

# Something wicked this way comes:

Authoritarian discourses of global warming and future-  
creation in Syria between the years 2011-2015

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## Abstract

Grounded in the discipline of climate politics, this theory-developing study (based on the work of Ben Anderson (2010)) is a first attempt towards expanding his analysis of future-creation in liberal countries to also include an authoritarian state. This is done by roughly sketching out the ways in which the Syrian al-Assad regime talks about futures related to anthropogenic global warming and/or its consequences. The thesis also intends to analyse the way in which the regime uses these discourses as an attempt to solidify its hold on power. A hypothesis is posited claiming that the regime constructed at least one such discourse. This is proven to be correct. Evidence that the al-Assad regime uses these discourses as a way of negating public malcontent and strengthening its control of the country is also found. Following this, the theory of Anderson is successfully expanded to include an authoritarian state.

*Key words:* Syria, future-creation, authoritarianism, authoritarian discourses, climate change

*Word count:* 9728

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## 1.0 Introduction

The issue known as anthropogenic global warming has had a fundamental impact on the way in which the average person leads their life. As democratic citizens we are constantly bombarded by arguments, requests and pleas telling us how we should live in order to stop global warming and create a more sustainable future for everyone living and not yet born. Every day debate articles are written, panel debates held, and demonstrations participated in. The democratic agenda- and policy-setting machine is in full swing. This has in turn impacted the scholarly world. An entire new field of climate change politics has sprung forth and risen to prominence during the last 20-25 years. Scholars and scientists have collaborated, argued and collaborated again trying to shed light on this new and exciting field of politics. Debates and arguments concerning everything from what the most efficient way to reach the goal of stopping global warming is, to which role the European Union plays in the policy-implementation of national emission goals have proliferated across the meta-political spectra and engaged countless scholars from several different disciplines.

In just a few years the scientific discussion regarding climate change, its effects, and how to deal with them has downright exploded on to the scene. However, there is still one area of the political aspect of climate change that has been unrightfully disregarded. This area is the nexus of authoritarian states and anthropogenic global warming. More specifically, how do authoritarian states construct the problem of global warming? Does this differ from how democratic states relate to the issue? It is not possible to sit around and deconstruct western liberal democracies down to the most miniscule detail when the subject of authoritarian discussions of – and responses to – climate change is undeservedly ignored. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and China have enormous influence on the global arena of climate politics, yet they are often unjustifiably overlooked in the scholarly pursuit of knowledge.

### 1.1 Purpose

The intention of this thesis paper is to examine how authoritarian regimes attempt to strengthen their hold on power and reduce public dissatisfaction by using discourses of anthropogenic global warming and the consequences arising from it. In other words, it will attempt to explain how the ruling regime of a state such as Syria (which has been severely affected by global warming induced droughts (Ali, 2010, p. 5; Kelley, 2015, p. 3241) might use its country's exposure to the effects of anthropogenic global warming as a way of deflecting blame from their own mismanagement. In fact, the case of Syria mentioned above is the one chosen to illustrate this point in the coming analysis. This study will be done through the mapping of discourses in regime-loyal media, since it is the most direct way available of getting to know an authoritarian regime's position on climate change and the way it wishes its population to relate to a warming world. Normally studying first hand regime-statements would have been the easier and more direct way to go, but since the author of this paper doesn't grasp the Arabic language this path is closed for the analysis conducted here.

The reason for choosing Syria as the object of analysis for this study is based on the fact that as a country it houses one of the most infected and medially attractive conflicts of the modern

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age while it at the same time possesses a startling vulnerability to the effects of anthropogenic global warming. Problems potentially related to these issues (such as drought and water-/food scarcity) abound. As such it is the perfect choice for a first dip into the waters of authoritarian responses to climate change. However as of today only a few researchers have connected these two areas in Syria. Even when they do, they mostly focus on whether the revolution of 2011 was a result of climate change effects or not. The question of how such an authoritarian state discusses climate change still remains largely unanswered. This thesis is an attempted first step towards carving out such a scholarly niche. By delving deeper into this issue it will try to not only shed some light on how a textbook authoritarian state deals with and discusses the consequences of anthropogenic global warming, but also to serve as a stepping stone for future research into the area of authoritarian responses to climate change.

In the analysis below an attempt will be made towards roughly mapping out the discourses constructed by the Syrian al-Assad Ba'ath regime during the years 2011-2015. Limiting the scope of the analysis to such a small time-span is required for a couple of reasons. Firstly, for causes unknown to the author of this paper, there is a distinct lack of sources that deal with the consequences of anthropogenic global warming before the revolution in 2011. Secondly, one of the aims of this thesis is to shed light on the Syrian situation as it stands right now in the hopes that doing so might contribute to a greater understanding of the conflict and in turn help speed up the quest for its solution. The focus of the analysis will thus be on the way in which the regime constructs a picture of the future of anthropogenic global warming and how they use this future in order to legitimize political action in the present. This is an academic analysis in the vein of social geographer Ben Anderson (2010), whose theoretical standpoints and analytical terms will be discussed further in section 2.0.

Every analysis needs a research question, and for this thesis it's formulated as follows:

*What discourses of future creation concerning anthropogenic global warming and/or its consequences did the al-Assad Ba'ath regime in Syria try to use in an effort to strengthen its hold on power during the period 2011-2015?*

## 1.2 Structure

For the purpose of clarification, the structure of this thesis will be as follows: First a theoretical background for the study will be provided. Here the theories of Anderson and de Châtel (on whose shoulders the analysis conducted stands) will be presented and discussed. After this the methodological approach of the paper will be provided. In this section both theoretical and operational definitions of central analytical terms will be found, as well as in-depth discussions of the material used and the case chosen. The next section is the analysis itself. This section will be followed by a conclusion, and lastly brought full circle by a short summary of the entire thesis. Sources will be provided on the last two pages.

