



CENTRE FOR HIGH  
DEFENCE STUDIES



MILITARY CENTRE  
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# Osservatorio Strategico Quarterly 2015

Issue 1





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# **Osservatorio Strategico 2015**

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## *South Eastern Europe and Turkey*

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*Paolo Quercia*

### **Erdogan's visit to Teheran and the complex evolution of Turkish – Iranian relation**

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid an important visit to Iran on April 7, just few weeks after an historical deal was reached between Teheran and the 5+1 group on the framework nuclear agreement that will be finalised later on this year. The full lifting of the sanctions will lead to the end of Teheran's isolation and open the way to its geopolitical rise, a medium term process that can alter substantially the balance of power in the region. The long awaited "Shia revival" became a sound possibility after the nuclear agreement was inked, and it is already producing significant political effects on Saudi Arabia and Turkey, the two regional states that fear the most a new Middle East dominated by a Shia rising power.

Surprisingly, the visit of the Turkish president was anticipated by strong controversial media remarks made by Erdogan, who accused Iran of destabilising Yemen and being behind many unstable situations in the region, including Syria and Iraq. Blaming Iran for Yemen conflict in the wake of the internationalisation of the civil war Erdogan has disregarded the complexity of the country internal situation and the fact that many of the causes of the country collapse are endogenous. Turkish statements were not received positively in Iran and, although they have been substantially overlooked, they provoked few official reactions, like the summoning of the Turkish ambassador by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to provide "explanations" about the meaning of Erdogan's words on Iran's destabilising role in the region.

#### **A difficult balance between economic opportunities and strategic consequences**

Erdogan's anti Iranian statements were part of a skilful calculation, designed to preserve a balanced approach between the Saudis and the Iranians, since the visit to Tehran occurred at the very same moment of the military involvement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in the Yemen civil war, with Riad accusing Teheran of backing Houti rebels in Yemen. More than ever, Ankara feels

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the necessity to outdistance Tehran, or to pretend doing so. The comprehensive review of Turkish foreign policy that occurred after the begin of the Arab uprising, included a significant rapprochement with Riad. The developments of the Arab uprising and the consequent growing instability of the region made necessary to avoid an exclusive approach to the regional crisis, making impossible to sever the relations with any of the relevant countries of the region, including Russia. The consequence of this scenario is that, despite the many conflicting issues between Iran and Turkey, a common interest for boosting bilateral trade between Ankara and Teheran remains a high priority for both countries. Bilateral trade was, in fact, the main objective of the State visit of president Erdogan to Iran, a mission aimed to open new commercial opportunities for Ankara and to increase the present level of the bilateral economic relationship. Erdogan believes this level to be almost half of what it could be reached once sanctions and other obstacles to economic cooperation between the two countries will be removed. Turkey is substantially preparing to capture a significant part of the expected rise in Iran GDP, estimated between 5% and 10% yearly for several years if sanctions will be removed. Ankara, of course, should be careful that the move to catch this export opportunity risks backfiring politically on the Turkish *entente* with Saudi Arabia and other regional relations. A good balance for Erdogan was, therefore, to maintain a close diplomatic contact with Riad before and after the visit to Iran, sheltering its geopolitical posture from a too close embrace with Teheran. But, maintaining a back channel with Riad was not enough for Erdogan's outreach necessities, that is not limited only to States but that includes, among its main political stakeholders, also the transnational Sunni Umma community. It was necessary for him, therefore, to reassure also the global Muslim public opinion that Turkey will remain the protector of the global Muslim community. It should, in fact be remembered that revolutionary Iran holds, since the 1979 revolution, a wide soft power and grassroots consensus not only within the Shia community, but also in the broader Muslim communities, Turkey included. This ideological competition on global Islamism couples with the traditional geopolitical concern that the rise of Iran will erode Ankara's strategic relevance and geopolitical position, increasing Turkish caution in its opening to Teheran and subordinating it to an economic advantage.

Therefore, it seems to us that the main reason for increasing the tension just

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before the State visit to Iran it was a way to remind both to its Sunni ally and to the transnational Sunni Umma community, that Ankara will remain on their side as far as the main regional security issues (Syria, Yemen) are concerned, and that improving the economic relation with Iran is a business-as-usual practice. It should also be noted that, it is easier for Ankara to maintain its broker role between Riyadh and Teheran in a scenario that doesn't include the option of a full re-admittance of Iran as a full-fledged member of the international community. If such result will be reached, it will – on the medium term, open the way for a direct bilateral settlement of the pending regional security issues.

### **Possible consequences of Iran “diplomatic return” on Turkey’s regional outreach**

The regional resurgence of Iran, a process that a full removal of the economic sanctions could make plausible, will result in a progressively direct and indirect marginalisation of Ankara’s regional outreach capacity. This would be a complete catastrophe for Erdogan’s foreign policy, that was shaped just five years ago but in a radically different geopolitical context, that was built on a strategy of abandoning the Turkish traditional pro status-quo position and gambling in favour of a Reset of the regional political order. The growth of Iran’s regional influence from a powerful but asymmetric and “underground” capacity to a full State spectrum may be the factor that will transform this risky game in a net loss for Ankara, especially in Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt. The actual problem for Ankara is that the present geostrategic environment is completely different from five years ago, when the last presidential visit to Iran took place (that time Turkish president was Abdullah Gül).

Five years ago Ankara was still able to extend the outreach of its hard power with a strong capacity of regional soft-power, effectively challenging the regional influence originating from Iran. Part of this capacity derived from being the only western-oriented country that could keep engaged the Iranian government even during the period of major tensions on the nuclear issue. Erdogan now faces a completely different and complex scenario, having lost much of its leverage with the Western block, and at the same time has severed or frozen diplomatic relations with many neighbouring countries. The main scenario became the difficult Syrian civil war, embarking in a proxy conflict that it seems

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it has little capacity to win without US help. Meanwhile Turkey went through this evolution, Iran progressed on a opposite path, moving gradually but smoothly to a new dimension of its foreign policy, upgrading its previous positions and reconfiguring them into the new regional balance of power, but without experiencing the same revolutionary reset that Turkish foreign policy went through since 2011.

### **The effects of ISIS rise on Turkish foreign policy and its transformational changes**

Undoubtedly, the de facto collapse of the Syrian - Iraqi border and the rise of ISIS as a major regional threat have been the key factors that has apparently rewarded Iranian strategy more than Turkish one. The continuous swift of the enemy/friend paradigm that occurs inside the Syrian war factory has transformed Iran from being part of the problem to being a possible chain of a future solution. The emergence of ISIS factor has spoiled Turkey strategy that, while being revolutionary at the beginning, ended up remaining inert, blocked into a sectarian civil war where the policy of “regime change at any cost” has become a difficult goal. *The paradox of Turkish foreign policy is that while few years ago it was able to make a deep internal reform, undergoing a great revolution that shook its fundamentals, today it looks to have difficulties even in adapting its posture to the progressive changes happening in the region.* Anyway, whatever were the reasons for this, a too limited ability to adapt its regional posture even in the occurrence of events of fundamental importance – for example, this was the case of the decision of UK House of Commons rejecting a military intervention to punish Assad in the summer 2013 – should be considered a structural constraint of the present Turkish foreign policy.

On a regional level, the possible strategic switch between Iran and Turkey is likely to produce major strategic consequences also in the bilateral relations, changing the way how these two countries, with a long history of conflict and cooperation, interact with each other.

Being the neighbour of a pariah and isolated Iran, with few allies in the region and in the international community, was one of the few situation-rent that remained to Turkey after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the begin of the Arab Spring. It was an advantageous situation for Turkish geopolitics, making

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it easy to play the role of a middleman between Iran and the rest of the West. For Ankara, the border with Iran was the last remaining long term geopolitical frontier, whose significance became evident in 2010, when Turkey could play its crisscrossing role by voting in the UN Security Council against a new round of sanctions, offering its territory for a nuclear fuel swap. In that way Ankara was acting not only as a pivot – or as a wedge – between Iran and the West, but also as a multilateral strategic hub, brokering across many dyads, the one with Iran, with US, with EU, with Russia etc. It was a very peculiar and beneficial role that was based on three assumptions that nowadays seem to be almost all gone: 1) An isolated nuclear Iran; 2) A non conflict Russian – West relationship; 3) A more discreet and pragmatic Turkish foreign policy.

### **Turkey and Iran. A switching-of-positions relationship?**

Today, the fact that United States talk directly with Iran and that Teheran is credibly working on removing the sanctions, has eroded Ankara's brokerage capacity and, at the same time, it risks to re-activate the centuries old Turkish – Iranian divide between the only two former Muslim-non-Arab empires. This doesn't mean that Iran and Turkey are moving toward a direct open confrontation, as it may appear. It is, of course a possible future scenario, but the history of the region has revealed that conflict is often indirect and it doesn't happen along clear cut lines but it mixes ideology, religion, economic interests, sectarianism, ethnicity and tribalism, regime perpetuation, geopolitical expansion etc. The fact that Iran and Turkey are competing against each other and are antagonizing themselves on the ground in the Syrian conflict through a variety of proxies, doesn't imply that they are moving towards a bilateral conflict, not even in the context of a growing Sunni – Shia divide. In this post-ideological, post-american very pragmatic and transformative geopolitical environment, literally everything can happen in the short term. On the long term what it may progressively occur is that Iran will slowly compete with, and may even substitute, Turkey in the position of the regional pro status-quo power, while Ankara may remain trapped in a full revisionist but inconclusive foreign policy.

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### **The difficult post-ottoman equilibrium. Balancing Teheran's rise with Riad's assertiveness?**

The new foreign policy adopted by Ankara after the start of the Arab spring has pushed the old rivals, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, toward a progressive convergence, particularly in the first phases of the Syrian conflict, when both countries entered the field of the anti-Assad militias and were cooperating to sweep away the nationalist and secular regime in Damascus planning to replace it with an Islamist regime.

The convergence between Ankara and Riad experienced a step back with the fall, in 2013, of the government of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the firm support KSA gave to General Al-Sissi a government that Ankara still does not recognize as a legitimate interlocutor. Egyptian turmoil put a wedge between the two countries, reminding the volatility of the strategic cooperation among regional powers who remain, notwithstanding the ideological proximity, always concurring contenders for influence and hegemony. An additional confirmation of this delicate balance between Riad, Teheran and Ankara was indicated by the unexpected meeting that President Erdogan had in Ankara just the day before his departure for Tehran with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, Minister of the Interior and head of KSA counter-terrorism activities. A confirmation that ISIS issue and the future of this proto-state stretching across Syria and Iraq, is an issue that can't be excluded from any functionalist approach and, for the time being, it will remain the main topic of Iranian – Turkish – Saudi trilateral balance of power.

### **The economic drivers of Iran – Turkish relation: trade liberalization abandoning the dollar and the gas price issue.**

On the other side, the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Iran will continue to be pulled by the trade driver, since the present level of commercial exchange is considered to be substantially below the potential that the two big neighboring countries could express. In view of a possible reopening of the Iranian market to international investment and its progressive reintegration into international finance and trade, there is an opportunity for Ankara to maintain its dominant trade position vis-à-vis Teheran. A position that Turkey strengthened also thanks to the sanctions regime. In 2012 the trade exchange

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between Iran and Turkey was estimated over 20 billion US dollars while, for the same year, the whole EU28 trade with Teheran was reduced by the effect of the sanctions to a minimum of just 7,5 billion US dollars. In 2014 Turkish - Iranian trade decreased to around 12 billion US dollars, and Turkey remained one of the three main economic partners of Iran, together with China and UAE. Back in 2005, before the sanction escalation, the value of EU bilateral trade with Iran was over 25 billion dollars (with Italy that alone accounted to almost 6 billion US dollars). It is clear that it is a Turkish priority in its complex and multifaceted relation with Iran to maintain the dominant trade position that it achieved also thanking to the distortive effects of EU sanctions. This was probably the main official context of Erdogan recent State mission to Iran. The institutional visit focused on the works of the Turkish High Level Economic Cooperation Council, established in 2013, and on the implementation of the trade liberalisation agreements (Preferential Trade Agreement – PTA) that entered into force in January 2015 after 8 years of intense negotiations. Turkish Iranian PTA will reduce its tariffs on almost 300 industrial and agricultural products exchanged. It is of course too difficult to assess who will benefit more by the signed agreements between Tehran or Ankara. Iran, of course would be in great need to find new markets for its exports in order to draw hard currency to boost its economy and promote the necessary investments postponed for long time due to the international sanctions.

No news about energy agreement were reported between the two countries, with the old issue of gas pricing representing the usual cahiers de doléances of every Turkish State visit in Iran, Turkey complains that even if it is Teheran's most important gas trade partner (buying 95% of Iran gas export) they pay the gas overpriced compared to other gas exporters. A final decision on gas prices and on an eventual increase in gas quantity imported may be taken in the second part of 2015, when the case for overcharging pending in front of the International Court of Arbitration will be decided.

