identify with any of the three and they split between universalism and Islamism. For the purposes of clarifying the idea, we allow for one vote for one category. Then, normalizing to the total population, we arrive at a set of scores for the relative strength of these ideological positions in Syria at the time in question as: nationalism 0.1, regionalism 0.4 and Arab nationalism 0.4. Universalism and Islamism in this example score 0.1. This is a statistical measure and it changes with time.

In the case of Syria the only available information is that of qualitative assessment. This is not a deficiency in the utility of the ideogram but rather a reflection of the inability to reach reliable data from a Syrian census bureau. At the same time, the nature of this investigation is *qualitative* as it aims to clarify the reasons that were used to drive Syria into a crisis with pre-existing propensities and motivations at every step leading to the crisis.

We can postulate that a Syrian *ideological space* can be spanned by eight dimensions: Syrian nationalism (*al-watanyyah alSouriya*), Arab nationalism (*al-qawmyyah al Arabiya*), Islamism, Sub-nationalism, Sectarianism, Isolationism, Universalism and Regionalism. This is an axiomatic construction and we do not include all possible ideologies that may appear in the Syrian ideological landscape but rather include what is of relevance to the Syrian society in this timeframe. The choice of dimensions is not arbitrary. It is now explained what is meant by each of these ideological dimensions in the Syrian socio-political context.

### *Syrian nationalism*

In the context of this study, *Syrian nationalism (al-watanyyah al Souriya)* refers to the general sense of belonging to the Syrian society and culture and the extent to which this sense supports an ideology that believes that Syrians constitute a nation by themselves. We can distinguish between the narrow sense of Syrian nationalism, which refers to belonging to the Arab Syrian Republic and the wider sense of Syrian nationalism, which refers to the Greater Syrian sense of belonging. The narrow sense Syrian nationalism refers to nation-state nationalism while in the wide sense Syrian nationalism refers to the Levant Syrian nationalism or Natural Syrian nationalism. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) initiated in 1932 is an example of a movement that aims to reconstitute *Greater Syria*. The SSNP uses the word *national* to mean *qawmi Souri* not the word *watani*.

### *Sectarianism*

In this context we view sectarianism as the antithesis of national unity. In that sense sectarianism refers to the disintegration of common goals that provide for the sense of belonging to a country in favour of the sense of belonging to the sect. The strength of sectarianism is inversely proportionate to the strength of national unity, which is normally bonded by common aspirations and purposes and communicated through a form of social contract. The systemic risk of disintegration of national unity is highest when there is no agreement among societal constituents on a social contract. In the context of this study we refer to sectarianism as the divisive practices based on sects within Islam or based on Christian–Islamic belonging in Syria. This issue deserves a separate study.

### *Arab nationalism*

In the context of this study, *Arab nationalism* or pan-Arabism (*al-qawmyyahal Arabiya*) refers to the general sense of belonging to the Arab nation that exists in Syria as well as ideologies that support that sense of belonging. Gamal Abd el-Nasser was the champion of Arab nationalism based in Egypt and Al-Baath Arab Socialist Party (BASP) was its champion based in Syria and Iraq, although both movements go beyond the boundaries of their respective countries to affect all Arab movements.

Pan-Arabism reached its peak in popularity and support in the days leading up to the 1967 Six-Day War, or 'Nakseh' (Disaster), which signalled the beginning of the decline of pan-Arabism as the dominant paradigm.

### *Isolationism*

In the context of this study, Arab isolationism refers to the antithesis of pan-Arabism. Arab isolationism prevents most forms of constructive connectivity among Arab countries such as defence and intelligence, alliances, economic cooperation, trade agreements, sharing of human resources, and travel restrictions (border controls). The League of Arab States (LAS) is supposed to increase cooperation amongst Arab states and decrease forms of isolationism. However, it proved to be a failure on many levels including its implicit endorsement of Arab isolationism in contradiction to its explicit charter objectives culminating in expelling Syria from the LAS in November 2011.

### *Islamism*

This is a wide topic that deserves a separate investigation. However, and for the purpose of this framework, we give a working definition of the term and the ideological impact on the Syrian landscape. Islamism is a term that has been invented in the 20th century to refer to any ideology that claims to be Islamic-based. Islamism is the extrapolation of some Islamic principles from various perspectives to form a socio-political and economic ideology. Some authors prefer to use the term *political Islam* not Islamism. Furthermore, because Islam has multiple schools of thought and sects, it is natural to have multiple ideologies that claim to be equally Islamic. We can easily identify three major and competing 'Islamisms' all emerging as organized entities in the 20th century and maturing towards its end. The first kind of Islamism finds itself in the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1928. The second kind of Islamism comes from the ideology that produced the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The third kind of Islamism can be viewed as the category of Islamist Jihadism whose famous brand is al-Qaeda. Those three categories play a dominant role in the current Syrian Crisis in its Islamist dimension and its regional dimension. There is no national conservative movement in Syria that represents the aspirations of conservatives in the political arena.