## 2.0 Theory

As mentioned above, the political study of climate change has downright exploded the last couple of decades. The aim of this section is to give a rough overview of the general subject and a more detailed description of the scholars who have delved into the subject of global warming and authoritarian states. However, the coming analysis is not so restricted as to only stand on a foundation of political science and theories about authoritarian states. Involved in the analysis is also research and theories conducted and constructed by Middle Eastern-scholars and human geographers. It is on the work of all these scholars that this thesis is based, and so in order for the reader to fully grasp the coming analysis there will now follow an exposition of the theories that are important for this subject.

### 2.1 Theoretical background

The theoretical cornerstone for this thesis is primarily based on two articles by two different authors. The first of these is an article by Francesca de Châtel called *The Role of Drought and Climate Change in the Syrian Uprising: Untangling the Triggers of the Revolution* (2014). In this article she takes up arms against the recent batch of studies claiming that the 2011 revolution in Syria was a result of the preceding four years of drought. She rejects this line of thought by putting forth several arguments pointing to the fact that it was the Syrian al-Assad regime's own mismanagement of water and rushed conversion from a socialist to a capitalist economy that exacerbated the populace, resulting in the revolution (de Châtel, 2014, p. 526). Further she argues that claiming the 2011 revolution was strictly a result of a catastrophic event caused by anthropogenic global warming is to play straight into a regime created scapegoat-discourse of blame deflection (de Châtel, 2014, p. 521-522).

de Châtel continues her article by bringing up a series of statistically based reasons as to why the revolution was not simply a result of one single non-political disaster. For example, she argues that several of the other countries in the area with similar environmental compositions such as Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon also experienced drought during the same period as Syria, without ending up in the same position of social unrest. If, as some of the scholars arguing against her claim, the revolution in Syria was strictly a result of a climate change-caused drought, shouldn't these countries also have experienced the same type of social unrest in the same time period then? (de Châtel, 2014, p. 522).

The potential validity of this last claim is certainly something that can be discussed, and frequently is. However, whether the revolution of 2011 was caused by drought or not is not relevant for this study. Since this thesis' analysis originates from a regime-centric point of view and deals with discourses going from the regime to the people the only thing that is interesting in this instance is how the regime itself talks about issues resulting from climate change. If this is so, then how come de Châtel's article is so prominent in this paper? The reason can be found in the middle part of the paragraph above. She claims that the Syrian regime has consciously and consistently blamed their own mismanagement of the drought and the water-/food scarcity caused by it on a number of factors, one of them being climate

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change. These claims are the foundation for the coming analysis, and is the reason why this study was thought up in the first place. As such, this entire thesis stands and falls with their validity. Since it was not possible to conduct a pre-study empirically verifying them beyond any doubt the reader will simply have to accept them as true for the purpose of this analysis. It is very possible that the conclusion reached below will have to be mended in the future as more evidence arises.

Following the claims mentioned above, de Châtel also states that the infected and sensitive nature of the water problem has led it to become such a taboo subject that it is rarely discussed, resulting in a sector stuck in a status quo where the only attempts towards change are strictly rhetorically colourful illusions for the masses (de Châtel, 2014, p. 528, 532). The regime even goes so far as to take a small part of the blame upon their own institutions. Doing this enables them to counter any criticism with the argument that change is forthcoming, but that it will take some time (de Châtel, 2014, p. 529).

The article by de Châtel is not the singular basis for this thesis however. The second text, and the one that is used as the theoretical framework for the coming analysis, is the article *Pre-emption, Precaution, Preparedness: Anticipatory Action and Future Geographies* by the human geographer Ben Anderson. In this article Anderson discusses the way in which action in the present is legitimized and limited by how the future is constructed (Anderson, 2010, p. 778). His general focus in the article is on how different futures are predicted and what consequences this has for the present in liberal democracies. He argues that what he calls “anticipatory action” is brought into being through the construction of three intersecting pathways. The first one of these is termed “styles”. By this Anderson means a series of statements that bring a particular future into being and limits the precautionary actions that can be taken, (i.e. how the future is discussed). What this means in layperson's terms is that by discussing the future in different ways, one can alter the way in which both the future and the present is perceived (Anderson, 2010, p. 778).

Anderson's second term, “practices”, signifies acts of performing, imagining and calculating that work as content-creators for the different futures (Anderson, 2010, p. 779) In less complex phrasing this means the ways in which the future is coloured and filled with content. For example, ramping up the frequency of military training exercises sends the signal that the future holds significant threats towards the bodily security of people in the country. The third term used, “logics”, is described by Anderson as “a programmatic way of formalizing, justifying and deploying action in the here and now” (ibid). With this he means the ways in which action in the present is justified and taken as a response to the future created (ibid).

While the term “styles” is fairly straight-forward in its approach to future-creation the other two take a more three-pronged approach. This means that while the “styles” of future-creation simply signify the statements that bring a future into focus, the other two each consist of three separate ways of content-filling and justificatory action. “Practices” of future-creation can for example be done through either mathematical calculation, visionary imagining or theatrical performance (Anderson, 2010, p. 784, 786). The “logics” used to justify present action can also take shape in three different ways, either by precaution (acting upon a threat before it has

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reached the point of no return), pre-emption (acting upon threats that have yet to emerge) or preparedness (stopping the effects of a threat after it has occurred) (Anderson, 2010, p. 788-791). The coming analysis will be using these seven paths of future-creation sorted by how the source material uses them as a way to discuss and/or create the future. This will be done by the creation of three ideal types termed “future as threat”, “future as opportunity” and “discourses of the now” (For further discussion on this subject, please consult section 3.4.3). As such, the major focus will be on the “styles” and “practices” present in the material chosen since they are the ones that deal with the actual discourse of the future. However, should certain “logics” be found and considered relevant for the mapping of potential discourses they will of course be included as well.

