

Conspiracy Theories

John McHugo's article ([Syria: Caught in a Trap](#), July 2013) ends: 'During both periods [the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict] many conspiracies were hatched against Syria.'

If 'conspiracies' had been hatched against Syria, then it makes little sense to call the Syrian people's reaction paranoid. It should be described so if, and only if, there were no such conspiracies. If I were cheeky, I would point out McHugo's incoherence and leave it at that.

Adopting the language of conspiracy without specifics of who, what, when and where simply means that one has given up substantive efforts to understand the world around you. When western historians adopt the language of conspiracy in regard to the Middle East it means they can no longer be bothered to understand current events in favour of an oft-repeated and long-discredited narrative of certain less than wholesome elements of the Arab street and the Ba'ath party (see, for example, Fouad Ajami's work of 1981, *The Arab Predicament*). It is the kind of narrative put forward by those whose present is a failure; who do not understand their own past and how it shaped the present; and who seek to deflect current and past failures onto others (preferably foreigners, Jews and 'traitorous' domestic minorities). In the past, those who had adopted this narrative were almost exclusively party functionaries of the Ba'ath and panegyrist for pan-Arabism. Why McHugo would promote this narrative is a mystery.

He may genuinely believe the roots of this conflict 'flow' from the Cold War and Arab-Israeli conflict. But those who are fighting it think they are fighting for or against the Assad clan and Alawite oppression or are fighting under the banner of Islam in a Sunni-Shia (Alawite-Druze) sectarian civil war.

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