### *Universalism*

In this context universalism refers to the collection of religious and philosophical concepts and ideologies that have universal reach and applicability. Islamism stands in competition to the rest of universal ideologies including the rest of religious doctrines. As an ideology it stands also in tension and sometimes in agreement with respect to aspects of secularism, Christianity, Zionism, Communism and globalization. We can

also adjoin internationalism to universalism for completeness. Part of universalism is global governance and the ‘new world order’. It is likely that the Syrian Crisis resolution will lead to a new formulation of the new world order.

### *Regionalism*

Regionalism refers to a political ideology that aims at maximizing interests in a region by creating alliances and subdivisions. For the Syrian case it refers to regional powers such as Turkey and Iran and their influences on Syria. Regionalism in the Syrian Crisis aligns perfectly with divisions of Islamism as outlined in the description of Islamism above. Turkey aligns well with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood while Iran aligns with its own revolutionary Islamism and resistance movements, and ‘Moderate Arab states’ (see below) align with selective utilitarian Jihadism. The three regional forces have representatives on the ground in Syria to advance their diverse agendas there. The Syrian internal ideologies and forces subdivide according to their loyalties to the regional powers except for parts of the Kurdish population. In this case the regional powers concerned are all Islamists in ideology.

### *Subnationalism*

Subnationalism in this context refers to the state of subdivision that results from regional alignments as reflected by the fragmentation of the Syrian population, polarization and self-organization. In the case of Syria in particular we find a subdivision of alignment along ideologies sponsored respectively by Turkey, Iran and Arab states, which creates a state of subnationalism in Syrian political positions. The Kurdish subnationalism becomes stronger with weaker Syrian nationalism and weaker Syrian economic performance, while Kurdish subnationalism becomes weaker in the face of stronger regional agreements. All subnationalism issues are used by regional powers as a means of influence.

### ***Pre-crisis Syrian footprint on the ideogram***

The ideogram is a method developed by the author that resulted from research on epistemology, which resulted in *epistemology diagrams*.<sup>1</sup> In this case, the ideogram is applied to sketch the footprint for competing Syrian socio-political ideologies before the crisis. We emphasize that this is a result of qualitative judgment based on assessment before the crisis. The qualitative assessment has its justifications as we notice that Arab nationalism has always been present as an ideology in the Syrian socio-political landscape while, post Syria’s independence, Islamism had only social influence with no formal political representation in terms of parties operating openly in the political system. In addition, and equally noticeable, before the crisis, Syria was achieving an advanced status on regionalism through successful regional relations – be it with Iran or Turkey. The Arab regional bloc, prior to Arab Crises, was represented by Saudi Arabia and Egypt with the supporting cast of Jordan and Morocco. This bloc is usually referred to as the ‘Moderate’ Arab bloc.

Most noticeable in the pre-crisis Syrian ideogram in Figure 1 is the elevated sense of regionalism and Arab nationalism at the expense of Syrian nationalism. We postulate that Syrian nationalism was approaching its lowest levels in decades because of the declining sense of belonging over the past three decades. There is consensus among Syria’s friends

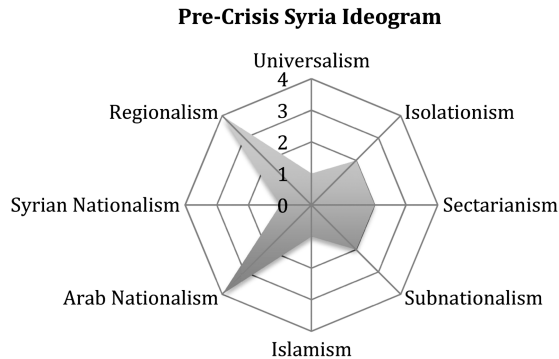


Figure 1. The qualitative ideogram represents the pre-crisis socio-political ideological footprint in Syria, which shows an elevated sense of Arab nationalism with strong regionalism in Syria.

