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# **Exploring the knowledge-politics nexus in global governance: A case study of the anti-chemical weapons assemblage in Syria (2013-2017)**

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Master of Science International Relations



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## **Declaration**

I, Lars Vetle Handeland, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....



## **Acknowledgements:**

Writing this thesis has been both challenging and rewarding. While I have followed the war in Syria since my days as an undergraduate student, this particular journey got started as I happened to read an article on assemblage thinking as part of my elective coursework. This put me on to Gilles Deleuze as well as his occasional writing partner, Felix Guattari, for which I am thankful seeing as their eclectic and thought-provoking writings have given me a great deal of personal and existential joy over the last two years. This thesis is my humble attempt at drawing on some of their concepts for the study of international relations.

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Any errors are mine alone, for which I take full responsibility.





## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the relationship between knowledge and politics in global governance today. To do so, I conduct a case study of the efforts to disarm and govern the use of chemical weapons in Syria between 2013 and 2017. Official documents from this time-period are analyzed by way of assemblage thinking. This perspective directs attention to the practices of assembling coupled with a sensitivity to processes of (de)stabilization.

Doing so helps me develop the argument that during the course of this process, the knowledge-politics nexus was performed according to a linear understanding. In this view, knowledge production is to inform political decision-making in a unidirectional way. This practice of delineating knowledge production and politics into two separate spheres was important for establishing a Russian-American consensus. Indeed, it allowed for cooperation on chemical weapons in Syria by isolating the issue from other dimensions of the conflict and, in doing so, stabilized what was perceived to be an apolitical and technical form of expertise.

During the post-disarmament phase (2015-2017), the same practice of separating the two turned into a source of tension between Russia and the US. More specifically, following continued allegations of chemical attacks even after the declared stockpiles had been destroyed in 2014, two new expert mechanisms were set up. Russia perceived these overstep their apolitical and technical mandates and took action to reshape their working methods.

However, the US and its allies viewed Russia's actions as attempts at interfering with the neutral knowledge producing mechanisms. While these differing perspectives are in agreement that knowledge and politics should be kept separate, I demonstrate how this practice in global governance can be problematic. As such, I end up calling for new ways of thinking and speaking about the relationship between knowledge and politics.

*Keywords:* assemblage thinking, Syrian Civil War, chemical weapons, practice turn, global governance, knowledge-politics nexus



## **Abbreviations:**

CWC – Chemical Weapons Convention

OPCW – Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

OPCW CSP – OPCW Conference of State Parties

OPCW FFM – OPCW Fact-Finding Mission

OPCW JIM – OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism

UN – United Nations

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UNSGM – United Nations Secretary General’s Mechanism



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## **1. Introduction**

Arguably, no other conflict has come to shape global politics to a greater extent in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century than the war in Syria. The vast array of stakeholders in the conflict have presented the actors in global governance with a plethora of issues and ethical dilemmas. One of the most salient of these ethical dilemmas is the use of chemical weapons due to an almost universally accepted taboo against the use of such weapons. Thus, the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria presented global governance actors with a serious breach of international norms that could not be tolerated.

The threshold for action was seemingly surpassed on August 21, 2013, when horrific images circulated on social media and news broadcasts, displaying what seemed to be a large-scale chemical attack targeting mostly civilians in Ghouta outside Damascus. The sheer extent of the attack seemed to demand a response.

After an agreement negotiated by Russia and the US, Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention in September 2013. This launched a process of disarmament, overseen by a Joint Mission between the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations, which resulted in the removal and destruction of Syria's declared chemical weapons capabilities in the midst of a civil war in less than a year.

The many stakeholders in the conflict, with their own interests and preferences for how the conflict should unfold, has made collaboration among members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) the exception rather than the norm. This makes the removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons a rare feat and begs the question of how this process was made possible in the first place.

Yet, allegations of chemical weapons use persisted long after the declared stockpiles of chemical weapons were destroyed. In response, two key mechanisms were established to deal with the issue: first, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in order to ascertain whether an attack had taken place and then, the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to identify the perpetrators.

Eventually, differing views on these mechanisms divided the UNSC, which culminated in a failure to renew the JIM in November 2017. Immediately prior to this, the JIM had produced a report that identified the Syrian Government as being responsible for the controversial Khan Shaykhun chemical attack in April 2017. These conclusions were fiercely

debated at the Security Council, where the report's conclusions and workings methods were put under scrutiny and discredited by Russia as being 'politicized'.

At its core, the dispute revolved around what should be regarded as authoritative knowledge in relation to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. This empirical observation points to the centrality of the relationship between knowledge production and political decision-making. The ability to attain, shape and spread knowledge is an essential component of political practice because actions require a sense of know-how, or knowledge of how things work. The ability to create knowledge or, put in another way, to produce knowledge is often a prerequisite for acting. By taking the position that the relationship between knowledge and politics cannot be known a priori, this thesis directs attention to how the relationship is performed within a given context. As such, this thesis asks, how was the knowledge-politics nexus performed in the efforts to govern the chemical weapons issue in Syria?

A useful entry point for grasping the relationship between knowledge production and politics is to examine how expertise is stabilized in relation to an issue. In fact, during the disarmament process of Syria's chemical weapons, experts played an important part by 'making it known' to decisionmakers at the UNSC. Indeed, the recognized claim to authoritative knowledge in relation to a specific issue defines *expertise*, which can be conferred upon certain actors who are then granted status as experts.

At the same time, the experts had to operate within mandates imposed by state actors, thus limiting their independence. As such, there were borders on the sort of knowledge being authorized by the UN Security Council. As a consequence, knowledge production and politics should not be thought of as two separate domains with a causal chain going from the latter to the former. Instead, the two can be thought of as *co-produced* (Jasanoff, 2004a), which foregrounds the view that knowledge and politics are entangled in intricate ways.

However, conventional ways of studying the relationship between knowledge and politics in International Relations tend to operate with an underlying ontological separation of the two. For example, the influential literature on 'epistemic communities' (P. M. Haas, 1992) conceptualized scientific expertise as a key force in policy-making and sought to assess the ability of these communities to influence political processes by drawing on their recognized expertise, which in turn is linked to their ability to produce knowledge. Likewise, in their influential study of International Organizations (IO), Barnett and Finnemore (2004) assume

recognition of expert status a priori and use it to explain the authority of such organizations. As a result, influential works in the IR literature take expertise and knowledge production for granted and use it as an explanatory factor. In both cases, appreciating both the construction of expert status as well as the production of knowledge are underexplored (see Bueger, 2015 and Sending, 2015).

More recently, the governmentality approach to global governance emphasized the role of relational power in recognizing certain kinds of knowledge over others (Neumann & Sending, 2010). This opened the research agenda on expertise to examine the practices of knowledge production and its relationship to authority in global governance.

Building on this, the so-called ‘practice turn’ in IR has drawn, inter alia, on concepts from Science and Technology Studies. In this perspective, expertise is *endogenous to politics*, meaning that it itself a product of political processes (Bode, 2018). Thus, the making of expertise itself is now in need of explanation.

Against this background, this thesis explores *assemblage thinking* as an approach to the knowledge-politics nexus in global governance. This thesis utilizes assemblage thinking as it has been used and understood in IR (e.g. Acuto & Curtis, 2014b, Bueger, 2018 and Leander & Wæver, 2019a) to explore the emergence of expertise in relation to the destruction and governance of Syria’s chemical weapons between 2013 and 2017.

Analytically the concern is how practices of assembling stabilized a certain form of expertise and how this relates to the knowledge-politics nexus in global governance. These practices center on exclusions and inclusions, such as classifying an issue, delineating boundaries, ordering roles, and relations of authority (Bueger, 2018, p. 620). As a result, assemblage thinking allows us to understand how cooperation on the issue of chemical weapons disarmament was made possible in the first place.

Yet, assemblage thinking’s dynamic outlook has the additional value of being able to shed light on situations where knowledge ceases to be stable. This is done by being attentive to not only practices of establishing consensus, but also how actors can engage in activities that disrupt or destabilize it. As such, this approach can elucidate a hitherto underexamined aspect of expertise, namely how it can be unmade. In turn, this expands our understanding of the relationship between knowledge production and politics in global governance today.

The case of Syrian disarmament is very intriguing in this regard because the process featured a wide range of authorized knowledge-making mechanisms. The chemical attacks in Syria constituted the first use of such weapons since the creation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993. Up until the attack in Ghouta, the international chemical weapons disarmament regime and its activities, carried out by the OPCW, was mostly focused on routine work such as the verifying and overseeing the destruction of declared stockpiles.

The perceived urgency of the situation in Syria demanded a different approach. Characterized by a sense of uncharted terrain, the OPCW and the UN engaged in experimental forms of disarmament governance, creating a wide variety of collaborative mechanisms along the way. These mechanisms differed widely in the type of knowledge they produced as well as in their organizational architecture, which sheds light on the forms of expertise valued in global governance.

As a way to analyze the relationship between knowledge and politics, this thesis examines official documents related to the disarmament process. Thus, transcripts of UNSC debates, resolutions, letters and expert reports are studied to the extent that they provide access to practices of delineating the knowledge-politics nexus. Hence, claims to authoritative knowledge advanced by mandated experts are linked to their reception in the Security Council. As a result, I am focusing on the interplay between authorized knowledge producers and their audience, which help me grasp how Syria-post-Ghouta was (de)stabilized as an object of global disarmament governance.

Based on this, this thesis argues that in the disarmament phase (2013-2014), following an agreement between Russia and the US on how to approach the chemical weapons issue, a ‘technical’ form of expertise was stabilized. As a result, politically salient issues were excluded, such as attributing responsibility for the chemical attacks.

However, during the post-disarmament phase (2015-2017), this consensus came under pressure and ultimately eroded. Here, Russia perceived the authorized knowledge production of expert missions and mechanism as being ‘politicized’. As a result, it refused to recognize its conclusions and sought to reshape their working methods.

For the US and its allies, Russia’s actions were perceived as state interference in an independent mechanism, which upset the strictly demarcated boundary between knowledge production and political decision-making.

In the end, the inability to reach common ground resulted in the collapse of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism in November 2017. These findings lead me to question the practice of demarcating the knowledge-politics nexus into isolated spheres and leads to a call for developing new ways of thinking about this relationship.

As such, this thesis contains three contributions. First, it brings empirical insights on the understudied chemical weapons regime by studying its operation in detail. Second, it aims to add to the literature on expertise in global governance. Third, it utilizes assemblage thinking, thus engaging empirically with a promising theoretical framework for IR.

### **1.1 Research question:**

Informed by the theoretical assumptions of co-production and assemblage thinking regarding the relationship of knowledge and politics, I have devised the following research question:

*How was the knowledge-politics nexus performed in the efforts to disarm and govern chemical weapons in the Syrian Civil War (2013-2017)?*

### **1.2 Outline of thesis**

In Chapter 2 I review the ways in which IR theory of has grappled with the relationship between knowledge and politics, in particular as it relates to global governance. Thus, the chapter covers the thematic focus of this thesis. The chapter ends on a discussion of the turn towards practices in IR theory, which sets the stage for a more in-depth discussion of my theoretical framework, assemblage thinking, in chapter 3.

After outlining and discussing how I understand and utilize assemblage thinking, I move to chapter 4 on methodology to illustrate the implications of this approach for how I conducted my analysis.

Then, chapter 5 deals with the case study itself. I start off with a background on the place of chemical weapons in world politics, followed with an overview of central stakeholders in relation to the Syrian chemical weapons program. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the case where I discuss the findings along the way.

This sets the stage for the conclusion where I dwell on the implications of these findings for my thematic interest in the relationship between knowledge and politics. This

leads to a consideration of the usefulness of my theoretical framework of choice. Finally, I take these concluding reflections as a jump-off point to suggest directions for future research. Also, I use ‘ ‘ and *italics* when drawing attention to a particular term or concept, while “” are reserved for quotations.

## **2. Knowledge-politics nexus in international relations**

The focus of this chapter is how the relationship between knowledge and politics has been studied in studies of global governance.<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to term this relationship ‘the knowledge politics nexus’ and within this literature, I have identified a few core themes, which make up the different sections of this chapter: ontological positions on the nexus, the role of power and the implications of the practice turn. Reviewing the scholarly literature will help me situate myself in the scholarly terrain, which leads to an argument for why the study of this relationship could be supplemented by assemblage thinking.

Granted, the review is influenced and informed by my own theoretical orientation. Here, I draw on an understanding of knowledge as generated in practice (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009) and as *co-produced* with political order (Jasanoff, 2004a), though this position will be outlined more fully below.

### **2.1 Knowledge production as external and endogenous to the political**

Early theorization of the relationship between knowledge and politics in IR tended to subsume knowledge under scientific knowledge, and treated science as a resource that could be drawn upon in bargaining situations with other international actors (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2015, p. 3). In this view, science and by extension knowledge, “has no independent role relative to state interests” (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2015, p. 3) and was accordingly only of secondary interest to IR scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> The relationship between knowledge and politics has been studied in many ways within the field of International Relations. For instance, the study of ‘expert knowledge’ has long been the focus of inquiries within security studies, in particular the more critical approaches (see Berling and Bueger (2015) and Neumann and Sending (2018) for an overview).

One of the most influential attempts at turning the knowledge-politics nexus into coherent research program is the *epistemic community* approach. The epistemic community approach moved away from the state-centric bias of earlier IR theory and advanced a newfound focus on the ability of science and scientists to influence policy outcomes. Thus, it was an extension of Ernst B Haas' (1991) argument that a key driver for changes in political interests is knowledge, which is increasingly tied to a scientific mode of knowledge production. Therefore, "the doings of actors can then be described by observers as an exercise of defining and realizing interests informed by changing scientific knowledge about man and nature" (E. B. Haas, 1991, p. 11). Such a perspective directs analytical attention towards understanding the influence of science *on* the political.

Building on this idea, the epistemic community approach is a more elaborate attempt to assess the influence of science and scientists in shaping state interests (Bueger, 2014a). The idea of an *episteme*, which can be understood as 'worldview', was borrowed by John Ruggie (1975) from the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Ruggie also coined the term 'epistemic community' to "account for the collective, scientific responses in which common "cognitive beliefs" are institutionalized" (Allan, 2018, p. 849).

What separates epistemic communities from any influential network of scientists is a "shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members" (P. M. Haas, 1992, p. 3). Accordingly, early works in this vein sought to highlight the role of advisors in shaping the interests of states in an increasingly complex and intertwined international arena (P. M. Haas, 1992, p. 2). It is defined in the following way: "An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (P. M. Haas, 1992, p. 3).

Two main components of this definition are the insights that expertise is both a *recognized achievement* and a *successful claim to authoritative knowledge* in relation to a specific political issue. As such, there is both an intersubjective and a relational dimension to the production of expertise, through which an actor at historical conjecture can successfully establish himself or herself as an expert upon being granted recognition as an authority. The tripartite focus on recognition, authority and shared normative beliefs are all key factors in carving out space for how to theorize epistemic communities and their role and influence on policy-making.

Importantly, the epistemic community approach “relies on an understanding of science and politics as following divergent logics and aims at understanding the role of science by conceptualizing expertise as a form of causal mechanism” (Bueger, 2014a, p. 41). Doing so enabled the concept to capture the ability of these scientific communities to have an influence on political decision making, albeit in a unidirectional way. Hence, “in this framework, knowledge and politics are conceptualized as two distinct spheres that are separated by a semipermeable membrane through which communication runs unidirectional from knowledge to politics” (Esguerra, 2015, p. 4).

This separation can be understood by looking at how the epistemic community literature operates with a *normative* perspective on the role of science, namely its ability to ‘speak truth to power’ (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2015). Hence, the two spheres should ideally be kept separate to keep the inherent truthfulness of (scientific) knowledge production from being tainted or shaped by political interests (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2015, p. 4).

However, this perspective also meant that these scholars

...had to insulate "knowledge" from political conditioning, for if it could be shown that the knowledge claims of an epistemic community were significantly shaped by pre-existing political interests, their role would ultimately be epiphenomenal.  
(Neumann & Sending, 2018, p. 36)

Thus, the normative fundament of the epistemic community approach also works as a “model to explain the boundary of knowledge and politics within the *theory* of IR” (Esguerra, 2015, p. 5). In other words, it demonstrates how IR scholars working with the epistemic community approach have taken an ontological stance on the knowledge-politics nexus.

An effect of this the sharp division between the two spheres of science and politics is that it prevents analytical focus on the necessary conditions for attaining a position of *authority*. As such, the epistemic community approach cannot explain why some actors or communities are more influential than others (Sending, 2015). Hence, “...it further strengthened the image of knowledge production as autonomous from policy making, and it did not ask what type of knowledge could ever become authoritative in the eyes of policy-makers” (Neumann & Sending, 2018, p. 36). Accordingly, the epistemic community and its main concepts cannot “explain how such knowledge claims came to be regarded as consensual, authoritative, or policy-relevant in the first place” (Sending, 2015, p. 15). Consequently, it lacks a satisfying way to account for the role of *power* and how prevailing



modes of governance conditions the likelihood that any given epistemic community will be able to have an impact on policy outcomes and/or informing the political agenda.

The inability to account for why certain actors have been able to become authoritative and not others constitutes a serious omission in theoretical frameworks that assume expertise a priori. As such, Ingvild Bode (2018) criticizes these theoretical frameworks for lacking a thorough conceptual reflection on the very idea of expertise. Indeed, she states that from these perspectives “being an expert is the actor-inherent, essentially static characteristic they bring to the process (Bode, 2018, p. 101). In other words, because the making of expertise is already assumed this leaves the question of how this happened in the first place unanswered. In other words, the recognition and attribution of expert status happens a priori to analysis in the epistemic community approach, which ostensibly occurs in a ‘non-political’ realm. So, while expertise is understood to be contingent on recognition, the attribution of such recognition is assumed to be shared intersubjectively among the actors in question and is therefore not put under scrutiny.

While the epistemic community approach opened up new paths for understanding the role of knowledge in policy processes, the tendency to zoom in on natural scientists in their attempts to theorize and study the knowledge-politics nexus prevented an appreciation of the increasingly varied sources of authoritative knowledge, or expertise, in world politics. For the epistemic community approach it is the “members' professional training, prestige, and reputation for expertise in an area highly valued by society or elite decision makers accord them access to the political system and legitimize or authorize their activities” (P. M. Haas, 1992, p. 17). In other words, expertise is a source of authority and is what makes members of an epistemic community potential political players. So, while “their authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge in a particular domain is based on their recognized expertise within that domain” (P. M. Haas, 1992, p. 16) does stress the importance of *recognition*, it is a pre-political attribution of expert-status that allows for the making of such authoritative claims.

To sum up the criticism of this understanding of the relationship between knowledge and politics in IR theory:

There can be no direct path from science to policy as long as there are different ways of knowing and acting, which explains why the same expert knowledge receives

different political responses in different social and political contexts (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2015, p. 10).

An implication of this for IR theory is that owing to the influential role of the epistemic community approach, Esguerra argues that "...in IR there is an almost unchallenged narrative that provides a coherent story on the boundary of knowledge and politics...this narrative has led to a coherent but problematic linear model of science and politics within the discipline of IR" (Esguerra, 2015, p. 3).

However, an alternative way of theorizing this model has been part of recent IR scholarship. Here, Bueger (2014a) suggests that the study of the relationship between knowledge and politics in IR can be viewed through the lens of experts and expertise.<sup>2</sup> Taking this as a point of departure, an alternative approach to the epistemic community framework opens up if instead of "considering expertise as an exogenous quality actors possess before they enter policy-making, expertise is seen as produced in practice, making the particular dynamics of this process an object of study" (Bode, 2018, p. 101). This process is often theorized through the idiom of co-production, where knowledge production and political order are intimately linked.

Indeed, Ingvild Bode (2018) divides the scholarly debate into two camps according to how the theoretical frameworks conceptualize the knowledge-politics nexus. In the first, she locates perspectives that take expertise to be *exogenous* to the political arena, meaning they a priori assume the status as an expert for certain actors and then seek to analyze their influence on the political process (Bode, 2018, p. 103). This would include the epistemic community approach.

In the second, however, we find works that question this assumption and makes the very production of expertise a question of research. As such, the attainment of expert status is a political accomplishment and thus *endogenous* to politics (Bode, 2018, p. 103).

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<sup>2</sup> Bueger (2014a, p. 40) identifies three generations of research. In the first generation, experts are considered actors with a causal influence on world politics. In the second, inspired by the linguistic turn of the 1990s, the focus is on discourse and how experts constitute the international. More recently, in tandem with the broader turn to practice, expertise is viewed through the notion of performativity, wherein practices of expertise "perform the epistemic arrangements of the international

Taking this as a point of departure, IR has looked to the field of Science and Technology studies, a field that has developed a rich conceptual vocabulary in which one can reflect on the relationship between knowledge and politics. While diverse in their theoretical outlook, methodological commitments and empirical investigations, these approaches share a few things in common, in particular in relation to how they conceptualize the knowledge-politics nexus. The ways in which these characteristics are bound up in a diverse, yet surprisingly similar manner will be outlined below, focusing on four key aspects.

First, scholars inspired by STS tend to adopt a *relativist* position on knowledge production. This is exemplified in how such a position informs the approach to the study of expertise, which takes the form of one of two approaches, namely

the elitist and the relativist approaches. In the elitist version experts are depicted as possessing superior knowledge and a hierarchy between expert and lay voices is installed. In the relativist version, however, expert claims are depicted as merely ‘politics by other means. (Jasanoff as cited in Berling, 2019, pp. 94–95)

Hence the relativist position rejects a privileged position of scientific knowledge claims. This is, second, in part due to an explicit and sometimes implicit understanding of science/knowledge and policy as a process of co-production (Jasanoff, 2004a). Such a position carries another important implication for how to approach the intersection between knowledge production, expertise and political decision-making, which “...may form a nexus but it is one where they are no longer neatly separable and their respective nature and roles therefore need to be radically rethought” (Leander, 2014, p. 30).

Therefore, third, scientific knowledge production, for instance, is not inherently expert knowledge, but “it becomes expertise when it is made authoritative in relation to a problem. The ‘expert’ is the person/object making the link...” (Leander & Wæver, 2019b, pp. 2–3). A logical extension of these positions is, fourth, that science is entangled in a spatiotemporal context or social order (Rychnovská, Pasgaard, & Berling, 2017, p. 328).

