

The politics of intervention

The art of talking

By **Jonathan Prentice**, Senior Policy Adviser, International Crisis Group¹

“It was impossible to get a conversation going, everybody was talking too much.”
Yogi Berra

Introduction

Depending on your perspective, last year signalled the Responsibility to Protect’s coming of age or its consignment to the slagheap of history². It’s a relief, perhaps, that we still feel military intervention merits such reflection and there certainly has been considerable commentary on the state of the doctrine known as R2P since 2011’s NATO intervention in Libya.

For the past year or so, the Security Council, and the international community more generally, has arguably been mired in an inability to address Syria, to no small degree as a result of ill-feeling (manufactured or otherwise) over aspects of its Maghrebian malaise.³ The end result might very well be that Libya did indeed mark the highwater point of R2P, at least for a while. This paper focuses on why that might be the case, and what limitations it highlights about the international community’s current approaches to thorny crises.

This paper considers three observations and two lessons coming out of Libya. While they do not form a comprehensive list, these observations and lessons are at play in a range of recent crises most notably perhaps in Syria, though one could also look back to Sri Lanka and forward to Iran.

The three observations are: that it remains the case that history is written by the winners; that unity of purpose is vital in the international community (but transient); and that sovereignty remains a formidable shield. All of these truisms have consequences, not all of which have been fully confronted by the proponents of R2P.

The lessons are: that prevention is, of course, better than the cure but our systems are not set up for such far-sighted interventions; and, on a related point, that the current international choreography of high rhetoric and demands (driven by the West and often impossible for the offending regime to meet), followed by sanctions, followed by a march to more forceful intervention, is tired. It needs a shake-up. Going back to basics – talking – would not be a bad place to start.

The purpose of this paper is not to condemn R2P (indeed, while a discussion of R2P is central to this paper, it is primarily about international responses to seemingly intractable, first order crises).

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1. The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and do not represent the institutional views of International Crisis Group.
 2. “In 2011, history took a turn for the better. The Responsibility to Protect came of age; the principle was tested as never before. The results were uneven but, at the end of the day, tens of thousands of lives were saved.” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Address to the Stanley Foundation Conference on the Responsibility to Protect, 18 January 2012; see also David Rieff’s article, “R2P, R.I.P.” in *The New York Times*, 7 November 2011 and “The evolution of the responsibility to protect: at a crossroads?” by Phil Orchard, *International Affairs*, volume 88, issue 2, pp 377 – 386, March 2012.
 3. The Kofi Annan initiative for Syria marks a possibly significant, and welcome development but there remains much skepticism as to its chances for success and the depth of unity behind it, not to mention that it took the Security Council 12 months or so to arrive at this course of action.

The steady but certain acceptance of the notion that human rights are both universal and a legitimate global concern has been one of the great jewels in the construction of the post-Second World War international architectural crown. This is as true in the establishment of the International Bill of Rights, as it is in the formalization of the notion of individual international criminal responsibility through the founding of the International Criminal Court (ICC). You would have to be of an obtuse amorality to take issue with the idea that there is a collective responsibility to protect people from mass atrocities – a notion that is simply a logical extension of our ongoing and very welcome human rights revolution. Human rights are universal – and consequences flow from that.

But... And there is a but...

When the doctrine of R2P is controversial both in its application (Libya) and in its omission (Sri Lanka, where R2P was not invoked during the dramatic, bloody end to the civil war), questions need to be asked as to whether the failures are of implementation or reveal some structural weakness in the concept. Asking those questions is not to undermine R2P but to give it the respectful treatment such an important doctrine merits.

History is written by winners

First, it remains the case that history is written by the victors. NATO and its allies have been unequivocal in declaring the Libya intervention a military, political and moral triumph (even rejecting calls for independent investigations into alleged civilian deaths).⁴ This declaration has even occurred in the face of the significant stresses currently placed on the Libyan state and the impact of Qaddafi's demise – anticipated in some quarters – in Sahelian Africa.⁵ Developments in Mali have unquestionably been exacerbated by developments in Tripoli.⁶

Given the fallout from Libya, particularly in terms of the paralysis to which it has contributed over attempts to reach international consensus on an approach to Syria, it seems perhaps a little odd that the victors have not been more sombre in their victory. This is particularly odd since the end of Qadhafi's rule is widely, and rightly, held up as a positive development and one could even argue that the number of suspected civilian deaths marks an improvement in the sorry history of so-called collateral damage: something if not to celebrate then at least not to be entirely ignored. Repeated expressions of unadulterated triumphalism might well please the converted, but they are likely to do little to encourage flexibility where it is most needed – from those who are more questioning. At the very least, they give those who feel aggrieved all possible cover to remain so.