The theory created by Anderson is primarily based on responses to three threats thought of as highly problematic for liberal-democratic life, namely: post-9/11 terrorism, transgenic pandemics and abrupt ecological disasters in the context of climate change and anthropogenic global warming (Anderson, 2010, p. 779). These three threats have a number of things in common. First, they are all thought of as potentially disastrous and inhabiting a potential of permanently altering the liberal-democratic lifestyle. Second, in each case the threat is somewhat vague and cannot be easily concretised. Third, in all three cases the threat is considered imminent, and can be discerned through different types of present warning signs that will bring the undesirable future into being if anticipatory action is not taken (Anderson, 2010, p. 779-780). In the article Anderson further argues that a future considered either unwanted or desirable in the present may act as a motivator for present anticipatory action, or that this present action in turn might spark new hope for old, previously forgotten futures (Anderson, 2010, p. 778). The general premise of all these future threats is that they construct the future as something radically different from the “present now”. As Anderson describes it: “the future is the realm of troubling and unforeseen novelty” (Anderson, 2010, p 780).

Central to the argument of Anderson is also the idea of what he calls “life as contingency” and the future as an open horizon. “Life as contingency” is a term which in this context means the concept of the Western liberal way of life; the importance of freedom of thought, action and choice. The purpose of anticipatory action is to negate any possible disastrous futures before they happen and in doing so securing “life as contingency” and the desired way of living (Anderson, 2010, p 788) This premise hinges upon the idea that “life as contingency” has come under threat from a potential future, and needs to be protected somehow (Anderson, 2010, p. 782). Understandably, the concept of “life as contingency” will hard to translate directly to the subject of authoritarian states since preserving freedom of thought, action and choice goes against their entire existence. As such, the applicability of this concept towards the subject of this thesis will also have to be explored. This will be done as part of the analysis in section 4.3.



## 3.0 Methodology

A scientific thesis and its analysis stands and falls with its choice of methodology. In this section the methodological standpoints of this particular paper will be broken down and discussed. Following this, the material that is used as the constructional foundation for the analysis will be brought up, discussed, problematized and organized in the analytical scheme upon which the actual analysis will be based. Further, the theoretical and operational definitions relevant for this thesis will be discussed.

### 3.1 Methodological approach

The analysis done in this thesis is constructed as a single-case, heuristic theory developing study. What this means is that the study conducted in this paper will focus on one single case (Syria during the period 2011-2015) and be used as a way to develop and expand Ben Anderson's theory of future-creation to authoritarian states and to expand the general knowledge-base of how authoritarian states deal with global warming for the discipline of political science. Such a heuristic theory developing study can be done in one of at least three ways. For this particular study the analysis will follow the hypothetic-deductive path. This particular method of research is known as the "third way", a crossbreed of the two classic ways of testing and developing existing theories, namely "deduction" and "induction" (Teorell – Svensson, 2007, p. 50-51).

However, despite being widely used and each being applicable to certain situations in their own way, neither of these two classic paths of reasoning can be considered free of faults. It is because of this that the hypothetic-deductive method has been created. By combining induction and deduction the major flaws of both methods are addressed. The result is a method that does not base its result on strict logical or observation based reasoning, but bases its analytical power on the strengths of both (*ibid*). A study constructed according to this method would be done as follows:

First, a hypothesis connected to the research question would be posited based on the theoretical groundwork already laid down in the study. This hypothesis will serve as the connection between the material studied and the theory used to examine it. From this theory-linked hypothesis empirical consequences will be derived. If the hypothesis is true, these consequences will be observable in the material analysed. After going through the material with the explicit intention of searching for these empirical consequences the hypothesis can be either confirmed or discarded, the research question answered, and a conclusion be drawn (Teorell – Svensson, 2007, p. 50).

It is important to note that even though the hypothetical-deductive way of reasoning removes some of the faults of the strict inductive and deductive methods, and is a good way of developing theories that can be further advanced by future scientists, it is not an all around perfect method. For example, it is still very dependant on material, something that has been a particular problem in this study (more on that in section 3.4). Having access to more, or different material has the possibility of providing a completely different picture and shaping

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the analysis in a different way. There is also the problem of so called “data fitting”. This is a common problem not only for the hypothetic-deductive process in particular, but for all types of theory-developing reasoning. In other words, this means that it is almost always possible for the researcher to create a meaning and a context for the material gathered and used in the study. It is especially dangerous when conducting a study of just a few cases (Esaiasson et. al, 2012, p. 113). When applying the hypothetic-deductive method to the coming analysis in this thesis attempts will be made to lessen the impact of “data fitting” by doing what can be called an “argument of circumstantial evidence”. Simply put, this means that the conclusion(s) reached through the analysis will not be advocated as the only factor(s) contributing to the strengthening of the Syrian al-Assad regime. There will of course be other factors that influence the strength of an authoritarian regime. The argument made in the hypothesis will simply be that constructing a future based on anthropogenic global warming and/or its consequences has played a role in helping the regime solidify its hold on power. By doing arguing for circumstantial proof instead of claiming my conclusion as the one and only reason for the status of the Syrian regime I hope to lessen the impact of potential “data fitting”, should it be deemed to exist.