Accordingly, expertise can be defined as “authoritative knowledge at a given decision point” (Leander & Wæver, 2019b, p. 2). Hence, what is at stake here is that “expertise designates not knowledge, but authoritative knowledge, where authority is the *power* to speak for, and expertise is thus the power to speak for a problem or a set of problems”(Halfon, 2015, p. 141). This highlights the circumstantial and contingent aspect of expert knowledge, thus making relations of power a central component of analysis.

However, while the focus thus far has been on the differences between the two main camps of studying expertise in IR to understand how these conceptualize the relationship between knowledge production and politics, there is common ground as well. Indeed, most works tend to understand expertise as an *intermediary*, wherein “expertise mediates between different forms of knowledge: scientific and technological knowledge, legal and economic knowledge, or political knowledge” (Berling & Bueger, 2015, p. 1). Following from this is a view of expertise as a potential translator between various domains, though this ability provides it with a capacity to police the boundaries between different forms of knowledge as well (Berling & Bueger, 2015, p. 9).

In sum, the result of STS-inspired approaches has been to unsettle the traditional narrative in IR theory that promotes a linear understanding of the relationship between knowledge and politics (Esguerra, 2015). The alternative ontological position on offer here opens up new ways of theorizing the knowledge-politics nexus in IR, as well as examining which ‘narrative’ actors in global governance invest in.

That being said, these questions of ontology it does not bring us closer to answering the question of how certain forms of expertise came to be seen as ‘desirable’ in global governance. Put differently, the role of power needs to be elaborated upon.

## **2.2 Knowledge and power: Authority in global governance**

Empirical observations in the post-Cold War world identified a proliferation of new actors in world politics (Rosenau, 1992). This led to arguments that assumptions about the location of authority in world politics had to be re-visited to reflect these changes, which opened up for new theoretical frameworks and concepts. Also, by questioning scientific knowledge as a uniquely privileged source of authoritative knowledge, launched the idea that expert knowledge could exist anywhere, which in turn opened up for investigations the *sources of authority* in global governance.

As research became more oriented towards the plurality of actors in global governance, this required a shift from the assumption that states are the central actors in world politics in favor of a focus on various nonstate actors and their ability to influence and shape policy processes all the while being independent of states (Bueger, 2018, p. 616). Common to these approaches was an underlying zero-sum understanding of power as it emphasized the

decrease of state power vis a vis other actors in global governance, such as International Organizations and non-governmental organizations (Neumann & Sending, 2010, pp. 110–111).

The shift from states towards other actors also led to an increased interest in the role of experts in world politics. In fact, Sending (2015, p. 14) links the proliferation of studies into expertise to the scholarly interest in the authority of non-state actors. In turn, expertise was found to be located in a wide range of sites and institutions (Sending, 2015, p. 3). A well-known example here would be Barnett and Finnemore's (2004) demonstration of how International Organizations (IOs) exercise authority independent of states. A central claim is that "IOs are often authoritative because of their expertise" (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004, p. 24) and indicates that the ability to make credible claims as holders of expertise/experts contributes to their authority in world politics (Berling & Bueger, 2015). In this view, authority is linked to characteristics and "derives standing from expertise demonstrated by credentials, education, training, and experience" (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004, p. 25).

This mode of analysis, where authority is linked to recognition of expertise, shares the same weakness as the epistemic community approach in that they either assume authority or explain it by listing characteristics (Sending, 2015). While such typologies were useful to demonstrate the variety of influential actors this still fails to explain the origins of their authority in global governance. Indeed, the power dynamics at play in policy processes, wherein some actors are more able to position themselves as an authority, are unaccounted for. In other words, while Barnett and Finnemore demonstrates *who* the experts in global governance are and *why* they matter for IOs in carving out a space independent of states, they fail to account for *how* some actors and not others were able to gain recognition as experts in first place (Sending, 2015, pp. 16–17). Given that certain actors with shared or similar characteristics vary in their influence across contexts and issue areas, this explanation is insufficient if we want to understand how certain claims to authoritative knowledge become legitimized, stabilized and even institutionalized at the expense of others.

To this end, some scholars argued that a new conceptualization of power was necessary, which entailed moving away from a zero-sum view towards a *relational understanding of power* (see Sending & Neumann, 2006). A corollary of embedding analysis in a relational understanding of power is to foreground the intricate relationship between knowledge and power. By either replacing or supplementing the conventional understanding of power in IR, that of compulsory power, and directing attention to the relational and

productive dimensions of power often found in language, insights and implications of this turn greatly shaped studies of global governance (see Barnett & Duvall, 2005).

In this vein of research, hierarchies of knowledge production privileging scientific knowledge were rejected, thus inducing "...a shift in perspective from studying the influence of experts to the investigation of *expertise* as an expression of epistemic structures and regimes of truth" (Bueger, 2014a, p. 45). Following from this was a view of various orders of governance as constituted by discourses and epistemes, which could be deconstructed and critically examined to open up new space for political thought and practice.

Authoritative knowledge thus becomes an analytical category that could elucidate prevailing modes of governance. This perspective foregrounds a mutual constitutive relationship between knowledge and political order. The implication for the study the knowledge-political nexus is that "...expertise is not a form of knowledge that precedes or informs politics, but is a form of governing in its own right, it is governance *through* expertise (Bueger, 2014a, p. 49).

To exemplify, one can look to the literature drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality*. Scholars using this approach have criticized, inter alia, the constructivist research on the role of norms in global politics for its zero-sum conceptualization of power (Neumann & Sending, 2010). Instead, Neumann and Sending (2010, p. 2) argues "that the transformations entailed by globalization do not result in states losing their power but that the rationality of governing shifts...". To this end, the concept of governmentality can shed light on the logic that informs state and non-state relations in global governance (Neumann & Sending, 2010, p. 112). Accordingly, the promise of governmentality lies in its ability to approach international relations through a focus on the underlying rationalities at play in global governmental practices, namely the liberal or neoliberal *mode of governing*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As opposed to the development from the police mode to a liberal mode of governing that Foucault identified in domestic societies, Neumann and Sending argues that the international, taken to be a separate sphere, is characterized by a different trajectory. Here, the issue is whether an object of governance should be approached through either the 'liberal' or 'police' form of governing. These two entail different sets of governmental practices where the former is marked by 'freedom' while the latter is, as implied by the name, linked with other practices such as surveillance and control.

Hence, knowledge production becomes implicated in the workings of power in global governance as the logic at work in the governmentality approach is ‘constitutive’ (Bueger, 2014a), i.e. “that which makes certain things possible” (Neumann & Sending, 2010, p. 63). Practices, then, are “expressions of particular form of power” (Neumann & Sending, 2010, p. 63). Here, the boundary between knowledge production and the political is increasingly blurred to the point of non-existence.

An important contribution of the literature on governmentality is its ability to highlight the interplay between knowledge production and technology, for instance benchmarking, and statistics (Bueger, 2014a, p. 49). The role of experts in translating the use of these techniques into knowledge makes them potentially influential and perhaps even constitutive in shaping the larger rationalities at work in global governance. The practice of quantification, for example, is a staple of modern governance and the role of experts are vital in this regard (see Porter, 2012). As such, in this perspective, knowledge production becomes a means through which IOs and other non-state actors engage in governance (Bueger, 2015, p. 2).

More recently, IR scholars drawing on the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu have expanded on the link between expert knowledge claims and authority. The focus here is on fine-grained analyses of how certain groups are able to attain a position as authoritative knowledge-holders. For instance, Sending (2015) traces the struggles between different actors competing for authority in specific ‘fields’. What is at stake for the involved actors, he argues, is “...to win recognition for their distinctive conceptions of governance” (Sending, 2015, p. 12). By viewing authority as relationship between superordinate and subordinate, wherein the latter defer authority onto the former, a strength of the field-oriented approach is the ability to account for the origins of expertise by allowing one to highlight the power struggles that shaped and influenced the position of actors within a given social field.

In sum, the primary contribution of the governmentality and the field-based approach is to give the study of expertise a dimension of relational power. This move allows for a more thorough investigation of the hitherto neglected question of how certain types of practices came to be seen as expert knowledge in global governance. Thus, turning the question on its head, expertise was now something to be explained, rather than what was doing the explaining in relation to authority in global governance.

At the same time, to grasp the “...intricacies of how the knowledge is actually produced and how validity and certainty are constructed...” (Bueger, 2015, p. 3), required a

slight shift towards even more detailed analysis of link between practices and knowledge production.

### **2.3 Practice turn: Stabilization of authoritative knowledge**

Given the newfound focus on how knowledge and political order are intricately linked, analytical attention was directed towards the practices of producing knowledge. This begs the question; what are practices and what are the implications of such a research focus? To answer that question, an outline of the use of the concept within IR follows.

Sometimes attributed to the call made by Iver Neumann (2002) to supplement the linguistic turn of the late 80s and 90s with a research program on the role played by practices in world politics, the turn towards practice has generated a lively and varied output by IR scholars. This is partly due to the way practice theory “revisits basic dichotomies that organize IR theory, including rationality and practicality, subjectivity and objectivity, and the ideal and the material” (Nexon & Pouliot, 2013, p. 342). For instance, Adler and Pouliot (2011, pp. 16–17) argues that practice theory can move the field forward on issues such as e.g. the agency-structure problem in analysis. At the very least, the turn has opened up new space for empirical engagement and the development of new theoretical frameworks by engaging with insights and thinkers from other fields, in particular sociology and Science and Technology Studies (STS).

Generally speaking, practice is not a theory in the singular, but plural, as it encompasses a broad and varied range of theoretical approaches that all share the same focus (Adler & Pouliot, 2011). As for the difference between practice and international practices, the latter “denote socially organized activities that pertain to world politics, broadly construed (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 6). That being said, while one cannot speak of a practice theory per se, practice-approaches do have a few things in common and I will briefly outline the three most prominent:

First, practice theory is said to occupy a middle ground between ontologies that foreground either materials or ideas as it combines elements of both in its outlook (Bueger, 2014a, p. 48). In other words, the focus is on specific situations where elements of both come into contact and interact, rather than actors or structures (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 451).



Second, there is an emphasis on the *becoming of the world*, its processual and ongoing emergence (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 453). In other words, the world is always in the making in an open-ended process continuously (re)produced by actors. Therefore

...practice theories embrace a performative understanding of the world. The world depends on practice. The "world of becoming" is the product of ongoing establishment, reenactment, and maintenance of relations between actors, objects, and material artifacts. (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 453)

Third, an influential current of practice-research in IR understand practices as 'competent performances' that act upon the material world. Importantly, these competent performances can be done good and badly. In their influential definition of practice, Adler and Pouliot highlights 4 features: performance, pattern, (in)competence, background, and the discursive-material nexus, neatly encapsulated in the following quote:

Practices are competent performances. More precisely, practices are socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world. (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 4)

However, this conceptualization of practice has been criticized for limiting the research agenda to studying re-production of orders and routine work (Bueger, 2015, p. 5). Drawing on the concept of *epistemic practices*, Bueger has drawn attention to the creative potential of practices by examining the production of knowledge at the UN. Here, an epistemic practice is the gathering and making of knowledge, which "aim at building universals out of particulars. Epistemic practices then aim at constructing a certain object" (Bueger, 2015, p. 6).

More specifically, Bueger (2015) analyzes how the issue of piracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was 'made known' in to actors in global governance through epistemic practices. By comparing different ways of producing knowledge, he examines how these constitute what he terms an 'epistemic infrastructure' of global governance. Here, International Organizations such as the UN become important sites or 'laboratories' for knowledge producing activities that holds this structure together. In this view, epistemic practices are constitutive of concrete arrangements of governance. As such, by making it known, he shows how the UN also turned the issue of piracy into an object that could be governed. As a result, Bueger demonstrates

how practices also generate objects of knowledge and, by extension, new objects of governance.

Linking the construction of governance objects with expert practices makes it necessary to investigate the implications of how certain knowledges are stabilized. Indeed, by drawing on practices to translate and stabilize something into an object of governance, experts are implicated in rearranging and delimiting the boundaries of knowledge. In this view “...producing expertise is a social process of stabilising the authority of a selection of knowledges in relation to a specific problem” (Berling, 2019, p. 95). The selected knowledges, then, can influence the terrain of meaningful actions for the stakeholders involved. For instance, Berling looks at the ways in which expertise was assembled at the NATO Defense College (NDC) to stabilize the crises in Ukraine and Libya as objects of knowledge. By examining this process, she makes the argument that different types of knowledge contributed at various stages in the process. Using a typology wherein expertise can be divided into practical and scientific expertise, she argues the NDC “...is also trapped between a civilian and a military logic” (Berling, 2019, p. 105). For instance, this meant that once the intervention in Libya was stabilized as an object of knowledge through a combination of scientific and military knowledge, civilian researchers had a hard time being recognized as holders of relevant expertise (Berling, 2019, p. 106). The contribution of this research is how it directs attention to the ways in which certain practices of knowledge production are stabilized in global governance and the implications and exclusions arising from this.

Furthermore, scholars have demonstrated how the bureaucratic rationality of global governance interventions tends to involve depoliticizing moves, thus moving issues from the political to the ‘technical’ ( see e.g. Bakonyi, 2018 and Murray Li, 2007). This calls for a greater problematization of how the seemingly mundane and ‘apolitical’ character of organizational or bureaucratic work carries important implications for policy formation by downplaying the political dimension of the intervention.

The focus on how experts stabilize an object of governance can perhaps be attributed to the epistemic community approach, wherein several studies have corroborated the importance of uncertainty as a condition for the influence of expert knowledge (Cross, 2013, p. 145). As such, “new ideas will be solicited and selected only after crises, for crises will alert politicians to the need for action and will seek to gather information about their interests and options” (Haas as cited in Cross, 2013, p. 151). This gives rise to the impression of

experts as *uncertainty reducers* that can help decision makers to cope by (re)stabilizing an object of governance.

Leander (2014) challenges this view by arguing that experts are also *uncertainty producers* in the sense that often exacerbate the very conditions of uncertainty they are tasked to mitigate. This is done through practices of *problematization*, for instance by identifying possible outcomes of a catastrophic event, selecting out aspects to be focused on and perhaps linking them to existing policy processes or norms. From this perspective, experts and the practices they rely on to produce knowledge are not simply to advise the political shot callers, but they also generate uncertainty. Using the chemical attack outside Damascus on August 21, 2013 as an example, Leander makes the argument that

contemporary expertise is anything but one of settling and closing controversies. On the contrary, expertise plays a core role in posing the overarching questions and hence generating and defining controversies. Experts have the specialized knowledge to ask questions and hence to generate the specific form controversies take. (Leander, 2014, p. 29)

Indeed, a wide variety of different groups attempted to explain ‘what was going on’ after the Ghouta attack, from human rights lawyers and international relations scholars to engineers and chemical weapons experts (Leander, 2014, p. 26). As a result, experts inform the gaze of the observer, making certain aspects of the event come into focus, while occluding others.

This goes to show that the selection of knowledges to be stabilized as authoritative regarding an object of governance also inherently contains a practice of *exclusion-inclusion* due to the inevitable privileging of certain things instead of others. Building on these insights, a new focus on *exclusive expertise* has been central to recent scholarship (see most notably Leander & Wæver, 2019a). As such, “*what is left out and what is included in this assemblage of accepted expertise – the exclusiveness of expertise – become the main questions of interest*” (Berling, 2019, p. 95). In other words, this re-orientation allows for asking not only which knowledges were authorized, but also what knowledges were selected out.

Attending to the exclusion and inclusion of knowledge requires at least two more considerations to be taken into account. First, to recognize that “...,the different types of expertise also carry important political logics with different forms of performativity tied to them” (Berling, 2019, p. 93). For example, “the mobilisation of scientific knowledge and

practical experience might entail different kinds of stabilisations and exclusions (Berling, 2019, p. 93).

Secondly, to be attentive to how stabilizing exclusive expertise can be shaped by institutional factors. For instance, Tom Lundborg (2011) analyzes the importance of institutional epistemologies through *practices of response*. Studying the attacks on 9/11, he argues that a certain doctrine of preemption came to shape how the attacks were turned from a chaos of movements and paradoxes into a stable object of knowledge, which highlighted certain parts of the event and excluding others. The point is that events or situations “does not present themselves in neat packages for us to produce knowledge about. Instead, they are ‘framed’, ‘stabilised’ or ‘assembled’ - in certain ways influenced - but not dictated by the nation/organisation/culture in question” (Berling, 2019, p. 95). Thus, Berling underscores the importance of organizational factors in shaping exactly how expertise is assembled in relation to a specific object or issue.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, institutional factors does not dictate the terms of this process as this would be too much a deterministic of an outlook (Berling, 2019, p. 95). In other words, actors within an organization still have an opportunity to act ‘incompetent’ or according to a different set of ideals than those espoused by the organization. The last part makes clear the necessity to be careful about attributing all explanatory power to the features of an organization or a culture.

Taken together, these shared positions and claims leads to an alternative way of posing questions about the knowledge-politics nexus. In this way, the practice turn has yielded insights on the ways in which knowledge is produced, stabilized and recognized as authoritative. As such, it has been able to mitigate some of the weaknesses in the epistemic community approach, which tended to occlude investigations into the making of expertise as this was assumed a priori. Instead, the task becomes something along the lines of exploring “the ever-shifting constellations of actors, institutions, data and forms of expression that make up the expertise” (Leander & Wæver, 2019b, p. 2). The question, then, becomes how can we theorize these constellations or arrangements?

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<sup>4</sup> See also Sheila Jasanoff (2004b) who has studied the importance of such influence through the concept of ‘civic epistemologies’.

At the same time, the focus on stabilization risks overlooking cases where knowledge is not stabilized, or where stabilized knowledge becomes contested and loses its authoritative status. In short, the practice turn demonstrates largely the stabilization of knowledge, which means that there is room for empirical work on case studies where this stability erodes. The task at hand, then, becomes to select an appropriate means of capturing the fluid and transformative play of (de)stabilizing expertise in relation to an issue, which is where I turn my attention now.

### **3. Theorizing knowledge with assemblage thinking**

This chapter outlines my theoretical framework; *assemblage thinking*. The purpose of doing so is to position myself within this terrain and to highlight some of the main areas of disagreements on how the term should be understood. This allows me to reflect on the various trade-offs involved in aligning oneself with a specific version of assemblage thinking. Doing so invites a reflection on the ‘thinking tools’ (Leander, 2008) offered by assemblage thinking, i.e. to answer what sorts of questions this theoretical lens allow us to investigate by directing our thinking in certain directions. Throughout this chapter I draw extensively on Christian Bueger (2018) given his centrality in introducing assemblage thinking to the study of global governance. However, due to the rather recent arrival of assemblage thinking in IR, I deem it necessary to draw on discussions from other fields from time to time, in particular, human geography.

#### **3.1 The emergence of Assemblage Thinking in post-cold war IR**

In the broader social science literature animated by an engagement with assemblages, there are multiple ways in which the concept has been used.

First, assemblage has been used as a loose structural metaphor, a *descriptor*, that foreground a processual focus. Works in this vein deploy assemblage to focus on *assembling* and *reassembling* and is less concerned with the theoretical underpinnings of the concept. These works tend to use the noun assemblage as it is normally understood in English, though with a focus on how this constellation transforms, and is argued to be a helpful way to think about new formations of order that circumvents traditional structures such as ‘the state’ and ‘the international’ (see e.g. Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009 and Sassen, 2008). Here, the

purpose is to draw attention to the process of assembling, not to demonstrate an assemblage (Wise, 2005, p. 77).

A second approach has been outlined by scholars interested in exploring the concept's more theoretical underpinnings to experiment and investigate its use for social science research. For instance, works in political geography (see Anderson & McFarlane, 2011) and policy studies (see Baker & McGuirk, 2017 and Savage, 2019) have taken a keen interest in this more theory-oriented way to engage assemblages. While depending on which strand of assemblage's genealogy these authors attach themselves to, works in this vein are generally interested in making assemblage thinking into a more coherent and delineated research tool or agenda.<sup>5 6</sup>

In any event, whichever way one chooses to engage with it, assemblage thinking is regarded by a wide variety of social scientists to be a useful way to sensitize oneself to the ways in which heterogenous elements are drawn together in order "to create an arrangement that has its own distinctive meaning and purpose" (DeLanda as cited Demmers & Gould, 2018, p. 367), which might be quite distinct from the individual components' function or meaning. These are then brought together "at a particular conjuncture only to disperse or realign, and the shape shifts according to the terrain and the angle of vision" (Murray Li, 2007, p. 265). This commitment to openness, complexity and emergence is shared by most, if not all scholars working with the concept (Abrahamsen, 2017).

In International Relations, the turn towards assemblages must be seen in light of wide-ranging changes in the discipline. Indeed, ever since the end of the Cold War, the field has seen rapid changes in terms of theory and methodology. The very notion of 'global governance' was a response to a world context seemingly marked by transformation and

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<sup>5</sup> Some even examine the possibility of sketching out an Assemblage Theory, most notably done by the philosopher Manuel DeLanda (see DeLanda (2006) and DeLanda (2016)). To others, a full-fledged theory would go against the very purpose of employing assemblages, which some argue calls for empirical work rather than philosophical contemplation Bueger (2014c).

<sup>6</sup> Both of these interpretations have invited criticism and debate, where some scholars disapproves of the tendency among social scientists to base their understanding of assemblage on second-hand literature and not engaging with the works of Deleuze and Guattari themselves, see Nail (2017), Buchanan (2015) and Buchanan (2017).

processes that required new concepts and frames of understanding. As such, when proponents of assemblage thinking emphasizes its applicability to a shifting global context (Abrahamsen, 2017), they latch onto a rich tradition of calls for theoretical innovation that has been going on for more than a quarter of a century. The proliferation of theoretical ‘turns’ means that there are other theoretical frameworks that, like assemblage thinking, highlight instability, materiality, spatiality and contingency of governance arrangements. The task at hand, then, lies in providing an account of what sort of research puzzles assemblage thinking allows one to explore and how it might improve upon or complement existing theories in IR.

As argued by Bueger (2018), the introduction of assemblage thinking to the study of global phenomena is a response to the contingency and complex character of global governing practices. As such, its appearance and introduction into IR should be seen as an expression of a certain dissatisfaction with established modes of analysis in their ability to grasp what is perceived to be the increased complexity of global governance (Acuto & Curtis, 2014a, p. 7).<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, assemblage thinking carries a lot of promise for some central conundrums in IR. For instance, its ability to avoid reifying abstractions such as the state, makes its better equipped to avoid the issue of state-centrism (Acuto & Curtis, 2014a, p. 7). Here, the ‘flat ontology’ of assemblage thinking, wherein both material and immaterial elements are given the same ontological status a priori, is argued to be useful for asking how things are put together, instead of stating this through the use of tired abstractions such as ‘nations’ or ‘the economy’ (Abrahamsen, 2017, p. 253). This rejection of essentialism demands a thorough engagement with empirical material (Bueger, 2018). Therefore, “if we want to understand how an assemblage works, we do not ask what its essence is, but rather what it can do. This is an empirical question” (Nail, 2017, p. 26).