When R2P's implementation is deemed to necessitate the use of force, and when that force results in a change of regime and allegations that there are civilian casualties, it is surely incumbent on those utilizing the doctrine (and their advocates) to deal with these concerns in a transparent manner. The sincerity with which some hold these concerns may be questioned, but it is more difficult to question the integrity of the concerns themselves. Not to deal with them openly cheapens the doctrine and undermines the prospects that those states using it will be entrusted by the broader international community with the authority to do so again.

4. Amnesty International "Libya: The Forgotten Victims of NATO Strikes", 19 March 2012; on NATO's response to questions of civilian casualties, see, for example, "In Strikes on Libya by NATO, an Unspoken Civilian Toll", *New York Times*, 17 December 2011, quoting Secretary-General Rasmussen as saying, 'We have carried out this operation very carefully, without confirmed civilian casualties'; subsequently, NATO has asserted it has no mandate to carry out operations in Libya, including investigations, after October 2011. See also NATO Sees Flaws in Air Campaign Against Qaddafi, *New York Times*, 14 April 2012 and NATO's Secrecy Stance, C.J.Chivers, *New York Times*, 24 March 2012.

5. See International Crisis Group, *Holding Libya Together, Security Challenges After Qadhafi*, 14 December 2011.

6. International Crisis Group Statement, *Putting Mali Back on the Constitutional Track*, 26 March 2012; Christian Caryl, "The Lesson from Mali: Do No Harm" in, *Foreign Policy*, 11 April 2012.

Unity of purpose

Furthermore, unity of purpose is key, but not all encompassing. Conversely, the absence of clarity of intent can impact on the future ability to act. There was no question that there was unity of purpose in the Security Council as Qaddafi's men converged on Benghazi: even if there are legitimate questions as to whether or not he intended to massacre everyone in that town, he can have no complaint that he was seen as so unpredictable, and ruthless, that such an outcome was a distinct possibility⁷. No Council member wanted that massacre laid at their door.

While one can argue there was unity of intent when the Security Council passed its resolution 1973 authorising military action in Libya for the express purpose of protecting that country's civilians, that unity faded fairly quickly as the length of the combat mission became more readily apparent; and the confusion of motives – sincere or otherwise – between civilian protection and regime change came into stark relief. Well before Qadhafi's convoy was strafed leaving Sirte in October 2011, there was little doubt about the NATO mission's endgame.

Perhaps it was always going to be thus. One could mount a perfectly coherent argument that to protect a people from a regime that has been declared murderous requires the root and branch removal of that regime. However, that conclusion – possibly an inevitable one whenever the intervention, rather than prevention, dimension of R2P is invoked – may highlight a truism in the concept which needs to be brought into the light considerably more. That Qadhafi's political demise at least was the end point of the NATO-plus intervention was both a logical outcome of the apparently murderous path he was set upon and also, arguably, the denouement that no other options were allowed to derail.

Once he was referred to the ICC, Qadhafi's options became significantly more limited, if not exactly non-existent. The speed with which the referral to the Court took place raised eyebrows. This was not simply due to comparisons with other cases but also because the referral, on 26 February, came only one day after the UN Human Rights Council had established a commission of inquiry into alleged human rights violations taking place in Libya. This, in itself, is typically a precursor to a more formal investigation and also serves the purpose of putting the supposed perpetrators on notice that tangible accountability was a real threat.⁸ By mobilizing the ICC process so quickly, the international community removed any potential utility coming from that threat. The international community used one of its cards prematurely, in effect giving up some of the flexibility it may have had in its dealings with Qadhafi. It is perhaps no surprise that even after some estimated 9,000 deaths in Syria (the intervention in Libya – legal and military – was launched after several hundred) there has been no serious, sustained discussion of an ICC referral for the leadership in Damascus.