This particular study will follow the above pattern of hypothetic-deductive reasoning almost note for note. A hypothesis related to the Anderson theory and the research question above will first be posed. After this the paper will move on to the analysis, where the material from Syrian regime sources will be explored and scrutinised, looking for the empirical consequences that needs to be found for the hypothesis to hold. As a result of this search a conclusion will be formed where the hypothesis posed will be proven either true or false, and the research question will be answered (ibid). Lastly there will be a brief accounting of all the criteria that have been applied in order for the study to reach the conclusion that it has. This is an important step in making sure that the reader can follow the analysis and accept the outcome as a scientifically based result and not simply the subjective opinion of a random layperson (Esaiasson et. al, 2012, p. 225).

The hypothesis which the coming hypothetic-deductive analysis will be based on is as follows:

*Between 2011-2015 the Syrian al-Assad regime constructed at least one discourse of future-creation based on anthropogenic global warming and/or its consequences in an effort to strengthen its hold on power.*

The empirical proof necessary for confirming this hypothesis could for example be articles discussing the future related to anthropogenic global warming and/or its consequences that place the blame of the water-/food scarcity on sources outside the regime's area of policy-creation. For an in-depth discussion on how this hypothesis will be connected to the material, please consult section 3.4.3.

## 3.2 Definitions

It is quite dangerous to begin structuring material with an analytical intention without first taking care that one is actually studying what the thesis claims it's supposed to be study. The

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theoretical definitions of all central terms need to correspond with how they operationalised. Otherwise one would run the risk of observing and/or analysing incorrect data (Teorell – Svensson, 2010, p. 55-57). In order to counter this problem, the central terms of this thesis will now be theoretically defined in this section and subsequently operationalized in the section 3.3 below.

The first, and for this thesis possibly most central, term that needs defining is “authoritarian state”. This term has quite a long, contested history and scholars from several different disciplines often argue what constitutes an authoritarian state and what conditions need to be fulfilled for a state to qualify as one. Since the focus of this thesis is the study of a single country the definition does not necessarily need to be particularly broad and inclusive. However, given that the analysis conducted below aims to expand the literature on authoritarian states and how they deal with global warming it might be beneficial for future scholars of this subject to have a clear, inclusive definition upon which they can build their studies. Following this, the definition of “authoritarian regime” used here is heavily inspired by Linz’ (1964) definition of authoritarianism as cited by Casper (1995, p, 40-41). An “authoritarian regime” is in this thesis then categorized as “a state-ruling regime with the final legislative and policy-creating power that has restricted the influence of existing and potentially existing political powers not associated with the state-ruling regime itself and bases its legitimacy on the argument that the ruling power is necessary in order to combat different societal troubles”.

Even if “authoritarian state” is considered the possibly most central term in need of defining for this thesis it has tough competition from term “strengthening of authoritarian regime”. A definition of this is needed in order for the coming analysis to carry any scientific weight. Lacking this definition, the conclusion would become quite muddy. If we don’t know what characterizes a strengthened regime, how can we conclude that the Syrian regime tries to strengthen its hold on power by the way of future-creation? In order to avoid this confusion “strengthening of authoritarian regime” has in this thesis been defined as “the process in which an authoritarian regime solidifies its hold on power by reducing and/or redirecting popular dissatisfaction without giving in to democratic concessions from within or without”. This particular definition is quite narrow. It is possible to re-interpret “strengthening of authoritarian regime” as a regime solidifying its hold on power by violently repressing the people through police or military means. However, since the point of the thesis is to study non-violent textual (written and verbal) discourses there is no need to include violent acts in this particular instance.

Now two of the three central definitions have been discussed and defined. However, there remains one which is just as relevant and necessary of defining as the two preceding ones. Since the entire thesis discusses discourses on future-creation based on anthropogenic global warming and its consequences it would be quite forgetful not to define the latter. Therefore “Anthropogenic global warming” will here be known as “the by the human race accelerated process of rising global temperatures as a consequence of released greenhouse gasses and other human activities”.

### 3.3 Operationalization of definitions

Now that the theoretical definitions of the three central terms have been given it is time to move on to the operationalizations of the same. In reality, this process is only necessary for two of the three. First, let's turn to the term "authoritarian regime". Since the analysis conducted below aims to study the Syrian case in a singular vacuum the operational definition of this becomes, quite unsurprisingly, the Syrian regime led by Bashar al-Assad from his father's death in 2000 until the present day. This regime fits well with the conditions posited in the theoretical definition. The legal political climate in Syria is restricted with a slim to none chance of anyone other than al-Assad and his trusted own holding positions of power (Hinnebusch, 2012). This makes them a perfect fit for the Linz-inspired definition discussed above.

When moving on to the other two theoretical terms the situation becomes somewhat different. An operational definition of "Strengthening of authoritarian regime" is not really necessary since the aim of this thesis is not to study whether such a process has taken place, but only to look at what discourses the Syrian al-Assad regime used as a way of potentially getting to that point. As such, this political status cannot really be observed, only hinted at through the ways in which the regime constructs the future. Lastly, the phenomenon known as "anthropogenic global warming" is quite easily operationalized. It will in this thesis be observed through the consequences that the process has had for Syria during the last 40 years. This includes decreased and irregular precipitation, drought, and water-/food scarcity.

### 3.4 Material

In this section the material relevant for use in this thesis will be discussed. First the actual selection of material will be presented, after which the sources chosen will be problematized. Lastly, the analytical scheme upon which the coming analysis is based will be presented and discussed.