Moreover, assemblage thinking is “not confined to a distinct scale (such as local-global or a micro-meso-macro scale) nor does it preclude a distinct order” (Bueger, 2014c, p. 60). This is particularly useful in contexts marked by a greater degree of fluidity less

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<sup>7</sup> The introduction of the concept has also been criticized. Indeed, the reception of assemblage thinking in IR is partly shaped by the discipline’s sociology. As such, ‘assemblage’ bears resemblance to other structural metaphors such as ‘fields’, ‘network’, ‘regime’ according to Bueger (2018, pp. 617–618). Concerns over appropriate structural metaphors is integral to the discipline, which has resulted in a tendency to employ assemblage as yet another structural metaphor or to describe an emergent and contingent constellation of elements in flux. This could prevent an appreciation of the variety of thinking tools that the concept of assemblage can provide.

bounded by rules such as e.g. the transnational space, where emerging arrangements increasingly replace the rigid categories of national-global (Demmers & Gould, 2018, p. 368). Thus, emerges what Saskia Sassen has termed 'global assemblages', consisting of "bits of territory, authority, and rights...that begin to escape the grip of national institutional frames. These assemblages cut across the binary of national versus global" (Sassen, 2008, p. 61).

Accordingly, assemblage thinking is utilized to grasp emerging constellations of governance in a world increasingly marked by the erosion of clear borders where for instance a levels-of-analysis approach is less useful (Abrahamsen, 2017, p. 255). The argument here is that assemblage thinking is appropriate for research interested in dis-order and the conditions for change because it provides studies of the international with a conceptual inventory for a way of thinking more attuned to fluidity and transformation (Lenco, 2014).

Thus, assemblage thinking has in many ways been a continuation of the practice turn in IR theory. In this perspective, assemblages are the result of practices; "...assemblage is the practice of bringing together a diverse range of materials while also representing a particular state of achievement in that process" (Srivastava, 2013, p. 73). Hence, using assemblage both to refer to an existing structure and to engage it as an analytical concept is certainly not mutually exclusive (McFarlane, 2011).

On the contrary, as argued in human geography, "it is partly this constant tension of formation and form that assemblage perhaps uniquely brings" (McFarlane & Anderson, 2011, p. 162). Thus, it is an appropriate approach for scholars interested in exploring its ability to direct attention to the *practices of assembling*, and how these novel orders relate to notions 'emergence' and 'multiplicity of agency'. The purpose of doing so is to elucidate how these practices of assembling orders of governance inform the capacity to act, establish relations of authority and, by extension, the forms of knowledge that these practices stabilize.

That being said, the emphasis on emergence and shifts can make it difficult to conceptualize more enduring forms of order in this perspective. As such,

the focus of transformation and fluidity can similarly lead to a neglect of durability and stasis. Much as the social world is in constant flux, it remains the case that certain key structures endure and persist. It is often in this stability and fixity that oppression and injustice reside and reproduce, and accordingly it is important to also account for the longevity of some assemblages. (Abrahamsen, 2017, p. 259)



In other words, while it is hard to argue against the claim that shifts, and transformations are occurring all the time, this seemingly provides an unsatisfactory ability to account for how many practices seem to be routinized, turning into repetitive patterns that stretches over significant amount of time. To mitigate this, assemblage thinking should attempt to situate emerging arrangements within a historical context. The rationale for doing so is due to the fact that assemblages do not exist in a sphere separate from historical conditions. On the contrary, "...particular assemblages are the result of historical processes of production" (Srnicek, 2007, p. 75), though this is not to imply the existence of "a transcendent determinant of history's movements" (Srnicek, 2007, p. 75). The point is rather that assemblages are inevitably entangled and intertwined with other, pre-existing assemblages, and these informs the ways the way it is ordered.

Regarding the knowledge-politics nexus more specifically, assemblage thinking has been used to highlight how expertise is assembled and stabilized (see e.g. Berling, 2019) and how *expertise emerges within an assemblage*. For instance, in his study of how actors in global governance response to the perceived crisis of pirate attacks outside Somalia after 2007, Bueger demonstrates that within every assemblage

certain forms of knowledge are valued more than others. Therefore, expertise is not a force outside governance, but develops along with the territory of governance. If we study the relations of an assemblage, we are also studying how knowledge becomes authoritative. (Bueger, 2018, p. 620)

This resonates with the discussion in chapter 2 by focusing on expertise as a political achievement endogenous to processes of governance. In short, it takes knowledge to be co-produced with a political order, thus rejecting a neat separation of the two. Analytically, this draws attention to the *processes of ordering, selecting and filtering knowledge*, in other words to study the interplay between continuous work required to stabilize "the authority of a selection of knowledges in relation to a specific problem" (Berling, 2019, p. 95).

Accordingly, regarding the knowledge-politics nexus, perhaps the most important claim assemblage thinking makes is that "assemblages establish relations of expertise and authority, technology and politics" (Bueger, 2018, p. 620). More specifically, assemblage thinking-"...posits that expertise is vital in governance, and that each governance process implies the assembling of a distinct form of expertise" (Bueger, 2018, p. 620). Herein, certain forms of knowledge production are permitted and recognized as valuable, while others are

excluded from consideration. In this way, engaging assemblage thinking examines the processes of making expertise “...authoritative in relation to specific crises in ever fluctuating constellations” (Leander & Wæver, 2019b, p. 5). As such, this processual and relational focus is akin to Bode’s (2018) two-step understanding of expertise, where a formal authorization of approved knowledge production is followed by the need for continuous recognition from the relevant audience.

However, while assemblage thinking has been utilized for its ability to demonstrate how knowledge becomes stabilized, I argue that it’s potential to demonstrate the shifting and contested aspect of expertise has been overlooked thus far. To make this argument, a more detailed examination of assemblage and its thinking tools becomes the focus of my next section.

### 3.2 What is an assemblage?

Originally developed as a concept by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his writing partner, the psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, defined assemblage in the following way: “An assemblage is a number of disparate and heterogeneous elements convoked together into a single discernible formation” (Deleuze & Guattari as cited Bueger, 2014c, p. 60). Importantly, the French word they use is *agencement*. Derived from the verb *agencer*, the noun *agencement* can roughly be translated into the ‘act of assembling’, and highlights the ongoing and never-ending processes of shifts and transformations (Phillips, 2006).<sup>8</sup>

The term ‘convoked’ implies that they are brought together towards a function or purpose. Indeed, “every assemblage is characterized by the process of constituting a "territory" that holds together distinct or heterogenous elements...”(Hayden, 1998, p. 96). The territory, then, comes to signify the identity of a given assemblage, which is derived from its *purpose* or *function*. Indeed, the assemblage is not “a random collection of things, since there

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<sup>8</sup> The English translation, *assemblage*, is more static and lacks the processual connotation of *agencement*, thus implying that the assemblage is a form or unitary structure, see Gherardi (2016, p. 687) and Law (2004, p. 41). Nail (2017, p. 22) advises English readers of Deleuze and Guattari to dissociate their understanding of the English word ‘assemblage’ from the concept of *agencement* since it will only confuse things more.

is a sense that an assemblage is a whole of some sort that expresses some identity and claims a territory” (Wise, 2005, p. 77).

Next, understanding how assemblages ‘claims a territory’ requires a look at some of the associated ideas found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. As such, the terms territorialization-deterritorialization, the material-expressive axis, and practices of assembling must be outlined first.

To start with, I think it is worth quoting Deleuze and Guattari at length here, giving their original formulation of an assemblage’s features:

On a first, horizontal axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, pp. 102–103)

In other words, there are two axes in the assemblage; *a vertical axis* of territorialization and deterritorialization, and *a horizontal axis* of components (DeLanda, 2006, p. 12). The vertical axis captures the stability of the assemblage, i.e. whether its internal stability increases or decreases, whereas the horizontal consists of elements ranging from the purely material to the purely expressive (Patton, 2006, p. 27). These four features give the assemblage *a tetravalent systematization*, which signifies the means of combination (Dewsbury, 2011). Next, I unpack these two axes to discuss and assess their applicability as thinking tools for studies of international relations.

On the vertical material-expressive axis, there is the material or machinic end, which consists of matter and bodies (Patton, 2006, p. 27). On the other end there is what Deleuze and Guattari calls *the collective assemblage of enunciation*, a rather broad category of different expressive elements including discourses, knowledges, semiotics and gestures. Taken together, the heterogeneous elements in an assemblage include socially situated subjects, materials, objectives and different “knowledges, discourses, institutions, laws and regulatory regimes” (Murray Li, 2007, p. 266).

At the same time, assemblage thinking accentuates *becoming* and *emergence*, meaning that its ‘territory’ is never fully stabilized. In fact, a core perspective in assemblage thinking is that “structural stability is seen as exception rather than the norm” (Bueger, 2018, p. 619). As such, the territory claimed by the assemblage constantly undergoes processes that stabilize, weakens and reshapes it. In assemblage thinking these are termed: territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, respectively. This leads us to the second and processual horizontal axis of the assemblage.

As for processes that increase hegemony among the content or elements of the assemblage, called *territorialization*, this is “first to be understood as a process that defines or sharpens the spatial boundaries of actual territory” (Bueger, 2018, p. 620). For the study of global governance, territorialization refers to the process of carving out a territory of *political space* that can be governed. The physical boundaries of such a space can be rather fluid, spread across great distances and be located at many sites. For instance, in Bueger’s (2018) study of the counter-piracy assemblage, territorialization referred not only to the creation of a special zone in the Indian Ocean, but also to the various sites and fora all over the world where stakeholders met and developed plans for action.

Importantly, “territorialization also refers to non-spatial processes. Practices such as classifying or sorting in and out, defining which actors, objects and practices belong to the territory, and what particular role they have are also processes of creating homogeneity” (Bueger, 2018, p. 620). Indeed, in Bueger’s paradigmatic case study, territorialization also included creating consensus on which practices of governance were to be considered legitimate regarding counter-piracy efforts, which ended up being inscribed in document called Best Practices Management. Hence, the making of consensual knowledge was a crucial aspect in the process of territorialization by creating homogeneity among the vast array of relevant stakeholders.

As a result, processes of territorialization in global governance settings are infused with power when, for instance, boundaries are drawn up to delineate specific knowledges as authoritative at the expense of other ways of knowing. This is why the act of sorting out what belongs and does not belong in the assemblage directs attention to the *power dynamics* at play in the assemblage as territorialization can work “through shutting out contingency and entrenching one particular assemblage...over others” (Müller, 2015, p. 36). Consequently, territorialization is a crucial dimension for analysis as it highlights what might be termed the practice of inclusion and exclusion, which defines what belongs and what does not.

However, even though an assemblage could be deeply entrenched, it is never final and always vulnerable to processes of *detrterritorialization*, which destabilize the it (DeLanda, 2006, p. 12). More concretely, the idea of detrterritorialization as a process that can undo the stability of an assemblage allows this mode of inquiry to capture transformations and changes on the ‘territory’. Thus, the erosion of boundaries understood in a broad sense, such as undermining identities, are processes of detrterritorialization (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017, p. 58).

The important point here is that for studies of expertise, the concept provides the means to account for how, for instance, knowledge claims put forwards by experts can be contested, challenged and critiqued. This can result in a destabilization of the assemblage and make it shift and transform. As such, by opening up for new relations to be established means that relations of authority can shift, thus creating ‘windows of opportunity’ where new connections can be made. Therefore, “in the process of assembling one always sees a territorialising force and a detrterritorialising potential: here is where power comes to play (Lancione, 2013, p. 359).

The territory, then, can be unmade by the forces of detrterritorialization and finally there is a potential for *reterritorialization* of the relations between components in the assemblage (Hayden, 1998, p. 96). As far as this author is aware, the notion of re-territorialization has not been widely used in the literature on assemblages in IR. The idea here is that while assemblages are inherently unstable, they also tend to reestablish themselves because they express a purpose or function. The longevity of certain institutions could be taken as an example of this. For instance, one could say that NATO expressed a purpose or function so that while the end of the Cold War initiated a detrterritorialization of the NATO-assemblage, it nonetheless reterritorialized, albeit in a different form. Importantly, the idea of re-territorialization is not a synthesis of a territorialization thesis and a detrterritorialization antithesis (Legg, 2011, p. 129), but aims to capture yet another transformation that the territory might undergo.

Taken together, these processes are then “the qualitative transformations of complex assemblages on the basis of proliferating relations between heterogeneous terms (Hayden, 1998, pp. 95–96). Because this is an ongoing and constant process, the assemblage is always becoming or emergent rather than a static or stable being (Wise, 2005, pp. 78–79). Hence, an analysis centered on assemblage thinking should look for the changes and transformations on

a given ‘territory’, and question how the assemblage articulates relations between its constituting elements, for instance, the relationship between knowledge and politics.

The next question, then, becomes how does assemblage thinking conceptualize the relationship between the elements that constitute it? Similar to other practice theories, assemblage thinking takes relations as an ontological point of departure (Hayden as cited in Bueger 2018). The implications of such a perspective is “...to see the world as hanging together by relations, connections and associations and to study actors, objects, knowledge, power and also concepts as the effects of these relations” (Bueger & Bethke, 2014, p. 38).

Assemblage thinking understands these to be characterized by *relations of exteriority*. This means that the component parts are not subsumed by the whole as they would be in *relations of interiority*. To illustrate the difference between the two, DeLanda (2006) uses the example of a father-son relationship as defined by *relations of interiority*; the identity as a father is dependent on a relation to another thing, a son. By removing the son, the father’s identity would instantly collapse.

*Relations of exteriority*, however, are defined by the autonomy from the networks in which they are embedded, which means that “...the component parts of an assemblage can have intrinsic qualities outside associations that impact on and shape the assemblage” (Müller, 2015, p. 31). To exemplify, DeLanda makes use of the human heart, which can be removed, and ‘plugged’ into another body, or a new assemblage, because the heart is not dependent on the whole for its function and properties; they can be exercised in another assemblage as well because of its relations of exteriority (DeLanda, 2006, p. 10). Thus, it is the externality of relations that arguably allows assemblage thinking to bypass the agency-structure dilemma through maintaining an ability of both parts and the whole to act on each other.

What is of interest here is how the assemblage articulates *incorporeal transformations* of bodies. This is rooted in speech act theory, which emphasizes the transformative potential of language on the material world. For instance, when a certain type expertise is stabilized in an assemblage, some actors striving for recognition as experts undergo a transformation upon being authorized to present knowledge claims. This transformation is not strictly physical but is rather an incorporeal transformation ‘around’ the individual. In this way, assemblages themselves have a capacity to act on its constituting elements. Such an ontology carries implications for the understanding of agency in assemblage thinking, which will be covered more extensively in chapter 4.

### 3.3 Thinking tools from ‘assemblage’

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, I have sought to highlight the reception of assemblage thinking in IR thus far. This discussion has been done with an eye towards my research interest in the knowledge-politics nexus, thus leading to an exploration of assemblage thinking’s ability to bring fresh perspectives and insights to this dimension of global governance. Doing so has enabled me to examine its potential as well as its limitations and weaknesses. This discussion has provided the basis on which I have identified the ‘thinking tools’ on offer in assemblage thinking as it has been taken up in IR.

First, assemblage thinking accentuates the transformative character of complex governance arrangements, which come into being through *practices of assembling*. These practices include *classifying, sorting in and out, ordering roles and establishing relations of authority* (Bueger, 2018, p. 620). Consequently, the two most important questions to consider are “...first, what are the inclusions, exclusions and boundary practices operative in any assemblage; and second, how does that matrix of inclusion and exclusion operate on a global terrain” (Lisle, 2014, p. 69). By examining these practices of assembling, this framework is well-suited to investigate how the knowledge-politics nexus is performed in a process of global governance.

Second, the processual outlook of *territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization* provides a conceptual inventory to describe the effects of these performances on the assemblage’s ‘territory’. In other words, the dynamic mode of thinking that ‘assemblage’ underscores, allows us to decipher the ‘performative effects’ in the sense that certain practices increase its homogeneity, while others drive the assemblage towards heterogeneity and potential erosion.

As a result, the added value of assemblage thinking to grasp performances of the knowledge-politics nexus is to provide thinking tools for detailed descriptions and analytical work on the (de)stabilization of expertise through boundary work and their accompanying exclusions/inclusions.

In the end, it should be stressed that utilizing assemblage thinking in IR should not be done to demonstrate that global governance processes are contingent, dynamic and becoming as that would conflate the premise with the findings (Collier, 2014, p. 36). Instead, assemblage thinking is a way of studying practices of arranging otherwise heterogeneous

elements and, in this these, to understand how these practices perform the knowledge-politics nexus in a specific way.

Now that I have discussed some of the theoretical foundations of assemblage thinking and established how I engage with it, I move towards a discussion of how this perspective translates into research practice.

#### **4. Methodology: Mobilizing assemblage thinking for empirical work**

This chapter discusses assemblage thinking as methodology and can be seen as a continuation of chapter 3 as theory and research practice cannot be meaningfully separated in this perspective. Accordingly, I reflect on how assemblage as methodology influences the selection of *methods*, which concerns the techniques for gathering information and the subsequent analysis of it (Barkin & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 855). Indeed, different interpretations of how to engage with ‘assemblage’ has led to a wide variety of experimental approaches in this regard. Here, I draw mostly on discussions in Acuto and Curtis (2014a).

This leads up to my argument for a case-study approach anchored in document analysis as a way to facilitate a productive intersection between the rather abstract tools of assemblage and detailed empirical work. Seeing as methods centered on document analysis have not been utilized as much within the assemblage framework, I draw on more general discussions for how to study practices through texts to develop my argument

Following this, I attempt to re-calibrate assemblage thinking to suit the ethos of critical IR. To do so, I draw on debates in critical urban theory (Brenner, Madden, & Wachsmuth, 2011 and McFarlane, 2011) that have problematized the ideas of ‘flat ontology’ and multiplicity of agency that is often said to be a core feature of assemblage thinking. This discussion has yet to arrive in IR, where such an understanding of assemblages is often adopted uncritically. As such, insights from this debate can advance the application of assemblage thinking in IR by highlighting some of the problems inherent to its use so far, as well as provide a possible solution. This, I argue, also makes assemblage thinking more suited to the study the relationship between knowledge and politics in global governance, the reasons for which will be outlined more fully below.

The chapter ends on an outline of how I collected my sources and how these were analyzed as I conducted my case study.



#### 4.1 Implications of an assemblage approach for research strategy and design

The value of assemblage thinking in terms of methodology is that it “provides a parsimonious and open ontological vocabulary meaningful for conducting empirical research” (Bueger, 2014c, pp. 59–60), and should be thought of as a way of engaging with the ‘stuff’ that constitute the world. This orientation is common to practice theories, which function as “...a sensitizing 'framework' for empirical research in the social sciences. It thus opens up a certain way of seeing and analyzing social phenomena” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 257).

Importantly, this engagement is not done through mere application of assemblage onto a corpus of data as “it is impossible to 'apply' assemblage thinking to the world because it doesn't come with a preformed 'toolbox' of methods that can be chosen and utilized” (Lisle, 2014, p. 70). As assemblage thinking does not, and cannot, come with a one-fits all way of applying it methodologically (Bueger, 2017, p. 333), it is encouraged to “...to *think in conjunction with* our research topics rather than seek to ‘explain’ or ‘understand’ them” (Lisle, 2014, p. 70).

While this freedom from methodological dogma might seem enticing, it also forces the researcher to spend significant time re-calibrating methods for them to suit the commitments of assemblage thinking as well as the research puzzle at hand. Importantly, the many ways in which assemblages are employed do not stand in opposition to each other but takes the implications of assemblage thinking to mean different things in terms of methodology and methods.

What seems to be a commonality is that to *think through the assemblage* problematizes the distinction between observer and the observed (Bonditti, 2013, p. 104). For some this makes ethnographic methods preferable. This approach, which can be called ‘doing assemblage’, involves a process of enrolling oneself into an assemblage through an entry point, and then tracing the relations among various material and non-material elements (Jones, Heley, & Woods, 2019). These studies tend to adopt an ‘ethnographic gaze’, and by drawing inspiration from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the analysis follows or traces an ‘actant’ to illustrate the larger assemblage in which the object of interest exists.

However, in their attempt to trace Welsh wool through the ‘global wool assemblage’, Jones et al. (2019) acknowledged that such an approach can be at risk of not being able to

account for *why* an assemblage form. In other words, the act of tracing an actant relies mostly consist of description but leaves the question of agency unresolved. It has therefore been suggested that this conceptualization of assemblage thinking be supplemented with other social theories (see discussion in Abrahamsen & Williams, 2014).

Another perspective is that methods are themselves assemblages (Law, 2004), hence an ‘assemblage methodology’ should reflect this. Building on this, Ronald Bleiker (2015) suggests that assemblages invite a heterogenous approach in terms of methodology. He argues that assemblage thinking allows for the integration of seemingly incompatible research strategies, for instance, combining the use of quantitative content analysis with a semiotic or discourse approach to study images in IR. This view fits well with the idea that assemblage thinking does not lead to a specific research strategy and a wide variety of methods can be adopted depending on the research question at hand.

In any case, while assemblage thinking allows for an open-ended approach to methods, this is not a *carte blanche* for sloppy research design. The chosen methods must be able to provide the researcher with an understanding of how this particular assemblage *works*, which then provides the basis for making empirical statements. It should be kept in mind that the goal is not to demonstrate the existence of an assemblage, this is asserted as an underlying premise, but to use it in order to draw conclusions on the topic of interest.

Finally, mobilizing assemblage thinking for research is an ontological stance in the sense that it is a particular way of approaching the social (Dewsbury, 2011, p. 149). As a result, bringing in assemblage thinking is not a neutral move. Indeed, there is ultimately a politics involved in utilizing assemblage: it contains an ‘ethos’ or specific way of engaging the world. The ensuing analysis, findings and conclusions are all informed by the positions and values contained in assemblage as an outlook.