What was important is that the two countries decided for the future to use their national currencies in their trade operations, a move that has wider political implications and is not only a trade facilitation. Abandoning US dollars in bilateral trade is usually a measure often invoked by those countries who want to erode the US dollar financial dominant position in international trade and finance, or that are looking for shelter from future US financial transactions.

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Still, the decision to regulate bilateral trade in the national currencies won't satisfy this primary need of Teheran for hard currency. Moreover, it appears that most of the Iranian products falling under the PTA are agricultural ones, while Turkey has a higher number of industrial product with reduced tariffs.

### **Analysis**

- The agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue between Tehran and the 5 + 1 is a new, albeit expected, game changer for Ankara. A new factor that adds to the complete transformation of the Middle East geopolitical system after 2011, the year on which the Turkish foreign policy has built its current posture. The resilience of Assad regime, the fall of the government of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the emergence of ISIS and the possible end of Iran's isolation should impose a complete revision of Turkish foreign policy. Unluckily, Turkish foreign policy appears increasingly hostage to the internal security policy of the country, to the political ideology of Erdogan and, probably, to the next general elections that will take place on June 7th.

- The controlled US disengagement from the region left a geopolitical vacuum that will last many years and can only be filled by a complex and asymmetric interaction between four, very different with each other, regional powers: Russia, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. None of them is able to unilaterally impose its own regional order, while competition exists on multiple dossiers, preventing the creation of a multilateral consensus between them. Turkey would have excellent potential to be the center of gravity of these quartet, but the failure in reforming its foreign policy has weakened Ankara's hard and soft power.

- The gradual return of Iran in the international scenario risks to marginalize Turkey regional posture in the coming biennium, with a possible domino effect for NATO's strategic presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. The attempt to stop or slow down this process relying on the growing strategic conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia it looks that it will not hold in the medium term. The alternative to a generalised regional sectarian conflict among Sunni and Shia will be represented by a gradual direct rapprochement between KSA and Iran. In such a context little geopolitical *espace de manoeuvre* will remain for Turkish initiative.

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*Nicola Pedde*

### **Iran and the P5+1 reached an agreement. Probably**

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On April 2<sup>nd</sup> Iran and the P5+1 countries (United States, Russia, China, Great Britain, France plus Germany) have reached a preliminary agreement on the nuclear negotiation.

It took almost 48 hours of continuous postponements to bring the teams to agree on a basic preliminary set of conditions, which are representing the basis for the final agreement that should be signed before July 1<sup>st</sup>.

The result achieved in Lausanne is not only extraordinary, but almost certainly a milestone of international relations, clearing the path for the solution of one of the more rooted and complex conundrum of the Middle East. US president Barack Obama commented the result with enthusiasm, adding that this will lead to a “safer world”, and strengthening the US position with an almost immediate release of an official document specifying the core contents of the agreement.

Having signed a preliminary document, however, doesn't mean that the agreement is done and the problems have been solved. In the coming almost three months each of the players of this complex game will be involved with the difficult drafting of the final document, challenged by the always present and even more aggressive opposition (both domestic and international), which will be desperately trying to sabotage the process and its possible positive outcome.

#### **The preliminary agreement and its contents**

The Iranian and the P5+1 teams have left Lausanne without releasing any details regarding the preliminary agreement, simply announcing the result and not commenting its core contents.

Few hours later, however, the US State Department published on its website a quite detailed document bringing the full list of the core elements of the preliminary agreement, offering to the media and the public a clear picture of its overall dimension.

It is necessary to specify that the document released by the US State Department is not officially recognised by the other parties of the negotiating team,

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but only an interpretation of what the US has understood and concluded on its own part in the last roundtable in Switzerland.

Nevertheless, despite the document released by the US has not been officially recognized by the other counterparts, it is also worth mentioning that it has not also been denied or refused, eventually being taken as the only complete and systematic element describing the results.

The publication of the US document provoked an almost immediate critique on the Iranian side, where the Minister of Foreign Affairs Zarif commented as a “big mistake” the event. According to Iranian sources, in fact, most of the teams specifically stressed the importance of a cautious release of the contents, at the end of the last meeting, in order to allow Iran and most of the others to carefully handle the results with their public opinion and more in particular with their local oppositions.

On the other side, some in the US commented that by publishing the content of the discussion Iran would have been forced to respect the final set of elements decided by the teams, without having the possibility of later changes or misinterpretations.

The most important elements of this document are divided in 7 paragraphs. With respect to the enrichment, although not expressly mentioned, the content of the agreement is clearly recognizing the Iranian right to it, bringing on the table the solution to one of the most crucial and difficult element of the entire negotiation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran will be forced to diminish by two thirds the overall number of its installed centrifuges, bringing the number to 6.104, and where only 5.060 will be effectively operational, leaving the other as spare parts and operational stock. Iran will be allowed to work only with first generation centrifuges – the IR-1 models – and the enrichment program will be granted for ten years. In addition, for a period of fifteen years, the enrichment activity will not be allowed to be over the limit of 3,67%, while the stocks of uranium will be reduced from 10 tons to 300 kilograms.

No new infrastructure could be realised by the Iranian within the same period of time, granting the overall level of the capacity to the limits agreed in the document.

The second paragraph focuses on Fordo’s infrastructure, which must be converted and not used for nuclear related activities for the next fifteen years, lim-

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iting uranium enrichment only to the plant of Natanz. There, only 5.060 first generation centrifuges will be authorized to operate, while the other almost 1000 second generation centrifuges will be dismantled and put under the IAEA's custody.

Enrichment through non-first generation centrifuges (IR-2, IR-4, IR-5, IR-6 and IR-8) will be suspended for 10 years, while a limited research activity will be granted upon condition of bringing the breakout time at a minimum of one year.

IAEA's inspections to Natanz and Fordo, with full access to the supply system, the mines and the depots, will be operated under conditions of transparency and constant full capacity of access.

Iran will be granted the possibility to rebuild an heavy water reactor in Arak, under specific rules and limited agreed with the 5+1 countries, and in any case with a technology which will be not able to produce weapon grade materials. The old reactor will be dismantled, put into an in-operational state and transferred abroad. Depleted uranium will be eventually transferred abroad and Iran will grant its commitment in not enriching additional quantities of uranium.

In accordance to the agreement, no new heavy water plants will be made for the next fifteen years, and it will be as well forbidden to stock heavy water in quantities surpassing those needed for the regular operational cycle of the new Arak plant.

With respect to the timing and the specific group of sanctions to be removed, a gradual calendar of withholding and progressive removal will be adopted parallel to the Iranian fulfilment. The US sanctions will be only suspended, although remaining valid and potentially immediately restorable in case of deliberate violations by Iran. UN sanctions will be will be revoked once Iran's first obligations will be fulfilled, ad in particular when the Fordo plant will be converted, and the new Arak plant will be under construction.

The UN National Security Council will then write a new resolution limited to the transfer of sensitive materials, weapons and weapons' components, favouring inspections and transparency. All the US terrorism related sanctions, human right violations and missile programs will remain effective and valid.

There will be also a en years moratorium on enrichment capacity, which will be followed by a long term agreement. The general plan is oriented at stopping the development of any new plant of infrastructure for the next fifteen years,

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while inspection will last for a period of 25 years.

Iran grants at the same time not to recede from the Non Proliferation Treaty, thus offering further guaranties to the international community.

### **The preliminary agreement as a political goal**

Both president Obama and president Rohani can consider the result of the last negotiation phase as a great success, either at domestic and international level. The agreement doesn't represent a step toward the *rapprochement* between the US and Iran, nor in any form an open and deliberate step ahead in the joint fight against ISIS in Iraq, but on the other side it cannot be denied that its also carries a deep and extremely important value in the bilateral dimension for the two countries.

Both the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran were clear and not ambiguous in describing the discussion for the agreement as a purely technical multilateral issue, being conscious of how difficult it could have been in their reciprocal political domestic contexts to sustain it if this would have been presented as a major step ahead between the countries.

Nevertheless, the level of confidence between the two countries, the improvements in the mutual trust and without any doubt the will to achieve a result have represented an important and fundamentally relevant element of the entire *excursus*.

It is thus clear how both the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran are willing to consider a progressive easing of their relationship, thanks also to the growing regional instability and the progressive lack of reliability of some historical allies of the US, like Saudi Arabia.

The US still represent an ideological taboo within the first generation of power in Iran, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran is not considered as a possible counterpart within most of the conservative US political groups. Nevertheless, the success of the negotiation on the nuclear file raised a new interest in both countries, freeing the potential for a future phase of confidence building.

The preliminary agreement of April 2<sup>nd</sup> thus represents a huge diplomatic success, and as well the starting point to rebuild the relationship between Iran and most of the Western countries. There are however several actors which are not satisfied at all with the result, and are still actively trying to force a sabotage or a delay.

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Among the others, Israel and Saudi Arabia are certainly those who look at the preliminary draft agreement as a potential threat to their national security systems, within the wider scenario a progressively normalized relations of the West with Iran.

Saudi Arabia, along with some few other monarchies of the Gulf, is at the same time concerned for its own political stability and for the growing hegemonic role of Iran, fearing a reverse in the equilibriums of forces that have dominated the region for the last 36 years.

Iran, along with the Muslim Brotherhood, is representing the alternate model offered by political Islam, the bottom-up systems promoting an open popular participation. The opposite of the bottom-down system which have granted the monarchies their absolute control over their countries in the last century.

Slightly different the concerns of Israel, mostly built on the islamophobic political campaign won by Benjamin Netanyahu in March, where Iran has been transformed into the new existential threat for Israel. Tel Aviv's pragmatic vision, however, is silently looking with interest to the preliminary agreement, which will grant also to Israel additional security once defined by the P5+1 and Iran. The biggest problem for Netanyahu will be now that of continuing pushing against Iran on one side, and hoping for a quick and solid conclusion of the negotiation on the other, bringing home the double result of a strong ideological tool to be used in terms of domestic politics, but as well a solid guarantee for the regional stability.

Among the others who are not satisfied with the positive evolution of the negotiation there is certainly France, an historical "cold" friend of Iran. Paris is growingly linked to Israel and Saudi Arabia, with a specific interest in the rich military contracts that Riyadh granted both in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. Nevertheless, France never denied an interest in doing business with Iran if the agreement with the P5+1 could have eventually defined, with a specific interest to the automotive and telecommunication market. A rather ambiguous position, which is mostly driven by the deep and growing economic crisis affecting France's industrial potential, desperately looking for regional (rich) counterparts.

There are however enemies also within Iran and the United States, looking with growing fear at any positive evolution of the nuclear debate.

In Iran, 36 years of embargo and sanctions have created a particular domestic

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economic environment, dominated by almost monopolistic domestic actors sharing a big and growing market. This complex and particular self referential system if looking with concern at any hypothesis of change, fearing the impact of the external competition and the global system.

Huge fortunes had been created in Iran in the last 36 years, with the development of an economic system essentially isolated by the rest of the world, dominated by few influential figures and with a solid rooting within the institutional system, which are not willing to be exposed to the risks of a rapid and uncontrolled opening to the global economic system.

Also in the United States there are however several solid and powerful opponents to the agreement. Among them there are several conservative members of the Congress – both republican and democrats – supported by influential lobbies and group of pressure, like the pro-Israelis and the human rights' activists. Other strong opponents are those supporting the relationship with Saudi Arabia, and the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an ambiguous opposition group created in the sixties as an Islamic-Marxist group, and later evolved as a sort of sect based on the cult of personality of their commanders.

### **What lies ahead**

The preliminary agreement must be transformed into a final one within the end of June, merging together each of the individual instances into a single comprehensive agreement.

This phase will be followed by the implementation, based on the fulfilment of the various goals specified in the agreement, and the contextual progressive removal of the sanctions affecting Iran's economic and industrial capacity.

This process will last for almost 18/24 months, and should be accompanied by an intense political effort to increase reciprocal confidence among the parties, and mutual trust.

The goal of both the Iranian and US administration is that to consolidate the overall elements of the agreement, in order to solidify its economic value and to make it difficult for the administrations that will follows come in the two countries to decide to stop it and come back.

It is not clear how Russia will react in the long term to the operational cycle of the agreement, being evident that a normalization of the relationship between Iran and the Western countries could be detrimental for its regional and global

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interests. Russia has actively supported the negotiation since the beginning, but the developments with the Ukrainian crisis and the deterioration of its relationships with the US and most of the EU countries, could lead Russia to adopt a more rigid, or even hostile, position within the overall structure of the P5+1 agreement.

It will be almost certainly less problematic the Chinese approach to it, although Peking's support will be only granted if its economic interests will be guaranteed and considered in term of growth's potential. China is today interested in Iran's oil, but more and more it will be attracted by the Iranian domestic market and its consumers, where Chinese goods could find a new and interesting potential expansion.