#### 3.4.1 Selection of material

The coming analysis will be based on material from several different sources. Since this study aims to focus on discourses of the future constructed by the Syrian al-Assad regime the main part of the material will originate from sources loyal to the regime. The reasons for this are clear. If one wants to study the prevalent discourses within a regime it is only appropriate to base such a study on material originating from within the regime itself. Otherwise there is a chance that other independent or opposed forces might alter the discourse in their retelling. As such, a decision has been made to base the study on primarily two regime-loyal sources and one independent source that translates regime-loyal Arabic news from different media into English. These first two are both online news sources that have sided with the regime. All three of them are in English. The reason for only picking English-language sources is the simple fact that the author of this paper doesn't not know any Arabic. This limits the number of potential material sources that can be utilized. For more information on the question of material limitations please consult section 3.4.2.

All three of the regime sources used in this thesis are available online and do regular, if not daily, updates. The first one is called the “Syrian Arab News Agency” (in this paper shortened as “SANA”). This is, according to their own website, the national official news agency of Syria, established in 1965. They cover a selection of different topics ranging from internal national politics and economy to international sports events and health debates (SANA, 2015). It claims to “adopt [...] Syria’s national firm stances and its support to the Arab and Islamic causes and the principles of justice and right with the aim of presenting the real civilized image of Syria” (SANA, 2015). As such it is a relevant source to consult when wanting the governing regime’s take on a subject, and eight articles from their site will be used in the analysis below.

The second source used is the website “The Syria Times”. This is an official daily electronic newspaper linked to the Ministry of Information. It began its life as a regular daily news paper but was closed in 2008 due to technical reasons. In October of 2012 it was re-launched as an electronic news paper, a format to which it still sticks. Like the Syrian Arab News Agency, it covers a wide spectrum of different subjects (The Syria Times, 2015). In the coming analysis, three of the texts discussed will originate from this paper. The third and last source of regime-based material will come from the site “The Syrian Observer”, a daily online news service with a focus on political and civil society news from and about Syria. Their primary function is to translate news from all sides of the Syrian conflict, but they also produce their own content in the form of for example op-eds, blogs and interviews (The Syrian Observer, 2012). The coming analysis will use three articles found on this site, all originally from regime-loyal sources and translated by The Syrian Observer. The first article is by an Arabic language Syrian pro-government newspaper called Al-Baath (The Syrian Observer, 2014-09-08), the second is from a Lebanese pro-Syrian government paper known as Al-Akhbar (The Syrian Observer, 27-02-2014), and the third and final one is a speech by Bashar al-Assad before the government on 2011-04-16 (The Syrian Observer, 2013-05-03).

### 3.4.2 Problematizing the material

When dealing with any material in general, and material concerning authoritarian states in particular, it is important to from time to time take a critical stance and view the sources from afar. The reason for this is quite simple; there is always a possibility among policy makers to skew certain parts of the reality in their favour. As such, caution usually needs to be taken when drawing conclusions from material sources such as the ones used in this paper. However, since the objective of the analysis conducted below is to examine an authoritarian discourse and not an objective reality, the problem is not that large in this particular case. There is no need to fear bending an objective reality by looking at it through the twisted lens of authoritarian subjectivity when the the actual focus of the study is the twisted lens of authoritarian subjectivity itself. This thesis is not looking at the reality of Syrian climate change but at the way in which the authoritarian al-Assad regime constructs their own subjective “reality” through the creation of different futures. In this case the material used in instead becomes quite helpful and fairly harmless.

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However, even if there is no need to fear bending the reality by looking at it through authoritarian lenses, there is some need to fear a potential twisting of the subjective authoritarian discourse. Since the barrier of not knowing Arabic prohibited the use of material in that language in this thesis, and all the information coming directly from the Syrian regimes and its Ministries are in just that language, there are no direct first hand sources in this paper. This means that one cannot know for certain if the potential discourses in the first hand sources differ from the potential ones in the second hand sources used. For example, the editors of the news papers used in the analysis below might have an agenda that slightly differs from the regime's. Since the papers used are mostly based in Syria and with direct links to the government the likelihood of this might not be that great, but it is still a problem worth considering.

Also, the fact that all the sources used are either reported in English or translated from Arabic might alter the potential discourses. Maybe some things are lost in the translation? Maybe some phrases are emphasized differently in English than in Arabic, giving the message a slightly new meaning? Maybe the discourses constructed in the English-language media differ from the ones in Arabic-language media since the regime might have different ideas of how they want to be perceived inside and outside of their country? These are all problems that deserve consideration before starting the analytical process. However, there are few things that can be done to address them besides than to be aware of their existence. As such, the reader needs to take the analysis below with a grain of salt. Some things might be revised or disproven in the future. But since the goal of this thesis is to create a rough map of a previously grey area in political science this problem cannot be considered that troublesome. Future scholars are more than welcome to criticize the findings here. The very reason for this thesis' existence is to serve as a springboard for future research.

Here it is important to note that Anderson's theory doesn't restrict this process of future creation to medial sources. Instead he makes a point of opening up this area to influence from other more traditionally unorthodox sources. He lists a number of ways in which a future can be related to. Contracts promising expected capital, evangelical prophecies and future tellers sitting in tents at a carnival are also all sources of future creation (Anderson, 2010, p. 778). However, this thesis has been consciously restricted to medial sources for two reasons. Number one is that the given spatial, temporal and economical circumstances surrounding the creation and construction of this thesis naturally limit its scope. There is simply no way that sources only accessible by direct participant observation could be included in the analysis. It would cost too much and take up too much time. Reason number two is that since this thesis is grounded in the discipline of political science, compared to Anderson's article which is based in human geography, it is important to not overlook the strict regime-centric policy creation that state-loyal media can provide.