and foes that Syria's foreign policies had been competent over the last four decades and leading up to the crisis. Competence does not mean favourable or likeable but that they were conducted with a high level of analysis and execution. The same experts could also agree that Syrian internal affairs and policies were deficient and substandard over the last four decades and through the crisis. As a direct proof of this claim, Syrian foreign policy had the right 'hedge' in place to thwart concerted NATO attack like the one launched on Libya. At the same time, Syrian interior policies could not thwart an all-out internal war on Syrian soil by Syrians assisted by mercenaries. Syria was taken from inside by a war of misinformation, misguided intentions, manipulated claims and opportunistic leaders whose best objective was to hold onto power or gain more power. In summary, prior to the Crisis, Syrian nationalism was low, Arab nationalism was high and regionalism was as high, while sectarianism, subnationalism and isolationism were present but not dangerous; Islamism and universalism were suppressed due to their tension with nationalism; this is summarized in the ideogram Figure 1.

### ***Post-crisis Syrian footprint on the ideogram***

The post-crisis ideogram refers to the qualitative ideological change in the Syrian ideological diagram after the crisis. Figure 2 shows the new qualitative ideological configuration of the Syrian socio-political structure. Most importantly is that up to this time, most signs point to a successful campaign against Syrian national unity that resulted in disintegration of national unity towards sectarianism. It can be considered as an example of *ideological re-engineering*.

The attack on Arab nationalism is not new but one of the by-products of the Arab Crises is to demonstrate explicitly that Arab nationalism has been defeated. This is a necessary step in creating an ideological vacuum that can be filled with isolationism or disparate Islamism. Arabs have not been further apart in their collaboration in their modern history than the state in which they find themselves after the Arab Crises. As a result the level of Arab isolationism has increased post-crisis at the expense of pan-Arabism.

On regionalism, the heightened war for winning a foothold in Syria among surrounding regional powers created heightened delineation among Syrians. Multi-polarizations ensued as a precursor for subnationalism. In order for subnationalism and sectarianism to

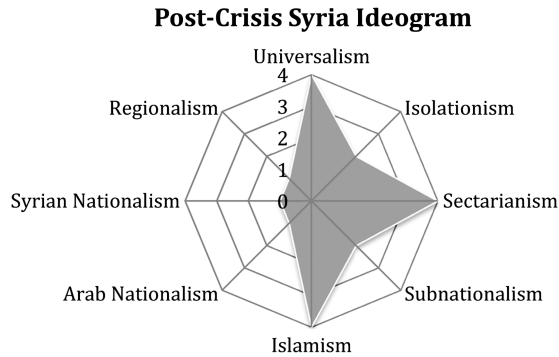


Figure 2. This ideogram qualitatively shows what the Syrian socio-political ideological footprint would look like after the crisis. The plan is to convert Syria into a failing state with endless sectarian internal conflicts providing a pretext for humanitarian intervention.

become the dominant mentality in Syria, the plan seems to allocate several roles: the Muslim Brotherhood supported mainly by Turkey and Qatar, Jihadist Islamism supported by certain Moderate Arab states in addition to the distinct factor of the existing alliance of politics in Syria with Iran in support of various resistance movements.

### **The geopolitical and economic diagram (geogram)**

To simplify the exposition of geopolitical and economic competing interests, the author introduces a geometric tool similar to the ideogram called a geo-political and economic diagram, or *geogram* for short. The geogram is used for the first time in this paper and provides pictorial representation of the strengths of geopolitical and economic ties of a country with respect to another country or bloc of countries. The word ‘strength’ in the definition of the geogram requires the use of a metric or a comparative analysis that can produce an ordering system of the geopolitical and economic participants in the geogram of a country. We use ranking values such as the level of political representation, ideological proximity, ability to influence decision-making in a country, and alliances and treaties to rank the geopolitical strength of one country versus another. Economic interconnections follow those of the geopolitical ones and often verify them. Table 1 shows how we arrived at the geogram in Figure 3. It is important to note that the scores of each component in Table 1 do not reflect what individuals think in Syria but what actually is being executed in politics and policies on behalf of Syria and what is being traded (exports, imports and trade balance).

### ***Plan for Syria’s realignment***

As a matter of designation in this paper, we refer to Iran, Russia, China and the rest of the countries on the left-hand side of the geogram as ‘the Left’. Similarly the United States, the European Union, Canada and Turkey are referred to as ‘the Right’. The vertical axis in the geogram contains most Arab states who themselves are projects of change. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are part of the Right. Egypt was almost neutral toward Syria’s Crisis until recently when it joined the Right. During the Syrian Crisis there appeared the designation ‘Friends of Syria’, which refers essentially to the Right. We can elucidate the objective of the project of the Right by stating that

Table 1. A scorecard for Syria versus weighted strength of its geopolitical and economic relations in 2010.