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**Sub-Saharan Africa**

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Marco Massoni

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**Boko Haram: the 'Other' Islamic State?**

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*With 180 million people and 36 federal states, Nigeria, despite being potentially the first regional and continental player in Africa, yet suffers in this historical moment the following series of structural problems: endemic corruption; high debt; inadequate governance; insufficient infrastructure; national income asymmetric redistribution. In fact, especially the north of Nigeria, where Boko Haram is raging, has always been marginalized and, as a consequence, never benefited from the wealthy dividend of the oil-rich southern States. Along with Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey, Nigeria is also one of the four MINT countries, having become three years ago the very first African economy with a GDP of over 500 billion dollars and an annual growth of 7%, thus the 28<sup>th</sup> the world economy. Although in 2016 it shall likely be surpassed by Angola, for decades it has nevertheless maintained the primacy of first oil producer in all of Africa. Likewise other exporting hydrocarbons countries, Nigeria too is paying the consequences of the crude oil lowering price, but is able to contain its effects, because over the last fifteen years it has been able to diversify the portfolio of its economy, sharing it out between agriculture and the service sector. In fact, the latter has progressed very quickly, including telecommunications, finance, insurance, banking, airlines and entertainment with the Nollywood film industry. From an anthropological point of view, the main ethnic groups in Nigeria are on the one hand the Christians Yoruba and Ibo, respectively placed the first in the Southwest and the second in the Southeast of the country, and on the other the Muslim Hausa-Fulani living across the North along the border with Niger. In 1999, twelve northern states, among them those of Borno and Yobe, introduced the Islamic law – the Sharia – within their juridical system. Abubakar Sheaku, who belongs to the ethnic group of the Kanuri, now leads Boko Haram, which has been founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Most recently, it has raised the level of confrontation, emulating style, actions, ways and purposes of the Islamic State (IS), pledging allegiance to it. The other non-state actor to be considered, although less powerful, is the Vanguard for the Help of Muslims*

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in *Black Africa (ANSARU)*, headed by *Khalid al Barnawi*. Boko Haram (in Arabic *Jamà atu ahli sunna lidda awati wal-jihad*) is commonly translated as ‘the people dedicated to the propagation of the teachings of the Prophet and the Jihad’; in the Hausa language ‘boko’ means *non-Islamic*, while in Arabic ‘haram’ means *forbidden*. Therefore, the expression Boko Haram is conventionally translated into *Western education is sin*. Tactical purpose of the sect is to banish the Western education system, to facilitate the strategic roots of Islamic fundamentalism, creating the conditions necessary at first to the purposes of the *Al Qaeda Associated Movements (AQAM)* across the Sahel, and next to those most promising of IS. Briefly, Boko Haram’s franchise shuttled from Al Qaida to that of the IS. At present, Boko Haram is transforming itself from a Nigeria’s underestimated local phenomenon to a full-fledged regional crisis, as the Islamist sect has rear and training camps outside the Nigerian border, which have allowed it to carry out attacks and kidnappings with open threats in Cameroon, Niger and Chad. In mid-January, Boko Haram had taken control of the military base of *Baga*, a strategic small town on the shore of *Lake Chad*. Consequently, at the end of January in Addis Ababa, the *Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU)* decided on deployment of an AU led military mission – the *Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)* – of 8,750 units with troops coming from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. In other words, it regards the Armed Forces of the majority of the *Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC-CBLT)* Member States except from the Central African Republic and Libya, plus Benin. Besides, both the *Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS-ECCAS)* and the *Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS-ECOWAS)* are becoming fully involved in the operations. With over thirteen thousand deaths from 2009 to today, all victims of terrorist attacks and military actions of Boko Haram’s militia, approaching the date of the national general elections, including the presidential ones, the Nigerian authorities declared to have been forced to postpone by six weeks the day of the vote, citing general security reasons. In particular, the extension to March the 28<sup>th</sup>, was based on the assumption, that it would not have been possible to guarantee the security of the voting process, for lack of staff, being the Federal Armed Forces engaged in law enforcement activities against Boko Haram in the North-eastern States. In reality, the picture was not clear. Until the very end of January, the Federal Government of the incumbent

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President *Goodluck Jonathan* had shown disinterest or inability on the question Boko Haram and the same Armed Forces had not carried out any noteworthy action of contrast, reaching up to the open confrontation with the US about it; regarding the counterinsurgency activities against Boko Haram, as a matter of fact, Washington suspended any military cooperation with Abuja, who, jealous of her sovereignty, did not seem to have worked accordingly. Even the former Nigerian President, *Olusegun Obasanjo*, in protest of the non-action of the Government against terrorism did resign from the ruling party – the *People's Democratic Party (PDP)* – throwing a heavy shadow on the possible implications of the election results and any possible PDP's mismanagement, obviously only interested in keeping the power, demonstrating lack of foresight and responsibility. Jonathan, at first convinced of an easy re-election, nearly neglected Boko Haram's issue, patently persuaded of the uselessness of the poor northern regions' votes; only after the turning point, he must have come to realize that, in order to still have any minimal chance to win the election, he should have ensured the voters and the international community to be able to defeat terrorism in less than two months thanks to an impracticable massive military operation. In doing so, however, Jonathan has de-legitimized himself and the PDP. Nigerians have understood that he was unfit to keep ruling the country, wondering how possible would be to annihilate Boko Haram in such a short time, if he had not managed to do so over the last five years. Such manipulation for electoral purposes of terrorism by the Nigerian ruling class did not consider the widening of Boko Haram conflict to neighbouring states, whose regionalization has subsequently relieve Nigeria of the exclusivity to cope with it. In fact, Yaoundé, N'Djamena and Niamey have certainly not waited for any further delays, attacking the positions of Boko Haram, also by virtue of the authorization obtained by the respective parliaments and by the African Union (AU) as well, to penetrate the Nigerian territory and fight them. From a domestic point of view, the political outlook currently sees the southern states *pro* Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP, whereas the Northern in favour of General *Muhammadu Buhari*, the candidate of the opposition coalition – the *All Progressives Congress (APC)* – who had already run the country in the mid-eighties (1983-85) after a coup. In terms of Constitutional correctness of Jonathan's nomination for this term, the computation of his mandates should not include his very first year as Head of State, having replaced *Umaru Yar'Adua* after his

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sudden death, occurred in February 2010. Yet, for the first time in recent history of Nigeria no follow up has been given to the unwritten law of the rotation of the Presidency in accordance with the *north-south alternation principle*. The last exit poll gave President Jonathan in free fall, linking it to the much-disputed postponement of elections. In fact, immediately after the announcement of the rescheduling of the vote, for the first time ever the federal security forces launched attacks against Boko Haram, suddenly demonstrating an operational capacity, before left unexpressed, causing no trouble believing that the affair is intentionally manipulated in order to achieve consensus and make up positions for the campaign.

### **Western Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.**

In *Benin*, the legislative elections will be held on April 26, while the municipal May 31. The incumbent President, *Thomas Boni Yayi*, is accused by the opposition of wanting to stay in power, risking to amend the Constitution, so as to get the go-ahead for a third term. In *Burkina Faso*, Blaise Compaoré's party – the *Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP)* – has been suspended, as not compatible with the period of transition. Actually, former President' ousting is enabling the *Colonel Isaac Zid*'s transitional government the reopening of the relevant dossier by the judiciary, more specifically the one related to the mysterious disappearance in 1998 of the journalist *Norbert Zongo* and even more important the inquiry into the assassination of former President, *Thomas Sankara*, gunned down in 1987 by the military junta coup that brought Compaoré to power until last October. The authorities in Morocco, where Compaoré fled after a short period in the Ivory Coast, have received a request for extradition, but the interim Burkina Faso's President, *Michel Kafando*, who also holds the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs, described the topic as not important at the moment. Furthermore, the transitional authorities have decreed that the presidential and legislative elections will be held on 11 October later this year. Meanwhile 26 political parties have been grouped under a single political entity, the *Negotiation Table of former Opposition Political Parties (CCPP)*, in order to above all monitor the credibility of the entire electoral process. In *Cameroon* there is an increase in terms of intensity regarding the confrontation between the armed forces and Boko Haram, which insists to score assaults and

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abductions of civilians in the northern regions of the country, where also troops of *Chad* have become started military operations against Boko Haram. The Chadian armed forces have regained control of the city of *Baga*, the stronghold that had been conquered by the Islamist sect in January with the massacre of two thousand inhabitants. *Yahya Jammeh*, the President of *Gambia*, who seized power through a coup in 1994, having deposed *Dawda Jawara*, immediately after the failed coup attempt of the night of December 30 last year, implemented a minimum of government reshuffle. Meanwhile the news that some alleged organizers of the attack by the double Gambian & American citizenships have been arrested in the US a few days after the event, made Jammeh suspicious, accusing unspecified principals international operating from *USA*, *UK* and *Germany* above the failed coup. The current leadership of the former British colony is highly at risk very likely, because of the excesses of its head of state and his party, the *Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC)*. While maintaining good diplomatic relations with the largest and surrounding neighbour, *Senegal*, *Gambia* pursues incoherent policies with the rest of the world. The Gambian President, who recently converted to Islam, in 2013 unilaterally closed its relations with the *Commonwealth* as well as with *Taiwan*; also by some years now there are more and more frictions with the European Union and with the United States, which openly accuse *Banjul* of abuses of human rights and of an intolerable restriction freedom of speech. In *Guinea*, the *World Health Organization (WHO)* has begun testing the first vaccine against Ebola, named VSV-EBOV. Besides, the presidential election will be held on October 11, at which the opposition parties will challenge the incumbent President, Alpha Condé, who has the constitutional right to run for a second term. The next presidential elections in *Ivory Coast* have been indicated for the autumn of 2015; the running of the incumbent President, *Alassane Ouattara*, is to be expected. In *Mali*, Modibo Keita is the new Prime Minister, replacing *Moussa Mara*. The President of the Republic, *Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK)*, has decided to speed up the stagnant dialogue between northerner and southerner factions and, thanks to Modibo Keita's expertise mainly gained through in his former appointment, namely that of *High Representative of the Government for Peace Talks with Rebel Groups in the North*. This is also why, March 1, in Algiers, a preliminary agreement of peace and reconciliation was reached, although signed only by a part of the irredentist groups, such as not

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including the *Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA)*, which gave supported his distance from the agreement, inasmuch no options between independence and autonomy is expected, as demanded by some relevant factions instead. Within the framework of the multinational force, Parliament of *Niger* approved sending troops against Boko Haram, which had set fire to several towns across the border. The wide spreading regionalization of the conflict caused by Boko Haram now concerns not just the three North-eastern States of *Nigeria* (i.e. Borno, Yobe and Adamawa), but also Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The general elections of February 14 have been postponed to March 28 for reasons of internal security linked to the issue of Boko Haram. While the coalition of opposition parties has judged compromising the decision of the federal authorities to postpone by six weeks the general elections, on the other hand the government has ruled out any hypothesis in regards of a possible interim government, as it would legitimize a transition led by the military. *Senegal* shall be holding a referendum in 2016, aimed at reducing by two years the so far seven-years presidential term's duration. *Samuel Sam-Sumana*, the former Vice-President of *Sierra Leone*, has appealed to the Supreme Court against his dismissal, which occurred March 17 by the Head of State, *Ernest Bai Koroma*, who is at his second and last mandate. In view of the forthcoming presidential elections will turn the political battle in *Togo*, in particular regarding the advisability of candidacy for a third term of the incumbent President, *Faure Gnassingbe*, assumptions defined illegitimate by the opposition leader, *Jean-Pierre Fabre*, of the *National Alliance for Change (ANC)*.