### 3.4.3 Organizing the material

The coming analysis will be based on a system consisting of three ideal types. For this thesis three ideal types have been created, each representing one particular way of constructing the future. They are as follows: "Future as threat", "Future as opportunity", and "Discourses of

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the now". "Future as threat" is the only one of these that has been taken from an already existing study, namely the article by Anderson mentioned in the theory section above. When constructing the future in this way it is discussed in problematic terms and used as a way of legitimizing anticipatory action (Anderson, 2010, p. 777-778). "Future as opportunity" is on the other hand characterized by talking about the future as a source of utopian potential, a way of legitimizing current action based on a bright, realistically reachable tomorrow. The third alternative discourse ("discourses of the now") is simply a way of categorizing material that deals with issues of drought, global warming and food/water scarcity but only places them in the context of the present "now", without explicitly taking part in the construction of a future.

The material on which the coming analysis is based will be sorted into one of these three categories depending on the way in which the future is discussed. By sorting the material in this way it will be possible trace a rough pattern in how the Syrian al-Assad regime talks about and constructs the global warming future related to Anderson's theory. It is important to note that the aim of structuring the analysis like this is not to reach a single all-encompassing conclusion claiming that the Syrian regime discusses the future in one single definitive way. Instead, the aim is to get a general grasp on what broad general discourses might exist and, if so, in what way these have strengthened the regime's authoritarian status. This will be done by examining if the hypothesis posited above is true or not. Should the analysis verify the claim made (see section 3.1) there will be proof that at least one discourse of future creation exists and the theory of Ben Anderson successfully expanded to the case of authoritarian states. This discourse will then be roughly mapped out. In order for this to be possible, there needs to be visible signs in the material of such a discourse. These signs might include which topics are raised or ignored, how these topics are discussed, or what arguments are used as a reason to legitimise the policy action taken or proposed. Should the material lack any signs of a discourse at all, the hypothesis will be discarded and the Anderson theory be proven incapable of explaining the argumentative policy-legitimizing process of the Syrian regime.

## 4.0 Analysis

As mentioned above, the exploratory analysis conducted here will be built upon the placement of fourteen different news paper articles of varying length into three rough ideal type categories based on the way in which they construct (or doesn't construct) the future. Of course, none of the articles will fit one ideal type exactly, and the reader will always be able to argue for one or several of them to be analysed or categorized differently. However, since this analysis is a first-step into probing the depths of authoritarian future-creation and authoritarian responses to anthropogenic global warming the reader will have to be somewhat lenient with the subjective nature of the conclusions drawn below. Also worth mentioning is that the articles analysed will be coded in a certain way in order to save space. Articles from the Syrian Observer will be coded SO: "insert date here", articles from the Syria Times coded ST: "insert date here", and the ones from the Syrian Arab News Agency coded SANA: "insert date here". The analysis will be constructed by focusing on the ideal types one by one and discussing the articles connected to them.

### 4.1 Analysing the discourses of anthropogenic global warming and their effect on authoritarian status in Syria

The first ideal type that will be discussed is "discourses of the now". The articles placed here do not show signs of a discourse of future-creation in that they don't discuss the future at all. However, studying them can point us to the way in which the regime perceives the present, which in turn might be used as building blocks for discourses of future-creation. A prime example of this type of discourse is ST: 2015-09-02. Here the article mentions the reduced olive harvest of the latest season as being a consequence of the drought and what is termed "current circumstances". Now, knowing exactly what the phrase "current circumstances" signifies is of course quite tricky. It could refer to anything from global warming to west-led trade sanctions to the civil war currently raging. The last one of these is possibly the most likely scenario, however.

In any case this article is a solid example of "discourses of the now" in that it only refers to the current drought-situation by comparing it to past production and agriculture yield. It is also a good example in that it projects a picture of a problem from which the public suffers while at the same time providing the regime with a potential scapegoat (the drought) for its own maladministration of the water issue. This is what de Châtel talks about when she makes the claim that to discuss drought as a trigger of the 2011 revolution is to allow the regime to escape blame from years of mismanagement of water resources and several failed agricultural policies. It plays right into their hands. When the regime obscures the actual causes of the revolution they solidify their hold on power as they are then able to shift blame on to sources outside of their own forum policy-creation (de Châtel. 2014, p. 522). ST: 2015-09-02 can be seen as an example of this. However, things get particularly interesting when connecting ST: 2015-09-02 to the theory of Anderson. Blaming their water mismanagement on war (or even drought or trade sanctions) could potentially allow the regime to create a scenario where they are seen as the only solution to a problematic future; the only ones that can save the



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population from the evils that may lie in wait. As such, this type of “discourse of the now” works like the “styles” of future creation discussed by Anderson. It is the first step towards bringing a particular future into being. But more on this below.

ST: 2015-09-02 is not the only piece of regime-discourse which puts forth the possibility of scapegoating though. In SO: 2015-05-03 (a speech by Bashar al-Assad before the government on 2015-04-16) the President himself talks about agriculture, even acknowledging that regime policy in that regard has not been adequate. He proceeds to make the announcement that the government “should award proper attention to rural areas in general” (The Syrian Observer, 2015-05-03). After mentioning this he glosses over the issue quickly before moving on to other subjects. Following Anderson, this particular statement might be thought of as a “logic of preparedness”. However, in this authoritarian context the goal of this logic differs a bit. While the liberal democracies analysed by Anderson use logics of preparedness in order to mitigate the impact of catastrophes on “life as contingency”, Bashar al-Assad here be interpreted as using it as a way of pouring oil on troubled waters. He is aware that his regime has fallen from the good graces of a large part of the Syrian population and as such uses this statement as a way to acknowledge his mistakes. By making open promises without mentioning actual realpolitik he attempts to create a position of trustworthy caring for himself and his regime in the minds of the people. Should the people start complaining about the lack of action taken towards combatting drought and/or global warming the regime can then point to this promise and say that action is being taken, and as by doing so hopefully stabilize their hold on power.