Country or bloc	Political relations	Ideological proximity	Economic activity	Average score (maximum of 4)
Algeria, Libya, etc.	3	3	3	3
Iran	4	3	2	3
Russia and China	4	3	4	3.67
Brazil, India, South Africa (BIS) & Venezuela	2	3	2	2.33
Moderate Arab	1	0	3	1.33
Turkey	3	2	4	3
United States	0	2	0	0.67
European Union	1	0	3	1.33

Note: A score of 4 means ‘excellent’, 3 means ‘very good’, 2 stands for ‘good’, 1 means ‘poor’ and 0 is non-existent. For economic activity of Syria, see Michigan State University (2010). The scores are normalized. Both political relations and ideological proximity are based on the author’s assessment of existing political and ideological differences. The plot in the geogram is the average of the three indices on a scale of 4. For example, European Union–Syria economic activity index comes mainly from trade with Germany, France and Italy. European Union–Syria political and ideological indices are low based on policies (mainly driven by France and Britain).

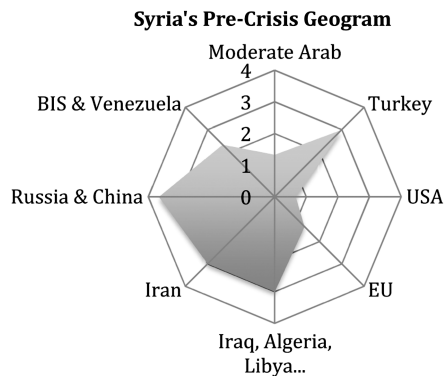


Figure 3. A pre-crisis representation demonstrates Syria’s geopolitical and economic footprint on the Syrian geogram. This is a qualitative summary for the period of 2008–10. Syria’s geopolitical and economic relations are on the left-hand side of the geogram.

*the Right decidedly wants Syria to move to the right-hand side of the geogram. We refer to this project as Syria’s Realignment to the Right. The project needs a plan to achieve its objectives. And the plan needs sponsors, funding, arming, execution, and methods of assigning roles and responsibilities, beneficiaries and rewards.*

The definition of *victory* for the coordinated effort of the Right, the countries in the camp of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the European Union (France and Britain), and led by the United States (the Right) is simply to achieve Syria’s geogram footprint as in Figure 4. Syria’s Reform would be a defeat for the Right and a victory for the Left, while regime change would be a victory for the Right and a defeat for the Left. Globally, regime change would be a victory for the unipolar new world order and a defeat for a potential multi-polar new world order. Regime change permits the birth of the ‘new

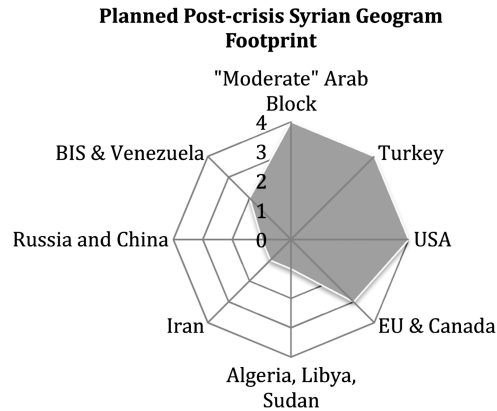


Figure 4. This is the desired end state of the Syrian geogram footprint if the plan achieves its objectives, as seen by the Right. 'Moving' Syria from the left side of the geogram to the right side of the geogram would have global implications.

Middle East' while reform may actually kill it. The people of Syria and their freedom are irrelevant to the plan.

As for the methods, the objective of moving Syria to the Right may be achieved by peaceful means or by force. Peaceful means requires explaining, convincing, enticing and threatening and depends on 'dragging' the country from its geogramic positions to new positions through long-term quasi-static incremental movements that ultimately result in the desired geopolitical state. This method has failed in the case of Syria. The other way to do it is by changing the positions by force with no regard to economic, military or human costs. The choice was evidently made to transition Syria by a combination of external shocks (Hermann 1990) and internal destruction. The choice was made to uproot Syria from the left-hand side of the geogram and dump whatever is left of it over on the right-hand side of the geogram. This is why there are scenes and actions so surreal, violent and totally foreign to Syrians and their culture that they would not classify under any reasonable practices of a revolt but fit under the objective of uprooting a country and punishing its people by inciting internal sectarian violence; allowing the flow of arms, terrorists and mercenaries; destruction of its infrastructure systems, human resources, and antiquities; and shattering its honour and dignity. Neither the opposition nor the government is allowed to win in this fight.