### **Eastern Africa: Comoros, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan**

In the *Comoros*, February 22, the second round of legislative and local elections was held. The majority has been reached by the *Union for the Development of the Comoros (UPDC)* of the Head of State, *Ikililou Dhoinine*, while second place went to the party of former President *Abdallah Sambi Juwa*. It is to be noted that in 2015 the presidential elections too are scheduled. Regarding *Kenya*, the *International Criminal Court (ICC)* has withdrawn the charges of crimes against humanity committed against the President of Kenya, *Uhuru Kenyatta*, due to lack of evidence. Nairobi has started a deal with Khartoum for joint initiatives to counter terrorism and exchange of information. Further-

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more, a wall in order to contain the flow of Somali refugees and stem the infiltration of militants of *al-Shebaab* along the border with Somalia will be built. In particular, the areas considered by the Kenyan Government's measure are *Ras Kamboni* and *Kiunga* near the *Lamu District* in the *Coast Province*. Yet, the incursions of Somali Islamists in Kenyan territory usually occur further north, predominantly in the areas between *Wajir* and *Mandera*. December 10, legislative elections, in *Mauritius*, were won by the *Lepep Alliance*, the umbrella of the three main opposition parties: the *Militant Socialist Movement (MSM)*, the *Mauritian Social Democratic Party (PMSD)* and *Muvman Libérateur (MV)*. Therefore both the *Labour Party* and the *Militant Mauritian Movement (MMM-MLP)* was defeated. In the *Seychelles*, relevant reserves of hydrocarbons offshore were confirmed. Since December the 24<sup>th</sup>, *Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke* is the new prime minister of *Somalia*, thus replacing *Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed*, as desired by the President, *Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud*. Sharmarke had previously held the same position between 2009 and 2010, as well as having held important for against the United Nations. *South Sudan* authorities have announced that general elections will be held next May, the first since independence in 2011, despite the still on-going armed conflict between the Government and the anti-government militias. The *United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)* has now also a Chinese component deployed in the capital, *Juba*, demonstrating the growing interest in Beijing to share not only the benefits but also the responsibilities arising from its role as the world's largest economy and principal investor in Africa. The legislative and presidential elections in *Sudan* are scheduled April the 13<sup>th</sup> and will be most probably won by the *National Congress Party (NCP)*, the ruling party of the incumbent President, *Omar al-Bashir*. Also, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has suspended the investigation into the crimes committed in Darfur by the Sudanese government, because of the alleged lack of support of the UN Security Council in the activities of the Attorney General.

**Central Africa: Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR) and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).**

The United Nations Office in *Burundi* (BNUB) closed after more than two decades of presence in the country, giving room to other UN agencies on sites. Actually, the BNUB was established in 2011, integrating the functions of the

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previous mission, the *UN Integrated Office in Burundi*, with a mandate to support the development of national institutions, promoting dialogue and human rights, combating impunity and mobilize the necessary resources to economic policies public. In the meantime the armed conflict continues along the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) against heterogeneous local militias. By means of the UN Security Council Resolution n°2137 dated February 13<sup>th</sup> was the official Electoral Observation Mission of the United Nations in Burundi, led by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General, *Cassam Uteem*, former President of Mauritius, has been deployed, in view of the presidential elections, whose first round will take place on June 26th. The European Union too is going to deploy its own election observation mission. It is feared that the current President, *Pierre Nkurunziza*, intends either through a different constitutional interpretation or through the amendment of the Constitution to run for a further term not in any compliance with the *2000 Arusha Peace Agreements*. The international and regional mediators indicated in August 2015, the overall period for the elections of the *Central African Republic (CAR)*. Bicameralism or semi-presidential systems are the two indicative options qualifying the constitutional reform plan being approved by the *National Transitional Council (NTC)* in Bangui. In parallel, unfortunately nothing done by the tentative agreement in Nairobi between former Presidents *Bozizé* and *Djotodia*, due to mutual disagreements about how to continue the transitional arrangements and the possibility of an amnesty or not within a wider framework of the national reconciliation. Besides, the European mission EUFOR-RCA ended, handing-over to the local UN Mission, the MINUSCA. Last, the re-known Chadian rebel leader of the *Front Populaire pour le Redressement (FPR)*, *Abdel Kader Baba Ladde*, was at last arrested. As far the *Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)* is concerned, the Secretary General of the United Nations, *Ban Ki-Moon*, explicitly requested to promptly act against the rebels of the *Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)*, in order to restore the proper balance of power in eastern DRC's regions. In addition to it, political tensions and riots were recorded several times in the capital, Kinshasa, due to the rumours according to which the incumbent President, *Joseph Kabila*, is willing to run for another term at the presidential elections, scheduled November 27 next year to be preceded by the Senate in January and the local in October of this year.

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**Southern Africa: Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.**

In *Lesotho*, March 17, *Pakalitha Mosisili*, exponent of the Democratic Congress, has become the new Premier, a position he had previously held between 1998 and 2012. To the observers of the *Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)*, currently chaired by South Africa, the elections of February 28 were conducted in a credible way. As per *Madagascar*, General *Jean Ravelonarivo* is the new Premier after the sudden resignation of Roger Kolo, accepted by the President of the Republic, Hery Rajaonarimampianina. In *Mozambique*, the new President of the Republic, *Filipe Nyusi*, appointed as Prime Minister the diplomat *Carlos Agostinho do Rosario*, whereas the former President of the Republic, *Armando Guebuza*, will continue to hold the post of President of the ruling party, FRELIMO at least for a while. After the reconfirmation of FRELIMO in power, the new government has devised measures and allocated funds, aimed at national reconciliation in favour of the major opposition party, RENAMO, in terms of subsidies destined to the ex-combatants, in particular thanks to the newly established fund for peace and reconciliation. RENAMO's leadership, dissatisfied with the outcome of last fall election's turnout, had until very recently though unsuccessfully asked for a national unity government. In *Namibia*, SWAPO's ruling party's candidate, *Hage Geingob*, was elected President of the Republic on the occasion of the general elections of 28 November. It is interesting to remark that he belongs to the ethnic group of *Damara* and not to the majority ethnicity of the *Ovambo*. The newly appointed Premier is *Saara Kuugongelwa*. As a matter of fact, Namibia stands once again as one of the African nations so far most stable and democratic. Taking the place of Bolivia, *South Africa* holds the Presidency for the current year of the *Group of 77 (G-77)* that is an intergovernmental organization of the UN, established in 1964, now counting 134 Member States, including China. It mainly consists of so-called Developing Countries, so it is principally aimed at the representativeness and the promotion of the interests of emerging economies in international forums. It is one of the elective institutions of the wider *South-South Cooperation*. January the 20<sup>th</sup>, *Edgar Lungu*, of the ruling party, the *Patriotic Front (PF)*, has won the presidential election in *Zambia*, having beaten *Hakainde Hichilema* of the *United Party for National Development (UPND)*. The new President will remain in office until next year,

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when regular elections will get back in track. The latest Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union elected the 91 years old President of *Zimbabwe*, Robert Mugabe, as new chairperson of the AU for the current year.

### ***Conclusions***

The Boko Haram's expansion strategy seems to be following in the *Sokoto Caliphate's* footsteps. The violent radicalism in northern Nigeria has grown enormously over the past decade, though without any consent of the people, whose territories are ravaged by Boko Haram. Yet, the concept of jihad throughout Nigeria has historical roots more distant in time: between 1802 and 1812 *Usman dan Fodio* had given birth to the Sokoto Caliphate, which was a true Islamic state. It stretched along the entire northern Nigeria and southern part of Niger. A closer look to the long term goals of the Islamists today coincide with the idea of establishing the first Islamic caliphate in contemporary Black Africa, precisely along the lines of that of Sokoto, the epicentre of the genesis of the radicalization of northern Nigeria and emblem of the Islamic resistance to British colonialism at that time. *Actually, the British in Nigeria had many difficulties in unifying these two still alike asymmetric realities: on the one side the Christian south, rich in natural resources and on the other a northern poor Muslim areas still in search of a lost identity reminiscent of ancient splendours and times.*

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*Lorena Di Placido*

### **The issue of foreign fighters is common to Europe, Central Asia and Russia**

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*The January 7 attack on the Paris headquarters of satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo has forcefully made the European public opinion aware of the issue of foreign fighters, namely jihadist fighters who, after undergoing deep indoctrination - often in their European countries of residence - go to Middle Eastern crisis areas to fight as volunteers. Once they are back home and by virtue of the war skills and prestige acquired from the war experience, the so-called foreign fighters may engage in radicalization for new followers or the planning of terrorist attacks.*

*The foreign fighters phenomenon appears to associate Western Europe with the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In Central Asia, which has already experienced infiltration of extremists from Afghanistan and Pakistan in recent decades, the attention of the local authorities is particularly high. Currently, several hundred Caucasian and Central Asian fighters are reported to be involved in Syrian and Iraqi war crises.*

*Here, the author presents an update of the situation in the five countries of the area and Russia.*

#### **Kazakhstan**

The Kazakh authorities' attention is focused on the use of the internet as a possible means of radicalization. On December 24, 2014, the Committee for Religious Affairs of Kazakhstan announced that experts monitored more than 8,000 suspected sites in 2014, identifying 244 radical ones. The war that Kazakhstan is now leading against extremism has its roots in an earlier phase of extremism, culminating in the 18 terrorist attacks occurred between 2011 and 2012. Currently, about 300 Kazakh fighters are reported to fight in Syria, and the authorities fear that after return to homeland, they may engage in activities disrupting the structure of the state.

The will to push forward with the recruitment of new volunteers is also explicit in several videos of Kazakh fighters, including young people, spread on the internet in the last months of 2014. Hence the need to intervene and ban the

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view of those potentially destabilizing videos. Although the situation in the country does not show the levels of violence reached in 2011-12, government authorities report an increase from 18 (2013) to 31 (2014) in the crimes that fall under the case of Article 233 of the Criminal Code of Kazakhstan, regarding "Promotion of terrorism or public call to terrorist acts".

For 2013-17, the government has implemented a plan to fight religious extremism and terrorism, which consists of:

a training program, aimed at 1.5 million people (half of them aged between 14 and 29 years), which consists of 17,000 events, 11,000 publications and a dedicated website that from February 2014 to January 2015 had more than 225 thousand visitors;

a telephone number, active 24/7, which, in the same time span, has carried out psychological or legal counseling for about 700 individuals.

Between 15 and 17 January 2015, the Kazakh armed forces carried out anti-terrorist exercises to repel a stream of refugees mixed with extremist elements. Kazakhstanis currently focusing on the contrast to extremist Islamic State preaching to young people. The issue will be discussed in depth in the next 10-11 June 5th religious forum in Astana.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

The Kyrgyz authorities strongly fear risks to state fragility resulting from the activities carried out by extremist elements, veterans or people about to go to the Middle Eastern crisis areas. In January, as reported by a news agency quoting sources of the Committee for National Security, a Kyrgyz citizen resident in Istanbul was arrested on charges of escorting more than 60 Kyrgyz citizens to Syria. In the same month, the police arrested three people in southern Kyrgyzstan on charges of carrying out recruitment activities aimed at sending volunteers to Syria, and using for this purpose social networks to call for the overthrow of the state and speak in favor of the Islamic State and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan - IMU (a terrorist group that, after a period of intense activity in the 90s, has been reduced in its offensive capacity mainly by concomitant international mission in Afghanistan). The security services estimate

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that more than 200 Kyrgyz citizens are currently fighting in Syria as volunteers.

Moreover, Kyrgyzstan is on a path of awareness and information of citizenship against the dangers of extremism disguised as religious preaching. The strengthening of the border with Tajikistan is crucial to create a southern barrier to face threats coming from Afghanistan.

**Tajikistan**

Tajikistan has been long showing a remarkable sensitivity to extremist preaching and radicalization, so much as to control the students going abroad for religious training. In 2010, the authorities forced Tajik young people abroad to return home and continue their religious studies away from extremist temptations. 2896 of the 3054 Tajik students surveyed abroad have returned home. At the beginning of 2015, the state committee for religious affairs still numbered 158 Tajiks who were abroad without special license to go to countries at risk such as, for example, Pakistan, for study purposes.

With the consolidation of the phenomenon of foreign fighters, the attention of the authorities has further increased, especially following the spread of videos of Tajik people affiliated to the Islamic State inciting to the holy war in their country (the last of which dates back to early January). Although the call was labeled as "ignorant and senseless" by the Islamic Center of Tajikistan, the risk of finding new volunteers cannot be ruled out with a 99% Muslim population. Also in early January, 50 km west of Dushanbe, the police arrested 11 suspected members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The few surviving IMU elements had taken refuge in the tribal areas on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The 11 people arrested were about to attack a police station and allegedly had the ultimate aim to establish an Islamic State in Tajikistan. The porous borders between Tajikistan and Afghanistan facilitate the passage of militants (mainly IMU affiliates), making it more urgent to strengthen cross-border cooperation. According to the January 16 statements by the Minister of the Interior, 116 including extremists and terrorists were arrested in Tajikistan in 2014.

Tajikistan is taking steps to improve the operational capacity of its security forces, still insufficient, given the need to keep a Russian motorized unit in the country. From March 10 to 14, Tajikistan carried out military exercises invol-

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ving 50,000 men along the border with Afghanistan in the simulation of a massive penetration of terrorists.

In addition to Russia, Tajikistan has also turned to Iran to intensify regional security cooperation, in the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding signed in September 2014 among the Persian speaking countries. The purpose of Tajikistan and Iran is to reduce the threats coming from Afghanistan in terms of both spread of extremism and illicit trafficking, especially drug.

