

# Solidarity with Syria

Syria was known for decades as a stable, multi-ethnic Arab country. In March 2011 that all changed, with a foreign backed insurgency shooting and bombing its way through an active but mostly peaceful political reform process. What happened?

The big powers – having destroyed Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya – claim that Syrian democracy protestors were attacked by a ‘brutal dictatorship’. Only after repression and massacres were they forced to take up arms. The corporate media has backed this lie, just as they backed the false stories behind the interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

In fact, the US and NATO, along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, instigated foreign-funded terrorist attacks from the very beginning (**see over**), derailing the peaceful political process. The organised ‘opposition’ now mainly comprises the exile Syrian National Council (SNC), funded by the US and NATO, and the largely fundamentalist Free Syrian Army (FSA), funded by the Saudis. Army defectors are very few. Even polls by his Qatari enemies showed reformist President Bashar Al Assad maintains majority support in Syria (‘Doha Debates’ poll, December 2011).

The USA, Britain and France use proxy armies for intervention. Egyptian Samir Amin says the big powers may have been surprised by the ‘Arab Spring’ in Egypt and Tunisia, but they quickly sought to replace this with an ‘imperialist springtime’, aiming to overthrow independent regimes in Libya and Syria. The alliance with Saudi Arabia and Qatar has added sectarian terror to the rebellion, threatening to replicate the chaos still taking place in neighbouring Iraq.

**There can be only one ethical response by Australians to this conflict: support the right to self-determination of the Syrian people. A Syrian government can only be determined by the Syrian people. All foreign intervention must cease.**

The FSA has used ruthless and cynical tactics, to attract foreign intervention. They have:

- carried out sniper attacks on civilians, then blamed them on the government;
- accused the Syrian army of atrocities when their terrorist cells are destroyed;
- perpetrated massacres, only to blame them on (i) the Syrian army, and when that fails (ii) on pro-government militia, in further attempts to attract foreign intervention.

Most Syrian-Australians are horrified by the attacks on their country. Australian Syrian Youth say: ‘the war in Syria now is a war between a united and secular Syrian army ... and a Salafist/Wahabi army that wants an Islamic based country’. They want neither fundamentalism nor foreign control.

The vilification of the Syrian government has the corporate media baying for blood. But let’s not be fooled into supporting **yet another** bloody intervention. It is not for outsiders to say who governs the Syrian people. Solidarity with Syria and the Syrian people!

**Don’t let US-NATO destroy yet another nation!**

# Intervention: the non-Syrian ‘revolution’

2002	President George W Bush says US ‘national security’ policy may involve pre-emptive strikes on sixty or more countries; General Wesley Clark says the Pentagon has plans to ‘take over 7 countries [including Syria] in 5 years’
2005	Condoleezza Rice spells out the US ‘Project for a New Middle East’
2006	US official William Roebuck expresses alarm at ‘growing strength and self-confidence’ of President Assad, looks for ‘new opportunities’ to bring him down
2007	Seymour Hersch reveals the Bush Administration is training ‘a regional army of terrorists’ to attack and overthrow the governments of Iran and Syria (New Yorker)
2010	Robert S. Ford is appointed US Ambassador to Syria; he worked under John Negroponte, architect of death squads in Central America and Iraq; Ford helps develop the ‘El Salvador option’ for Syria; in October 2011 he flees Syria
2011	March: first ‘Free Syrian Army’ (FSA) attacks on Syrian police in Daraa; snipers attacks civilians; Syrian army responds, US-NATO accuses army of brutality
	Saudi Arabia admits sending weapons to the FSA through Jordan, since March (AFP)
	FSA are also trained and operating from US bases in Turkey, funded by the Saudis and Qatar (ex-CIA agent Philip Giraldi)
2011-2012	Fighting in Homs: US-NATO say this is Syrian Army killing civilians, in fact the army is engaged with FSA which has taken parts of the city; Mother Agnes Mariam accuses the FSA of ethnic cleansing the Christians in Homs (National Review)
2012	Arab League observers report pro and anti-government demonstrations but also armed opposition groups attacking both the army and civilian targets (AL, January)
	‘Hundreds of foreign fighters’ joining the FSA (Spiegel Online, Feb)
	Massacre of 100 civilians in Houla, US-NATO blames it on Assad, UN inquiry inconclusive; three German newspapers name FSA allied Al Qaeda groups as behind the 25 May massacre. (Die Welt, Bild and FAZ)
	FSA receiving weapons including ‘third generation’ anti-tank weapons ‘paid for by Persian Gulf nations and coordinated by the U.S’ (Washington Post, May)
	Saudi Arabia paying military deserters in Euros and US Dollars (Guardian, RT, May)
	German intelligence estimates ‘90 terror attacks .. attributed to organizations ... close to al-Qaeda or jihadist groups’ were carried out in Syria (FAZ)
	Turkish Labor Party leader Hasan Basri Ozbey accuses Turkish President Abdullah Gul of encouraging terrorists to commit crimes in Syria (GR, SANA, July)
	‘Lebanese, Tunisians, Algerians, Libyans, Saudis, Iraqis, Egyptians, Jordanians and Kuwaitis have swollen the ranks of the jihadists’ (Sunday Times, July)
	British SAS training Syrian terrorists in Iraq: ‘more than 300 pass through base inside Iraq, command course run in Saudi Arabia’ (Sunday Express, July)
	US and Israel have invasion plans for Syria, US working on new Syrian government and new Syrian constitution with SNC and FSA (GR, FP, June)