A major part of the problem is that, however it is dressed up, R2P is about military intervention. The fact remains that the cleverest conceptual shift behind the articulation of the R2P concept – away from a right of intervention towards a responsibility to protect – does not alter the fact that the underlying issue when it comes to R2P is about when armed intervention in another sovereign state can be justified. This aspect of R2P – the so-called third pillar – was downplayed by all parties involved in the debate during the doctrine's formulation. The interests of those who wished to focus only on 'soft' forms of prevention and capacity-building (thus preserving the inviolability of the state) were, ironically, aligned with the

7. According to extensive Crisis Group interviews with diplomats in New York, the fear of another Srebrenica, this time in Benghazi, was a major motivating factor behind the decision to push ahead with resolution 1973. For an alternative view, see Hugh Roberts, "Who said Gaddafi had to go?" *London Review of Books*, volume 33, no.22, 17 November 2011.

8. In a conference the author attended in November 2011, a senior member of Libya's National Transitional Council said that in his opinion the referral to the ICC regrettably extended the conflict denying Qadhafi the negotiated exit that he had come to realise was his only chance. The Security Council referred Libya to the ICC on 26 February 2011 (through resolution 1970) and an indictment was issued on 27 June 2011. In the case of Darfur, the Security Council referred Sudan to the ICC on 31 March 2005 (through resolution 1593) three years after the outbreak of conflict and only after having previously established an International Commission of Inquiry. The ICC indicted Omar al-Bashir on 4 March 2009.

interests of those who wanted to bed down the concept in international practice, or who did not want necessarily to be saddled with the responsibility to intervene in every case of mass atrocity⁹. By the time these competing notions came out into the open in Libya, the bombardment was already underway and it was clear the crisis was only going to end with Qadhafi's removal. The moment for open, honest debate of all the options had passed.

R2P, as currently articulated, is essentially a humanitarian doctrine. Its overt focus is on civilian protection ; it tells you very little about how to stop the conflict or crisis that is putting people at risk in the first place. However, in the case of Libya – and one could argue this would be so in every instance where force is deemed necessary – it segued rapidly into an operation with an avowedly political objective. There's a tension there, which is built into the doctrine and which needs a proper airing if R2P is to strengthen its foundations in international practice and acceptance.

Though somewhat airbrushed from history, it's worth noting that the international unity in question was quickly frayed, and, perhaps, only ever more apparent than real – even at its height. Although three African members of the Security Council voted for 1973, unity was achieved by support for the intervention from the League of Arab States and, in particular, the Gulf Cooperation Council. The more skeptical position adopted by the African Union was deemed to be of less import¹⁰.

Resolution 1973 called, in its first operative paragraph, for an immediate ceasefire ; in its second operative paragraph, the focus was on dialogue. To the extent their positioning in the text indicates priority, it is revealing how little activity there appeared to be towards their attainment. In that regard, the current approach to the crisis in Syria – seeking to coalesce around the Annan mission – is to be welcomed. Its flaw, perhaps, lies not so much in the design of the six-point plan but in its timing. The international community essentially took one year from the start of the turmoil to reach any sort of consensus on the way forward : by then, battle lines – political and military – were too deeply drawn.

Back to Libya. On 10 March 2011, AU heads of state adopted a roadmap for conflict resolution and urged the Libyan authorities “to act with utmost restraint, ensure the protection and the security of their citizens and that of foreign nationals living in Libya, and to facilitate the timely and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations”. This position was rapidly marginalized, as the League of Arab States' position – supportive of intervention – attained prominence.¹¹

Once NATO's intervention had commenced, the AU announced it would meet with Qadhafi in Tripoli and the opposition in Benghazi on 20 March ; permission to land was not granted¹². On 11 April, the AU did manage to visit Libya and South African President Zuma claimed the visit was a success.¹³ Despite repeated public calls for a peaceful settlement to the crisis by the Secretary-General, the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and others, negotiations were arguably never really given a chance. The opposition insisted that they could not even begin before Qadhafi left power – why would they insist on anything else ?

9. All references to the 'responsibility to protect' in the two Security Council resolutions on Libya, 1970 and 1973, are explicitly about the responsibility of the Libyan Government and not that of the international community.

10. This has been described as 'forum shopping' by Alex Bellamy and Paul Williams in their interesting article, “The new politics of protection? Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and the responsibility to protect”, *International Affairs*, 87:4 (2011) pp. 825–850.