### **Turkmenistan**

In 2014, Turkmenistan was affected by continuous Taliban raids from neighbouring Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has fortified the border near the Afghan province of Jawzjan, through the implementation of a six-metre deep moat and a two-metre high fence topped by barbed wire that will be installed in the middle. The state border between the two states is affected by chronically poor controls, as well as trespassing shepherds (due to a frontier alteration, following the withdrawal of the Amu Daria river waters marking the border) and militants. According to March official estimates, about 200 extremists have found refuge in southern Turkmenistan. They are reported to belong to Daesh (affiliated to the Islamic State), the Taliban and IMU. To strengthen fighting capacity, a decree was enacted on October 30, 2014 to call up reservists (the decree entered into force in January 2015), for a training session that will involve 1200 people aged between 25 and 45 years throughout the year. In addition, on January 13, President Berdymuhammedov announced before the National Security Council that defense initiatives would continue throughout the current year, in parallel with a more intense training activity of the armed forces, for an effective defense of land and sea borders.

### **Uzbekistan**

The security forces of Uzbekistan are focusing on the risks posed by the use of the internet. In particular, the authorities have investigated four men from the province of Surkhandarya, who have gone missing after migrating abroad for work reasons. The authorities suspect that they have undergone internet radical preaching and travelled to Syria as voluntary fighters between July and September 2014. Earlier in 2014, Tashkent focused on migrant workers fearing that they might be indoctrinated abroad and plan subversive activities once

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back to Uzbekistan. In this context, we point out the eight-year imprisonment sentence imposed on January 12 by a court of Urgench (province of Khoresm) on four migrant workers accused of returning to the country to carry out subversive activities.

In January, a local study centre revealed that the Islamic State allocated \$ 70 million to the planning of terrorist attacks in the Ferghana Valley, a fertile and densely populated region among Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, where the IMU settled in the 90s.

The authorities fear a growing extremist activity, aimed at the destabilization of Uzbekistan through initiatives originating from neighbouring countries, particularly Afghanistan. The common border, recently affected by numerous terrorist infiltrations, has been fortified by raising alert levels and enhancing staff resources. The government has also launched a number of initiatives to bring people closer to the armed forces, raise patriotic spirit and reduce the influence of subversive preaching.

In Uzbekistan, the fight to the Islamic State also occurs through the denial of any credible religious implications in the messages of the extremists. The vice President of the Administration of the Muslims of Uzbekistan wrote a book in Uzbek language that describes the ongoing violence in Syria and Iraq, highlighting violations of Islamic teachings, including the recruitment of young peoples.

### **Extremism in Moscow and the Caucasus**

In some respects, the foreign fighters issue is directly affecting Russia too, because, as well as the extremist outbreak in the North Caucasus, there are also signs of radical activities in Moscow. According to some estimates, about one million Muslims make up Moscow's over 12 million population. Given that the city has only six mosques and that most of those who want to observe religious practices can only use inappropriate and barely monitorable places, the security forces see unauthorized places of worship as potential breeding grounds of unofficial Islam, and even radical preaching or terrorist propaganda. In early 2015, the Moscow police arrested 14 including Chechens and Dagestanis on suspicion of terrorist activities, and considered close to the planners of the 2013 terrorist attacks in Volgograd. According to police sources, the group was preparing various kinds of explosives to apply to an explosive belt

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to be worn by a suicide bomber. All those arrested had been under police custody in November 2013, as part of a security forces preventive campaign, in view of the next February Winter Olympics in Sochi. The 14 arrested were part of the group Takfir wal-Hijra, an atypical terrorist organization, which see not only non-Muslims, but also Muslims of different religious denomination as infidels. On February 25, the police arrested a man accused of creating a website extolling the jihad on behalf of the Islamic State. The fact that he was of Tajik nationality amplified threat perception, given the generalized fear among the Russian public opinion about the potential threat posed by Central Asian migrants.

The visit of FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov to Washington (February 18) could be a sign of Moscow's desire not to be left alone with jihadism. The isolation of the Russian security services and the lack of cooperation with foreign colleagues facilitate the transit of militant returnees across the so-called Caucasus Emirate, limiting the effectiveness of the ongoing security forces anti-terrorism operations.

The new Islamic State jihadist threat has been combining with the already existing separatist threat in the North Caucasus, which has always been hostile to Moscow's control, and has been affected by two wars in the last 20 years (the second one started in the first period of Putin's rise, August 1999).

In a March 11 meeting in Pyatigorsk, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev emphasized the radical threat of fighters returning from Syria and Iraq, that, thanks to the war experience and prestige gained on the battlefield, may both plan attacks and recruit volunteers.

Patrushev sees the clan structure of local power as a source for easy spread of extremist preaching in the region: corruption in the public sector, the influence of the dominant ethnic groups and nepotism are now difficult to eradicate, and have been dealt with by Russia since the conquest of the region in the 19th century.

Another key issue is the interception of international financing channels of jihadist rebels, that combine with local funding sources, such as illicit trafficking, zakat (charity), voluntary donations of sympathizers.

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***Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia***

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**Analysis/ Assessment/Outlook**

In Central Asia, the foreign fighters issue is part of a complex security framework. Although over the last 25 years there have been few areas of the region being prone to extremist preaching (mainly the areas on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan and the Ferghana Valley), fears of local authorities appears well-founded. On the other hand, the video spread on the internet and the number of arrests made in Central Asian countries highlight a composite and noteworthy extremist world. Given the lack of regional coordination, the individual efforts of each country are, however, limited and more inclined to restrict individual freedoms rather than actually fight radicalism.

The situation is made even more complex by the unresolved issue of Afghanistan's security, which is still a source of extremism and instability for the entire region. In the short-to-medium term, it is therefore hard to forecast positive conditions for effective contrast to the extremism and foreign fighters phenomena.

The withdrawal of most of the multinational coalition from Afghanistan may further worsen the risk of regional destabilization caused by unresolved security issues in the country, which emerged prior to the fall of the Taliban. The precarious political, institutional and security framework of Afghanistan, combined with the proliferation of illegal activities and illicit trafficking in the country and the region brings international attention on the country.

A further element of concern is instability along Afghan borders with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan and the difficulty of Central Asia countries in ensuring efficient border control. Hence, the interest in intensifying positive cooperation with partners such as Iran, destined to play a niche but not secondary role within regional security, highlighting good cooperation prospects for a serious reflection on Afghanistan's regional role. Beyond the internationalization of the foreign fighters threat, the case of Russia raises further considerations. Specifically, cooperation with Russia against transnational jihadism could produce a synergistic effort, potentially more useful and effective than individual initiatives by Western countries or Moscow. Joint security policies between Russia and countries not maintaining close relations with Moscow could therefore set favourable conditions to overcome tension in West-East relations. Indeed, insofar as the crisis in Ukraine has separated Europe and Russia and frozen di-

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plomatic relations, common interests remain unchanged, both in the areas currently affected by sanctions and in new areas of cooperation resulting from common security needs. Although desirable, such cooperation does not seem feasible in the short-to-medium term. With regard to Central Asia, the common extremist threat will be in the coming months/years a key variable to the emergence of alliances and partnerships in the Eurasian space.

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*Nunziante Mastrolia*

## **Xi Jinping and Hong Kong**

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After about two and a half months, on December 15, the Hong Kong police removed the majority of protesters from the city streets, where they had been since September 28 to demand universal suffrage in multiparty elections. Without a doubt, it was the most impressive street demonstration in China since Tiananmen Square in 1989, but unlike the former, it ended without bloodshed. The streets are clear now but institutional problems persist. Electoral reform should be subject to further scrutiny, but strong opposition from the pan-democrats threatens to lock it in the Legislative Council<sup>1</sup>. Social problems continue- stark economic and social polarization, higher rents etc. - which are likely to amplify the already existing tensions<sup>2</sup>. Politically, the city remains divided in two; those participating in the demonstrations with those who line up alongside the protesters, and the others who support Beijing<sup>3</sup>. Due to a series of political, economic and social fractures, the former British colony is so experiencing one of the most difficult periods in its history.

The question of Hong Kong remains open, and its future developments therefore remain uncertain. But now that the dust has settled, it's necessary to reconstruct its origin and place what happened in Hong Kong in the broader framework of Chinese politics.

It is possible to sustain the following hypothesis: Xi Jinping initiated a political reform program essentially liberal who encountered strong opposition within the party, especially among those who are likely to fall under the ax of the massive anti-corruption campaign and in particular among those who are considered part of the former President Jiang Zemin faction.

1 Zhou Bajun, "Post-'Occupy' HK faces harsh political realities", China Daily, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014. See also "The Next Battleground in Hong Kong's Democracy Fight", Wall Street Journal, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

2 Wang Shengwei, "Hong Kong needs rule of law, not rule of violence", China Daily, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

3 "Hong Kong, the Resilient City", Foreign Policy, 11 dicembre 2014.

It stands to reason that those who oppose Xi Jinping have as their objective his political (or even physical<sup>4</sup>) elimination. Now, how to eliminate Xi Jinping politically? All things considered, the best way to eliminate Xi Jinping politically might be to accuse him of acting against national interests, of harming the honor and prestige of the country and weakening the power of the CCP. According to these concepts, in the *CeMiSS Outlook 2014* we hypothesized that internal opposition could create purpose-made regional and national tension in order to weaken the reformist leadership.

Now, let's examine the most tense moments of the year: a series of terrorist attacks relating to religion which shook the city; friction with Japan and therefore the United States following the establishment of the Identification of Airspace in the East China Sea without any preventive communication; the installation of an oil platform in the waters of the South China Sea claimed by Hanoi.

It is possible to assume that all of these events have been put in place by opponents of Xi Jinping in order to weaken him or deprive him of power. To be clear, one can assume that each event was orchestrated by the reformist leadership, but not without damaging consequences to the organization.

Let's study this example. On November 23, 2013 the People's Republic of China established an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea. The establishment of this zone provoked a strong reaction from Washington and Tokyo who blatantly defied Beijing by sending in military aircrafts that ignored identification procedures provided by the Chinese authorities.

Here we assume that the suddenly establishment of the ADIZ was a trap orchestrated by those who opposed Xi Jinping.

Now, if it was truly a trap it may have been thought out in the following way: if Xi Jinping had not reacted to the American and Japanese challenge, he could have been accused of being soft towards those great powers who in the past had - according to the rhetoric of the CCP - humiliated the country. If he had reacted badly, he could be accused of putting the country on a collision course with the United States. The same thing was done with the oil rig installation in

<sup>4</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, "Just How Secure Is Xi Jinping Really?", *The Diplomat*, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

the South China Sea whose purpose was precisely to cause a popular uprising in Vietnam against Chinese citizens in the country. At this point, if Xi Jinping hadn't reacted decisively against Vietnam, he could have been accused of being careless with national prestige. If he had instead reacted badly, he would have been accused of creating a destabilizing situation in the South China Sea. The same theory could be applied to the internal terrorist attacks.

Taking this into consideration and now looking at the question of Hong Kong, it seems legitimate to ask the following question: was Hong Kong another one of those spots where the internal opposition has fanned the flames to hinder Xi Jinping's leadership?

While the attention of the public opinion in Hong Kong was already high for months on the issue of universal suffrage, it is equally true that two specific events increased the tension and triggered the demonstrations. The first event in question was the publication of the *White Paper* regarding Hong Kong on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2014 by the State Council Information Office, with which Beijing wiped out any margin of autonomy the ex-British colony had acquired<sup>5</sup>. The White Paper says the Beijing government has "comprehensive jurisdiction" over Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). "As a unitary state, China's central government has comprehensive jurisdiction over all local administrative regions, including the HKSAR," it adds<sup>6</sup>.

The second event was the decision by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, by which the free elections, already considered in the Basic Law, were denied (universal suffrage among several candidates vying for the post of city governor), resulting in the switch from the principle "one country, two systems" (which has governed relations between Beijing and Hong Kong until now), to the principle of "one country, one system".

Larry Ong affirms that the publication of the White Book was made by Zhang Dejiang and Liu Yunshan, (the two men seem closely tied to Jiang Zemin), and that the State Council Information Office, which published it, is controlled by

5 "The Practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region", [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-06/10/c\\_133396891.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-06/10/c_133396891.htm).

6 "China media: White paper on Hong Kong", BBC, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2014. .

another man, Liu Yunshan<sup>7</sup>, who is part of the faction close to former president. In addition, Zhang Dejiang is the President (with designation for the Hong Kong and Macao's affairs) of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, which was responsible for the August 31st decision to deny free elections in Hong Kong<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, both the publication of the White Book and the decision of August 31st, which caused so much irritation in Hong Kong, are due to men belonging to the faction that opposes Xi Jinping. Consequently, it can be supposed that in both cases it is about initiatives that fall within a specific strategy, whose aim was to create "the case" in Hong Kong. That is to say, increase the tension in a part of the country, which is in direct contact with all international media. Also in order to ramp up the voltage (one can continue to speculate) the decision of Leung Chun-ying, the governor of Hong Kong, and a man close to Jiang Zemin chose to use tear gas and pepper spray against protesters on September 28th. Similarly, it is possible to assume that CY Leung had the objective to irritate the protesters, and to increase the tension in the square when he stated that universal suffrage distorted Hong Kong, given that the city government would go to the poor, namely the victims of that social question which affects the city. It seems legitimate, as well, to assume that the intervention of some provocateurs (apparently men close to the Chinese criminal organizations) in the early days of the demonstrations, clashed with protesters with the objective to exacerbate tempers<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, all of these initiatives were intentionally orchestrated to create a social explosive climate. At that point, if Xi Jinping had not intervened to restore calm, he could be accused of having allowed Hong Kong to slip into chaos.