**A principled position:** ‘[We reject] the systematic intervention and destabilization policy in the sister nation of the Arab Republic of Syria aimed at forcefully imposing a change of regime ... [we] condemn the acts of armed violence that irregular groups supported by foreign powers have unleashed ... [and] support the policy of reforms and national dialogue bolstered by President Bashar Al Assad, which are intended to find a peaceful solution to the current crisis, with respect for the Syrian people’ sovereignty and the territorial integrity of that Arab sister nation’ – **ALBA nations: Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.**

## Syria: the need for an ethical discussion

People outside Syria cannot be blamed for not fully understanding the conflict. The propaganda war and the lies have been intense, in particular to hide the key backers (the USA, NATO, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) of this proxy war. However everyone should be clear on one ethical principle:

**who governs Syria is a matter for the Syrian people, and for them alone**

It has become a habit in the imperial cultures ('the west') to form rapid judgements about other peoples, their cultures and governments. In the case of Syria there have been a series of assertions, from Hilary Clinton through the corporate media down to the 'imperial left', asserting Syria is ruled by a 'dictatorship' and that '**Assad must go**'.

One could develop an independent moral reasoning against this '**imperial voice**', but there are three international agreements which tell us it is just unethical to condemn and demand 'regime change' for another people. **First**, the international order recognises sovereign and independent states. **Second**, the declaration which marked the end of the colonial era recognised the right of peoples to self-determination. **Third**, the twin covenants of the International Bill of Rights use that same wording to establish **the collective right of self-determination** as the founding principle.

Despite attempts by the big powers to promote a supposed 'right to protect' and hypocritical claims over 'humanitarian intervention', this ethical principle remains a pillar of the international order, the post-colonial era and of human rights agreements.

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### Charter of the United Nations (1945)

**Article 2:** '[The UN] is based on the principle of the **sovereign equality** of all its Members ... [who] shall refrain ... from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or **political independence** of any state ... **Nothing** shall authorize the United Nations to **intervene** in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.'

### Declaration on Decolonisation (1960)

*(Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, Adopted by General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960)*

'1. The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.

'2. All peoples have the right to **self-determination**; by virtue of that right they **freely determine their political status** and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development ... '

**In favour:** 89 countries      **Against:** None.

**Abstaining:** Australia, Belgium, Dominican Republic, France, Portugal, Spain, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom, United States of America.

### International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

**Article 1.1:** 'All peoples have the right of **self-determination**. By virtue of that right they **freely determine their political status** and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'

## Syria: how the violence began, in Daraa

By Tim Anderson

*'The claim that armed opposition to the government has begun only recently is a complete lie. The killings of soldiers, police and civilians, often in the most brutal circumstances, have been going on virtually since the beginning.'* – Professor Jeremy Salt, October 2011 (Ankara)

There is no doubt that there was popular agitation in Syria in early 2011, after the events in Egypt and Tunisia. There were anti-government and pro-government demonstrations, and a genuine political reform debate. However the serious violence that erupted in March 2011 has been systematically misrepresented, in line with yet another US-NATO 'regime change' agenda.

