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The Department of Internal Relations and European Studies

“Militaryising the Arab Spring:
Western Nation-Building Strategies in Historical Perspective”

delivered by



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Introduction: Michael Merlingen, Associate Professor, IRES

Date: Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Time: 3:30 p.m.

Venue: Faculty Tower, Room 309

One of the many historical 'first-mover' advantages enjoyed by the liberal English-speaking West besides capitalism is its post-nationality, the conception of nationality as citizenship and its disconnection from ethnicity. Britain in the 19th century and the United States in the twentieth as a result have been able to intervene in nation-building processes abroad without being exposed to counterstrategies in the same way. From the Congress of Vienna and Latin American decolonisation to the retreat of the Ottoman empire, British statesmen sought to foster 'open nation state formation' wherever they felt UK interests were served by it; after World War I and II, and again in the collapse of state socialism, the US has further developed this role, taking it to a 'scientific' level. The academic disciplines of International Relations and Comparative Politics were the by-products of the strategy of open nation-building. The Arab Spring has brought to light how even anti-Western revolts can be manipulated in this sense. Although history is open-ended and the outcome of the popular revolts in the Arab world cannot be predicted, the militarisation of social change by US and NATO intervention have so far neutralised the revolt against neoliberal privatisation that was the subtext of the uprising against the dictators in the Middle East.

Kees van der Pijl is a Dutch political scientist who currently is Professor of International Relations at the University of Sussex. He is known for his critical approach to Global Political Economy.

The work of Kees van der Pijl covers four main areas: a) transnational classes; b) the structure of the global political economy; c) the history of ideas in International Relations and Global Political Economy; d) modes of foreign relations.