7 Larry Ong, "What Xi Jinping Really Means by 'One Country, Two Systems'", Epoch Times, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

<http://www.2017.gov.hk/filemanager/template/en/doc/20140831b.pdf>.

8 The text of the Decision can be read here: .

9 Wang Taotong, "Beijing Struggles to Reach a Decision About Hong Kong", The Epoch Times, 3 December 2014.

On the contrary, if he intervened with an iron fist, he would be accused of having discredited the country. In other words, the goal was to create in Hong Kong, under the eyes of international public opinion, conditions to initiate a new massacre like that of Tiananmen Square<sup>10</sup>, in order to politically eliminate Xi Jinping, as it was in 1989 with Zhao Ziyang, the then General Secretary of the CPC who promoted a process of democratic and liberal reforms: the so called fifth modernization.

If all this has not happened, it is because Xi Jinping was able to deftly navigate between the Scylla of repression and the Charybdis of inaction, preventing the situation from degenerating<sup>11</sup>. In this regard, it can be interesting to quote the words of condemnation that *Epoch Times* attributed to Xi Jinping regarding the use of force by the police in Hong Kong in the early days of the demonstrations: *"It's absolutely not allowed to open fire. Was not the lesson of June 4 strong enough? Whoever permits shooting steps down! Even tear gas was not necessary. Let it be, if it was already done. If people are not scared away, just leave. The condition has deteriorated to this point, and it's your job to figure out how to solve the problem. Overall, never allow bloodshed. Try to win public support. Hong Kong affairs must be negotiated with the Hong Kong people"*

What to expect for the future? It may be instrumental that the position of the opponents of Xi Jinping (as expressed in the White Book of last July and in the decision of August 31st) is to reset any degree of autonomy for Hong Kong, replacing, as mentioned previously, the principle of "one country, two systems", with the principle of "one country, one system", which, incidentally, would have the effect of alienating public opinion in Taiwan.

In this connection it may be useful to point out, as evidenced by Lu Chen, that in recent months Xi Jinping has never referred in his public interventions to either the White Paper nor the decision of the Standing Committee of the Na-

10 Li Zhen e Karen Tsang, "Chinese Officials Seek to Discredit Xi Jinping in Hong Kong", *Epoch Times*, 21<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

11 Lu Chen, "Xi Jinping Averts Tiananmen-Style Massacre in Hong Kong", *Epoch Times*, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

tional People's Congress last August<sup>12</sup>. He indeed has repeatedly stressed the need to stick to the principle of "one country, two systems". On September 23, Xi, in fact, stated: "The basic policy that the central government takes to Hong Kong has not changed and will not change. [The central government] will firmly hold onto one country, two systems and the Basic Law, supporting Hong Kong, promoting the development of democracy and maintaining prosperity and stability. "

On the contrary, in his public statements during the demonstrations, Leung Chun-ying had declared "willing to have dialogue with anyone who is in accordance with the Provisions of the Basic Law and the resolution of the NPC", which meant eliminating any possibility of dialogue between the city government and the protesters.

There is an additional element to highlight, that is to say the speech Xi Jinping made in occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Macao's return to China, a speech that is a true celebration of the principle of "one country, two systems ". On the same occasion, Xi expressed the greatest appreciation for the work of Fernando Chui, the current Chief Executive of Macao, which has "loyally Carried Out His duties and not failed his mission."<sup>13</sup> More concise was the appreciation of Xi Jinping about the work of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, who had simply "Carried out His duties." Larry Ong points out that: "in the subtle linguistic and propaganda games of Chinese politics, the absence of the term «loyally» from the description of Leung Chun-ying would not have gone unnoticed."<sup>14</sup>

Xi Jinping, in line with the liberal view expressed at the Third Plenum of 2013 and the Fourth Plenum of 2014, might support the autonomy and self-government in Hong Kong in line with the Basic Law. If Xi Jinping is able to get the better of the internal opposition, important overtures might be made to Hong Kong. The first could be the removal of Leung Chun-ying, guilty of having

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> "Full text of remarks by President Xi Jinping at gathering for Macao SAR's 15th anniversary", 21<sup>th</sup> December 2014, <http://english.cntv.cn/2014/12/21/ARTI1419129527631875.shtml>

<sup>14</sup> Larry Ong, "What Xi Jinping Really Means by 'One Country, Two Systems'", Epoch Times, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

acted in harmony with members of the faction of Jiang Zemin, with the aim to increase tension in the city. When these overtures might occur is hard to say. The point is that Xi Jinping, while he may be well disposed towards Hong Kong, cannot recreate the situation of a chaotic square full of unrest, which manages to wrest concessions from the central political power. In Chinese policy, reforms must filter down from above.

In conclusion, everything that has happened in Hong Kong in recent months could be nothing more than a reflection of the struggle that is taking place in Beijing between men loyal to Xi Jinping and those linked to former president Jiang Zemin. This suggests that future developments of the situation in the former British colony will depend on the fate of the clash between the two factions fighting each other in Beijing. The amplitude of the anti-corruption campaign (which is also the tool that Xi Jinping is using to oust political opponents), the indictment of the powerful Zhou Yongkang<sup>15</sup>, and the fact that the situation in Hong Kong is not degenerate, all suggest that the wind is blowing in favor of the reformists of Xi Jinping.

<sup>15</sup> “China’s ex-security chief Zhou Yongkang charged with corruption, leaking secrets”, South China Morning Post, 4th April 2015; Shannon Tiezzi, “Zhou Yongkang’s Greatest Crime”, The Diplomat, 21th April 2015

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*India and the Indian Ocean*

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*Claudia Astarita***Why India is aligning to the United States.  
An early assessment of the new “natural alliance”**

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It is undoubtedly risky to make an early assessment of Modi's government, as twelve months are not enough to judge a new government with such a broad and brand new strategy. Beyond that, we should not forget that for a country like India, it is easy to miss the tree for the woods. India is a five thousand year old civilization, the country is still counting on a continuity of ideas and identities that despite their changes and adjustments are continuing shaping the inner identity of its people. Finally, the nation is also grounded on a very solid experience of independent government that it succeeded in consolidating during the last seven decades.

Making an evaluation of the potential of Modi's India would be meaningless without taking into account the history as well as the political, economic and strategic background of the country. That being said, the various complexities of this nation together with the huge internal and international expectations that accompanied Modi's rise should be carefully counterweights when trying to provide such a parlous evaluation. A brief summary of the major implications of the “Indian democracy” puzzle and debate is useful to demonstrate why the identification of a direct cause-effect connection among Modi's choices and the rise of India as a global power could be a too simplistic explanation of the current and potential future evolution of the country. Until the '80, the most reputable international scholars and politicians were convinced that democracy simply could not survive in India. Their idea was that liberal democracy could prosper only in countries with relative internal homogeneity, with basic standard on living and stable economic, social and geographical conditions. However, except for a very short 19 months period, Indian democracy has never been questioned or challenged, proving that the country not only survived as a democracy, but it actually succeeded as a democracy. Moreover, a new argument has recently been raised introducing India as the contemporary bulwark of democracy, stressing the idea that no matter what sort of alternative other emerging countries are offering to the developing world, a successful India would remain a potent reminder that democracy can still be a pathway to pros-

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perity.

The big Indian puzzle is very complex and nuanced, but it is by no means fair to claim that we can have an idea about where the country is going by looking at what happened within and beyond its borders during the last twelve months. At least two areas should be considered to make a balanced assessment of Modi's government. These are foreign policy and economics.

Foreign policy is undoubtedly the sector in which so far Narendra Modi performed beyond expectations. This positive evaluation is linked not only to the extraordinary results he achieved in this area, but also to the belief that after his election he would have assumed and maintained a strong inward-looking approach, focusing on a domestic agenda to be shaped along the same lines and policies he used to define his agenda for Gujarat when he served the state as Chief Minister from 2001 until 2014. Another reason that pushed analysts to underestimate Modi's ambitions in terms of foreign policy was certainly related to the limited emphasis he gave to foreign policy issues during the entire electoral campaign.

It is a matter of fact that no Indian leader has ever travelled as much as Narendra Modi has been doing during the last twelve months. The Indian Prime Minister has visited 16 countries in the first eleven months, a figure that, with an upcoming trip to China, South Korea and Mongolia, will rise to 19 by his first anniversary. Further, it is important to highlight that all these travels have been organized to either re-launch or promote a robust engagement with international powers in Europe, America and the Asia-Pacific as well as with Indian neighbours. Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, even Sri Lanka, where he was welcomed in March as the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the country in nearly three decades. Further, despite the continuous highs and lows, a continuous pattern of sustained engagement can be identified with Pakistan and Afghanistan as well. The creative and energetic approach Narendra Modi has impressed to Indian foreign policy had recreated some hope on the role the country may play in contributing to the stability of the Asian region. The level of decisiveness that Indian foreign policy has shown during the last twelve months can be compared to the one that marked the country in the early '70s. In 1971 India moved away from its non-alignment policy in response to the Nixon-Kissinger tilt towards Pakistan and the opening towards China, while in the last twelve months a massive opening towards the United States went

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on stage. Before his election, there was an expectation that Modi might well reflect a nationalistic, even chauvinistic approach, which might further complicate India's relations with foreign powers in general and with the United States in particular. But once in office, Modi showed his pragmatic side, prioritizing regional relations as well as the relaunch of a stronger partnership with the United States. The rapprochement between New Delhi and Washington has been well underlined by the fact that for the first time ever in the history of independent India in a period of less than ten months two summit level meetings involving President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have been organized in the two countries. During his trip to the States in September, Modi was invited to the White House and he literally sold out New York City's Madison Square Garden as no politician has even done before. In January, Modi invited Obama to join him at the annual military parade scheduled for the Republican Day. An event that no American president ever joined before. Differently from foreign policy, huge expectations about a huge set of big-bang reforms have been associated to the election of Narendra Modi since the very beginning of his electoral campaign. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate was indeed endorsed with the firm belief that he was the only person who could have radically transformed the country on an unprecedented scale and in a short period of time. Although before the elections the country was still growing at what other country would describe as a dreaming rate of 5 per cent, this rate is definitely too low for India to generate enough job for the over ten million people entering the workforce every year.

What Modi has achieved so far is the approval of a set of policies and initiatives supported by a well-structured and balanced budget whose major aim appear as being the one of addressing the fundamental weaknesses in Indian economy: infrastructures; skills; increasing bureaucracy's efficiency; key critical areas such as land reform, foreign investments and commerce. Reforms and liberalization have been re-launched, but they seem all oriented at creating the necessary structure changes that will serve the Indian economy in the long term. At the same time, the interest in stabilizing the fundamentals of national economy has also raised, with India strongly committed to reduce the fiscal burden it has inherited, contain inflation, and push the GDP growth toward a realistically achievable +7/8 per cent. Modi has been recently attacked for not completely coping with original directions, for not implementing the pace of the

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reform drive he promised, but it is impossible to deny that he is showing he has a strategy and that he is going in the right direction. Further, the change in the economic mood from the glum months leading up to last year's election should be emphasized as well. In a recent interview with *Time Magazine*, the Indian Prime Minister stressed that "You will actually see that internationally the world is, once again, excited and enthusiastic about India and the opportunities that India represents. Whether it is the IMF, the World Bank, Moody's or other credit agencies, they are all saying in one voice that India has a great economic future". Finally, going back to the idea that he is following a focused strategy aimed at implementing his vision of inclusive growth (a philosophy summarized by the political slogan "*Sabka saath, sabka vikas*" in English "Together with all, progress for all"), Modi stressed that he has been elected for a five-year term, and that he has a plan for the whole period, not just for the first year: "what we have done in the last one year is precisely as per that plan, and in the next four years, we have step-by-step measures that would unfold as we go along".

If something more is expected but this will come in due time, it is consistent to argue that the activism that is currently marking Narendra Modi's foreign policy is actually laying the foundations for the future evolutions his economic policy will inevitably follow. It is claimed that the changes India-US relationship has been going through during the last twelve months can effectively summarize the connections between politics and economy that the BJP leader is trying to both emphasize and exploit.