For many months the big powers and the corporate media pretended that armed opposition in Syria did not exist at all. All violence was government forces against 'peaceful protestors'. In the words of the US-based Human Rights Watch (strongly linked to the US Council on Foreign Relations), 'protestors only used violence against the security forces ... in response to killings by the security forces or ... as a last resort'. This was a dreadful deceit. Washington and its allies (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and some elements in Lebanon) were sponsoring armed attacks within Syria from the very beginning.

With the revelations of foreign Islamist fighters in Syria, engaged in kidnappings, torture and executions, we can see a 'revised imperial line'. These 'jihadis' or 'Al Qaeda' groups are said to be 'on the fringes' of the rebel 'Free Syrian Army' (FSA), which is said to be led by defectors from the Syrian Arab Army. An alternative line is that the genuine 'revolution' is in danger of being 'hijacked' by the fundamentalists.

### **Daraa: the killings begin**

In February 2011 some anti-government demonstrations began. They were met in March with even larger pro-government demonstrations. In early March some teenagers in Daraa were arrested for graffiti that had been copied from North Africa 'the people want to overthrow the regime'. It was reported that they were abused by local police. Time magazine reported that President Assad intervened, the local governor was sacked and the teenagers were released.

What followed is highly contested. The western media version is that protestors burned and trashed government offices and that 'provincial security forces opened fire on marchers, killing several' (Time, 22 March). After that, 'protestors' staged demonstrations in front of the al-Omari mosque, but were in turn attacked. The western media exaggerated the demonstrations, claiming crowds of up to 300,000, with 15 anti-government 'protesters' killed (AP 23 March). Daraa is a border town with 150,000 inhabitants.

The Syrian government, on the other hand, stated that armed attacks had begun on security forces, killing several police, along with the burning of government offices. There was corroboration of this account. While its headline blamed security forces for killing 'protesters', the British Daily Mail showed pictures of guns, AK47 rifles and hand grenades that security forces had recovered after storming the al-Omari mosque. The paper noted reports that 'an armed gang' had opened fire on an ambulance, killing 'a doctor, a paramedic and a policeman'.

Israeli and Lebanese media gave versions of the events of 17-18 March closer to that of the Syrian government. An Israel National News report (21 March) said 'Seven police officers and at least four demonstrators in Syria have been killed ... and the Baath party headquarters and courthouse were torched'. The police had been targeted by rooftop snipers.

Al Jazeera (29 April), owned by Qatar's royal family, implied the rooftop snipers in Daraa were government forces. 'President Bashar al Assad has sent thousands of Syrian soldiers and their heavy weaponry into Derra for an operation the regime wants nobody in the world to see'. However the Al Jazeera claim that secret police snipers were killing 'soldiers and protestors alike' was both illogical and out of sequence.

The armed forces came to Daraa precisely because police had been killed by snipers. Once in Daraa they engaged in more gun-fire and stormed the local mosque to seize the guns and grenades storied by

'protesters'. Michel Chossudovsky wrote: 'The deployment of armed forces including tanks in Daraa [was] directed against an organised armed insurrection, which has been active in the border city since March 17-18.'

Saudi Arabia, a key US regional ally, had armed and funded extremist Sunni sects (Salafists and Wahabis) to move against the secular government. From exile in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Adnan Arour called for a holy war against the liberal Allawi muslims, who dominated the government: 'by Allah we shall mince them in meat grinders and feed their flesh to the dogs'. The Salafist aim was a theocratic state or 'caliphate'. Sheikh Muhammed al Zughbey said the Alawites were 'more infidel than the Jews and the Christians'. The original North African slogan was rapidly replaced by a Salafist slogan 'Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the grave'. They would soon act on these threats.

Saudi official Anwar Al-Eshki later confirmed to BBC television that arms had indeed been provided to groups within Syria, and they had stored them in the al-Omari mosque.

While the Syrian Baathist system has been authoritarian, it has also been secular and inclusive. The Saudi-Qatari and US-NATO backed armed insurgency aims to derail the reform program led by President Bashar al-Assad. If a more compliant government cannot be formed in Damascus, the big powers will probably settle for a country mired in sectarian chaos. That is, after all, what we see across the border in Iraq.

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**Sources:**

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Daily Mail (2011) 'Nine protesters killed after security forces open fire by Syrian mosque', 24 March

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Rania Abouzeid (2011) 'Syria's Revolt, how graffiti stirred an uprising', Time, 22 March

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## Syria: the Houla Massacre – who did it?