Execution of the plan for Syria's Realignment can be summarized in three steps: break it, own it,<sup>2</sup> move it where you want on the geogram. To break it one needs to politicize, radicalize and militarize the population through the use of sectarianism. Once broken with massive killing, humanitarian intervention comes to the rescue with a new leadership. This point is well summarized by Kissinger on the subject of humanitarian intervention:

In this context, civil conflicts are viewed internationally through the prisms of democratic or sectarian concerns. Outside powers demand that the incumbent government negotiate with its opponents for the purpose of transferring power. But because, for both sides, the issue is generally survival, these appeals fall on deaf ears. Where the parties are of comparable strength, some degree of outside intervention, including military force, is then invoked to break the deadlock. (Kissinger 2012)

Breaking the deadlock creates new ownership, new opportunities and even new borders.

The transition of Syria from the Left to the Right requires both an *internal project* and *external project*. Each has its objectives, people and tools. From the pattern of events and actions observable to date, there are four main threads: (1) the self-destruction thread; (2) the media and chaos thread; (3) the socio-political thread; and (4) the economic thread. Here we shall focus simply on the self-destruction thread.

### ***The self-destruction thread***

Once the Right made the decision for regime change as a definition of victory, the patterns of responses and positions taken by the Right reflected not only the lack of support for reform but also incitement to abort and reject the slightest advances towards dialogue among Syrians. All methods and tools have to align with the objective of regime change including the possibility of driving Syria into civil war.

Sectarianism turned out to be the weapon of choice, whether for gathering sufficient force to remove the Syrian president, or for driving Syria to self-destruction. Destruction of Syria's infrastructure results in a weak state and then a regime change or subdivision. This is captured by the statement of US Secretary of State Clinton on 7 June 2012 in Istanbul that 'Assad has doubled down on his brutality and duplicity, and Syria will not, cannot be peaceful, stable or certainly democratic until Assad goes' (Kelemen 2012). This statement is interesting in its association of peace and stability in Syria with Assad's departure. It should be viewed as an explicit threat to destabilize Syria for the sake of regime change.

Ideologically, in order for sectarianism to become the dominant theme in Syria, all other support systems for national unity had to be destroyed. Syrian nationalism was already weak due to failed Syrian interior policies. There was a need to strike against Arab nationalism and Syrian regionalism simultaneously while pleasing and supporting Islamism as the new dominant player with the Right. Therefore, the Islamists found themselves in the unlikely position of gaining total support from the Right.

For many Syrians, at the outset of the crisis, there was no clear distinction between *internal* opposition and *external* opposition. And there was no clear distinction between what would be later designated as national opposition and a non-national one. The only 'talking point' of the opposition campaign has been 'regime change' by any means necessary without any indication of what could be offered as an alternative. Regime change was the only constant in the chaotic opposition path from the SNC in Istanbul to the Syrian National Coalition in Doha. This constant demand is unattainable without the destruction of Syria by turning the conflict into a sectarian war. The State Department designation of the Nusra Front as a terrorist organization, which, as stated on its Website on 11 December 2012, means 'prohibition against knowingly providing, or attempting or conspiring to provide, material support or resources to, or engaging in transactions with, al-Nusra Front' (US Department of State 2012). However, there seems to be no clear and forceful intent on the part of the US foreign policy maker to actively stop the movement of members of Al-Nusra Front from pouring into Syria.

The strategy of self-destruction from the beginning of the crisis seems to follow these guidelines and patterns:

- For each event there should a sectarian interpretation provided by the talking heads on the Right and forcing an equal response from the Left camp.



- The role of regional and international media led by Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia to reflect a certain version of the story was a dominant pattern throughout the crisis. Any form of event must be consumed in any way possible to incite more violence and division among Syrians.<sup>3</sup> American media followed the script as well (Ben Swann 2013); and Glenn Beck voiced deep concern (Beck 2013a, 2013b). For each event there can be an expected retaliatory action in coming days or weeks. No message of harmony, coexistence, dialogue or peace initiative can be welcomed, contemplated or advanced.
- For each Friday there should be an event and a label or name for the Friday. Inciting violence and counter violence was part of the strategy.
- For each town there must be the appearance of divisive acts along sectarian divides.
- There should be classification of public figures like actors into ‘Lists of Shame’ and demanding their heads and the kidnapping of their families.
- Targeted actions to challenge authority at every level including killing any person in uniform, civil servants, hospital professionals and school teachers and students.
- Killing members of the media from any side for impact. In particular attacking any Syrian media agencies including anchors, photographers, technicians and writers.