Lastly, SO: 2014-09-08, SANA: 2015-06-03, SANA: 2014-06-21 and SANA: 2015-08-15 all deal with regime scapegoating in a way similar to that of ST: 2015-09-02. These articles claim that at least part of the blame concerning the current problems of drought and water scarcity lies outside of the regime's area of policy-creation. In contrast to ST: 2015-09-02 however, these three articles are explicitly stating that this outside menace threatening the water supply are groups of what they call “terrorists”. It is quite safe to assume that the term “terrorist” in this context is what the regime uses as designation for the several different rebel groups that they are currently fighting as part of the civil war. As with the example from the Syria Times above they here try pushing the blame on to agents outside of their own policy-making area. This type of blame referral is not strictly limited to “terrorists” though. In SANA: 2015-11-27 the blame for the water problems is shifted onto the US-led coalition fighting ISIS. Here the regime claims that the American-led forces targeted water pumps outside of Aleppo, which caused them to go out of service. This is an example of the same type of scapegoating as with the “terrorists” in SO: 2014-09-08, SANA: 2014-06-21, SANA: 2015-06-03 and SANA: 2015-08-15. Here yet another example of the logics of preparedness discussed above treads forth. By redirecting blame for their own mistakes to sources outside of their own policy-creation the regime can mitigate the potential of adversarial reactions from the people.

The next ideal type which will be researched and analysed is the one called “future as opportunity”. This category deals with media that talks about the future as a possible utopia

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and paints political action in the now as the potential origin of this particular utopia. In this way action in the now can be legitimized by anchoring it in the idea of a bright reachable future. Interestingly enough only one of the fourteen medial sources analysed in this paper constructs the future in this way. ST: 2015-06-24, paradoxically titled *Climate change: Threat to human health* exists somewhere in between “future as opportunity” and “future as threat”. Talking about climate change as a global phenomenon, not about consequences in the context of Syria or any other particular geographical location, it mentions the problem of climate change as a great threat to the world's human population that might “undermine the last fifty years of gains in development and global health” (The Syria Times, 2015-06-24).

However, the article doesn't stop just here. It goes on to quote an American scientist who says that “Climate change has the potential to reverse the health gains from economic development that have been made in recent decades [...]” (The Syria Times, 2015-06-24). As a whole the article has an undertone of global catastrophe and uses this threat in order to paint a picture of a disastrous future. In the same vein it also, however, conjures up a vision of a potential utopia that might spring forth if only certain steps of action are taken in the “present now”. As such it fits both the criteria of “future as threat” and “future as opportunity”. Consulting the theory of Anderson, this might be considered a “practice of visionary imagining” since it takes an existing view of an apocalyptic future and repaints it with the colours of utopian potential. It is interesting however to note that this, the only example found of “future as opportunity” in the articles used for this thesis, only talks about a positive future when it comes to a global whole, and that no such discourse was found relating to the future of Syria as a country. This will be shown and discussed further below, as it indicates that the al-Assad regime views the local consequences of anthropogenic global warming as a topic completely separated from the issue of anthropogenic global warming itself.

As mentioned earlier, the ideal type “future as threat” is the only one of the three that is directly taken from previously existing theory. It springs from the Anderson theory of the future as cause and justification for action in the present and deals with future-creation that conjures up some sort of apocalypse-scenario, which can then only be avoided through present policy creation (Anderson, 2010, p. 778). This future was found to be the one most commonly utilized in the medial sources observed for this thesis. Unlike “future as opportunity”, where the only article found focused on a global potential disconnected from the Syrian locality, the articles utilizing this type of future-creation focus on both the global and the local. However, the distribution between these categories is a bit skewed. Only one article (ST: 2015-09-09) brings up any sort of global issue, where as the other five solely discuss local environmental problems.

The world-encompassing threatening future of ST: 2015-09-09 is the same as the one existing all over the news in the west, namely that several different types of species (in the case of ST: 2015-09-09 amphibians) are gravely threatened by global warming and anthropogenic climate change. What is interesting about this article is the fact that it (like the global world health “future as opportunity” of ST: 2015-06-24) exists entirely outside of the Syrian regime's area of policy creation. There are no mentions of what the Syrian regime is doing in order to

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combat anthropogenic climate change and global warming even though mentioning this might be beneficial for them; a way of upholding the façade of a functional government that cares about the troubles of the people. Both articles construct the problem of climate change as a political issue only relevant for the international community, and not something that needs to be taken care of on a local level. This clashes somewhat with the picture constructed by de Châtel (2014) of the Syrian regime as a political entity that grasps at any straw which might help them divert blame from themselves onto other factors. de Châtel is most likely correct in this regard, especially given the amount of work and sources she has backing up her claim, which makes the Syrian regime's lack of discussion about climate change on a global level interesting. The only other mention of the problem of climate change on a global level can be found in SANA: 2015-11-30 when Dr Nazira Serkis, Minister of State for Environment Affairs, kicks off the 3<sup>rd</sup> Environmental Research Conference by mentioning it as one of the problems facing the environment. However, there is no mention of the connection between this and the Syrian drought at all, further establishing the view that these problems are constructed as separate entities without influence on each other. As such it seems like the Syrian al-Assad regime disconnects itself from the climate change future of the outside world, choosing instead to construct their own apocalypse of arid lands and wells ravaged by evil "terrorists".