"As a boy, Narendra Modi helped his father sell tea to support their family. Today, he's the leader of the world's largest democracy, and his life story—from poverty to Prime Minister—reflects the dynamism and potential of India's rise. Determined to help more Indians follow in his path, he's laid out an ambitious vision to reduce extreme poverty, improve education, empower women and girls and unleash India's true economic potential while confronting climate change. Like India, he transcends the ancient and the modern—a devotee of yoga who connects with Indian citizens on Twitter and imagines a 'digital India.' When he came to Washington, Narendra and I visited the memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. We reflected on the teachings of King and Gandhi and how the diversity of backgrounds and faiths in our countries is a strength we have to protect. Prime Minister Modi recognizes that more than 1 billion

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Indians living and succeeding together can be an inspiring model for the world”.

This are the words that the United States President Barack Obama has chosen when asked by *Time Magazine* to write a short profile of the Indian leader as he had been included in the newspaper’s prestigious list of 2014 global influencers. The symbolic value of this choice is huge, and it proves that a long time has passed since when, in 2005, the US issued a visa ban for the then Gujarat leader in the wake of the 2002 controversial riots. At least several thousand of both Muslims and Hindus died during a violence escalation that started with the burning of a train in Godhra. At that time, Narendra Modi was accused of inaction and negligence, giving the impression that he deliberately refused to intervene to get the situation back under control, pushing part of the international community to identify him as a “dangerous” leader as well as a *persona non grata*. Modi’s visa problem has remained a hot issue during India 2013 electoral campaign, and it was only in early 2014 that a Congressional report announced that the nine-year US visa ban on Narendra Modi would have been automatically be lifted and the leader would have enjoyed diplomatic immunity if he had become the new prime minister of India. The seven-page report “Visa Policy: the case of Narendra Modi” was prepared by the CRS, an independent and bipartisan wing of the US Congress whose views are non-binding either on the Congress or the US Government, at the request of several lawmakers. The argument of the automatic lift of the visa ban for the leader was linked to the acknowledgment that, in December 2010, a Special Investigative Team appointed by the Supreme Court of India had found “no substantial incriminating evidence” that Chief Minister Modi had favoured the escalation of violence in Gujarat in February 2002. That being said, it remained under the authority of the US President the possibility to exercise his right to deny a visa to a person when recognizing this privilege as potentially detrimental to the American interest. Although Obama’s lack of interest in exerting this right was broadly expected, it is significant that a series of official requests with whom two groups of Indian parliamentarians tried to pressure US officials to maintain the *persona non grata* status for Modi remained unanswered. Just a few weeks later, it became clear to both bureaucrats and analysts that a new climax in India-US relationship was about to be achieved.

At the beginning of May Narendra Modi described India and the United States

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as “natural allies”, and when asked about that New Delhi and Washington could do together, he offered an evocative reply saying “what should the India-US relationship be, what India can do for the US, what the US can do for India, I think that is a rather limited point of view to take. I think the way we should look at it is what India and the US can together do for the world”.

Although Prime Minister Modi has been pretty active in re-launching Indian relations with foreign partners, he has never taken such an engaging approach with any other nation, pushing analysts to further investigate on what these two countries could do together. From an economic perspective, India and America have never been major trading partners, but it is undeniable that an economically stronger India could become a lucrative market for US companies, and provide a boost for a limping global economy the new engine it is desperately looking for. For India, instead, the US could be an important source on new investment and technology transfers, and at the same time a better relationship with Washington could help the country to raise its profile abroad. The fact that the comments of Raghuram Rajan, the head of the Reserve Bank of India, about the hypocrisy of global financial rules and the ideas that there is “no reason for emerging economies to delay demanding more say”, and that “there is a concern that the rules of the game are not clearly set in the international world” have been “noted with interest and appreciation” by international financial institutions is definitely proving that Indian international grip is changing. Nothing similar would have even happened one year ago. From a political and strategic perspective, instead, India seems particularly interested in welcoming the US in Asia, supporting their moves in Afghanistan, a country with which India has old ties, and rebalancing the Asia-Pacific in a less China-centred way.

Although this massive change in US-India relations is now clear to most of analysts, just a few have noticed that its seeds were sown in the immediate aftermath of Modi’s election. This was the time in which the two countries decided to test each other approaching issues that had been held up for a long time. Among them, resolving the WTO impasse (and indeed India decided not to oppose the Trade Facilitation Agreement in exchange of some room for agriculture subsidies); find an agreement on the nuclear liability issues that was blocking the US-India nuclear cooperation deal (and a memorandum of assurance that both parties considered as acceptable was subsequently signed); and

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resuming talks with Pakistan, another step that Modi decided to take. In many ways, these were frank discussions with both sides keen to bridge gaps and resolve differences through candid conversations, and the most recent development of US-India relationship is further strengthening the collaborative spirit by which they have been originally conceived. As Modi enters his second year in office, his American and Indian fellows are hoping he will not make any step backward

*Stefano Felician Beccari*

## **Pyongyang calls, Moscow answers: a new wave in DPRK's foreign policy?**

*9<sup>th</sup> May in Russia and in many countries traditionally remembers the end of the Second World War, also known in Russia as “Great Patriotic War”. But this year the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII will be probably attended in Moscow by a special guest: Kim Jong Un. The leader of North Korea (DPRK) has been invited, among other world leaders, to celebrate the anniversary: despite the first rumors, he agreed. Therefore, after more than three years in power and for the first time, Kim Jong Un will come out from his solitary country. It is a big move for the young leader: instead of heading to Beijing, the traditional supporter of DPRK, Kim Jong Un will travel to Moscow first. This move, that seems highly provocative knowing the background of DPRK-China relations, should be carefully analyzed to understand the reasons of this “strange” move. As usual, in North Korea “strange” does not mean “irrational”: Pyongyang wants (needs?) to reinforce its ties with Moscow, trying to find some much needed oxygen for its weak economy.*

*Is it the end of the “special relation” between China and DPRK?*

*Is Pyongyang shifting to Russia?*

When some news agencies started to spread the news about the visit of Kim Jong Un to Russia for the 9<sup>th</sup> of May celebrations, many thought it was a joke. Traditionally the leaders of DPRK have seldom travelled abroad, and until this late announcement Kim Jong Un has never publicly travelled out of the country. The formal invitation for the remembrance of WWII apparently seems to be an important occasion, even if during the war Korea did not exist *per se*, it was a Japanese colony (conquered in 1910). Korea severely suffered during the Japanese domination; Japanese control ignited a fierce anti-Japanese resistance, still celebrated in the DPRK's rhetoric as one of the cornerstones of the “socialist Korea” born after the Second World War. Despite some gross exaggerations of the propaganda, the founder of DPRK himself, Kim Il Sung, played an active role during the anti-Japanese war. Therefore, apparently, the remembrance of the end of WWII seems to be enough important to justify the

official travel of Kim Jong Un to Moscow. But the remembrance of the war is probably not the main aim of Kim Jong Un's visit.

### **DPRK-Russia: a silent relation that never dies**

DPRK and Russia share a long history of diplomatic relations; these could not be overlooked when considering the recent rapprochement between Moscow and Pyongyang. Despite just 18 kilometers of shared border, Russia-DPRK long relationship is important, but during the years it had many ups and downs. Pyongyang's geographical position is quite uncomfortable: the southern border is closed (there is only South Korea) while in the north DPRK shares its borders just with two superpowers, China and Russia. Therefore, it is very difficult for the North Korean Government to exert some leverage on its powerful neighbors. In the modern era, Soviet Union attacked the Korean peninsula in 1945, during the last days of the Second World War. At that time, Korea was a part of the Japanese Empire; due to the imminent collapse of the Japanese Army, in the beginning of August 1945 Soviet Union launched a large scale attack against the region of Manchuria, aiming to regain some position lost at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (as Shakalin island or the small Kurils). In this offensive Soviet troops were also able to secure the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, while the south was controlled by the United States troops: it was the embryo of the Korean division. In the following Korean war (1950-1953) Soviet Union played a silent but crucial role, supporting DPRK's efforts and providing military assistance in technologies and materiel.

During the Cold War era, DPRK was quite able to balance Soviet and Chinese influence. Despite its closeness with China, North Korea was able to receive enough support from the Soviet Union; this much needed aid simply disappeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the new Russian-North Korean relations became colder. The Russian political agenda of the 90s was plenty of more urgent priorities than the political or economic relations with DPRK; the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century opened a new phase for both the countries. The 9<sup>th</sup> January 2000 Moscow and Pyongyang signed a "Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighborly Relations and Cooperation" which replaced the previous bilateral treaty (1961); the following visit to Pyongyang of the newly elected Russian president, Vladimir Putin, (19-20 July 2000) confirmed the new trend in the Russian-North Korean relations. In recent years Russia has

been critical of the three nuclear experiments of DPRK in 2006, 2009 and 2013; but since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un era the relations have changed again, and now the two countries are getting closer.

Despite this new diplomatic momentum, today the area between Russia and DPRK is still scarcely populated. The two border settlements, Khasan in Russia and Tumangang in North Korea, are small towns connected by a railway bridge that crosses the Tumen river. Despite its scarce population and the absence of other relevant human settlements, the area is playing an increasing important role. After the 2000 agreement, rail connections have been renovated, and in 2009 it was re-opened the railway line Rason-Tumangang-Khasan<sup>1</sup>. The new line will be the gate to connect the ice-free port of Rason, in DPRK, to the Russian railway network. This link can be the backbone for the development of the Rason province and of its harbour, where Russia has heavily invested in renovations and transformation.

### **Moscow-Pyongyang *versus* Pyongyang-Beijing? What is at stake in North Korea**

Since the “succession” of Kim Jong Un as head of DPRK the relations between Moscow and Pyongyang gained a new momentum. There have been some visits of members of the two governments, and in 2012 the Duma voted to write off the 90% of the DPRK's debt, nearly 10 billion \$ out of a total of 11 billion<sup>2</sup>. In February 2014, a delegation of DPRK leaders, led by Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the DPRK's Supreme People's Assembly, attended the Olympic Winter Games opening ceremony in Sochi, but had also the time to discuss further economic developments in the Russia-DPRK relations<sup>3</sup>. In October 2014 North Korea's foreign minister, Ri Su-yong, met its Russian

1 <http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/infrastructure/single-view/view/north-korea-rail-link-completed.html>

2 <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/04/19/russia-northkorea-debt-idUKL6N0NB04L20140419>

3 <http://tass.ru/en/sports/718698>

counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Moscow, and spent ten days visiting the Russian far east and discussing the bilateral economic cooperation between the two countries<sup>4</sup>. In November 2014, another North Korean top-brass, Choe Ryong Hae, visited Russia; in February 2015, Moscow declared its intention to organize some joint drills with the DPRK's military in the same year. Then, at the beginning of 2015, there were many rumors about the possible visit of Kim Jong Un himself in Moscow, a buzz that has been recently confirmed.

The new wave of the Moscow-Pyongyang relation involves many levels, with a different intensity; but it also involved the relation between Pyongyang and Beijing. China is one of the main sponsors (*rectius*, “the” main sponsor) of DPRK: when we consider the relations between Moscow and Pyongyang we cannot forget to mention the role of Beijing.

### **Russia vs DPRK**

Historically, DPRK has played a marginal role in Soviet Union and then in Russia's geopolitical agenda. Even the communist ideology soon divided the countries, especially when Kim Il Sung began the “Koreanization” of DPRK's socialism. Today there are no similarities between the two political systems, therefore the ideological link is irrelevant; the two heads of state have just exchanged some official letters expressing mutual appreciation. Russia's political influence on DPRK is growing, but it cannot be compared with China's, the traditional backer of DPRK. On the security level, Russia has more concerns about the nuclear stance of DPRK: Moscow has condemned the nuclear experiments of Pyongyang and the tensions after the bombardment of the South Korean island of Yonpyeong (2011). The Kremlin wants to avoid further military escalations, provocations and nuclear tests nearby its borders, but, as for the political influence, Moscow is also aware of the limited leverage on DPRK's government. At the same level, Russia understands that a possible collapse of DPRK would be a scaring perspective, but it will mainly affect China: the survival of DPRK or its evolutions are important for Moscow but not a top

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/30/north-korean-minister-visits-russia>

***Asia - Pacific***

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priority. Today other issues on the Western side are the major concerns for the Kremlin. Russia has called for a new phase of the “Six Party Talks”<sup>5</sup> but in this framework it has never had such a critical influence. Eventually, economy is the main driver of this new “Korean connection”; as the sanctions are hitting Russian economy, Russia looks to intensify economic cooperation with Eastern partners, as China or DPRK. As Pyongyang desperately needs to diversify its complete dependence on China (78% of DPRK's import are from China, 76% of DPRK's export goes to China) Russia is looking to create a pipeline to connect South Korea and to develop some businesses in the special area of Rason and its harbor<sup>6</sup>. For DPRK the economic cooperation with Russia could be essential to counterbalance the shrinking economic relations with China, and to open a new space for trade with its huge neighbor. The visit of Kim Jong Un in Moscow will confirm this trend and will probably underline a new and more positive phase in the relations between Russia and DPRK.