11. The onset of the Libya crisis took place as the denouement of the Côte d'Ivoire conflict was played out ; the comparison between the two – with numerous regional mediating missions dispatched to Abidjan before the decision was taken to intervene militarily – is striking.

12. Permission was denied in circumstances which have yet to be made fully clear, see William Davison and Oudaa Marouf “African Union Panel Is Denied Permission to Land in Libya”, *Bloomberg News*, 21 March 2011.

13. “Our visit was a huge success. The Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi, accepted the roadmap of the African Union, which in our view will enable the AU to assist Libya towards lasting peace and democracy. Only an inclusive dialogue among the Libyan parties on the appropriate reforms will ensure a lasting solution in Libya.” <http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=17716&tid=31841>.

If it is generally seen as welcome news that military interventions now require some sort of regional green light (in the sense of endorsement by states in the neighbourhood) there should, perhaps, be considerably more concern about local fighters and their political representatives – as in Libya or Syria – acting as a red light on the pursuit of negotiated settlements¹⁴. Once military intervention begins (or is even aired), the interests of rebel groups – their fighting power now incalculably enhanced – in seeing such intervention stop short of total military victory is negligible.

Sovereignty: Still a formidable shield

It has become commonplace to point out that sovereignty is no longer a shield behind which major human rights violations can take place, but that should not numb us to the profound significance of this understanding. It is a challenge to find any debate on a conflict situation that doesn't very quickly reflect on the human rights failings driving that conflict, whether they are developmental, cultural, political or a combination of all three. Indeed, this is evident in the current debates on Mali, Sudan, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire, Myanmar and Syria.

The traumas of the 1990s led to a decision to try to ensure that there were mechanisms in place to at least attempt to prevent, mitigate or stop the worst excesses. The structural consequences – the reform of the UN human rights machinery through the creation of the Human Rights Council, particularly the notion that all states, through its Universal Periodic Review, were to have their human rights performances publicly reviewed; or the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission – and the greater acceptance of the role of civil society organisations in policy-making and conflict prevention, are all welcome part of this transition.

However, it shouldn't be a constant surprise when these mechanisms and this new rhetoric don't work in a pure manner. The international system is still predicated on sovereign states constituting its core and this is not going to change any time soon. Those bodies charged with overseeing collective peace and security – whether it is the Security Council or, at times, the Human Rights Council – are made up of states and they behave as states do. To criticise the Security Council for being political is not a particularly insightful observation; it's like criticising an elephant for the length of its nose. However, this factual observation about the nature of these bodies should not be a defence. Both the Security Council and the Human Rights Council fail too often on their own terms.

Thus, the Security Council can quite easily find itself not debating what to do about Sri Lanka, as its army slaughtered quite possibly tens of thousands of innocent civilians. In fact, the Human Rights Council outdid itself on this issue and, in a special session, passed a resolution¹⁵ praising the government in Colombo for this course of action¹⁶. Similarly, the paralysis on the Security Council for the first year of the Syrian crisis or the fact that the entire Arab Spring, built on foundations of systemic denial of civil and economic human rights, took us all by surprise.

While sovereign states might constitute the core of our international system, permeating this structure is the brute reality of power. Not all states, in this regard, are equal, whatever the dictates of the UN Charter. Thus it was possible to intervene militarily in Libya – the regime there had, literally, no friends. Contrast this with the situation in Syria and the point becomes clear, if it needed articulation.

14. But one should not be blind as to the motivations behind regional support: the League's broader interests in Libya and Syria no doubt played some role behind their stance on these countries, in addition to humanitarian concern; contrast these positions, for example, with the League's more muted approach to Bahrain.

15. S-11/1 Assistance to Sri Lanka in the promotion and protection of human rights, 27 May 2009.

16. This policy, essentially to allow war to burn itself out through the eradication of a particularly unpleasant terrorist outfit in the LTTE, remains the signal failure to date of the R2P concept: it simply wasn't applied and was barely even referred to. An extremely modest ex-post facto salvation was attained in March 2012 when in the face of aggressive Sri Lankan lobbying, the Human Rights Council passed a new resolution (A/HRC/19/L.2/Rev1) seeking to keep alive the issue of accountability.

R2P is a value-based doctrine operating in a world based on power. That's not to the detriment of the concept, but we shouldn't pretend it is otherwise.