Accordingly, the assemblage approach carries implications for *validity* as well, where I aim for *internal validity*. In other words, internal validity is achieved if “...given our assumptions, our conclusions follow rigorously from the evidence and logical argumentation that we provide (Jackson, 2016, p. 22). What is meant by this is that the premise and design of my study actually informs my analysis and that my conclusions follow from the findings this outlook allowed me to see. If this is done in a consistent and transparent manner “...even someone who rejects our values should be able to acknowledge the validity of our empirical results within the context of our perspective” (Jackson, 2016, p. 22).

## 4.2 Research design: Case study - zooming in and zooming out

The next step is to delineate the scope of my thesis into feasible endeavor within the limitations and constraints of a master's thesis. To do so, I need to reflect on the research topic and, in relation to this, my research question. As a way to get started, Bueger suggests the following two-step approach:

The first step is to study an arrangement by zooming in on a distinct element. This can be a distinct type of relation, practice, an object, a concept or a site in which different practices prevail. The second step is then to zoom out to gather an understanding of the effects of the element and what resources it requires to produce it. (Bueger, 2017, p. 333)

These two steps correlate with my research question: The first step resonates with my intention to zoom in on a distinct relationship, the relationship between knowledge and politics in the disarmament process. The second step, zooming out, asks what this can tell us about the knowledge-politics nexus in global governance more generally by examining the effects of the specific way it was performed within the case in question.

Here, the choice of methods depends in part on what it is that the analyst would like to focus on in a particular assemblage. Given that my *unit of analysis* is the practices of assembling, the chosen methods must provide me with access to these practices. Seeing as the research objective is to gather an in-depth understanding of social phenomena a qualitative research design was deemed appropriate.

Additionally, the research question can be categorized as a 'how question'. Yin (2009, pp. 9–10) suggests that such questions are often approached through a historical or case-based approach. Seeing as the disarmament process qualifies as a contemporary event, a *case study* approach was chosen. In a much cited article the following definition of a case study is offered: "the case study...is best defined as an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units" (Gerring, 2004, p. 352). For practice theories however, causality is local in the sense that causality is dependent on the particular context in which these takes place, which does not square well with the goal of generalization. Instead, the aim of this case study is to provide a contextually rich historically-contingent analysis of a single

case, while also aiming for more general insights regarding the relationship between knowledge and politics.

Another caveat of practice approaches is that while case studies that employ a qualitative research strategy are often inductive (Bryman, 2016, p. 62), for practice-approaches “the logic of research is recursive and *abductive* insofar as one continuously moves from theory to methodology and empirical material and back (Friedrichs and Kratochwil as cited in Bueger, 2017, p. 332).

As a result, the concepts and the case under question were refined and reshaped during the research process. For instance, the concepts in assemblage thinking helped structure my understanding of the empirical material, which led me to adopt a longer timeframe for the case than I initially intended. So, while the design centered on the Ghouta attack at first, it became clear that I needed a wider timeframe to capture the processual and dynamic character of the knowledge-politics nexus that my theoretical framework emphasized. As such, I expanded my focus to consider events from 2013 to 2017. Adopting a broader timeframe allowed me “...to follow the play of expertise in specific situations. That is, follow how different forms of knowledge production acquire authority as expertise” (Berling, 2019, p. 95).

Nonetheless, even if I adopted a wide timeframe, I had to delineate the scope even further. To this end I focused in on the disarmament phase (2013-2014) and the controversy surrounding the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism in the post-disarmament phase (2015-2017). Ideally, I would have liked to include even more recent developments, though the nature of research demands that a limit is set. As such, I do not go into the most recent developments in the disarmament process, though these are touched upon in the conclusion.

The case itself displays characteristics of both a *unique case* and an *exemplifying case*: unique in the sense that it dealt with the first use of chemical weapons in 25 years and that it meant, eventually, a different role for the OPCW. Exemplifying in the sense that responding to perceived crises is a central feature of global governance today. While categorizing the case is important to some extent, “any case study can involve a combination of these elements, which can best be viewed as rationales for choosing particular cases” (Bryman, 2016, p. 63).

Additionally, how the researcher conceive of the case is amenable to change during the research process (Bryman, 2016, p. 64). For instance, I only realized the unique features of the selected case upon getting deeper into the source material. In sum, I retain the notion of

the case as exemplifying and therefore apt for my overarching interest in the relationship between knowledge and politics in global governance today, though without diminishing or underscoring the unique features it also exhibited.

The goal is, to exemplify, to *zoom in* on the workings of global governance, and then to *zoom out* and link the findings to the overall goal of understanding the relationship between knowledge and politics in global governance today.

However, as for the research topic, zooming in on the role of expertise in relation to the disarmament process could contribute to justify this particular conflict response. For instance, Michelle Bentley (2015) has argued that the focus on chemical weapons allowed the various global actors to uphold an appearance of taking action to mitigate the atrocities taking place in Syria. Seeing as putting any issue on the agenda inevitably excludes other aspects by taking up political will and resources, the focus on chemical weapons might have been given a disproportionate amount of attention. The contingency of the response itself merits further analysis, though such a focus falls outside the scope of this thesis, which takes the response as a point of departure.

### **4.3 Operationalizing agency in assemblage thinking**

Now that I have made clear my unit of analysis (practices of assembling), the scope (2013-2017) and design (case study) envisioned for this endeavor, I must confront the issue of operationalization. I focus on the following questions: How are the ‘thinking tools’ identified in chapter 3 to be utilized within the context of the case study? What are the normative implications of assemblage thinking for agency?

The most pressing issue here was to find ways to establish criteria for what, who, when and which objects and subjects become part of the assemblage. To that end, Murray Li provides an outline of the various stages in the territorialization of an assemblage: “forging alignments, rendering technical, authorizing knowledge, managing failures and contradictions, reposing political questions and reassembling as the ground shifts” (Murray Li, 2007, p. 268). By keeping these in mind, the analyst can reflect on the steps involved in the ‘lifespan’ of an assemblage.

Furthermore, Murray Li provides a criterion for *when* we can speak of an assemblage and how we can know that we have identified a set of elements that belong to one. In her study of the forest management assemblage she states it

qualifies as 'an' assemblage by the consistency with which the set of elements...are drawn together, and by the resonance of the label itself. Like public education or family planning, the label flags an identifiable terrain of action and debate. (Murray Li, 2007, p. 266)

So, to speak of an anti-chemical weapons assemblage means that it must be identified as a 'terrain of action and debate'. In terms of action, the existence of a general anti-chemical weapons assemblage can be identified by enormous efforts over the last quarter of a century to disarm, destroy and prevent the use of chemical weapons. Regarding an anti-chemical weapons assemblage in Syria more specifically, the debates, discussions and meetings at the UNSC and OPCW indicate that anti-chemical weapons efforts in relation to Syria was indeed a meaningful terrain of debate to the actors involved.

As for the questions of *who* and *what* is a part of the assemblage, I suggest to borrow from Actor-Network Theory-inspired approaches the insight that networks tend to be made up, inter alia, of texts and actors reading said texts (Bueger & Bethke, 2014, p. 41). Indeed, in transnational networks that work across sites all over the world, these texts and their circulation are important in keeping the network or arrangement together.

Focusing in on actors and the circulation of texts between different sites requires reflection on agency. Indeed, in assemblage thinking, the notion of agential capability is quite complex and demands further elaboration. Several scholars argue that the notion of *agency as multiplicity* is a central feature of an assemblage perspective (for instance, Bueger, 2014c and Abrahamsen, 2017). Tied to the idea of a 'flat ontology', assemblage thinking does not a priori grant any component or element a privileged ontological position, which makes it resist privileging humans as social agents acting on a passive material world filled with 'dead stuff'.

Instead, agency can be said to be scattered across a wide variety of sites. As stated by Anderson, Kearnes, McFarlane, and Swanton (2012, pp. 180–181), "what the rethinking of agency provides is a way of describing how different agents within the assemblage may possess different resources and capacities to act". Accordingly, agency is a 'becoming' in the assemblage, wherein the capacity to act depends on the constellation or arrangement of relations among its elements (Anderson et al., 2012). For instance, the capacity of an expert to

act may depend on access to certain locations or the prevailing mode of governance. Likewise, the agency of a chemical could shift depending on the particular assemblage it takes part in. Chlorine, for instance, can be utilized for sanitary purposes in one assemblage, but as an instrument of war in another.

However, there are some potential issues related to the idea of flat ontology and scattered agency, particularly for a social science such as IR. First, leaving behind the idea of a sovereign social agent in favor of a flat ontology could pose a problem as it “complicates the identification of causality and responsibility” (Abrahamsen, 2017, p. 259). Not only does this require a radical shift from more conventional social science methods in how one conducts analytical work by taking a myriad of new actors into consideration, it also gives rise to a specific politics wherein “...a passive-voice politics prevails in which assemblages are anonymously, almost mysteriously destabilized or dismantled” (Brenner et al., 2011, p. 236).

To stay with the example of a chemical such as chlorine; while it is certainly true that its potential to act as an instrument of war may depend on it being enrolled in a soldier-assemblage rather than a scientist-assemblage, it could be ethically problematic to shift focus to this chemical as an agent rather than the individual and/or group involved in the process of chemical warfare. Though this example is oversimplified, it remains the case that moving away from the sovereign human as the acting individual comes at a cost. Recognizing this possibility Jane Bennet asks the following question:

Should we acknowledge the distributed quality of agency in order to address the power of human-nonhuman assemblages and to resist a politics of blame? Or should we persist with a strategic understatement of material agency in the hope of enhancing the accountability of specific humans? (Bennett as cited in Abrahamsen, 2017, p. 259)

To this end, Anderson et al. (2012, p. 186) suggest that “...our ethical or political obligations might demand that we cut and specify causality within assemblages in order to attribute responsibility and blame”, which I return to just below.

But first, upon closer scrutiny it also becomes clear that while the perspective of flat ontology is often claimed in theory, scholars sometimes implicitly privilege the agency of human actors. For instance, in his study of global governance and counter-piracy efforts, Bueger (2018) claims that “assemblage theory allows us to decipher how this cooperation has been made possible in practice, providing a lens with which to examine the inner workings of the relations that *actors* have established, and the tools that they are using (Bueger, 2018,

p. 615)(italics added). Later, he claims that “assemblages establish relations of expertise and authority, technology and politics (Bueger, 2018, p. 620). While the insight that assemblages also possess a form of agency is important to be sure, it seems like the main driving force in Bueger’s account of the counter-piracy assemblage is very much anchored in social agents given his emphasis on their practices of sorting and ordering. Thus, even if the importance of materials and technology is asserted a priori, it is not demonstrated how they matter in the empirical study beyond the fact that the Best Practices Management document was circulated among the stakeholders. Thus, a human-centered agency focus is snuck in through the back-door.

Accordingly, due to my interest in practices of assembling the knowledge-politics nexus, the social implications of these practices are my main focus. As such I choose, based on an ethical stance, to highlight the agency of this category of social agents, rather than the agency of materials. That is not to say that I intend to focus exclusively on the agential capacity of experts as acting on ‘passive material objects’, but rather that the bulk of my analysis will be directed at a critical examination of how these individuals and their practices can be utilized to explore the knowledge-politics nexus in a specific constellation of global governance. This is not necessarily problematic in and of itself because in “...our methodological choices in centring our research objectives around particular actors, we are already producing a particular kind of agency while marginalizing others” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 186).<sup>9</sup> Being aware of the potential implications of these moves must be part of a researcher’s consideration when constructing a research design and methodology. In sum, such a move arguably expands the usefulness of assemblage thinking to suit the concerns of critical IR scholarship.

That being said, even though I advance a focus on human agency, I do retain the notion of agential capability as dispersed or distributed through the focus on practices. This is because the orders of meaning that practices enact also “...produce agency, that is, the capacity to act and become an actor, and subject positions, that is, the possible spectrum of available actions in the first place” (Bueger, 2015, p. 5). This extends to the assemblage itself,

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, there is a precedence for explicitly retaining the individual as the acting subject in assemblage thinking, most notably in Murray Li’s (2007) study of the forest management assemblage, where she draws attention to the importance of *situated subjects*.



which can act back on its parts and therefore allows the actors to be affected due to their participation in the assemblage (DeLanda, 2006).

Now that I have reflected on how I understand agency in assemblages, I shift the focus to the practices of these actors. More specifically, as identified in chapter 3, “assemblage theory... follows a distinct style of analysis primarily interested in empirically describing practices of assembling” (Bueger, 2018, p. 619). The underlying assumption here is that “practices not only organize the world – they are also the raw materials that comprise it (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 15). The next question, then, is how can practices of assembling be accessed?

#### **4.4 Accessing practices through texts**

While some arrangement studies rely on various ethnographic methods to study such practices (e.g. Berling, 2019), a different methodological approach might be considered when working on larger scales such as the global “as participant observation fieldwork is not the only means of sensing the mundane and paying attention to detail” (Bueger & Bethke, 2014, p. 38).

In the case at hand, the disarmament process happened at multiple sites across great distances. Accessing the practices of assembling in such a context requires an approach capable of capturing this process. Given that the events I am interested took place in the time-period between 2013-2017, archival research is more suitable to access the assemblage than for instance, ethnographic methods. In such situations, one needs to access the practices by proxy, either by ‘talking about practices’ with practitioners, or by ‘reading about practices’ through texts (Bueger, 2017, p. 333). As such, a focus on texts and reports can be justified insofar as they provide access to practices (Pouliot, 2013).

An advantage here is that the efforts to destroy and disarm Syria’s chemical weapons program is a very formalized process. Decisions, meeting reports and transcript of debates in various fora are thoroughly documented and, more often than not, these documents are also publicly available. This allows for intense and thorough engagement with a large body of sources on which to draw conclusions. In particular, seeing as the debates are available, this is a unique opportunity to study the interplay between the various stakeholders. By doing so, the different positions and sources of tension in the assemblage comes to the fore. Using a case

study approach is particularly apt here as it provides analytical space in which it is possible to; first zoom in and conduct a detailed empirical analysis, and, then, to zoom out in order to provide a link to how this can help elucidate a particular relationship, in this case the relationship between knowledge production and political affairs.

That being said, there are a few potential challenges by analyzing the disarmament process through an official archive. For instance, solely examining the relations articulated in selected documents could result in a text-based bias. Hence, the chosen research design could prevent me from capturing non-articulated or less formal aspects of practices. As such, it could be supplemented with semi-structured interviews with the practitioners themselves. Such a move could also increase the ‘triangulation’ of my findings.

However, due to the sensitive issue of disarmament efforts, I deemed it to be infeasible that interviews would provide access to insights about practices not already contained in the open documentary sources. I also assumed that the decisionmakers at the UNSC made their statements in response to and based on the reports put forward by the various mechanisms. Thus, interviews with the practitioners themselves would have been of limited added value for my endeavor.

There are more implications of a text-based analysis for studying practices. While texts and documents can provide access to practices, they are nonetheless *representations* of practices and must be interpreted as such (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 457). This means that the analysis must be aided by a form of interpretative procedure, in this case by way of an assemblage approach. The main point here is to be careful and keep in mind that these documents allow for insight into specific, and potentially idealized, representations of these practices (see table 6.2 in Bueger & Gadinger, 2018, p. 154).

Indeed, the shifting relations of authority during a controversy or issue of contention among experts will be justified in texts and documents (Bueger, 2014b, pp. 396–397). For my study, this means that transformations in the relations among actors can be found in official documents, thus shedding light on the dynamics of expertise in this context. In sum, as texts are artefacts of the practices at work, an examination of the documents from the period gives insight into the practices of assembling.

As for the collection of sources, this related first and foremost to the timeframe under consideration. So, collecting sources started off from the first formal efforts made at governing chemical weapons in the Syrian Civil War. The starting point for this was Syria’s

formal request made in March 2013. After that, I zoomed in the various mechanisms established after Syria's accession to the CWC in September of the same year and follow these developments up until the collapse of the JIM in 2017.

Seeing as attempts at stabilizing expertise arguably functions has been argued to be a useful entry point, I had to gather data where these practices are inscribed and referred. To this end, "to get a sense for authorized epistemic practices, a useful starting point is the documents produced in the UN and how they reference knowledge..." (Bueger, 2015, p. 9). Gathering documents, then, was done by using the open database search engine on the UN's website. Using this strategy, I identified four groups of formally authorized knowledge producers in the anti-chemical weapons assemblage. While these will be elaborated upon in the next chapter, I outline their 'output' below to account for the sources consulted during my analysis.

First was *the UN Secretary General Mechanism for Investigation* (UNSGM) (2013), which produced 2 reports on investigations into alleged use of chemical weapons. This was followed by *the OPCW-UN Joint Mission* (JM) (2013-2014). The work of the Joint Mission was described in detail in 13 monthly progress reports published by the OPCW for distribution among members of the UNSC. These contained detailed descriptions of the implementation of the disarmament efforts.

After the declared stockpiles of chemical weapons were destroyed in 2014 two new mechanisms were set up. First, *the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission* (FFM) (2014- ), which published 13 reports within the period covered by this thesis. These reports covered investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons after Syria's declared weapons had been accounted for and set to be destroyed.

Last but not least was *the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism* (JIM) (2015-2017). This mechanism published 7 reports over the course of its existence, all of whom were considered relevant. These featured investigations into guilt for the attacks confirmed by the Fact-Finding Mission's reports.

By examining these reports, I was able to identify related letters, debates and resolutions that took place at the OPCW and the UNSC during this time period. As such, I gathered documents from the OPCW-UN Joint Mission website, the OPCW's own website and the official UN database. Using the reference management program Citavi, I created a database of the collected sources (on file with the author).

To supplement these, I also incorporated a range of news briefings and statements from the UN, OPCW as well as reporting from major international media outlets such as Reuters, the BBC and Associated Press. I also looked for reflexive reports, so-called ‘lessons learned’ documents. These provide a glimpse into how practitioners themselves understood the disarmament process and their envisioned role in it.

Governance efforts related to the chemical weapons issue existed outside the UNSC and OPCW. For instance, the UN Human Rights Council who produced its own report on the Ghouta attack. I decided to exclude because I sought to maintain a more restricted focus on the governance response to the alleged chemical attacks. At the same time, such a focus could however occlude sources of influence outside these sites, though the delineation was in part due to constraints regarding time and resources.

In the end, my empirical material was collected from open sources. The use of open sources limits my ability to get a peek behind the scenes so to speak. When it comes to closed negotiations between senior diplomats and statesmen, there are slim chances for researchers to get access to say a transcript. Therefore, my interpretation of the course of events and how things are related to each other largely depends on the material available to the public.

Of course, as with all material records that are stored, there is a chance that some things have been left out, which could have an impact on the analysis. A pre-condition then is to read these documents with this in mind it informs the sort of conclusions one draws later. For example, the documents available on OPCW’s own website have clearly undergone a process of selection. Certain decisions, plans, declarations and statements are not listed among the documents available to the public. While these documents are sometimes used as references in available documents, attempting to interpret or speculate about their content would be pure guesswork.

#### **4.5 Analyzing the sources: Sites of controversy and practices of assembling**

As a way of accessing practices in texts, a focus on sites of *controversies* and *crisis* can be particularly interesting because a perceived crisis inherently renders the practices-at-work to be insufficient (Bueger, 2014b, p. 396). The perceived urgency of a crisis also tends to speed up the process of arranging expertise, because they set things in motion and new practices are integrated in order to deal with uncertainty, which tends to be more pronounced in the context

of a crisis (Bueger, 2014b, p. 396). In short, the most important point here is that “in taking the justificatory texts and representations as a key source and investigating how controversies are settled and closed we can learn more easily about the background knowledge of practices” (Bueger, 2014b, pp. 396–397), in this case how these practices relate ways of performing the knowledge-politics nexus.

Accordingly, I conducted a preliminary reading of the collected sources, which formed the basis for identifying some central *sites of contention* in the disarmament process. The empirical observation that disagreements over the Joint Investigative Mechanism’s reports led to its discontinuation pointed to an object of contention in need of further investigation. Following this observation, I zoomed in on this controversy, and proceeded to collect the documents published in the time-period leading up to it that might help contextualize it.

Next, I needed to establish some sort of criteria in advance that would allow me to measure the empirical data up against ‘something’. More precisely, I had to establish what I will look for, implications of this focus and the basis for claiming that I have found something in the sources. To this end, assemblage thinking provided the thinking tools which guided the analysis of these documents.

More specifically, seeing as practices of assembling are the core concern to an assemblage approach, I analyzed these practices by examining the boundary work and practices of exclusion/inclusion found in the collected documents. Documents that outlined, named or designated roles and responsibilities were given special attention. These provided insights to the division of labor, ordering of actors and establishment of relations of authority in the assemblage. Identifying these provided the means to grasp the form of expertise that was made authoritative and how the knowledge-politics nexus was delineated through boundary work.

Another set of thinking tools identified in chapter 3 was the axis of territorialization and deterritorialization. These gives the analyst an idea of what to look for and therefore “assemblage appears to operate as an orientation to the possibility of uncertain shifts in the processes being discussed” (McFarlane & Anderson, 2011, p. 162). I took the passing of OPCW decisions and UNSC resolutions as indicating that actors in the assemblage were cooperating on the basis of shared understandings. Shared understandings were then taken as an indication of internal homogeneity or territorialization in the assemblage. Criticism, dissent and challenges to knowledge claims were viewed as increasing heterogeneity, or

detrterritorialization, in the assemblage. Concrete examples here would be attempts to challenge the findings of the expert reports, an inability to agree on draft texts and the use of veto powers at the UNSC. Thus, this processual axis helped me assess the degree of consensus in the anti-chemical weapons assemblage by examining whether key actors recognized or contested expertise. Focusing on shared understandings and consensus, or lack thereof, means that my analysis mostly contains a focus on the expressive aspect of assemblage thinking.

On a final note, the issue of how to structure the analysis can prove difficult when one chooses to engage the thinking tools of an assemblage perspective. For instance, there were signs of detrterritorialization already during the disarmament phase, yet, I have chosen to link the process of territorialization with the disarmament phase and the process of detrterritorialization to the post-disarmament phase. Also, during the UNSC debates delegations took turns to present their views, but to present my findings in a readable manner the statements are not necessarily made in exactly the order that they are presented.

Now that I have reflected on the thinking tools at hand in the assemblage approach, operationalized my main concepts and outlined how I conducted my analysis in terms of data collection and reading of sources, I turn to the case study itself.