When looking at the four other articles this view becomes even clearer. In SO: 2014-02-27, SANA: 2014-12-04, SANA: 2015-09-22 and SANA: 2015-06-16 the problems concerning drought, water scarcity and desertification are extensively discussed, but none of them connect these issues to anthropogenic global warming at all. They definitely subscribe to a chaotic, apocalyptic future of arid lands and rapidly diminishing crop harvests, which places them squarely under the heading of "future as threat", but they don't seem to utilize this future as a way of legitimizing radical political action in the now, the way in which it is done in the original theory by Anderson. They seem to recognize the problem of the future, but choose to utilize it as a way to preserve the current status quo instead.

Both SANA: 2015-06-16 and SANA: 2015-09-22 acknowledge the fact that drought and desertification exists and is the cause of several different problems ranging from dust storms (SANA, 2015-09-22) to land degradation (SANA, 2015-06-16). The main focus of these two articles however, is the process of pointing out the many ways in which the regime claims to be dealing with these issues. Promise after promise and plan after plan is presented in order to reassure the public that something is being done. However, all the responses thought up by the regime are spoken of in very vague terms. Dr Serkis is referenced by SANA as having claimed that her Ministry had "executed the national plan for combating desertification which included a number of projects that were enlisted in the 11th five-year plan", which according to them signifies that "a number of projects were carried out in the period between 2010 and 2014 [...]" (SANA, 2015-06-16). However, the article doesn't mention exactly what these projects entail, how many there were, and how effective they were in combatting desertification. This harkens back to the logics of preparedness mentioned above. By discussing the problems of climate change this way the regime can reassure the public

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populace that something is being done, and that they are fulfilling their part of the social contract, without actually having to do anything concrete at all.

This follows perfectly with the picture painted by de Châtel of the regime dealing with the water issue on two levels, where the official narrative and the actual reality are radically different (de Châtel, 2014, 528-529). SO: 2014-02-27 and SANA: 2014-12-04, both discussing the problem of “terrorists” destroying water sources, provide the nourishment for this split between reality and political discourse by giving the regime an outside source on which to blame their own faults. This is especially potent in SO: 2014-02-27 where the language is very vivid and dramatic. Words and phrases such as “locals fear...” and “recent clashes” that “erupt” provide a frightening chaotic alternative future to the controlled bureaucracy of the current Syrian regime. Here it is quite clear that the regime attempts to construct a “future as threat” in the vein of Anderson. By first constructing a “style” (a statement that brings a catastrophic future into being) and then colouring it with practices of visionary imagining the regime attempts to create a future in which they are seen as the only safe and sensible path to the individual security of the population. However, instead of using it as a way to legitimize political changes it is wielded as a tool by which the dissatisfaction of the public at large can be reduced and controlled. It is in this way, by providing the populace with an outside enemy to blame for the faults of the regime, that President al-Assad keeps and reinforces his hold on power.

## 5.0 Conclusion

In the analysis above it has become clear that a number of different discourses concerning anthropogenic global warming and/or its consequences exist, both when it comes to the present and to the future. As such, the research hypothesis posited in section 3.1 will have to be considered confirmed. What is interesting however is that the discourses of global warming act on two separate levels. When it comes to the actual issue of anthropogenic climate change the only discourses found are on a strict global level, outside the policy-creation area of the Syrian regime. However, when speaking of the empirical consequences of this problem, such as droughts or water scarcity, the regime takes a much more local, hands-on approach to future-creation. The reason for this might be that discussing the local consequences are much more relevant to the continued well-being of the regime itself.

Using “discourses of the now” the regime constructs a problematic present which allows them to partly deflect blame from themselves. Following this they also begin creating a potentially more dangerous “future as threat” that can only be prevented from happening by keeping the regime in power. Since most visions of the future generally are at least partly based in what the current society looks like, problematizing the contemporary situation makes it possible for the regime to pump out visions of what might happen if the “terrorists” are not kept in check. This future is then brought into being through medial statements which by the way of “practices of visionary imagining”. By conjuring up a vision of a significantly more chaotic future (such as the one in SO: 2014-02-27) the regime creates a harrowing alternative to their own rule, which they then attempt to secure by partly acknowledging their own mistakes through Anderson's “logics of preparedness”. In doing so the regime creates a present “now” which is undoubtedly problematic, but is infinitely preferable to the chaotic future that lurks just around the corner. As such, it is possible to see that the way in which the Syrian regime uses the responses to future-creation differs somewhat from that of the liberal democracies analysed by Anderson.

In the case of liberal democracies, responses to future-creation such as “logics of preparedness” are used as a way of legitimizing anticipatory action meant to secure individual freedom and the western way of life before it is swept away by a catastrophe. However, when looking at the case of Syria it becomes clear that the purpose there is to secure the future rule of the regime through action which will preserve the current status quo. Following this, the term “life as contingency” which is used as a motivator for anticipatory action in Anderson's theory of liberal democracies will have to be replaced. It is simply not in the interest of an authoritarian regime such as the one in Syria to act towards securing the liberty of action for the governed masses. Instead a new term called “contingency of regime” is proposed as the motivating factor. Concisely put, this term signifies the ability and possibility of the regime to continue operating in the way it sees fit. Future-creation as used by the Syrian regime can be seen more of as an attempt to make sure that it will stay in power than as a way of legitimizing present radical anticipatory reforms. Of course this is not the only way in which the regime attempts to secure its hold on power. But it is a contributing cause, and as such it deserves to be more deeply investigated.

## 6.0 Summary

This paper has been an attempt to shed some light on the area of authoritarian responses to climate change by the way of Syria. It has explored in detail how medial sources connected to the Syrian al-Assad regime used Ben Anderson's discourses of future creation as an attempted way of solidifying their hold on power. The intention of the paper was to test the hypothesis that the Syrian regime constructed at least one discourse of future creation in an effort to strengthen its hold on power. This was proven to be correct.

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