The best promotion for R2P is honesty, not dissembling, about what it is; what its limitations are; the implications of its use – possible regime change and unintended casualties; and when it can, feasibly, be used. Not to address these points head-on opens the doctrine up to charges of selectivity from which it will find it difficult to extricate itself.

Prevention: Better than the cure, but still so elusive

Just as doctors perennially beseech us that prevention is better than the cure, our ability to head off the onset of a crisis – even when we have the tools to see it coming – remains hugely limited. Herein lies what is perhaps the core weakness of R2P: its focus on a very narrow band of the worst of crimes.

There is a tension at play between the emphasis in R2P doctrine on prevention and its focus on mass atrocity crimes. Not least, which country is going to want to situate any of its national policies within a framework of the prevention of mass atrocities?¹⁷ Framed in this way, it will always be very difficult to look to discrete incidents – the closing of a newspaper, for example, or the unfair distribution of development assistance – and say that this is setting a country on the path to mass atrocities.

As a case in point: Libya's human rights record was discussed by the UN Human Rights Council in November 2010¹⁸. The official summary of that review is suggestive of a country with significant human rights deficiencies but which is making strides to address them; the trending is positive. Nowhere in this summary, in which NATO states also recognised general progress, was there a sense that the country's leadership was so homicidal in intent that three months later it would pose a clear and present danger to its people. A lot, of course, can change in three months but the discrepancy in assessments between November 2010 and February 2011 is striking and does suggest a preventive capacity that the international community lacks.

Indeed, looking at the downward trends in some of the places which the International Crisis Group covers – the virulent anti-Uzbek nationalism in southern Kyrgyzstan for example, or the creeping authoritarianism in Burundi for example, or concerns of a victors' justice in Côte d'Ivoire, or the total absence of minority rights in Sri Lanka, or effective development policies in Mali – none of these have had the label 'R2P' applied to them¹⁹.

The result, of course, is that R2P is only ever likely to come to the fore when it is being discussed in the context of whether a military intervention is merited (and feasible). Its association with armed force – which its recasting as a responsibility to protect rather than a right to intervene was designed to circumvent – is impossible to escape.

A combination of more honest reflection on when force should be used and for what purpose (and why it was not used when perhaps it should have been) as well as a genuine commitment to longer-term techniques of prevention offers R2P the best chance of gaining universal acceptance. This means re-orienting foreign policy obsessions away from a purely narrow security prism towards capacity-building, intelligent development policies, and more clearly articulated expectations of how aid should be used. In short, it means drawing the lesson most keenly voiced as the Arab Spring unfurled itself – stability requires much more than strongman leaders – and putting it into practice in a comprehensive fashion.

17. Juan Mendez, the first Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on Prevention of Genocide used to say somewhat wryly that it was often tricky getting an invite to visit countries with the word 'genocide' on his calling card.

18. Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (A/HRC/16/15), 4 January 2011.

19. Except in the case of Kyrgyzstan, but here I would argue that expressions of success in intervening within such a framework are premature – the southern town of Osh and its environs remain the scene of deepening and pervasive Kyrgyz nationalism squeezing out any space for the ethnic Uzbek community.

The international fandango: Fiery rhetoric, sanctions, intervention or bust

Military intervention is, logically, the option of last resort: its consequences, inevitable and invariably unpredictable, surely dictate that. The trouble is the current international dispensation is in danger of adopting a maddeningly mono-dimensional approach to crises, one in which the issue of intervention is increasingly at the forefront from an early stage.

Much of the debate about how to handle the Syria crisis has taken place within a framework of whether or not military intervention makes sense. Fortunately, most opinion has resolved that it does not²⁰. However, the framework of analysis – effectively starting with intervention as a first option, almost reluctantly dismissing it for its lack of feasibility – highlights the paucity of imagination as to how best to use the so-called diplomatic tool-box. Currently, all too often, there is a somewhat stolid playbook being drawn from – a three-step choreography that goes something like this:²¹

First, the international community, essentially the West and the United Nations, ratchets up the rhetoric, drawing on principle, expressing outrage, and demanding action according to a set of benchmarks. Recent crises in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire and ongoing crises in Sudan, North Korea, Syria and Iran all reflect this pattern. The benchmarks in question would often involve, if implemented, the suicide of the offending regime in question, or at least its very public climbdown. It's at least a legitimate point of reflection, for example, whether Qadhafi's abandonment of a nuclear program (or Saddam's in Iraq) will be seen by Ayatollah Khamenei to contain any lessons for Iran's next steps in their nuclear discussions with the EU 3+3 grouping, or for North Korea's Kim Jong-un (all the more so after the latest failed rocket test).