**May 25, 2012:** More than 100 civilians including children massacred in Homs. Most are shot in their houses - a shocking crime which provokes international reaction.

Houla: How a massacre unfolded



### Western reaction: leaders condemn Syrian government, expel diplomats.

US Secretary of State **Hilary Clinton** claimed there was 'indisputable evidence that the regime deliberately murdered innocent civilians'. **Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan** branded the massacre 'attempted genocide'.

### United Nations' initial responses:

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon criticises President Assad's commitment to the peace plan. UN human rights council condemns Syria for the massacre, blaming pro-regime militias and government troops for the deaths.

### Syrian Government: blames 'foreign funded terrorists'

### UN inquiry: cannot decide who was responsible

'The C.o.I. is unable to determine the identity of the perpetrators at this time' (26 June)

### Investigative journalists: find rebels were responsible

**Rainer Hermann (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung):** 'After the Friday prayers ... more than 700 gunmen under the leadership of Abdurrazzaq Tlass and Yahya Yusuf came in three groups ... fought bloody battles in which two dozen soldiers, mostly conscripts, were killed. During and after the fighting the rebels, supported by residents of Taldou, snuffed out the [Allawi and Shiite] families of Sayyid and Abdurrazzaq. They had refused to join the opposition.'

**Russian journalist Marat Musin (Anna news agency):** eyewitness who publishes other witness statements.

### Independent observers: see a pattern

Dr Gunter Meyer (University of Mainz): 'It's quite obvious that the rebels were responsible for the Houla massacre ... whenever an action of the U.N. Security Council is going to start, then these atrocities are being reported'

## Istanbul summit tries to increase pressure on Syria

Foreign ministers from more than 70 Western and Arab countries have sought to increase pressure on Syria at a key meeting in Istanbul.

The "Friends of the Syrian People" summit warned Damascus not to stall on implementing a UN-Arab peace plan and stressed support for the opposition.

However key players remained absent, including Russia, China and Iran.



The UK Foreign Secretary spoke of plans for "a managed transition, a political transition" in Syria

**Ankara 'Friends of Syria' agenda:** regime change 'peace plan', armed rebellion against Syrian government (main players: USA, Britain, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17576134>

## Who are Syria's real friends?

**Tehran conference agenda** (main players: Iran, Russia, China, Iraq, India, Venezuela, Palestine): end foreign arms currently flowing into terrorist hands inside Syria, broker a meaningful ceasefire, coordinate humanitarian aid, and support the Syrian people's right to reform without foreign interference.

<http://landdestroyer.blogspot.fi/2012/08/the-syrian-government-is-not-isolated.html>

### 30 Nation International Consultative Conference on Syria

Hosted by Iran regarding Syria - attending were representatives from Russia, China, Belarus, Mauritania, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Benin, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Oman, Venezuela, Tajikistan, India, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Nicaragua, Cuba, Sudan, Jordan, Tunisia and Palestine



3.4 billion people represented - over half the world's population.

## Media coverage of Syrian violence partial and untrue, says nun

**PATSY McGARRY, Religious Affairs Correspondent**

Mon, Aug 13, 2012

A NUN who has been superior at a Syrian monastery for the past 18 years has warned that media coverage of ongoing violence in that country has been "partial and untrue". It is "a fake", Mother Agnes Mariam said, which "hides atrocities committed in the name of liberty and democracy".

Superior of the Melkite Greek Catholic monastery of St James the Mutilated in Qara, in Syria's diocese of Homs, which is in full communion with Rome, she left Ireland yesterday after a three-day visit during which she met representatives of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in Maynooth.

She told The Irish Times she was in Ireland "not to advocate for the (Assad) regime but for the facts". Most news reports from Syria were "forged, with only one side emphasised", she said. This also applied to the UN, whose reports were "one-sided and not worthy of that organisation".

UN observers in Syria had been "moderate with the rebels and covered for them in taking back positions after the withdrawal of heavy equipment, as seen so tragically in Homs", she said.

When it was put to her this suggested the whole world was out of step except for Syria, Russia and China, she protested: "No, no, there are 20 countries, including some in Latin America" of the same view.