## **5. Case study: The anti-chemical weapons assemblage in Syria (2013-2017)**

In this case study, I make three moves. First, I situate the place of chemical weapons in world politics within a historical context. Then, second, I outline the main actors in my analysis, OPCW, the UNSC and Syria. These two sections are intended to provide the reader with the necessary information before I, third, delve into the analysis, which consist of two parts: a disarmament phase (2013-2014) and a post-disarmament phase (2014-2017).

### **5.1 The chemical weapons taboo**

Chemical weapons have been on the international agenda for a long time. Not only has it been on the agenda, but chemical weapons occupy a rather unique place in the international politics due to the existence of a ‘chemical weapons taboo’ (Price, 1997). The notion that there exists a norm against the use of such weapons, even though arguably they are less deadly than so-called conventional weapons, is tied to a specific current in the literature on norms in IR

theory. The overarching question in this vein of research on norms is; why is chemical weapons treated differently than other weapons? Indeed, the sheer destructiveness of chemical weapons cannot explain its special status given that other so-called conventional weapons possess far greater destructive capabilities. Put differently, what is it about chemical weapons that grants them special attention and treatment?

According to Price (1995) breaching the taboo against chemical weapons use entails a particular stigma tied to a discourse of standard of civilized conduct. Thus, he explains the emergence of a chemical weapons taboo by tracing the historical development of discourses around this particular class of weapons. While reservations around the use of poison as a means of warfare long pre-dates modernity, concerns about the use of chemical weapons in the modern era can be attributed to both technological and ideational developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Hague Peace conference of 1899 is one of the earliest instances of states dealing directly with the issue (Price, 1995). The desire to organize this conference and to have chemical weapons on the agenda was a move initiated by Russia, though this was driven by a “need to promote peace to enable its own internal development” (Jefferson, 2014, p. 649), and not due to moral or ideational convictions.

Importantly, at the time of the conference, the issue of poison as a weapon and the more recent development of weapons capable of projecting asphyxiating gases were understood to be separate issues. The importance of the conference for the emergence of a chemical weapons taboo was therefore to codify two norms that eventually came to be seen as connected (Jefferson, 2014, p. 652).

However, the codification of these norms at the Hague peace conferences of 1899 and 1907 did not, however, prevent large-scale use of various chemical weapons in the First World War. Nonetheless, Price (1997) argues that the post-war period saw an increased moral dimension to the discourse surrounding chemical weapons, in particular due to the perceived indefensibility of civilians confronted with such weapons.

Moral concerns aimed at preventing a similar scenario in the future were instrumental in the 1925 Geneva Conference that resulted in the Geneva Protocol making the use of chemical weapons illegal under international law. The moral dimension came to override realpolitik concerns as policy makers gave up what they saw as a military advantage in favor of a universal prohibition. Importantly, while the Geneva Protocol outlawed the use of

chemical weapons in warfare, it does not constitute a ban on the production, proliferation and stockpiling of such weapons. Instead, it was more akin to a pledge to a no-first-use policy by the signatory states (Price, 1997, p. 154).

It would take another 40 years before the issue re-appeared on the international agenda. Kelle (2014) has suggested that the use of herbicides by the US in Vietnam led to strong international reactions and put the issue back on the agenda. At the time, biological and chemical weapons were seen as belonging to the same broad category of weapons. However, following a UK initiative, efforts to negotiate disarmament treaties on biological and chemical weapons were separated from each other. Shortly after, in 1972, the Biological Weapons Convention entered into force, though it contained "...in its Article IX a normative guidepost for its states parties to continue negotiations for a CW treaty (Kelle, 2014, p. 101).

Nonetheless, negotiations on a possible chemical weapons convention were largely brought to a standstill during the Cold War as these weapons were considered to be of importance to the East-West arms race (Mutimer, 1998, p. 109). In the meantime, chemical weapons continued to be used although sporadically. Most infamous was the case of the Iran-Iraq war, where Saddam Hussein utilized chemical weapons repeatedly and systematically both against Iran and towards Iraq's own Kurdish minority, in particular, the Halabja attack in 1988.

Eventually, the international outrage displayed towards Saddam's use along with the softening of tensions between the US and Soviet Union towards the end of the 1980s re-opened the possibility of a Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) (Price, 1997, p. 153). Another crucial factor was according to Mutimer (1998, p. 106) an expansion of the norm against proliferation of nuclear weapons to cover chemical and biological weapons as well.

A final agreement over the specifics of the CWC was reached in September 1992 after a series of discussions between the US and the Soviet Union (Price, 1997, p. 153). While states could sign the document already a few months later in January 1993, the Convention did not enter into force until April 29, 1997 (Price, 1997, pp. 153–154). The added value of the CWC vis a vis the 1925 Geneva Protocol towards strengthening a norm against the use of chemical weapons was the expanded scope of the convention's obligations. In particular, Price highlights two additional features: not only does it prohibit the use of such weapons, but also "...the production, transfer, and possession of chemical weapons, and even prohibits



signatories from assisting others in engaging in such proscribed activities” (Price, 1997, p. 154).

Writing on the eve of the Chemical Weapons Convention’s entry into force and the founding of the OPCW, Price (1997, p. 155) observed that “acceptance of the bureaucratic routines of the OPCW will have significant effects...It represents a potential movement of the issue of chemical weapons away from the political and towards the legal and technical as it becomes routine”. Indeed, draping the chemical weapons taboo in the language of bureaucracy indicates as a move away from the explicitly political is in itself a deeply political move as it erases the historical and contingent evolution of the taboo. Consequently, the taboo becomes something that is taken for granted, thus obscuring its political origins. In other words, Price highlights the ‘anti-politics’ of moving an issue into the sphere of techno-legal implementation under the auspices of routinized expertise.

## **5.2 Central actors in the anti-chemical weapons assemblage in Syria**

Some authors have suggested that chemical weapons disarmament and nonproliferation can be thought as a regime in global politics (see Kelle, 2014 and Kelle, 2019). The notion of a regime implies a durable structure, which at first glance might seem at odds with ‘assemblage’. That being said, structural metaphors in international relations theory are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, the logic of assemblages can be utilized to study how a regime attempted to govern a specific issue. The added value of thinking in terms of assemblages is to highlight the fragility of orders. Indeed, assemblage thinking directs analytical focus to practice and the constant work required to uphold such arrangements (Bueger, 2018, p. 621). In this view, the regime becomes an effect of practices and is not granted an ontological existence outside these practices of maintaining relations.

As opposed to other international regimes, for instance the anti-biological/biological weapons non-proliferation regime, the chemical weapons non-proliferation regime is highly specialized and centralized in terms of institutional expertise. Indeed, the regime is unique in that the responsibility of implementing the Convention is to be carried out by a designated organization; the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Thus, OPCW tends to feature prominently in analyzes of power in the chemical weapons disarmament regime as “the OPCW provides a forum for the regime members to enact a set of recurrent practices and thereby implement the regime's normative provisions. It is therefore an

essential tool in the realisation of the regime norms” (Kelle, 2019, pp. 119–120). As a result, the OPCW enjoys something close to a monopoly when it comes to expertise in relation to chemical weapons disarmament and non-proliferation. Hence, there is not a whole lot of room for other actors to lay claims to authoritative knowledge on issues related to verification and destruction of chemical weapons.

In terms of organizational structure, the OPCW consists of three major bodies. Of these three, the highest organ is the Conference of States Parties (CSP), which is made-up of the member states of the organization. By ratifying the Convention, a state automatically becomes a member of the OPCW and is given a single vote. When a state joins the Convention it has “...to submit initial and annual declarations, and have to accept data monitoring, and on-site verification by the OPCW of both military and civilian facilities” (Kelle, 2019, pp. 124–125).

The CSP meets annually and its main purposes is to implement the Convention and to oversee the activities of the two additional bodies of the OPCW: Executive Council and the Technical Secretariat (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [OPCW], 2019a). The CSP is also responsible for matters regarding compliance and is therefore authorized to impose a variety of measures in the case of non-compliance with the Convention, which may include restriction of rights under the Convention or bringing the issue to the attention of the UN.

Next, the Executive Council is the policy-making organ in the OPCW and tasked with “...promoting the effective implementation of and compliance with the Convention” (OPCW, 2019b). It consists of 41 member states elected by the CSP on the criteria of geographic balance. The Executive Council enjoys quite a broad range of executive powers that can be put into action without reference to the CSP, such as establishing agreements on chemical weapons protection and verification arrangements with member states (OPCW, 2019b).

Lastly, The Technical Secretariat is charged with assisting the OPCW’s policy-making organs in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (Kelle, 2014, p. 121). Headed by the Director-General, whom is elected from among the member states for a four-year period, the Technical Secretariat oversees the daily operations of the OPCW and its activities towards achieving the goals of the Convention. To this end, the Technical Secretariat carries out inspections, monitoring and verification activities (OPCW, 2019c).

A second key site in the anti-chemical weapons assemblage in relation to Syria was the UN, more specifically the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). As pointed out by Kelle (2019, pp. 133–134), while the OPCW’s ‘technical expertise’ was used for the destruction efforts in Syria, the decision-making powers were anchored at the UNSC. Here, the most important characteristic of the UNSC is the veto power of the permanent members, which allows these members to effectively block resolutions as they see fit.

As for the relationship between the OPCW and the UN, there existed a tenuous institutional link between the two prior to the war in Syria. While the OPCW is an independent organization not directly under the authority of the UN, there is an agreement of understanding between the two (see UN-OPCW relationship 2001). Regarding cases of alleged chemical weapons use by a state not party to Convention, the OPCW has a mandate through the Convention to assist the UN Secretary-General if requested to do so (OPCW News, 2012).

Finally, another crucial actor is of course Syria itself. There are some unique features to Syria’s relationship with chemical weapons because it contains a sort of resistance found among some Arab states. This resistance is not necessarily about challenging the prohibition against the use of chemical weapons as much as it is a way to challenge the legitimacy of the current norms and rules regarding weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, the perception among some, primarily Arab, states is that the disarmament regime reproduces a discriminatory practice wherein certain states are allowed to possess weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons, while others are categorically denied this possibility (Price, 1995, p. 102).

Even so, Syria was in fact a signatory to 1925 Geneva Declaration, which it ratified in 1968. Thus, it was bound to the stipulations of the declaration that bans first use and retaliatory use of chemical weapons. At the same time, Syria was not a member of the Chemical Weapons Convention and thus not obligated to adhere to its rules. In a review of the efforts to implement the Convention over a five-year period from 2008-2013, the OPCW noted that Syria, along with Egypt and Israel cited “...regional security as a justification for not joining the Convention. They have linked accession or ratification to a broader political settlement. Although unlikely to join the Convention in the near future, Egypt and Israel have shown willingness in maintaining contacts with the Secretariat. Contacts remain interrupted with the Syrian Arab Republic” (OPCW, 2013c, p. 14). Thus, in the years leading up to the Arab Spring, Syria did not appear any closer to joining the Convention.

At the outbreak of protests against the Assad regime in 2011 there was a consensus among western states that Syria possessed a chemical weapons program (Nikitin, Kerr, & Feickert, 2013, p. 3). Though Syria frequently denied having such weapons at its disposal, many states expressed concerns early on about the possible use of these weapons as the protests descended into a nationwide armed conflict. For instance, the OPCW expressed concern about the potential for chemical weapons use as early as 18 July 2012, which was around the time of major escalation in terms of violence in Syria (OPCW News, 2012).

Here, the existence of a chemical weapons taboo can help explain how actors came to perceive the use of these weapons as something to be addressed, even though Syria was not a member of the Convention. For instance, Obama's famous 'red line' put forward in 2012 where he implied that the use of these weapons could change his mind on not intervening directly in the conflict (Ball, 2012), can be interpreted in light of this taboo.

### **5.3 Disarmament: Reaching consensus and de-politicization (2013-2014)**

In this section, I examine how the relationship between knowledge and politics was performed in the formation of the assemblage

As argued above, the use of chemical weapons was already seen as an object of governance, i.e. it was 'on the radar' so to speak. Hence, allegations of chemical weapons use were perceived as a disruption to the governance arrangements aimed to prevent this from occurring, thus constituting what was perceived as a 'shock' to the usual state of affairs. Accordingly, my analysis takes this as a point of departure, namely that the perceived crises in chemical weapons disarmament governance allowed for new mechanisms of governing to form in its wake.

#### **5.3.1 Laying the foundations: Selective ignorance in the UNSGM Investigation (2013)**

On March 20, 2013, the government of the Syrian Arab Republic sent a request to Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon that an official investigation be conducted on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal outside Aleppo in the north of Syria on March 19 (UN News, 2013) (see Figure 1). This was the first step towards forming an anti-chemical weapons assemblage.



*Figure 1.* Location of Khan al-Assal outside Aleppo, BBC (2013a), retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23488853>

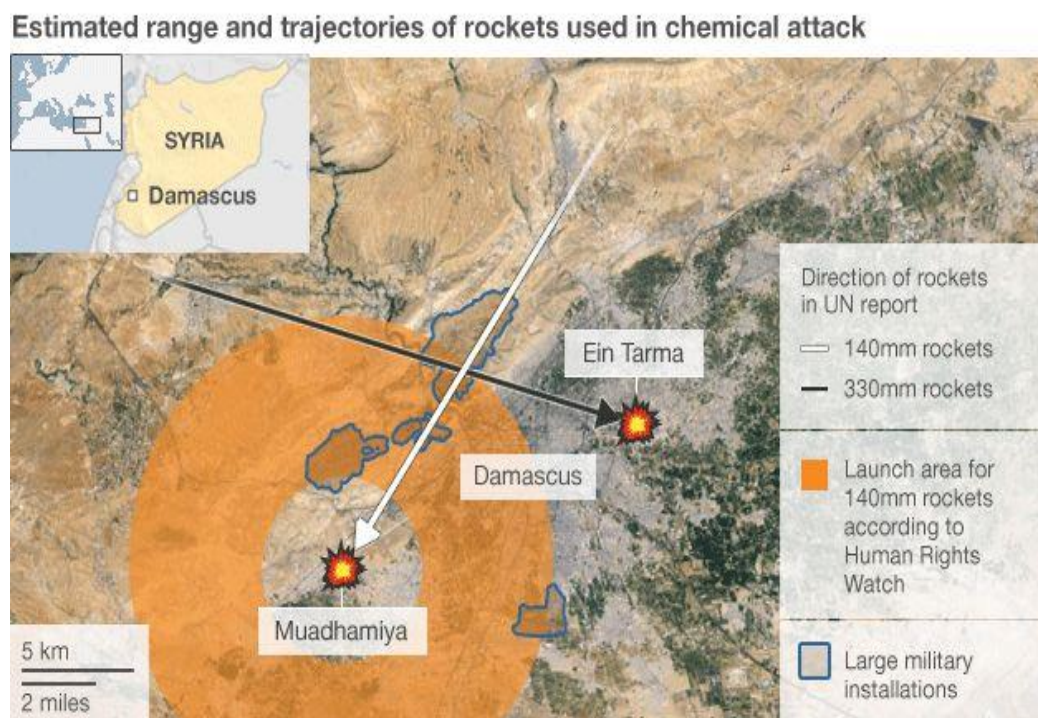
Shortly after, the Secretary General received a letter from France and the United Kingdom asking to expand the scope of a possible investigation to include other alleged instances of chemical weapons use beyond Khan al-Assal (United Nations [UN], 2013b). To this end, Ban-Ki Moon invoked the UN Secretary General Mechanism for investigation (UNSGM) into alleged use of chemical weapons in cases of states not party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. This investigation was to be supported by components from the OPCW and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Given that Syria was not a member of the Convention, the OPCW did not have legal authority to conduct investigations on its territory, unless as part of a UN investigation as stipulated in the relationship agreement between the two (see OPCW, 2000). The possibility of extending its cooperation to the Secretary General’s investigation was discussed in the OPCW’s Executive Council on March 27. Here, it was agreed that the organization would contribute to the mission as requested by the UN. The already established framework for cooperation between the UN and the OPCW provided the rules of procedure in this regard (OPCW, 2013e), thereby “...recognising that the latter possesses the necessary expertise to investigate allegations of use” (OPCW News, 2013b). As such, even in cases where states are not parties to the Convention, the OPCW is nevertheless an integral part in anti-chemical weapons efforts due to a recognition of their specialized knowledge.

To conduct the UNSGM investigation, a team of experts headed by the Swedish scientist Dr. Åke Sellström was set up. In total, the team consisted of 9 experts from the

OPCW, 3 from WHO and Dr. Åke Sellström himself (OPCW News, 2013b). The scope of its mandate was as follows: "...to ascertain the facts related to the allegations of the use of chemical weapons, to gather relevant data, to undertake the necessary analyses for this purpose, and to deliver a report to the United Nations Secretary-General" (OPCW, 2014a, p. 15). Importantly, the mandate did not extend to issuing blame for the attack and was therefore to refrain from attempts at identifying the culprit. As such, the mandate entailed an exclusion of a certain type of knowledge production, which would become important at a later stage in the assemblage.

Deployment of the expert team was delayed for several months due to discussions of the extent of the investigations. In the end, the team arrived in Damascus on August 18, 2013. Three days later, a large-scale chemical attack allegedly took place in Ghouta just outside Damascus. Images, videos and media reports on the alleged sarin attack went 'viral' in a matter of hours. As such, although the team was sent to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal in the north of Syria, the priorities of the team were shifted to investigate various locations in and around Damascus given the scale and proximity of the attack to the team. If the allegations of an attack in Khan al-Assal was a disruption to chemical weapons disarmament governance, the attack in Ghouta constituted a 'shock' to the anti-chemical weapons regime (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Location of Ghouta attack on August 21, 2013, BBC (2013e), retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23927399>*

On the ground in Damascus, after negotiations between the UN Chief of Disarmament, Angela Kane and Syrian government officials, the inspection team was finally allowed access on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, five days after the alleged attack. Upon the short drive from the hotel, the UN inspection team came under fire from unknown assailants (BBC, 2013b). Following interviews with doctors and potential victims, samples were collected and sent to OPCW laboratories for analysis (OPCW News, 2013a).

Back at OPCW headquarters in the Hague, the Director-General met with UN Secretary General on August 28, where they condemned the attack and reiterated the purpose of the investigation:

The work of the UN investigation team represents an impartial and objective means to establish the facts on the allegations of use in Syria. Their work must therefore be treated as inviolable and all cooperation must be extended to the Mission that includes avoidance of hostilities by all parties. (OPCW News, 2013a)

This is an important instance of boundary work, wherein the work of the UN team was to be regarded as impartial as insisting on the neutrality of the fact-finding mission became a way of side-stepping ‘political’ entanglements. Thus, upholding the perception of its work as neutral thus became critical for the OPCW-UN efforts. Importantly, not only was the mission’s work ‘on the side’ of the political, it was *above* it. All parties were asked to put their quarrels aside in order to allow for the mechanism to conduct its work.

The UN investigation team was deployed for a total of two weeks, before they returned to the Hague on 31 August. Subsequently, the team produced a report on the Ghouta attack, published on 16 September 2013, where they concluded that chemical weapons had been used on August 21 at different locations around Damascus (UN, 2013e).

Upon publication of the Ghouta report, the investigation team held a press conference, where Sellström underscored that “we are a fact-finding mission” (United Nations News [UN News], 2013). Interestingly, right after stating this, Sellström acknowledges that the team explicitly sought to avoid investigating certain issues. These were, in other words, ignored. This exclusion was justified by referring to the mandate, which had clear limits on what the

team was supposed to find out. A second and final report was issued in December 2013 and contained examinations of the alleged use of chemical weapons in a variety of locations (UN, 2013a). Upon confirmation that chemical weapons use had taken place at these locations, the mission ended its work.

Accordingly, the authorized knowledge, or expertise, at this stage was a very limited investigation seeking a very specific set of facts. The investigations proceeded on the basis of a selective ignorance by solely focusing on the question of whether it happened or not. Thus, while the actors themselves might perceive their job as simply there to find facts, the framing of the mandate already entails the exclusion of certain knowledge. As such, the ostensibly neutral work of the report occludes that it also contains a stance on the appropriate boundaries between knowledge production and the political. Already here, at an early stage in the assemblage, the OPCW and the UN took on the role of a neutral and objective providers of facts. This reified the narrative of the expert as operating in a vacuum to advise the decision-makers, which was anchored in a linear understanding of the knowledge-politics nexus. The limited mandate and ‘technical’ expertise that characterized the work of the Ghouta investigation would continue to serve as a basis for performing the knowledge-politics nexus as the assemblage underwent a process of territorialization.

### **5.3.2 Classification: The Russian-American Consensus (2013)**

Awaiting the Ghouta investigation’s results, state actors scrambled to muster a response to the attack. It should be noted here that at the G8 meeting in June 2013 only a few months earlier US president Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin had come to the agreement that Syria was to join the CWC “...as a way to control the spread and use of chemical weapons in Syria, and avoid military intervention” (Makdisi & Pison Hindawi, 2017, p. 1696).

However, the Ghouta attack on August 21 challenged these efforts due to Obama’s famous ‘red line’. His promise that chemical weapons use would “change his calculations” seemed to imply the possibility of direct military action (Ball, 2012). Indeed, a few days after the attack, on August 25, Obama and United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron agreed that the attack “required a response” (Chulov & Helm, 2013). For the US and the UK, this revolved around whether to engage in direct military action towards the Assad regime.



Accordingly, Obama used the following days to shore up both domestic and international support for strikes against the Syrian government (Edwards & Cacciatori, 2018, p. 286). To this end, UK prime minister David Cameron put the issue to a vote in the House of Commons on August 29 and unexpectedly lost the vote by a slim margin, 285-272 (BBC, 2013c).

Obama then moved to seek congressional approval, though he did not recall Congress early which left “a window of opportunity for a multilateral agreement on Syrian chemical disarmament” (Edwards & Cacciatori, 2018, p. 286). Thus, from 12 to 14 September, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Minister of Russia Sergei Lavrov negotiated what eventually became the ‘Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons’ (‘Framework’ henceforth) (Jefferson, 2014, p. 660).

As such, the effect of the Ghouta attack was to infuse the efforts to integrate Syria into the chemical weapons disarmament regime with a sense of urgency due to the possibility of military escalation. Put differently, the making of the anti-chemical weapons assemblage now rested on a sense of urgency, under which laid the threat of military action in case of its failure. This greatly enhanced the focus and attention given to the issue among central state actors.