As a result of the need to do 'something', in the second step the West invariably follows the rhetoric with sanctions and the severance of diplomatic relations – thus making the dialogue that bit more difficult. To the countries listed above, we could add Myanmar (until now) and Zimbabwe.

This paper does not include a detailed look at the efficacy of sanctions but a few points are worth mentioning. First, whatever their improved precision, sanctions have to hurt or they're meaningless. This allows those regimes subject to sanctions, for example Zimbabwe, to blame every ill of the nation on external forces. In Zimbabwe, the question of sanctions has become as much the issue as the democratic ailments of the country which the sanctions were established to address.

It is also extremely difficult to gauge the impact of sanctions with any precision as they are an imprecise tool at precisely the time when clarity is required. In the case of Iran, there is talk that the latest round of swingeing sanctions has forced Tehran back to the table. Equally, it can be effectively argued that, from the perspective of the regime in Iran, the sanctions regime now in place – together with other measures (cyber sabotage and sabre-rattling) – are aimed at its toppling. By this logic – that yielding to pressure only invites more pressure and the ultimate goal is its demise – what compulsion is there to give up the nuclear card?²² Similarly, in the case of Myanmar, there are those, principally in the West, who have argued that it was the sanctions policy which forced the current reform programme on the regime in Naypyidaw²³. ASEAN countries have given the credit to its policy of 'constructive engagement'²⁴.

20. "Syria: The Only Plan in Town", Editorial, *The Guardian*, 12 April 2012; reportedly a confidential NATO assessment of its Libya campaign "undercut the idea that the intervention was a model operation and that NATO could effectively carry out a more complicated campaign in Syria without relying disproportionately on the US military", "NATO Sees Flaws in Air Campaign Against Qaddafi", Eric Schmitt, *New York Times*, 14 April 2012.

21. "Preventing and Ending Wars: Challenges and Opportunities for 2012", Louise Arbour, address at the Business Council of British Columbia, 23 April 2012.

22. International Crisis Group, *In Heavy Waters: Iran's Nuclear Program, the Risk of War and Lessons from Turkey*, 23 February 2012.

23. See letter to *The Economist* by Michael Mann, Spokesman for Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative, 17 March 2012.

24. Najib Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia, "The ASEAN Way Won Burma Over", *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 April 2012.

Sanctions were not, ultimately, decisive in Iraq or Libya, and their impact has not altered the fundamental contours of the Syrian crisis. When something is, at best, imprecise, and, at worst, counterproductive, it might be time to rethink strategy²⁵.

The third step is a ratcheting up of international isolation, accompanied by the threat or the reality of intervention. Recent moves by the ‘Friends of Syria’ – some to arm, others to finance, and others to provide non-lethal equipment to the opposition – can be seen in this light. The efficacy of this approach depends on many factors: the military capacity of the potential intervenors; the domestic political capital at their disposal; the balance of alliances (Qadhafi, of course, faced a nearly unique international isolation); and an assessment of the consequences. In the cases of Iran and Syria, while those consequences have been deemed to be too significant for the moment, the escalation of tensions increases risks at the very time when a more measured approach is necessary.

The Yogi Berra quote at the beginning of this paper encapsulates this point. What’s missing is perhaps a more natural reflex towards sustained, intensive high-level engagement, which starts early in the trajectory of a crisis. The Kofi Annan initiative in Syria is welcome – how could it not be? – but it has come some 12 months into Syria’s nightmare: the mood for compromise is slight; sectarianism has surfaced; alliances have become entrenched; and the challenge facing Annan is immense.

A commitment to prevention and a commitment to dialogue – including to understanding the other side (one need not agree with them) – would be no bad start. Honest reflection on the limitations of force, sustained engagement with one’s enemies, greater use of economic and other incentives (as opposed to penalties), and more perseverance in building alliances are surely preferable to the three-step march to war.

25. There are, possibly, signs of a debate emerging on this very point; “Tough talk, no strategy”, Charlemagne, *The Economist*, 3 March 2012.