The reason the media was being denied easy access to Syria currently was because in the Libyan conflict journalists placed electronic devices for Nato in rooms used at press conferences in that country, she said. "So Syria didn't want journalists," she said.

Christians make up about 10 per cent of Syria's population, dispersed throughout the country, she said. The Assad regime "does not favour Christians", she said. "It is a secular regime based on equality for all, even though in the constitution it says the Koran is the source of legislation."

But "Christians are less put aside [in Syria] than in other Islamic countries, for example Saudi Arabia," she said. "The social fabric of Syria is very diverse, so Christians live in peace."

The "Arab insurrection" under way in that country included "sectarian factions which promote fundamentalist Islam, which is not genuine Islam", she said.

The majority of Muslims in Syria are moderate and open to other cultural and interfaith elements, she said. "Wahhabism (a fundamentalist branch of Islam) is not open," she added.

Christians in Syria were "doubtful about the future if the project to topple the regime succeeded". The alternative was "a religious sectarian state where all minorities would feel threatened and discriminated against", she said.

There was "a need to end the violence", she said. "The West and Gulf states must not give finance to armed insurrectionists who are sectarian terrorists, most of whom are from al-Qaeda, according to a report presented to the German parliament," she said.

"We don't want to be invaded, as in Aleppo, by mercenaries, some of whom think they are fighting Israel. They bring terror, destruction, fear and nobody protects the civilians," she said. There were "very few Syrians among the rebels", she said. "Mercenaries should go home," she said.

What she and others sought in Syria was "reform, no violence, no foreign intervention." She hoped for "a new, third way, a new social pact where the right to autodetermination without outside interference" would be respected.

## Truth and Falsehood in Syria

By Assoc. Professor Jeremy Salt – Ankara – 5 October 2011

[http://palestinechronicle.com/view\\_article\\_details.php?id=17159](http://palestinechronicle.com/view_article_details.php?id=17159)

As insurrection in Syria lurches towards civil war, the brakes need to be put on the propaganda pouring through the western mainstream media and accepted uncritically by many who should know better. So here is a matrix of positions from which to argue about what is going on in this critical Middle Eastern country:

1. Syria has been a mukhabarat (intelligence) state since the redoubtable Abd al Hamid al Serraj ran the intelligence services as the deuxième bureau in the 1950s. The authoritarian state which developed from the time Hafez al Assad took power in 1970 has crushed all dissent ruthlessly. On occasion it has either been him or them. The ubiquitous presence of the mukhabarat is an unpleasant fact of Syrian life but as Syria is a central target for assassination and subversion by Israel and western intelligence agencies, as it has repeatedly come under military attack, as it has had a large chunk of its territories occupied and as its enemies are forever looking for opportunities to bring it down, it can hardly be said that the mukhabarat is not needed.
2. There is no doubt that the bulk of people demonstrating in Syria want peaceful transition to a democratic form of government. Neither is there any doubt that armed groups operating from behind the screen of the demonstrations have no interest in reform. They want to destroy the government.
3. There have been very big demonstrations of support for the government. There is anger at the violence of the armed gangs and anger at external interference and exploitation of the situation by outside governments and the media. In the eyes of many Syrians, their country is again the target of an international conspiracy.
4. Whatever the truth of the accusations made against the security forces, the armed groups have killed hundreds of police, soldiers and civilians, in total probably close to 1000 at this stage. The civilian dead include university professors, doctors and even, very recently, the son of the Grand Mufti of the Republic. The armed gangs have massacred, ambushed, assassinated, attacked government buildings and sabotaged railway lines.
5. Bashar al Assad has a strong base of personal popularity. Although he sits on top of the system it is misleading to call him a dictator. The system itself is the true dictator. Deeply rooted power in Syria - entrenched over five decades - lies in the military and intelligence establishment, and to a lesser degree in the party structure. These are the true sources of resistance to change. The demonstrations were Bashar's opportunity to pass on the message, which he did, that the system had to change.
6. In the face of large scale demonstrations earlier this year the government did finally come up with a reform program. This was rejected out of hand by the opposition. No attempt was even made to test the bona fides of the government.
7. The claim that armed opposition to the government has begun only recently is a complete lie. The killing of soldiers, police and civilians, often in the most brutal circumstances, has been going on virtually since the beginning.
8. The armed groups are well armed and well organised. Large shipments of weapons have been smuggled into Syria from Lebanon and Turkey. They include pump action shotguns, machine guns, Kalashnikovs, RPG launchers, Israeli-made hand grenades and numerous other explosives. It is not clear who is providing these weapons but someone is, and someone is paying for them. Interrogation of captured members of armed gangs points in the direction of Saad al Hariri's Future Movement. Hariri is a front man for the US and Saudi Arabia, with influence spreading well beyond Lebanon.
9. Armed opposition to the regime largely seems to be sponsored by the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. In 1982 the government ruthlessly crushed an uprising initiated by the Brotherhood in Hama. Many thousands died and part of the city was destroyed. The Brotherhood has two prime objectives: the destruction of the Baathist government and the destruction of the secular state in favor of an Islamic system. It is almost palpably thirsting for revenge.