Consequently, the Framework explicitly stated that Russian and the US “...agree that the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria should be considered an urgent matter to be implemented within the shortest possible time period” (OPCW, 2013b, p. 5). To this end, the agreement outlined a timeframe divided into three distinct targets; “(a) Completion of initial OPCW on-site inspections by November. (b) Destruction of production and mixing/filling equipment by November. (c) Complete elimination of all chemical weapons material and equipment in the first half of 2014” (OPCW, 2013b, p. 5). These ambitious deadlines underscored the perceived urgency of the situation.

Moreover, it maintained that the OPCW decision “...should address the extraordinary character of the situation with the Syrian chemical weapons” (OPCW, 2013b, p. 4). More specifically, both “the United States and the Russian Federation believe that these extraordinary procedures are necessitated by the prior use of these weapons in Syria and the volatility of the Syrian civil war” (OPCW, 2013b, p. 2). This underscores the importance of uncertainty in global governance. Indeed, that unpredictable nature of the war necessitated ‘extraordinary procedures’ in response, underscores the importance of uncertainty in global

governance as this joint undertaking can be seen as an attempt stabilize or tame the uncertainty.

Viewed through the lens of assemblage thinking, classifying the issue as urgent and extraordinary was important as it constituted a ‘shared problem definition’ (Demmers & Gould, 2018). This framework, then, became a guiding document for the ensuing disarmament efforts. In other words, there was a consensus that something had to be done as well as the best way to proceed in order to deal with this issue, which created the necessary conditions for a process of territorialization.

Additionally, the framework included the possibility of authorized use of force. In the event of non-compliance by Syria, it recommended that the UNSC should take measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (OPCW, 2013b). As a sort of insurance policy, this maintained the possibility of military intervention should the principles set out in the framework somehow fail to be upheld. More specifically, to ensure compliance, “...this UN Security Council resolution should provide for review on a regular basis the implementation in Syria of the decision of the Executive Council of the OPCW” (OPCW, 2013b, p. 2). Thus, to make sure that the disarmament process proceeded in a satisfying manner, the Syrian government was to be placed under supervision of the OPCW.

Syria proceeded to deposit its instrument of ratification on September 14, 2013, with the Convention entering into force a month later on October 14, 2013. Next, a week after its ratification, Syria submitted its initial declaration of chemical weapons.

Interestingly, the process of territorialization continued in spite of the findings of the Ghouta investigation. Published mere two days after Syria ratified the Convention, the findings were interpreted in complete opposite ways by Russia and the US. While the Russian Deputy Foreign minister maintained that the attack had been done by rebels intended to frame the Assad regime, the US took the findings as clear evidence that the Syrian government was responsible (BBC, 2013d).

Nonetheless, territorialization of the anti-chemical weapons assemblage continued. On September 27, 2013, at the 33<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Executive Council the OPCW confirmed Syria’s accession to the Convention. Next, an Executive Council decision established deadlines on when the functional operability of the chemical weapons program were to be destroyed (OPCW, 2013a). The OPCW’s decision was bolstered by the passing of UNSC resolution 2118 on the same day (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2013b). A result

of these decisions was that the guiding principles contained in the Russian-US Framework became formalized.

By looking at these decisions more closely, the continued emphasis on ‘urgency’ becomes clearly visible in the deadlines set out in the Executive Council decision. Here it was decided that the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons program should be achieved within the first half of 2014 (OPCW, 2013a). While states acceding to the Convention after 2007 are required to destroy its program as soon as possible, the Syrian disarmament process was to be completed within less than a year. More examples of the prevailing sense of urgency include the decisions that inspections would start on October 1 and that Syria was to complete its destruction of chemical weapons production equipment by November 1, 2013 (OPCW, 2013a).

The ambitious deadlines were justified by reiterating the extraordinary character of the situation in Syria. Indeed, the 27 September Executive Council decision issued made sure “(d) to recognise that this decision is made due to the extraordinary character of the situation posed by Syrian chemical weapons and does not create any precedent for the future” (OPCW, 2013a, p. 4). Consequently, owing to the perceived urgency and extraordinary character of the situation in Syria, the disarmament efforts framed Syria as a special zone. The territory of governance thus became a space wherein different rules and orders of authority applied. Thus, informed by a sense of working against the clock the issue was something that required greater flexibility in terms of protocol and rules of procedure.

To ensure compliance the UNSC resolution maintained the US-Russian Framework’s threat of force by “reaffirming that the proliferation of chemical weapons, as well as their means of delivery, constitutes a threat to international peace and security” (UNSC, 2013b, p. 1). Therefore, the resolution also decided that measures under Chapter VII of the UN charter could be invoked in the event of non-compliance by Syria (UNSC, 2013b, p. 4). In short, it maintained the possibility of the use of force in the event of non-compliance, though this option came with significant restraints as the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov issued a condition for its invocation, namely that “the actions taken will be commensurate with any violations, which will have to be 100 per cent proved” (UNSC, 2013a, p. 4). In other words, only in the case of complete certainty would measures imposed under Chapter VII be considered an option for the Russians.

In sum, the Russian-American consensus was inscribed in these decisions. This consensus emphasized a sense of urgency and the extraordinary circumstances of the chemical weapons issue in Syria, as well as the underlying possibility of using force in the case of non-compliance by Syria. These documents, along with the principles contained within, became foundational guides to the ensuing process of territorialization.

### **5.3.3 Boundaries, inclusions and exclusions: Rendering technical and depoliticization**

Next, with the overall goal established, along with tentative timelines for achieving this, new questions regarding the concrete implementation came to the fore. As such, while practices of classification had been crucial to the Russian-American consensus, other practices were now instrumental in delineating the anti-chemical weapons assemblage's 'territory'. In other words, the question was what belonged and what was to be left out of this territory. To this end, actors engaged in 'boundary work', which relies on practices of inclusions and exclusions.

A crucial component of this work was to separate the chemical weapons issue from other dimensions of the conflict in Syria. Indeed, during a debate in the Security Council following the joint decisions on September 27, the Secretary-General emphasized the unique place of the destruction efforts. He did so by separating it from the 'humanitarian' and 'political dimensions':

“All the violence must end. All the guns must fall silent. We must capitalize on the newfound unity of the Council by focusing on two other equally crucial dimensions of the conflict — the dire humanitarian situation and the political crisis (UNSC, 2013a, p. 3)

This statement constitutes an interesting instance of ordering and compartmentalizing an object of governance, the Syrian crisis, into various domains. As such, already at an early stage was it decided that the chemical weapons issue should be viewed as separate from the humanitarian and political aspects of the conflict response. In other words, the humanitarian efforts and the political process, which referred to the Geneva talks between representatives from the Syrian opposition and the Assad regime, were excluded from the anti-chemical weapons assemblage. Doing so allowed for cooperation over the disarmament efforts because other differences and disagreements, such as the Russian's alliance with the Assad regime and American support for opposition, were at least in theory kept away from the efforts to respond

to chemical weapons use. In short, the boundary work resulted in a *trichotomized* conflict response: humanitarian efforts, the political process and the chemical weapons issue.

A more tangible effect of isolating the chemical weapons issue was how it influenced the distribution of roles that actors were expected to perform. Indeed, separating the issue finds its formal expression in the OPCW-UN Joint Mission. Mere days after the landmark decisions on 27 September, an ‘Advance Team’ consisting of OPCW and UN personnel had been deployed from Rotterdam to Damascus to start inspections (OPCW News, 2013c). Not long after, the Advance Team transitioned into what became the OPCW-UN Joint Mission (hereafter the Joint Mission), which was formally established on 16 October 2013. Headed by a Special Coordinator, Sigrid Kaag, the mission was mandated to “...oversee the timely elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic in the safest and most secure manner possible” (OPCW-UN Joint Mission website, n.d.).

Additionally, it was decided that “the work of the OPCW/United Nations Joint Mission will be entirely separate from the ongoing but unrelated humanitarian and political work” (UN, 2013d, p. 8). In other words, this was a continuation of the boundary work identified above. The effect was that once again the issue of chemical weapons use was compartmentalized and separated from the ‘political process’ anchored in the Geneva talks as well as from the humanitarian relief activities. As such, the Joint Mission can be seen as an expression of the boundary practices at work in the assemblage.

Importantly, the Joint Mission was the first of its kind in the histories of the OPCW and the UN (UN, 2013d). While there was a general outline for the relationship between these two organizations (see OPCW, 2000 and UN, 2001), the implementation of such a relationship in this specific context required the establishment of more detailed areas of responsibility (OPCW, 2015a). Through discussions and consultations, the UN Secretary General and the Director-General of the OPCW it was decided that “while OPCW will serve as the lead technical agency, the United Nations is willing to play a strategic coordination role and serve as an operational enabler for the Mission” (UN, 2013d, p. 3). More specifically, the UN would be in charge of logistics and security assessments, while the OPCW was to provide chemical weapons expertise such as verification and guidelines for removal. Hence, a specific division of labor was established wherein the OPCW, supported by the UN, was to take the lead in terms of ‘expertise’, while the political decision-making process was to be centered in the UNSC (Kelle, 2019, pp. 133–134). As such, boundary practices divided the authorized knowledge production and the ‘political’ into different spheres.

By extension, these roles also created a specific hierarchy of authority. For instance, paragraph 12 of UNSC resolution 2118 decided that the monthly progress reports, produced by the OPCW's Technical Secretariat for its Executive Council, was to be submitted to the UNSC as well (UNSC, 2013b). As a result, the 'flow' of knowledge was to go through both organizations to be reviewed and discussed by state parties. This elucidates the formal hierarchy of authority within the assemblage, which gave states a central role by making them the key recipient of the sorts of knowledge being produced.

Accordingly, the knowledge-politics nexus was performed along the lines of a linear understanding, wherein the 'scientists' or 'technical experts' from the OPCW and the UN, were to supply the political actors and decisionmakers at the UNSC with neutral facts. Thus, the type of expertise stabilized in the assemblage followed the linear narrative outlined in chapter 2, wherein knowledge production is an activity external to the political realm. Here, the boundaries between the two spheres are rather clearly demarcated.

In turn, this shaped the 'capacities to speak' within the assemblage by imposing limits in terms of agency. Indeed, seeing as expertise is a relational phenomenon dependent on recognition from the relevant audience, the formally authorized experts had to put forth knowledge claims in accordance with this conception of expertise. Put differently, in order to uphold their expert status, actors would have to demonstrate their distance to the political. For instance, the OPCW Executive Council decision which formed the basis for the UNSC resolution, continuously referred to the OPCW's 'technical experts', which indicates that this understanding was shared by the formally mandated experts (OPCW, 2013a). By stressing their 'technical' competence, they sought to adhere to their envisioned role and to receive recognition as such by the relevant audience, the UNSC.

As for the expectations among permanent members of the UNSC, the Russian foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that

“pursuant to the resolution, the leading role in the upcoming work will be played by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and the United Nations will provide it with assistance. We believe that the OPCW and United Nations experts will act in a professional and impartial way in Syria, with full respect for the sovereignty of that country” (UNSC, 2013a, p. 3)

To this end, the type of knowledge production expected from the Join Mission was anchored in purportedly objective and apolitical practices. Indeed, by placing the chemical

weapons issue within the technical dimension of a tripartite response to the war in Syria, the ‘technical’ became a frame of understanding for the actors involved. In turn, this had crucial implications for the designated experts in the assemblage: their work was to be separate from the political issues. In other words, establishing the Joint Mission stabilized a form of knowledge production that centered on what was perceived to be technical matters and, importantly, impartial.

Consequently, by isolating the issue from the larger conflict response the object of governance was ‘rendered technical’. Such a move can be said to constitute a de-politicization, whereby an issue is moved from the political arena to a so-called ‘technical’ and neutral forum. Here, the issue is stripped of its political character and draped in the language of bureaucratic implementation. A statement made by the Russian delegation to the 18<sup>th</sup> Conference of the State Parties at the OPCW aptly captures the envisioned role of the OPCW as precisely such a neutral forum:

“Today, the OPCW represents one of the most efficiently operating international structures in the field of disarmament. We are interested in seeing the Organisation continue as a *depoliticised* highly professional platform where the spirit of mutual understanding, objectivity and political tolerance prevail” (OPCW, 2013d, p. 3).

However, to render the chemical weapons issue technical also required that a selective ignorance was woven into the fabric of the assemblage. Indeed, the integration of Syria into the disarmament regime entailed important exclusions as well. For instance, the foundational resolutions did not include any way forward in terms of holding someone accountable for the attacks. Paragraph 15 of UNSC resolution 2118 is particularly instructive here, which “expresses its strong conviction that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic should be held accountable” (UNSC, 2013b).

Still, this falls short of actually setting up a mechanism capable of doing so. This is an important act of excluding questions related to attribution of guilt. In other words, it was decided that per resolution 2118 that the perpetrator should not be made known, thus making the identification of individuals directly responsible fall outside the sort of assemblage’s ‘territory’. Hence, excluding certain forms of knowledge production that could be politically salient helped stabilize expertise in the assemblage as technical and apolitical. In this way, the authorized knowledge production in the assemblage was limited to practices of verification and inspections in relation to the disarmament and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons

program. Stabilizing expertise as technical in accordance with a linear understanding of the knowledge-politics nexus had performative effects that would become clearer as time went on.

#### **5.3.4 Maintenance work and containing critique (2014)**

The first implications of this clear separation became visible during the destruction phase in early 2014. Here, the issue of ‘operational roles’ surfaced given the lack of destruction capabilities in the Syrian Arab Republic. Indeed, if the deadlines were to be met, it seemed as if the Joint Mission might have to play a more active role than initially envisioned. Therefore, there was a potential that the established roles and boundaries would come into conflict with the sense of urgency that prevailed at this stage. This meant that “the role of the Joint Mission, if any, in conducting actual operations, for instance in the packing, safe transport, and possible removal from the Syrian Arab Republic of chemical agents, requires further consultation and review” (UN, 2013c, p. 4). This was a sensitive issue, because to maintain recognition the experts had to operate within the envisioned form of expertise that had come about through practices of assembling. Therefore, it was important that the experts engaged in efforts to demonstrate a distance to the political, i.e. the conflict.

Accordingly, it was decided that chemical weapons belonging to ‘Category 1’ and ‘Category 2’ were to be destroyed outside the territory of Syrian Arab Republic, while those in ‘Category 3’ were to be destroyed within Syria under supervision of OPCW personnel. As for the issue of roles, this was solved by involving third party states to contribute directly. To this end, Norway and Denmark provided carriers and freighters for the transportation of the chemical weapons out of Syria to international waters (BBC, 2014)

However, further solutions were required in order to maintain the sharp division between knowledge production and the political. In particular, a detailed list of requirements submitted by Syrian authorities regarding the transport and destruction of the chemical weapons outside Syrian territory became problematic as some of the materials requested could also be of military use. This put the ‘technical’ framing that guided the work under pressure, as the boundaries between the expert involvement and the ‘political’ war would become less clear.

On this issue it was decided in accordance with the understanding of roles that



“the United Nations will not procure or otherwise provide such dualuse [sic] material to the Government. Any assistance provided by the United Nations will be subject to strict conditions in order to ensure that it is used solely for the intended purposes” (UN, 2013c, p. 5).

Procurement of dual-use materials would have obscured the boundaries drawn up in the establishment of the Joint Mission, thus making it vital that neither the UN nor the OCPW be seen as contributing, even if indirectly, to the warring parties in Syria. This goes to show that the actors were highly aware of the need to preempt critique and any possible indications that the disarmament process was related to the ‘political’. As such, maintaining an image of neutrality was crucial to the Mission as it had been rendered a technical endeavor, which had been key to ensure cooperation on the chemical issue in the first place.

Nonetheless, the sense of urgency did allow for an expansion of OPCW’s area of operations in the Joint Mission inducing a shift from its previous role as a passive observer towards a more active role in the destruction efforts (Kelle, 2019, p. 131). Thus, the perceived urgency of the situation constituted a ‘window of opportunity’ that allowed for a re-interpretation of the sorts of activities the OPCW could and should engage in, for instance in procuring destruction materials. In other words, participation in the anti-chemical weapons assemblage brought about an institutional transformation as new practices were integrated into the OPCW’s portfolio. This expansion can be seen as an important way of doing ‘maintenance work’ to maintain a level of homogeneity, which necessitates an ability to deal with challenges and ‘containing critique’. Moreover, the OPCW intensified its work as witnessed by the unprecedented number of meetings in the Executive Council during this phase program (Kelle, 2019, p. 121). The success of the early efforts to govern chemical weapons use in Syria also raised the OPCW’s public profile (Jefferson, 2014, p. 660).

However, while the sense of urgency allowed for an expansion of OPCW’s portfolio, it also placed pressure on Syria to cooperate. This became obvious as the delay in moving the chemicals themselves from various facilities within Syrian territory to the port of Latakia for destruction outside Syria proved to be rather divisive. On one hand, Russia pointed to the success already achieved as well as the financial burden placed on the Syria (OPCW, 2014b), a country in the midst of a civil war. On the other hand, the US and the UN-OPCW Joint Mission urged the regime to ‘intensify its efforts’ (OPCW, 2014d). In their perspective, by not adhering to established timelines Syria failed to recognize the situation’s urgency. Deviation from the tight schedule or any actions that were seen as deliberately delaying the process led

to tension and accusations at Executive Council meetings (OPCW, 2014e). As the US representative put it: “The Syrian Arab Republic has said that its delay in transporting these chemicals has been caused by security concerns and insisted on additional equipment... These demands are without merit, and display a “bargaining mentality” rather than a security mentality” (OPCW, 2014e, p. 1).

As such, there were concerns that the Syrian government attempted to take advantage of what was to be a matter of technical implementation. Seemingly, the level of trust among stakeholders remained low, which meant that maintaining an understanding of the disarmament process as apolitical and technical also depended on continued cooperation from all participants. On the issue of chemical weapons disarmament, the Syrian authorities were expected to comply with the OPCW's demands and assist the experts in their technical work.

While things were finally moving ahead towards the end of January albeit significantly behind schedule (OPCW, 2014c), another source of tension occurred surfaced during these last stages of the disarmament process. This time it was a row over the destruction of chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs). Syria applied for a conversion of some of their CWPFs into chemical facilities, though this request had been denied. The U.S. ambassador claimed that “Syria continues to drag its feet in complying with its obligation to destroy chemical weapons production facilities” (OPCW, 2014f, p. 2). As such, friction among members became visible over Syria's unwillingness to cooperate as efficiently as expected, both in terms of transporting chemicals to the coast and the destruction of its CWPFs. This would mark the beginning of increasing tensions among Russia and the US.

In the end, the Joint Mission ended its operations on 30 September, when 98% of the declared Syrian stockpile of chemical weapons had been destroyed (Kelle, 2019, p. 129). Yet, while the declared stockpiles were destroyed within the set timeframe, allegations of new attacks continued to surface. These also pointed to possible inconsistencies and omissions in the original declaration submitted by Syria in 2013. Clearly, from the point of view of the OPCW, the overarching goal of implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention had not been achieved given the continued existence and allegations in use of chemical weapons after the declared chemicals had been destroyed or removed from Syria's territory. Additionally, there was a persisting desire among some of the actors to not only remove and destroy, but also to attribute responsibility for the attacks. This marked the start of a deterritorialization process, where cooperation soured effect thus increasing heterogeneity within the assemblage

and driving it towards erosion. The performative effects of the stabilized expertise would continue to be a core issue here.

#### **5.4 Post disarmament: The collapse of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (2014-2017)**

In this section I move into the final part of my case study: the post-disarmament phase. At this stage, two new mechanisms were established in response to the continued allegations of chemical weapons use; the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (OPCW-UN JIM).

After outlining their mandates and initial work, I zoom in on the controversy surrounding the chemical attack in Khan Shakykun in April 2017, which pitted the US and Russia against each other. In this phase, the chemical weapons assemblage underwent a process of deterritorialization, where the consensus established in 2013 started to erode and the atmosphere at the UNSC as well as at the OPCW policy-making organs went from cooperative to polarized. To understand this process, which culminated in the collapse of the Joint Investigative Mechanism in November 2017, requires an in-depth look at some key debates held at the UNSC during that fall.

##### **5.4.1 Responding to challenges: Setting up the FFM (2014)**

If the assemblage's *raison d'être* was to prevent chemical warfare in the Syrian conflict, the continued allegations of chemical warfare threatened the stability of the assemblage. In other words, these attacks had a destabilizing effect for two reasons; first, because they pointed towards the possibility that the objective had not been achieved after all. Related to this, second, it maintained the possibility that Syria had not fully complied and might have withheld chemical weapons capabilities in its declaration to the OCPW.

To this end, in April 2014 the OPCW set up a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) tasked with investigating allegations of chemical weapons use (OPCW News, 2014). As such, the FFM was a response to the allegations of continued attacks. The creation of this mechanism was indicative of activities and responsibilities gradually being shifted toward the OPCW due to Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. This meant that Syria was bounded by the chemical disarmament regime's rules and norms, which included inspections and investigations conducted by the OPCW. Importantly, the FFM's mandate did not extend

to identify perpetrators behind the alleged attacks, thus mirroring the scope of the Ghouta investigation. In this way it did not upset the agreed upon boundary between neutral expertise and political issues. As a result, the separation between technical expertise on the one hand, and political decision-making on the other, became even further entrenched.

For the first year of its existence the efforts of the FFM were anchored at the OPCW without formal ties to the UNSC. This was to change at the 48<sup>th</sup> Executive Council meeting where, in a decision adopted on February 4, 2015, it was decided that the reports of the FFM were to be included in the monthly progress reports put forward to the UNSC (OPCW, 2015b). As a result, the FFM's three previous reports were attached in a letter to the UNSC dated 25 February 2015. Of these reports, the most substantial was the third published on December 18, 2014 because the findings indicated the continued existence of chemical weapons capabilities (OPCW, 2014g). This made clear that the disarmament efforts had yet to be completed even if the Joint Mission had proclaimed the successful destruction of the declared chemical weapons a few months earlier.

In response to this, the Security Council adopted resolution 2209 a few weeks later in March 2015, which expressed support of the OPCW's decision to forward the FFM reports to the Security Council. Once again, the necessity of Syria's compliance was undergirded by threat of violent intervention. The resolution recalled that the Russian-American consensus had been reached on the underlying condition that non-compliance by Syria could result in military action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (UNSC, 2015e, p. 2). Seeing as the resolution garnered 14 votes in favor, with the last member of the Council, Venezuela, abstaining, the passing of this resolution indicates that at this stage key actors in the UNSC were cooperating on the how to approach the challenge from continued attacks.

