

## **Amr Al Azm Abstract**

### **Can We Blame Sykes-Picot for the Downfall of Syria Today**

It is often said that the original sin for many of the Middle East region's troubles is the Sykes Picot agreement of 1916 because it created states with artificial borders that did not take into account ethnic, sectarian, religious or tribal boundaries.

In this paper however I would argue that at least as far as Syria is concerned, the problem does not necessarily lie in the supposedly volatile artificiality of the state. Rather, it is persistent policy by successive Syrian regimes to suppress the emergence of a strong national identity, promoting instead alternate supra-Syrian identities that are sectarian (Sunni or Shiite) or inherently ethnic (Arab or Kurdish) or supra politico-ideological such as the one party state system of the Ba'ath. It is these supra identities that conferred advantages on those who fit them to the exclusion of the rest that ultimately led to the disintegration of the country today.

Looking to the future, any post-conflict planning should make it a priority to re-establish and enhance a strong sense of a Syrian national identity as a principal way towards reconciliation and stability rather than seeking to redraw the boundaries of the modern Syrian state based on new supra identities.