10. The armed groups have strong support from outside apart from what is already known or indicated. Exiled former Syrian Vice President and Foreign Minister, Abd ul Halim Khaddam, who lives in Paris, has been campaigning for years to bring down the Assad government. He is funded by both the EU and the US. Other exiled activists include Burhan Ghalioun, backed by Qatar as the leader of the 'national council' set up in Istanbul. Ghalioun, like Abd ul Halim Khaddam, lives in Paris and like him also, lobbies against the Assad government in Europe and in Washington. Together with Muhammad Riyad al Shaqfa, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, he is receptive to outside 'humanitarian intervention' in Syria on the Libyan model (others are against it). The promotion of the exiles as an alternative government is reminiscent of the way the US used exiled Iraqis (the so-called Iraqi National Congress) ahead of the invasion of Iraq.

11. The reporting by the western media of the situations in Libya and Syria has been appalling. NATO intervention in Libya has been the cause of massive destruction and thousands of deaths. The war, following the invasion of Iraq, is yet another major international crime committed by the governments of the US, Britain and France. The city of Sirte has been bombarded day and night for two weeks without the western media paying any attention to the heavy destruction and loss of life that must have followed. The western media has made no attempt to check reports coming out of Sirte of the bombing of civilian building and the killing of hundreds of people. The only reason can be that the ugly truth could well derail the whole NATO operation.

12. In Syria the same media has followed the same pattern of misreporting and disinformation. It has ignored or skated over the evidence of widespread killings by armed gangs. It has invited its audience to disbelieve the claims of government and believe the claims of rebels, often made in the name of human rights organisations based in Europe or the US. Numerous outright lies have been told, as they were told in Libya and as they were told ahead of the attack on Iraq. Some at least have been exposed. People said to have been killed by state security forces have turned up alive. The brothers of Zainab al Husni claimed she has been kidnapped by security forces, murdered and her body dismembered. This lurid account, spread by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiyya amongst other outlets, was totally false. She is still alive although now, of course, the propaganda tack is to claim that this is not really her but a double. Al Jazeera, the Guardian and the BBC have distinguished themselves by their blind support of anything that discredits the Syrian government. The same line is being followed by the mainstream media in the US. Al Jazeera, in particular, having distinguished itself with its reporting of the Egyptian revolution, has lost all credibility as an independent Arab world news channel.

13. In seeking to destroy the Syrian government the Muslim Brotherhood has a goal in common with the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia, whose paranoia about Shia Islam reached fever pitch with the uprising in Bahrain. Wikileaks revealed how impatient it was for the US to attack Iran. A substitute target is the destruction of the strategic relationship between Iran, Syria and Hizbullah. The US and the Saudis may want to destroy the Alawi-dominated Baathist regime in Damascus for slightly different reasons, but the important thing is that they do want to destroy it.

14. The US is doing its utmost to drive Syria into a corner. It is giving financial support to exiled leaders of the opposition. It has tried (and so far failed thanks to Russian and Chinese opposition) to introduce an extensive program of sanctions through the UN Security Council. No doubt it will try again and depending on how the situation develops, it may try, with British and French support, to bring on a no-fly zone resolution opening the door to foreign attack. The situation is fluid and no doubt all sorts of contingency plans are being developed. The White House and the State Department are issuing hectoring statements every other day. Openly provoking the Syrian government, the US ambassador, accompanied by the French ambassador, travelled to Hama before Friday prayers. Against everything that is known about their past record of interference in Middle Eastern countries, it is inconceivable that the US and Israel, along with France and Britain, would not be involved in this uprising beyond what is already known.