To this end, actors in the assemblage forged institutional links to strengthen the unity between different sites in the assemblage. Setting up the FFM, followed by opening an official channel to the UNSC, displays the 'maintenance work' that actors engaged in in face of threats that undermined the assemblage's stability. Yet, the UNSC decision also underscored that that these would be investigations without attributing blame. This prevented the decision from upsetting division of labor between apolitical experts and political decisionmakers that had guided the governance process from its inception.

At the same time, different views on the implications of the FFM's findings in their third report were put forth. In the Security Council debate following the vote, both the UK

and the US argued that the FFM's conclusion that the use of chemical weapons was systematic in nature and most likely dropped from the air pointed to the Assad regime as the culprit (UNSC, 2015a). Meanwhile, Russia questioned the findings on the basis that data collection and selection of interviewees lacked transparency and thus potentially biased against the Assad regime (UNSC, 2015a). In other words, the Russian ambassador called the credibility of the OPCW experts' working methods into question.

This was harshly criticized by the U.S. ambassador to the UN at the time, Samantha Powers:

“I will be extremely brief. I would just refer Council members and anybody watching this meeting to the reports that have been prepared by the experts of the fact-finding mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. I would not myself deign to weigh in at the level of detail as somebody who is a diplomat and not a chemical weapons expert” (UNSC, 2015a, pp. 7–8).

Here, Ms. Power challenged the Russian ambassador's attempt to question the findings of the FFM by pointing to his lack of recognized expertise on the issue of chemical weapons. In her view, this should be placed squarely at the hands of the OPCW personnel. This exchange of views would foreshadow a major fault line in the Security Council, which centered on whether to recognize the knowledge claims put forward by the formally authorized knowledge producers, i.e. the experts.

So, while expertise was formally delegated to the OPCW, hereunder the FFM, their knowledge claims were met with differing degrees of recognition by the relevant audience, i.e. the UNSC. This discrepancy would become even more pronounced as the findings led to demands for a mechanism able to identify the perpetrators (UN, 2015). Indeed, these conclusions also brought the issue of accountability back to the surface, which had hitherto been excluded through selective ignorance, because it begged the question: who was behind the attacks that the FFM had confirmed.

#### **5.4.2 Identifying the perpetrator: Creating the OPCW-UN Joint-Investigative Mechanism (2015)**

Indeed, the findings of the OPCW FFM paved the way for a mechanism able to identify the perpetrators: the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). Headed by a

panel of three experts, the mechanism was established with unanimous support in August 2015 through resolution UNSC 2235 with a mandate to:

...identify to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups, or governments who were perpetrators, organisers, sponsors or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical, in the Syrian Arab Republic where the OPCW FFM determines or has determined that a specific incident in the Syrian Arab Republic involved or likely involved the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical.... (UNSC, 2015d, p. 2)

Because the chemical weapons attacks in Syria constituted the first major incidents since the Chemical Weapons Convention came into being, the JIM mission lacked precedence and constituted another instance of ‘experimental’ governance. A rather significant difference here was that the JIM would be in need of renewal. Thus, to borrow a phrase from Bueger (2015, p. 15), this ‘procedure of approval’ meant that while the JIM was formally independent, it was very much dependent on being recognized by the UNSC. In fact, over the course of its existence, the JIM was headed by two different teams owing to a delayed renewal after its first year. The second of these teams were led by the Guatemalan diplomat, Mr. Edmond Mulet (UN News, 2017), supported by a career UN diplomat, Ms. Judy Cheng-Hopkins of Malaysia and Swiss chemical weapons expert Stefan Mogl. A noteworthy difference here was that whereas the experts in the 2013 UNSGM investigation and the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission whom mostly had a background in the natural sciences, the two of the experts in the three-person JIM leadership panel hailed from political science and diplomacy.

Importantly, the JIM was to use the OPCW FFM’s findings as a starting point investigating instances that had been confirmed by the latter. Yet, while its working methods consisted of analyzing information obtained by the FFM, the JIM investigators also collected information elsewhere, for instance examining data provided by states and consulting open sources such as social media posts and online videos and images.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of its relationship to other governance efforts situated at the UN,

...the Joint Investigative Mechanism shall be separate from the operation of humanitarian work, which provides indispensable life--saving support to innocent

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<sup>10</sup> While the ‘evidentiary standard’ was featured in their first report, their methods of work were outlined in Annex 1 in the third report, see

people suffering from the conflict, and from the political process, which is seeking to bring about a diplomatic solution to the conflict. (UNSC, 2015c)

Hence, the JIM was also classified as an isolated component within a three-dimensional conflict response to the war in Syria. Thus, questions related to humanitarian and political efforts continued to be excluded from the ‘territory’ of the anti-chemical weapons assemblage. In turn, this informed the expectations of the JIM experts, as expressed by the Russian ambassador to the UNSC, Vitaly Churkin:

we believe that the Mechanism will work impartially, objectively and professionally, as guaranteed by the successful experience of the Secretary-General and the OPCW Director-General in destroying Syria’s chemical arsenal, as well as the successful cooperation of the United Nations and the OPCW in the framework of their joint mission, within which their responsibilities had been clearly delineated. (UNSC, 2015b, p. 4)

Accordingly, the JIM’s activities were to follow suit in terms of the stabilized understanding of expertise in the assemblage; that of impartial, apolitical and objective knowledge production. In other words, that of ‘technical’ expertise.

Interestingly, neither of the resolutions that mandated the FFM and the JIM respectively contained references to urgency or the extraordinary character of the issue, which could indicate that these perceptions were less pronounced at this stage. In other words, based on the lack of references to these notions, which had been central in the disarmament phase, it is possible to ascertain that these perceptions had diminished among these actors.

At any rate, the findings of the JIM were not seen by all as neither fulfilling it’s envisioned role. For instance, the conclusions of the JIM’s first couple of reports led to fierce debates in both the Security Council and the Conference of State Parties forum of the OPCW. In particular, the 4th JIM report’s conclusion that the Syrian Arab Republic was behind 3 of 4 of the incidents under investigation received a mixed response at the UNSC. Again, an important implication of this conclusion was that the Syrian regime deliberately left out stockpiles in their formal declaration upon accession to the Convention. These discussions would be a sort of prelude to the most divisive issue since the formation of the assemblage, the chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun on April 4, 2017 (see Figure 3).

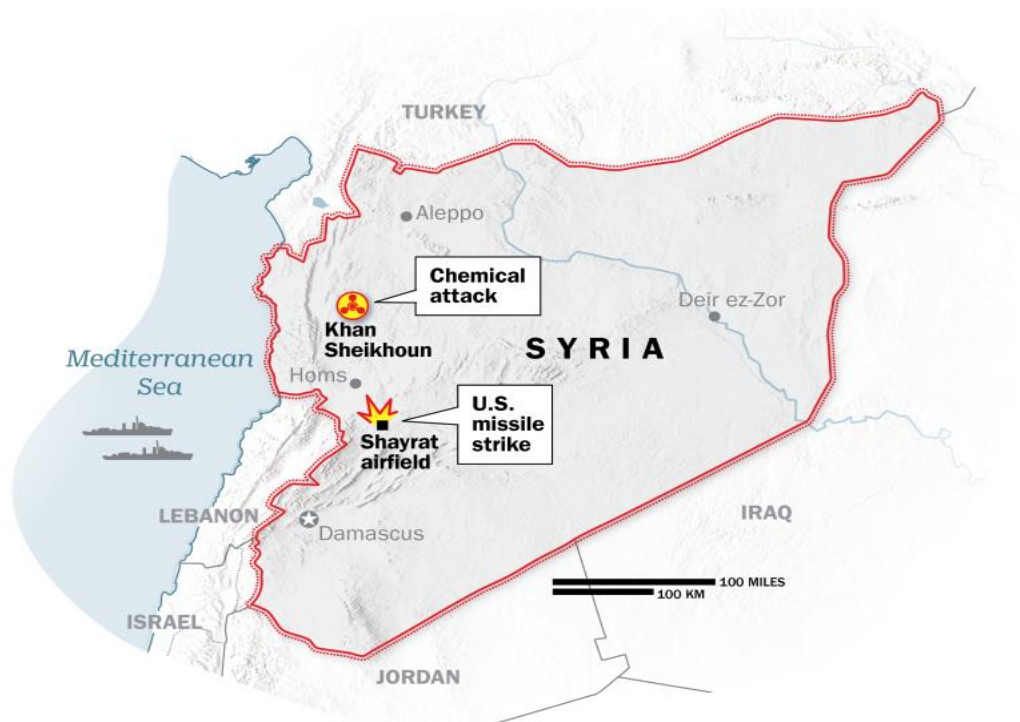


Figure 3: Locations of Khan Shaykhun attack and US retaliatory missile strike, Jenkins (2017), retrieved from <https://time.com/4730805/syria-airstrikes-map/>

The allegations that chemical weapons had been used in Khan Shaykhun on April 4<sup>th</sup> were confirmed by the Fact-Finding Mission’s investigation in June 2017 (OPCW, 2017a). The conclusion polarized the UNSC upon publication. More specifically, the Fact-Finding Mission faced severe criticism from Russia for drawing conclusions in lieu of an inspection of the actual site as it had been declared impossible due to security concerns (UN, 2017c). Instead, the report relied on interviews and open source data in order to draw its conclusions. Another contentious finding was that a chemical precursor collected during the investigation was identified by the Mission to be the same found in samples taken from of Syria’s declared stockpile in 2013. On this issue, through an exchange of letters, Russia and the OPCW Technical Secretariat engaged in a rather detailed and in-depth discussion about the methods and findings of the latter, wherein the Russia outlined a series of detailed criticisms (see UN, 2017d and UN, 2017f).

Referring to the increasingly tense and polarized atmosphere at the UNSC, the report expressed concerns that state actors were actively attempting to influence the activities of the mechanism:



“The Leadership Panel is concerned by unfortunate attempts to politicize the work of the Mechanism and is aware that various stakeholders hold views on how the investigation should be conducted in order to generate confidence in its outcomes. The Panel and the entire staff of the Mechanism remain committed to fully implementing its mandate in an independent impartial and objective manner” (UN, 2017b, p. 6).

Notwithstanding such concerns, the JIM made the confirmed attack the subject of its 7<sup>th</sup> report. Seeing as the Khan Shaykhun attack had garnered significant coverage in the press, its findings were highly anticipated.

#### **5.4.3 Re-politicization of expertise: Linking the JIM’s mandate and the report on Khan Shaykhun (2017)**

Awaiting the report, the issue of JIM’s renewal came up in the Security Council. As it happened, the mechanism’s mandate was set to expire on 17 November 2017. A discussion of a one-year extension took place on October 24, only two days before the expected publication of the JIM’s seventh report. The core of the discussion was whether JIM’s mandate should be renewed before or after its report on the Khan Shaykhun chemical attack. While 11 member states voted in favor of the draft resolution that would have renewed the JIM for another year, it failed to pass due to Russia’s veto against it.

Explaining this decision, Russia stated that the vote was rushed and that there was no need to discuss the matter of renewal until the mechanism’s expiration in mid-November and, importantly, after the publication of the report. Instead, as the Russian ambassador put it; “we all want to familiarize ourselves with it, discuss its content and conclusions calmly, and then, just as calmly, return to the issue of the extension of the JIM, whose mandate expires on 17 November” (UNSC, 2017a, p. 4).

For Russia, the report would constitute a litmus test of whether the work of the JIM adhered to the standards of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality. In other words, the content of the report would serve as the base for evaluating whether the mechanism was to be extended. Doing so placed the findings directly under state supervision, suspending the division of knowledge and politics and placed the authority of expertise *under* the authority to govern in a hierarchical manner. In short, it reduced the formal experts’ capacity to speak authoritatively and to make authoritative claims to knowledge.

In terms of ontology, the Russian position here borders on the paradoxical because to claim that the findings of the report did not adhere to ‘objectivity’ in a scientific sense takes a position that there is a diverging nature to these two spheres. At the same time, Russia reserves the right to judge itself whether the mechanism got it right, which would be a contradiction as ‘science’ is placed under state supervision, i.e. compromising its objectivity. Put in a different way, Russia’s position simultaneously emphasized a belief in a divide between knowledge production and politics, while also claiming the right to assess the truthfulness of these knowledge claims.

In any case, the Russian ambassador argued further, “let us wait for the release of the JIM’s report and then judge it on its professionalism and objectivity. Note that I do not say judge it based on whom it accuses, but on its professionalism and objectivity” (UNSC, 2017a, p. 4). This can be seen as an attempt to re-order relations within the assemblage, advancing a hierarchy wherein states are positioned as the arbiter on the question of objectivity. While evaluating and discussing the mandate is a rather unremarkable occurrence, it is the attempt to link the report and the mandate that constitutes a departure from the linear and unidirectional narrative of knowledge production informing politics.

At the same time, Russia accused the United States of using the JIM to serve its political goals:

“The United States is not interested in either the lack of evidence or the laughable techniques and methods of the investigation...Is it not the case that the American side knows the report’s conclusions and understands that the evidence for their theory will not stand up to any criticism and that in turn could call into question extending a mechanism that is not equal to its task and serves only to justify unseemly political aims?” (UNSC, 2017a, p. 4).

As such, knowledge production, which had been rendered technical during the disarmament phase, were perceived by Russia as being ‘politicized’. The use of ‘politicization’ in this debate as a slur aimed at discrediting knowledge claims can be understood linking by linking it to an underlying ontological position on the knowledge-political nexus. Seeing as the consensus established during the disarmament phase demanded that the two were to be clearly demarcated, claims to authoritative knowledge requires, in this case, an ability to emphasize a separation from ‘the political’.

Consequently, accusing the JIM as Russia did of being ‘contaminated’ by the mess of politics immediately casts a shadow of doubt over the Mechanism’s claim to authoritative knowledge. Seeing as the decision-making process was centered at the UNSC, would-be experts had to gain recognition in this forum, in particular from members with veto power. In this way, Russia’s use of the accusation becomes a rather effective way to silence expert voices.

In response to the Russian position, UK ambassador claimed that it was Russia’s attempt to link the report and the mandate that qualified as an act of ‘politicization’:

Russia’s procedural proposal is a cynical attempt to link two things that do not need to be linked and that should not be linked — the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, on the one hand, and its report, which is due imminently, on the other. Attempting to link the two, as Russia is doing, is politicization...I think that we should go to great lengths to make sure that there is no politicization in the mandate renewal of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, and the best way to avoid politicizing such an important issue is to go ahead with the vote on the mandate renewal today, as planned. (UNSC, 2017a, p. 2)

In their view, which was echoed by the US, the renewal of the mandate was to be evaluated on other terms than the findings in the report. Indeed, accusations of ‘politicization’ once again demonstrate that the assemblage had been held together on the condition that a clear line separating the apolitical practices of the UN personnel and the OPCW from that of what was seen as political matters. Thus, the US offered its support to the mechanism and stated that “the JIM has been successful in its work, and we want that vital work to continue without interruption in its operations. We want to know the truth about those attacks regardless of where it takes us” (UNSC, 2017a, p. 6).

The insistence that the two ‘should not be linked’ is also indicative of a perspective that foregrounds the ability of experts to access the ‘truth’, which then informs the political process. The truth in this instance can be located outside the council, i.e. outside the political process, and is generated through the practices of experts. This position is akin to the linear understanding of knowledge production and political affairs. According to their position, the mandated experts would supply knowledge on an issue that decisionmakers could act on without engaging in an evaluation of its findings.

On this note, the U.S. ambassador continued:

we reject the cynicism, and we reaffirm our confidence in the technical experts — men and women — who come from many regions, backgrounds and perspectives. They knew their work would be attacked by Syria’s allies, yet they have carried out their mandate effectively and responsibly. (UNSC, 2017a, p. 6)

This goes to show that the US held on its insistence that the division of labor agreed upon during the disarmament phase in the assemblage should be upheld. In a relational understanding of expertise, however, knowledge claims must be recognized by a relevant audience. In this case, this audience consisted of state actors. Thus, whenever states acknowledge a certain claim to authoritative knowledge, they are simultaneously contradicting linear and unidirectional understandings of the knowledge-politics nexus.

Thus, the position advanced by the US and the UK contains a tension as well. The procedure of approval that the JIM had to undergo goes against the ideal of a knowledge production free of political influence. By applauding the work of the JIM, the US and its allies are also taking a stance on the ontology of knowledge and politics o permitting itself to have a final say in whether the experts work adhere to standards of objectivity. As a result, there is a tension in the US position here as well, because by saying that the JIM has been successful, they reserve the right to assess claims to authoritative knowledge for themselves.

Ultimately, what this exchange illustrates is a fundamental disagreement in terms of how the knowledge-politics nexus should be arranged. For Russia, the findings of the report could not be separated from the question of whether the JIM should be renewed. This was due to their view that the JIM were driven by political motives, which went against the agreed upon conception of technical expertise as in apolitical, impartial and objective. Indeed, perceiving these boundaries to be blurred Russia used its veto power to postpone discussions of the mandate.

For the US and other states, Russia’s position implied a departure from the boundary practices that had been a core component to the consensus established during the disarmament phase. As they regarded the JIM as adhering to its technical mandate, they claimed that Russian attempts to link the forthcoming Khan Shaykhun report with question of renewal qualified as a breach of the agreement to depoliticize the chemical weapons issue.

However, by subjecting the JIM to close oversight by the UNSC seeing as it required renewals, placed it directly under state evaluation. Thus, the question was: did the JIM live up to the expectations among its relevant audience? For Russia, it did not, while for the US and

its allies it certainly did. Interestingly, both these positions formally agree that there is a clear line separating the two, the point of disagreement is whether the JIM straddles into questions of politics or not. This would indicate the practice of separating these two is widespread in global governance. At the same time, the independence of these experts were limited as they had to go through renewal processes, which meant that state actors that disagreed with their findings could shut the mechanism down. In the end, the JIM failed to be renewed at this time and proceeded to publish its report facing an uncertain future.

#### **5.4.4 Contesting expertise: Russia challenges the JIM's Khan Shaykhun report (2017)**

A few weeks later, following the publication of the JIM report on the Khan Shaykhun attack, the UNSC met again to debate its findings. During this discussion, the implications of Russia's position to not recognize neither the FFM and the JIM's as adhering to their mandates became clearer. More concretely, it meant that Russia increasingly asserted itself as an alternative provider of knowledge, which inhibited the formal experts' ability to gain recognition for their knowledge claims. To illustrate the increasingly contested nature of expertise at this point I focus in on the exchanges within the debate.

Ahead of the debate, head of the JIM leadership panel Edmondo Mulet briefed the council on the JIM's Khan Shaykhun investigation. Here, he went into detail about the mechanism's methodology, which formed the basis for drawing conclusions. The mechanism had employed the same methodology in both cases under investigation, where it relied on methods such as conducting interviews, examining footage, consultations with medical and forensic experts (UN, 2017e).<sup>11</sup>

An important finding here was that a laboratory study showed a match between a chemical precursor for sarin (DF) that had been used at Khan Shaykhun and samples from the

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<sup>11</sup> To illustrate the extent of these efforts more concretely,

“the Mechanism interviewed over 30 witnesses in addition to those interviewed by the FFM, and collected and reviewed 2,247 photographs, 1,284 files of video footage, 120 audio files and 639 documents, most of which required translation. I visited Damascus in August. Technical teams visited Damascus in September and the Al-Shayrat airbase in October. Technical teams also visited a neighbouring country on two occasions to interview witnesses and to collect materials” United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2017b).

original Syrian stockpile handed over to the OPCW (UNSC, 2017b). The report argued that the unique composition of this precursor, which is necessary in order to develop the binary sarin used in Khan Shaykhun, they argued, was very difficult to replicate and pointed towards the Syrian regime being responsible.

Regarding the decision not to conduct a site visit to Khan Shaykhun during the investigation, Mulet explained that the security risks notwithstanding, too much time had passed since the alleged attack took place (UN, 2017e, p. 5). Additionally, "...the crater from which the sarin emanated had been disturbed after the incident and subsequently filled with concrete. Accordingly, the integrity of the scene had been compromised" (UN, 2017e, p. 5).

Despite these limitations, he argued nonetheless that "... the Mechanism has taken great care to ensure that its methodology and findings are technically and scientifically sound" (UNSC, 2017b, p. 3). Indeed, Mulet referred to the methodology as a guarantee "...that the Mechanism covered all possibilities and conducted a thorough, impartial and objective investigation" (UNSC, 2017b, p. 3). In his view, the investigation was in accordance with the Mechanism's mandate. For instance, Mulet noted that "questions have been asked about the possible motives for the use of chemical weapons in each case. The Leadership Panel noted that it was not helpful for the investigation to speculate, and focused on technical issues instead" (UNSC, 2017b, p. 5).

Again, the validity of these knowledge claims is constructed by reference to the 'technical'. To bring the point home, Mulet made clear that "I understand the political issues surrounding the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. However, this is not a political issue, but an issue about the lives of innocent civilians" (UNSC, 2017b, p. 7). " This gives an indication that the experts themselves considered their work to be apolitical and separated from political issues.

In the end, even though "certain irregularities and inconsistencies emerged in the course of the investigation...they were not of the nature to change the assessment of the Leadership Panel" (UNSC, 2017b, p. 5), which concluded that the Syrian regime had dropped chemical weapons on Khan Shaykhun from the air during the early morning hours of April 4, 2017. The report refrained from pointing out individual actors and/or institutions associated with the government, citing lack of resources and information to do so.

Following the briefing, states proceeded to make comments about the findings of the report. Here, Russia criticized the work of both the Fact-Finding Mission and the JIM, seeing

as the conclusions of the former were the basis for the JIM's investigation. In short, Russia contested the knowledge claims put forward by the mandated experts in two ways. First, Russia questioned the JIM's methods. For instance, Russia criticized the decision to not collect samples of sarin during the visit to the al-Shayrat airbase:

they were prepared to do it and had the necessary technical and human resources, but did not because they had not been given the go-ahead by the leadership. And yet finding out if sarin had been stored at the airbase was crucial to establishing who was to blame and was therefore the direct responsibility of the JIM. (UNSC, 2017b, p. 15).

Then, second, Russia issued alternative explanations that sought to undermine the report's findings. For instance, regarding the chemical precursor (DF) found that had been identified as the same found in the original Syrian declaration, it maintained the possibility that "it is also possible that the DF and sarin were deliberately synthesized following the known Syrian recipe" (UNSC, 2017b, p. 16).