Intervention through self-destruction, using a low-frequency or ‘low-intensity’ war, can be achieved by targeting all Syrian infrastructure systems such as those of the military, security services, finance, the economy, transportation, industry, agriculture, oil production, the electrical grid, aviation, telecommunications and healthcare. The most notable evidence of this has been the targeted destruction of Aleppo’s industries. Another example is the destruction of the oil industry and energy sector: ‘Syria’s energy sector is in a state of disarray, and the current conflict threatens to set Syria’s energy sector back by years’ (Energy Information Administration (EIA) 2013). The net result is increased unemployment and disruption of production for a long time.

The Syrian Accountability Act of 2004 was passed by the US Congress and approved by President George W. Bush. The basis for the act was that ‘Syria was supporting terrorism and interfering with US efforts to stabilize Iraq’ (Kessler 2004). Iraq shares a 641 km-long border with Syria, which was home to more than 1.2 million Iraqi refugees after the Iraq War that failed to find the missing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). It is ironic that the Nusra Front was allowed to enter Syria from all available borders under the watch and political cover of participating countries of the Right. The irony is that al-Qaeda never had a foothold in Iraq prior to the US invasion, dubbed Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Syria never had the Nusra Front prior to Syria’s induced self-destruction plan, perhaps dubbed ‘Syrian Spring’. Should there be a US Accountability Act on foreign policy by the American people? Should not the national Syrian opposition unite and retrieve its autonomy and national identity and work for the good of the Syrian people? The Syrian national opposition must put together a plan for the good of the Syrian people first. The Syrian opposition has not been free and autonomous enough to advocate freedom and democracy on behalf of the Syrian people whose voice has been marginalized completely throughout the Crisis. Syrian opposition must be free and autonomous to advocate freedom, sovereignty and shared governance; only then will it win the respect of Syrians and the rest of the world.

## Conclusions

This paper has provided a framework for one of the most complex ideological, socio-political and economic situations today. The Syrian Crisis combines the complexities of Lebanon, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and the tools used in the Syrian Crisis are taken from all these experiences and applied in stages and in parallel to achieve certain objectives that lead to Syria's realignment as defined in this work. The humanitarian intervention doctrine risks being viewed as a pretext for intervention to achieve neo-colonial or geopolitical objectives in a new world order – so far a more plausible interpretation based on the list of countries that have been 'helped' by humanitarian intervention. In the case of Syria, in the author's view, inhumane and induced self-destruction has been manufactured to achieve Syria's geopolitical realignment. The UN member states should address the fundamental questions of thresholds and criteria for humanitarian intervention, put forth as a challenge by Annan in his *Millennium Report* of March 2000 (United Nations 2000). And more importantly we add another challenge to the UN member states, which is to set governance, standards and procedures to balance the interests of the people in a sovereign state with the international interests of certain states to prevent the abuse of humanitarian intervention by the 'more' sovereign states.

The UN members should decide whether *classism in state sovereignty* is a just proposition in the 21st century. We view the cases of Libya and Syria as examples of abuses of humanitarian intervention or 'Responsibility to Act' as Obama (2011) put it, wherein the pretexts for humanitarian intervention were enhanced or manufactured to achieve other objectives that pose tremendous risk and cost to the people of the countries at large with no accountability for the act. As it is set up now, humanitarian intervention advances the interests of the more sovereign states at the expense of the destruction of other sovereign states regardless of claims to achieve justice, peace or better human conditions, with absolute lack of accountability. The responsibility to protect does not come with sufficient definitions, standards and procedures. Most importantly it does not come with adequate accountability – a prerequisite for balancing interests and preventing international *political moral hazard*.

## Acknowledgement

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## Notes

1. The author coined the name '*epistemigrams*' for this class of methods (diagrams).
2. US Secretary of State Colin Powell and his deputy, Richard Armitage, called this the Pottery Barn rule as quoted in the 'Plan of Attack' on Iraq (Woodward 2004; Safire 2004).
3. This documentary on YouTube provides an insight: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=dwv7JXgPxLI#at=759/](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=dwv7JXgPxLI#at=759/)

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