15. While concentrating on the violence of the Syrian regime, the US, European governments (especially Britain) have totally ignored the violence directed against it. Their own infinitely greater violence, of course, in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and other places, doesn't even come into the picture. Turkey has joined their campaign against Syria with relish, going even further than they have in confronting the Syrian regime. In the space of a few months Turkey's 'zero problem' regional policy has been upended in the most inchoate manner. Turkey eventually lent its support to the NATO attack on Libya, after initially holding back. It has

antagonised Iran by its policy on Syria and by agreeing, despite strong domestic opposition, to host a US radar missile 'defence' installation clearly directed against Iran. The Americans say its data will be shared with Israel, which has refused to apologise for the attack on the Mavi Marmara, plunging Israeli-Turkish relations into near crisis. So from 'zero problems', Turkey now has a regional policy full of problems with Israel, Syria and Iran.

16. While some members of the Syrian opposition have spoken against foreign intervention, the 'Free Syrian Army' has said that its aim is to have a no-fly zone declared over northern Syria. A no-fly zone would have to be enforced, and we have seen how this led in Libya to massive infrastructural destruction, the killing of thousands of people and the opening of the door to a new period of western domination.

17. If the Syrian government is brought down, every last Baathist and Alawi will be hunted down. In a government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood the status of minorities and women would be driven backwards.

18. Through the Syria Accountability Act, and through sanctions which the EU has imposed, the US has been trying to destroy the Syrian government for twenty years. The dismantling of unified Arab states along ethno-religious lines has been an aim of Israel's for decades. Where Israel goes, the US naturally follows. The fruits of this policy can be seen in Iraq, where an independent state in all but name has been created for the Kurds and where the constitution, written by the US, separates Iraq's people into Kurds, Sunni, Shi and Christian, destroying the binding logic of Arab nationalism. Iraq has not known a moment's peace since the British entered Baghdad in 1917. In Syria ethno-religious divisions (Sunni Muslim Arab, Sunni Muslim Kurd, Druze, Alawi and various Christian sects) render it vulnerable in the same way to the promotion of sectarian discord and eventual disintegration as the unified Arab state the French tried to prevent coming into existence in the 1920s.

19. The destruction of the Baathist government would be a strategic victory of unsurpassed value to the US and Israel. The central arch in the strategic relationship between Iran, Syria and Hizbullah will have been destroyed, leaving Hizbullah geographically isolated, with a hostile Sunni Muslim government next door, and leaving Hizbullah and Iran more exposed to a military attack by the US and Israel. Fortuitously or otherwise, the 'Arab spring' as it has developed in Syria has placed in their hands a lever by which they may be able to achieve their goal.

20. It is not necessarily the case that a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government in Egypt or Syria would be hostile to US interests. Wanting to be seen as a respectable member of the international community and another good example of 'moderate' Islam, it is likely and certainly possible that an Egyptian government dominated by the Brotherhood would agree to maintain the peace treaty with Israel for as long as it can (i.e. until another large scale attack by Israel on Gaza or Lebanon makes it absolutely unsustainable).

21. A Syrian government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood would be close to Saudi Arabia and hostile to Iran, Hizbullah and the Shia of Iraq, especially those associated with Muqtada al Sadr. It would pay lip service to the Palestine cause and the liberation of the Golan Heights but its practical policies would be unlikely to be any different from the government it is seeking to destroy.

22. The Syrian people are entitled to demand democracy and to be given it, but in this way and at this cost? Even now, an end to the killing and negotiations on political reform is surely the way forward, not violence which threatens to tear the country apart. Unfortunately, violence and not a negotiated settlement is what too many people inside Syria want and what too many governments watching and waiting for their opportunity also want. No Syrian can ultimately gain from this, whatever they presently think. Their country is being driven towards a sectarian civil war, perhaps foreign intervention and certainly chaos on an even greater scale than we are now seeing. There will be no quick recovery if the state collapses or can be brought down. Like Iraq, and probably like Libya, looking at the present situation, Syria would enter a period of bloody turmoil that could last for years. Like Iraq, again, it would be completely knocked out of the ring as a state capable of standing up for Arab interests, which means, of course, standing up to the US and Israel.

*Jeremy Salt is associate professor in Middle Eastern History and Politics at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey.*