The effect of this two-pronged approach was to infringe upon the independence of the investigation. Indeed, by refusing to recognize the JIM and the FFM as impartial mechanisms, Russia took it upon itself to present knowledge claims in the role of an expert. It did so by providing alternative accounts and highlighting the points where the reports were less certain about the basis for their conclusions. In effect, Russia revoked recognition of the JIM as an authoritative knowledge producer and placed itself in its stead.

Paradoxically, the Russian ambassador went on to claim that

we are not undermining the authority of the JIM, simply proceeding according to facts and logic based on our thorough scientific and technical analysis of the report. We firmly believe that the Mechanism, vested with such a major responsibility, cannot continue to work in this way. If comprehensive changes are not made, it will remain a tool used solely to settle accounts with the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. (UNSC, 2017b, p. 17)

Contrary to this claim, what Russia did was to assert their own claim to knowledge as authoritative at the expense of the JIM. Indeed, pointing to its own analysis as a way to measure the credibility of the report is an assertion of its own knowledge claim as authoritative.

At this point, the core of the dispute becomes visible as it concerns the authority of states vis a vis the authority of experts to provide authoritative knowledge on an issue. Russia's view that the boundaries drawn up between the technical sphere and the political had been undone, led to it calling the report into question and, subsequently, taking on the role as an expert by directly challenging the findings of the formal experts.

The result was a process of deterritorialization. Indeed, re-politicizing expertise increased heterogeneity in the assemblage in the sense that the notion of what counted as authoritative knowledge, and what type of expertise should be stabilized, became unclear. The Russian position maintained that if the FFM and JIM did not adhere to its technical mandate, their case for being knowledge providers faltered. In that case, Russia took it upon itself to issue knowledge claims.

Taking the opposite view on the JIM's work, the US commended its work, in particular its ability to recognize and reflect on the implications of various irregularities found during the course of the investigation:

The JIM's report not only identifies those behind the chemical attacks, it also explains how it reached its conclusion. It lays out in great detail how the team carried out such a challenging investigation. And just as any independent team of experts would, it takes note of any irregularities that it found in the information obtained from the investigation. The report transparently lays out those facts, but determines that they do not call into question the findings. (UNSC, 2017b, p. 7)

Here, the uncertainties contained within the reports are identified as strengths, which attests to the scientific robustness of its methods. Again, the US position contrasts starkly with the Russian. Given this inability to agree on the report's neutrality or lack thereof, it is safe to say that the report garnered a mixed reception at the UNSC.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, at the very end of the discussion the Syrian representative spoke, where he argued that Mulet's claim that the issue be considered a technical matter was flat out wrong and ignores the political nature of any such endeavor/enterprise:

“Mr. Mulet's statement in his briefing to the effect that his mandate and that of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to investigate the incident in Khan Shaykhun is not a political matter. He said that it is not a political issue...His



Discussions of the report spilled over to the OPCW as well. At the request of Bangladesh, an OPCW Executive Council meeting convened on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November to discuss the JIM's Khan Shaykhun report. Russian criticized this decision by arguing that it politicized the OPCW:

The seventh JIM report has been submitted for consideration by the United Nations Security Council—not the OPCW. In New York, the discussion on this matter is far from over. Yet we are forced to discuss this issue since it is on the agenda for the meeting of the Executive Council. Why was this done, and why is it necessary to continue politicising the work of our essentially technical Organisation, and widen the divide? (OPCW, 2017b, p. 1).

Indeed, by allowing the issue to spill over into the OPCW, charges of politicization were once again being directed at the US and its allies:

in a word, due to efforts by the United States and those like minds, our Organisation, as the most successful disarmament and non-proliferation forum, is being further removed from its initial form and turned into an arena for political showdowns. (OPCW, 2017b, p. 4).

Taken together, these illustrate how Russia perceived 'politics' to increasingly contaminate the anti-chemical weapons assemblage. This is far removed from the praise issue by the Russian delegation to the same organization just a few years earlier. On the JIM's report, the Russian ambassador repeated the criticism against the findings and methods employed by the JIM. For instance, "as per the assessment of Russian experts, this plane—while on its designated flight path, as indicated by the Americans—could not have even theoretically dropped a bomb where the crater was found" (OPCW, 2017b, p. 2). Again, drawing on an alternative version of what had happened, the Russian delegation rejected the report's conclusions.

In sum, Russia questioned the mechanism's methodology and report's findings, arguing that their methods did not lead to credible results and were motivated by political preferences. As such, the claims to authoritative knowledge, conceptualized here as needing

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briefing was completely devoid of any understanding of the complex political scene in my country. The Mechanism's mandate cannot be strictly technical" UNSC (2017b).

to be impartial, objective and neutral, were rejected by a key stakeholder. This demonstrates that even in the chemical weapons disarmament regime, where the OPCW enjoys something close to a monopoly of specialized knowledge, even highly institutionalized expertise can be challenged and revoked based on the lack of recognition of the practices that experts engage in. In this case, once the Russians perceived the activities of the FFM and the JIM to transgress the strictly ‘technical’, it challenged the authority of these formal experts in a direct and confrontational manner.

#### **5.4.5 Erosion of consensus: Collapse of the JIM (2017)**

Shortly after the heated debates over the JIM’s Khan Shaykhun report, the issue of renewal came up once again at the UNSC as the mechanism’s expiration on November 17 came closer. To this end, two different draft texts were both discussed on 16 November 2017; one put forward by Russia and the other submitted by the UK.

Importantly, while Russia did not object to renewing the JIM, its draft text contained specific suggestions on how to improve the JIM’s methods and earlier work. In particular, paragraph 11 to 13 of the Russian draft consisted of detailed requests to the JIM to, inter alia, dispatch a team to conduct a site visit in Khan Shaykhun (UN, 2017a). Additionally, it also asked the mechanism to re-evaluate an earlier investigation into an attack in the town of Sarmin (UN, 2017a).

The suggested changes in its draft were not well received by the US. Indeed, ahead of the voting the U.S. ambassador claimed that

Russia wants a mechanism, but not an independent one. It wants reporting, but not if it blames Syria. If Council members pay attention, they will notice that the Russians think the JIM works great when it finds the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant at fault for chemical weapons, but when the perpetrator is one of its own friends, the problem is suddenly the JIM, not its friend that committed the crime. (UNSC, 2017c, p. 4)

This can be read as a rejection of Russia’s attempt to enhance the ability of UNSC members to influence the work of the Mechanism. Adopting Russia’s draft would have serious implications for chemical weapons expertise as the U.S. ambassador stated that

the draft resolution would also allow Russia or any other member to micromanage the JIM and it would put the Council in the absurd position of putting the fox in charge of the henhouse, having countries such as Russia and Syria dictate how, when and where we investigate the use of chemical weapons. (UNSC, 2017c, p. 4)

So, if adopted, the JIM would ostensibly work with more direct interference by states, who in turn could guide the investigations as they saw fit. Such a scenario was deemed unacceptable to the US, who argued for upholding the independence of the JIM. Agreeing with his American colleague, the French ambassador stated that “we created the JIM upon the joint initiative of Russia and the United States in order to transcend political disagreements and establish the truth” (UNSC, 2017c, p. 5). Truth, in this case, is thus located outside the realm of politics. In this perspective, it is the ability of experts to ‘transcend politics’ that renders them useful to decision-makers. Therefore, “the Mechanism cannot and must not be held to ransom by political squabbles, or worse, tactical games...The JIM should be able to conduct its activities without preconditions or interference” (UNSC, 2017c, p. 5).

Eroding trust in institutions such as the UN and OPCW as well as mechanisms such as JIM is a dangerous path, according to the French ambassador, because the independence of expertise is central to its ability to get at the truth.

At this point, the two blocs differed fundamentally in terms of boundary practices that arrange the relationship between knowledge and politics. The stakes were once again the independence of expertise vis a vis state interference. In many ways, these two texts encapsulated the diverging views on how the knowledge-politics nexus should be performed in the post-disarmament phase. In short, the JIM’s knowledge producing activities are either to be overseen by states or to be conducted separate from state mingling.

Not surprisingly, both drafts failed to pass. After the vote on the UK-sponsored draft, which had been prevented from passing by a Russian veto, disagreements were on full display. The Russian ambassador castigated the mechanism and argued that ‘politicization’ had corrupted the JIM from the very start:

“Against the backdrop of a pseudo-investigation that cannot tolerate any criticism, and testimony cooked up by who knows what witnesses or where that collapses like a house of cards when checked up on...However, we know that blaming the Mechanism alone for this is pointless. It has merely functioned as a means to an end by executing

the political instructions of its puppet masters. And we know who they are” (UNSC, 2017c, p. 17).

On this basis, seeing as the mechanism had worked with insufficient methods, he continued:

“We cannot consider the investigation of the sarin incident in Khan Shaykhun concluded until the JIM has visited the site and collected samples at the Shayrat air base. The draft resolution includes specific provisions for that” (UNSC, 2017c, p. 17).

This is a rather straight forward instance of state meddling in the mechanism’s working methods. From the Russian perspective, seeing the JIM as a political mechanism made it necessary to place it under the direct supervision of state power. As such, it is precisely because Russia and its allies perceive the mechanism as politically driven that it fights to reassert state dominance. This exhibits an understanding of expertise wherein its independence cannot be allowed if it is seen as encroaching on state authority, i.e. the political. As such the ambassador stressed that:

We are not about to infringe on the independence of the Mechanism’s investigators. The task consists of establishing clear, transparent parameters for its activity, which would also help to prevent any further manipulation of the investigation’s activities as supplied up until now by opponents of the Syrian Government. (UNSC, 2017c, p. 17)

This seemingly contradicts the assertion made right before that the draft includes specific provisions in relation to how the investigation should be conducted. Again, there is a contradictory tension in the ways in which Russia envisions the relationship between knowledge production and politics; it argues for a binary division, while also advocating for a hierarchy wherein ‘political’ actors are authorized to have the ultimate say in regard to the knowledge claims. In effect, this would make states final authority on the question of truth.

This was picked up by U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, who concluded that: “They want a JIM that does not have independence. They want a JIM that does not have reporting. They want a JIM that they can micromanage — or that any member can micromanage. That is the JIM they want. That is what they are looking for” (UNSC, 2017c, p. 18).

As such, the two draft texts contained different perspectives in regard to what type of expertise should be mandated in the assemblage. The differences in the two main positions can be encapsulated in the following way: the US-led bloc advocated for a sharp separation:

knowledge production and politics as two separate domains. Opposing this, the Russian position was that of a hierarchical separation: state authority over expert authority.

In turn, these two ways of performing the knowledge-politics nexus carries important implications for agency. Here, the Russian position infringes upon the expert's capacity to speak authoritatively by not recognizing his/hers independence, thus making expertise contested.

The US position, however, maintained that the experts should be able to work independently. By extension, the US rejected its own role as relevant audience with the ability to challenge knowledge claims, thus refusing to meddle in the specifics of knowledge production. This enhances the mandated experts' capacity to speak and to gain recognition.

Interestingly, in both these positions there is a point of agreement is that there exists a division between the two. Put differently, there is seemingly agreement in terms ontology: knowledge production should be separated from politics.

Where they differ, however, is their perception of the FFM and the JIM as adhering to this ideal. For Russia, a politically driven mechanism could not be tolerated. In other words, for Russia, the JIM was already politicized.

For the US and its allies, the JIM was fully within its mandate and Russian attempts to infringe upon their independence were seen as acts of politicization. In the end, this disagreement in terms of how to arrange the nexus had a deterritorializing effect that brought the collapse of the JIM closer as both drafts failed to pass.

In a last ditch hope to save the JIM, draft resolution 970 was put forward the next day by Japan. It aimed at extending the JIM for at least a few weeks to allow for more discussions on its mandate, scope and working methods. The draft text was, according to the U.S. ambassador, more or less identical to the text put forward by Russia and Bolivia the day before (UNSC, 2017d, p. 3). Nonetheless, it failed to pass due to a Russian veto.

In response to the outcome, France argued that the fallout over the JIM could erode the non-proliferation regime and that

“The goal of draft resolution S/2017/970...was a purely technical renewal of the regime for one month. It did not require a political statement of position, much less of ideology. It was a neutral, technical text that would have given us the time necessary to consider and discuss...” (UNSC, 2017d, p. 4).

For Russia the draft did not alter its position on the issue, stating that “as far as we are concerned, no extension of the JIM’s mandate is possible unless we fix the fundamental shortcomings in its work” (UNSC, 2017d, p. 7). This was an ultimatum, wherein the exclusion of the paragraphs concerning the specifics of methods and data collection in relation to the Khan Shaykhun incident prevented Russia’s from supporting draft resolution 970.

Moreover,

“We cannot consider the subject of extending the JIM in isolation from the general context. Yesterday’s Security Council meeting, which was politically loaded in ways that had very little to do with chemical weapons in Syria, left a very unpleasant aftertaste. We are even more alarmed about what is going on in the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The United States delegation introduced a draft resolution (S/2017/962) that essentially paves the way for giving Syria an ultimatum” (UNSC, 2017d, p. 7).

Thus, citing the politically loaded atmosphere, Russia refused to accept what seemed to be a draft that recognized its concerns regarding methodology, albeit without the specific provisions entailed in the Russian-Bolivian draft. This indicates that Russia simply did not accept any extensions that did not include the specific provisions regarding site visits and collection of sarin samples at the al Shayrat airbase. In any case, the main point is that Russia sought to attain a more active role in determining the work of the mechanism.

In the end, an inability to agree on whether the experts adhered to the boundary between knowledge and politics led to a deterritorialization of the assemblage as seen by the discontinuation of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. A crucial element to this deterritorialization process was a perceived re-politicization of expertise, which both sides blamed on the other part.

As a result, the shared understanding of a depoliticized and technical type of authoritative knowledge production dissolved. While a central component in the disarmament phase had been to render the chemical weapons issue technical through practices of classification and boundary work, the post-disarmament phase saw processes reversed over the Khan Shaykhun chemical attack.

In light of this, the practice of delineating the nexus through a strict separation can be questioned. Indeed, while this separation had allowed for cooperation at first, it became a

source of significant tension during the post-disarmament phase. Insisting that knowledge production should occur in an apolitical realm also makes it vulnerable to perceived politicization, which in this case prevented further cooperation the chemical weapons issue. As such, these findings could point to the necessity of new ways of thinking about how to think about the relationship between knowledge and politics in global governance, though this is for others to develop further.

## **6. Conclusion: A call for rethinking the knowledge-politics nexus**

In this thesis, I have showed that during the disarmament phase of the anti-chemical weapons assemblage in Syria, the knowledge-politics nexus was performed around a separation between technical expertise on the one hand, and political decision-making on the other.

This followed a Russian-American consensus reached after the Ghouta attack in August 2013. Here it was decided that the chemical weapons issue should be regarded as separate from other dimensions of the conflict. Indeed, classifying the issue of chemical weapons use in Syria as urgent, exceptional and a threat to international security were key during the territorialization process of the assemblage by creating a shared problem definition

Isolating the chemical weapons issue as a technical and depoliticized endeavor allowed stakeholders to ignore their differences in terms of who they supported in the war and come together on this separate issue. This effect was underscored by the consensus at the OPCW policy organs and at the UNSC, where several important resolutions were passed during this phase. Thus, cooperation over the chemical weapons issue possible because it was seen as a isolated and apolitical undertaking, separate from the political negotiations and humanitarian efforts.

In turn, this informed the ordering of roles within the assemblage, as well as how they approached by setting ambitious deadlines and expanding the OPCW's area of operations. Hence, the expert's capacity of to speak authoritatively depended on their ability to have their knowledge recognized as technical. The performative effect was that of reinforcing the narrative of a linear understanding of the relationship between knowledge production and politics in global governance.

However, as soon as the limited objective of destroying and disarming Syria's declared chemical weapons was achieved, allegations of continued attacks threatened the

established consensus. The unresolved issue of accountability also re-surfaced at this point, as seen by the establishment of the OPCW-UN JIM. Trying to address this issue while also maintaining the Russian-US consensus proved untenable.

More specifically, during the post-disarmament phase the shared linear understanding of neutral knowledge production seeking to inform political decision-making deteriorated. From Russia's perspective, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and the JIM were seen as anything but objective and technical. Thus, it accused the work of the two mechanisms of being politically motivated. Therefore, Russia refused to recognize the knowledge claims put forth by the experts during this phase. To this end, Russia's veto on the JIM was a way to silence the experts.

At the same time, Russia devoted significant attention and resources towards challenging the experts on their concrete knowledge claims, which it did by questioning their findings and methods. In other words, Russia did not simply dismiss or ignore the reports, but constructed alternative narratives. Here, knowledge claims that were seen as transgressing into the political were contested and challenged on the basis of being politicized knowledge, as in being partial and subjective. The US and its allies disagreed with Russia's perspective that the 'technical' knowledge claims were contaminated or politicized. Instead, they argued that Russia was the one who attempted to politicize the work of the JIM. As a result, members of the UNSC and the OPCW engaged in a battle over what should count as authoritative and legitimate in relation to the chemical weapons issue in Syria. These disagreements drove the assemblage towards a process of deterritorialization in the sense that it increased heterogeneity and shattered the established consensus.

Taken together, this indicated that the chemical weapons issue was no longer seen as technical, which had implications for expertise in the assemblage. Russia sought to interfere and reshape the JIM to improve its working methods and assessments. For the US, this qualified as meddling into the independent mandate of the JIM

Based on these findings it became apparent that the practice of delineating knowledge production and politics into clearly demarcated spheres of activity makes experts vulnerable to claims that their work is influenced by politics. When states interpret knowledge production to be shaped or influenced by politics, they regard it as a threat to the integrity of expertise, thus hampering its ability to get at 'the truth'. Accordingly, the narrative of unidirectional influence from neutral expertise informing politics is a potential source of



controversy whenever states interpret actions or developments as threatening this division of labor. That being the case, this further underscores the importance of theoretical work in IR that investigate and problematize the relationship between knowledge and politics in a critical way. This means a move away from the conventional perspective that these are to be understood as separate spheres.

To this end, the added value of assemblage thinking is its ability to highlight the practices upon which the process of making of expertise depends. By drawing attention to the practices of ordering roles, excluding and including elements and creating relations of authority, the assemblage perspective has allowed for a fine-grained understanding of how cooperation over the issue of chemical weapons in Syria was made possible and then how it collapsed. It did so by drawing attention to the coming-together of these actors in the first place, which highlighted the practices at work in stabilizing a certain conception of expertise.

Additionally, the processual outlook entailed in assemblage thinking also provided a conceptual frame to grasp the unmaking of expertise. Thus, assemblage thinking provide valuable analytical purchase for a hitherto overlooked aspect within the research agenda on the relationship between knowledge and politics, namely the destabilization of expertise. Indeed, using territorialization and deterritorialization to guide my thinking, I was able to identify the crucial moments in terms of how consensus was reached and, then, to link this to the object of contention, the issue of accountability in the post-disarmament phase. This is what is meant by thinking *through* assemblages.

By drawing on this perspective, this thesis has brought new light on its thematic focus: the relationship between knowledge and politics. In turn, these have some implications for IR theory. Indeed, the case study demonstrated that the idea of experts ‘speaking truth to power’ remains influential in global governance. While this belief was formally inscribed in a strict separation, actors sometimes contradicted this division in practice. For instance, putting the JIM’s mandate under close supervision and in need of constant renewal did impede on its independence vis a vis political actors. This points to an incongruence between formally stated beliefs in knowledge free from interference and how expertise is actually allowed to operate.

Grasping this incongruence required a move away in IR theory from the narrative of speaking truth to power. Indeed, if IR theory mirrors a practice in global governance, it likely escapes scholarly attention. As such, by introducing new ways of conceptualizing the

knowledge-politics nexus has allowed this thesis to critically engage with important practices of delineating this key relationship in global governance today.

Moreover, innovation in IR theory in this regard could also have bearings on the ‘real-world’ of global politics by opening up new space for thinking about expertise. For instance, perhaps a more inclusive process would be preferable, where the strict separation was dissolved in favor of a plethora of voices with capacities to speak. This could perhaps prevent the sort of turf battles between states and experts seen in this case study, where a strict divide might do more harm than good if the overarching goal is to cooperate on difficult issues. As Jasanoff (2003, p. 160) points out, issues characterized by uncertainty coupled with political salience might demand greater participation by non-experts. In fact, the contingent nature of knowledge objects does not need to be a hindrance, but should perhaps be emphasized to enhance transparency and accountability (Jasanoff, 2003). As such, this can be seen as a call for developing new ways of speaking of knowledge production in relation to sensitive issues in global governance.

These concluding reflections can be used to sketch out a few trajectories for future research. Herein, a possible direction could be to examine more cases wherein purportedly stabilized knowledge is unmade. Uncovering the dynamics and processes at work in this regard could also elucidate the ‘erosion of truth’ more generally. Indeed, the much-touted rise of fake news and a destabilization of truth is certainly an issue to be followed closely by IR scholars. As the idea of truth comes under attack, scholars of IR as well as practitioners needs to re-envision how they represent the relation between knowledge and politics. This could entail, *inter alia*, a move away from the ‘linear’ model of science or expert knowledge that informs political decisions. More specifically, seeing as the case study uncovered how state actors made use of uncertainty in order to discredit the experts, the instrumentalization and mobilization of this as a tool of governance should be further examined.

A second trajectory could be to direct attention to processes of re-politicization. For instance, the analysis demonstrated how the practice of moving issues from a political sphere to a ‘technical’ one was reversed following Khan Shaykhun chemical attack. This could serve as a point of discussion for those interested in the conditions under which an issue is ‘re-politicized’, so to speak, i.e. how and under which circumstances an issue becomes perceived as no longer fulfilling the criteria of belonging to technical procedures and rather necessitating political action.

Another possible direction could be to explore the role of time in global governance. For instance, as the notion of urgency dissipated upon, consensus among actors in the assemblage was harder to come by. This could indicate that perceived ‘urgency’ allows heterogeneous actors to come together on an issue. A potential here is to engage in a conversation with works within the field of IR that have attempted to understand the temporal dimension of world politics (see e.g. Lundborg, 2011 and Hutchings, 2008).

Researchers interested in the theoretical framework utilized for this thesis, could attempt to examine related concepts and ideas in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In their collective and separate works there is a rich flora of ideas and concepts that could be explored to broaden the possibilities of assemblage thinking for the study of international relations.

Finally, as of December 2019, efforts to govern chemical weapons in relation to Syria persist. Recently, a mechanism capable of attributing blame for chemical weapon attacks was set up at the OPCW. While work in this regard has only just gotten underway as of December 2019, more research is needed in order to account for these developments.

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