**China vs DPRK**

It is no secret that China and North Korea share a long history of common traditions; Chinese influence on Korean culture has been relevant during the centuries, and it is still relevant today. It should be also important on the ideological level, but Korean and Chinese communist systems are too different today. Both the countries formally remember the comradeship and the joint efforts during the Korean War, but this “heroic” memory quickly fades away if we analyze the current state of the bilateral relations. The Council on Foreign Relations

<sup>5</sup> <<Launched in 2003, the Six Party Talks are aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear program through negotiations involving China, the United States, North and South Korea, Japan, and Russia. The disjointed process has been hindered over the years by North Korea's repeated missile tests and other provocations. Progress reached a stalemate when Pyongyang walked out of negotiations in 2009 and, a year later, revealed a vast new uranium enrichment facility to visiting U.S. scientists. In early 2012, under new leader Kim Jong-un, the isolated nation announced it would suspend nuclear tests and allow international inspectors to monitor the moratorium in exchange for food aid from the United States. But a long-range missile launch in late 2012 and another test in early 2013 that defied UN resolutions prompted Russia to prod Pyongyang back to the negotiating table>>, su <http://www.cfr.org/proliferation/six-party-talks-north-koreas-nuclear-program/p13593>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesasia/2013/11/20/things-are-brewing-in-north-koreas-rason-zone/>

correctly says that <<China is North Korea's most important ally, biggest trading partner, and main source of food, arms, and energy>>, but today the relations between the two countries are under stress. Beijing's political influence on DPRK is at the lowest level: China has criticized DPRK for its nuclear experiments, and it is particularly worried by any possible military escalation in the peninsula. But the protests of China did not stop DPRK from testing three atomic bombs or from increasing tensions with the South. Therefore, as retaliation, China's president Xi Jinping in 2014 decided to visit directly South Korea avoiding a stop in the North. This behavior clearly explains the (poor) level of the bilateral relations. Security and defence are not a priority for Russia but are a priority for China; moreover, DPRK's bizarre behavior is a perfect justification to boost Japan's rearmament, a serious concern for China. The survival of Pyongyang's regime is another top priority for Beijing. The collapse of DPRK would create a huge pressure on China's borders, (China and DPRK shares 1.352 km of borders), and therefore China must be prepared for such a scenario. Stability in the Korean Peninsula is therefore a crucial issue for China's national security: the perspective of sharing the border with a unified (and pro-US) Korea is a worst-case scenario that China should postpone in time as much as possible. Given these circumstances, China has no other option than backing North Korea, at least economically and with some humanitarian aid. While for Russia DPRK could be more interesting on the economic level, DPRK is crucial for China's geopolitics. For China it is deeply unpleasant that Kim Jong Un decided to visit Moscow before Beijing; but today China has no other options than backing North Korea in order to avoid a possible collapse of its small neighbor. It means that China will remain the most important external player in the Korean peninsula, and that Russia will be a second option for Pyongyang. Russia-DPRK relations can be flexible, but China -DPRK relations simply cannot stop or disappear completely. As the famous scholar Victor Cha summarized on the Huffington Post some years ago (2012), <<China has worked itself into an uncomfortable corner when it comes to North Korea. It cannot stand the way Pyongyang drags China's name through the mud with every provocation. At the same time, it cannot turn the screws for fear of causing the regime to unravel. For North Korea's part, it does not like the way China mistreats it like a poor province, and sucks it dry of resources, but has little choice in the matter if it wants to survive. Does the Chinese leadership like

this mutual-hostage situation? Absolutely not. Is Beijing more comfortable with a friendly yet weak and sometimes embarrassing North Korea on its southern flank than they would be with a rich, powerful, democratic, US-aligned, unified Korea? You bet<sup>7</sup>>>.

### **Analysis/evaluation**

*The world is waiting to see Kim Jong Un travelling out of his country: this will be an historical event for the young leader and the North Korean history. Many are waiting to see how the leader will behave far from his “Hermit kingdom”. But, on the other side, the visit to Russia has another value for DPRK: it will send a clear message to Beijing, underlining the political difficulties between the countries and replying to the “insulting” visit of Xi Jinping to Seoul. Beside this episode, it is clear that in the short and medium term Russia cannot assume the same role that China has for North Korea. China will be (or, maybe, must be) the main backer of DPRK despite any flamboyant or bizarre action of Pyongyang: there are too many (Chinese) interests at stake in the Korean peninsula, including the security of the Chinese north flank.*

*Eventually it is clear that the approaches of Russia and China towards DPRK are different: for Russia, North Korea could be an interesting partner for some economic business; for China North Korea is still a dependent but problematic partner.*

*Kim Jong Un can celebrate this “new friendship” with Moscow, but it is clear that his survival is still passing through Beijing. The geopolitical balance in the Korean peninsula is shaken, but not broken yet.*

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/victor-cha/china-north-korea-relations\\_b\\_1404178.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/victor-cha/china-north-korea-relations_b_1404178.html)

The level of Russian and Chinese interests concerning DPRK

	Russia	China
<b>DPRK's ideology</b>	<b>None</b> (the two systems are politically too far)	<b>Medium/Low</b> (formally both countries are communist, but their systems are radically different)
<b>Political influence on DPRK</b>	<b>Low/Medium</b> (There is a momentum in Russia-DPRK political relations, but traditionally DPRK has been controlled by China)	<b>Low</b> (China is very disappointed by DPRK's behavior; in 2014 President Xi Jinping preferred to first visit South Korea than the North)
<b>DPRK's Security/Defence</b>	<b>Medium</b> (avoid further nuclear experiments)	<b>High</b> (avoid nuclear experiments; avoid military provocations)
<b>DPRK survival</b>	<b>Medium/Low</b> (the bigger impact of a possible North Korean collapse will affect China)	<b>High</b> (collapse of DPRK is a nightmare scenario for China)
<b>DPRK's economy</b>	<b>High</b> (Economy is the main driver of Russia's new relation with DPRK)	<b>Medium</b> (China is an essential partner for DPRK; 78% of its import comes from China)
<b>Humanitarian aid</b>	<b>Medium</b> (Russia has canceled DPRK's debt as a <i>beau geste</i> , looking to foster some economic relations)	<b>High</b> (without Chinese aid DPRK will collapse)
<b>Balance of Power in the Korean Peninsula</b>	<b>Medium</b> (Russia is one of the less important actors in the "Six Party talks". Traditionally has never had a strong influence on the Korean Peninsula. Moscow can "play" with DPRK against the USA)	<b>High</b> (Traditionally China had a strong influence on the Korean Peninsula. A united and pro-US Korea could be very bad for China's ambitions)

Alessandro Politi

### Cuba: a multilevel peace

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The history of relations between Cuba and the United States is an old love affair that began in 1805 when President Thomas Jefferson, envisioning the conquest of the island for strategic reasons, began secret negotiations with the then Spanish governor. Part of the Spanish colonial elite was interested in annexation to the US because there slavery was still considered legal, while Britain, then the globalizing and maritime power, wanted to extend the abolition of this practice, deemed unworthy and unprofitable for the emerging global economy.

Cuba begins to enter more and more in the North American conceptual orbit first with the ripe fruit theory, formulated by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, and then with the Monroe Doctrine (December 1823), which explicitly mentioned Cuba as a national security interest.<sup>1</sup> That said, the USA still were not ready to carry out their policy statements because, until the Spanish-American War, they let pass several occasions to intervene, like the four insurrection attempts of general Narciso López, the Ten Years' War or the Smallest War (all episodes of more or less successful rebellions against Spanish authorities). Only after three years of the War of Independence (1895-1898) and helped by the explosion of the US cruiser Maine in the harbour of Santiago de Cuba, president McKinley decided to declare war to Spain, conquering the Philippines and liberating Cuba in 1898. After one year Cuba was made independent, but the USA continued controlling its foreign and strategic policies since 1902

<sup>1</sup> Adams' quote is "*There are laws of political as well as physical gravitation; and if an apple severed by its native tree cannot choose but fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union which by the same law of nature, cannot cast her off its bosom*". The application of the ripe fruit theory can present the political discourse with interesting paradoxes regarding contested territories, like Crimea, the Donbass area or Kaliningrad.

(Teller and Platt amendments).<sup>2</sup>

With the Cuban Revolution (1959), China quickly entered the Caribbean political stage, becoming in the course of time the second most important current geopolitical actor. In fact the new government, headed by Fidel Castro, was among the first in 1960 to recognize the Popular Republic of China, ending the bonds that since 1929 the dictatorial government of Fulgencio Batista had with the Republic of China (Taiwan) and trying to keep up good relations with the two great Communist powers of the time (PRC and USSR).

This effort failed because precisely during that same year because of the split between the two Communist parties in Moscow and Beijing, while relations with Washington quickly worsened to the point that the Administration was plotting to topple the new government.

1962 was another crucial year because in swift succession: the Kennedy administration imposed a trade embargo (February 1962), after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion by Cuban émigrés (April 1961) and in October the Cuban missile crisis reached its peak. Sanctions were gradually tightened and actually became harsher after the fall of the Soviet Union (1991) with the Torricelli act (1992) and the Helms-Burton act (1996). The sanction machinery lasted until 2014, but the worst economic effects were felt by the Cuban population in the 'Nineties because the Soviet economic support to the island dried up. In the meantime support for the embargo in the UN General Assembly was minimal already since 1996 with just two countries supporting the US vote against the end of sanctions (Israel and the Marshall Islands), reduced to one in 2013.

Relations with Beijing were effectively restored in 1999 and experienced a constant growth until last year.

Born under the sign of ideological affinity, the relationship grew particularly through common economic interests (in 2014, China was the leading exporter with 30,30% of the market and the first importer absorbing 18,44% of Cuban exports) regarding in order of importance: sugar cane, refined oil, nickel, tobacco. The main obstacle has been an insufficient economic and bureaucratic

<sup>2</sup> The so called "Maine incident" was attributed by the yellow press (led by Mr Pulitzer and Mr Hearst) to a Spanish mine, but successive enquiries tended to corroborate the thesis of coal self-combustion in a ship's bunker.

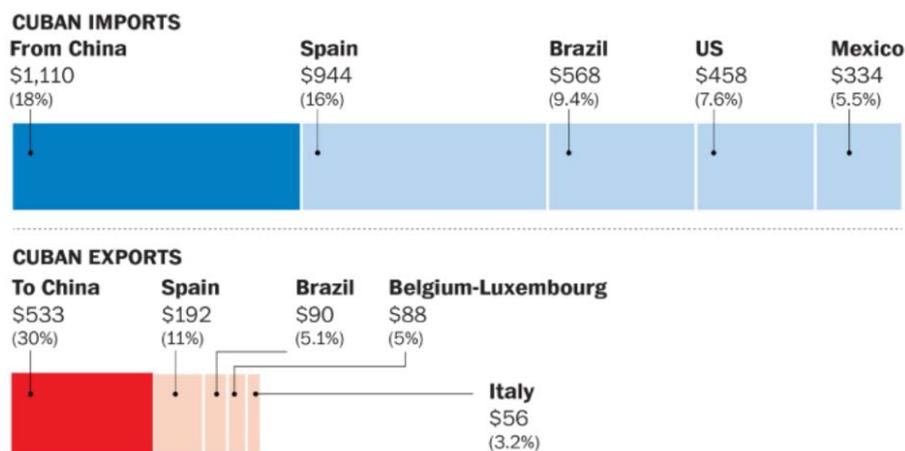
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modernization.

The last year seemed to mark further Chinese progress thanks to the opening of a new cargo terminal, complementary to other major ports or transportation projects already achieved in Brazil (Miritituba-Barcarena) or to be implemented in Central America (Great Nicaragua Canal and a transoceanic railway).

**Cuban impex in 2012**

In millions of dollars, 2012



Source Cuban government, embassypages.com, Washington Post.

But what the Chinese did not know and could not appreciate from open sources was that, while Obama had promised openings since 2009, postponed by hesitations within the administration and a strong congressional opposition, his Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham-Clinton had worked constantly for a thaw with Havana. The turning point came during the Summit of the Americas in Cartagena (April 2012), because Ms Clinton was repeatedly criticized by all regional leaders, including key allies like Colombia, for the continuation of the embargo. Hillary Clinton took the point and passed forcefully the message within the administration that Washington’s new role in Latin America entailed necessarily a solution to the Cuban problem.

While in Washington, the scales began to tilt decisively towards the end of the embargo, the political balances in Cuba changed after the death of Venezuelan leader Chavez (2013). After the end of the Cold War Cuba had lost any strategic importance for Russia, and even after the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine a meaningful role has not been regained.

There has been talk that the opening was due to US worries about an increased role of Moscow in the island because of: a possible deal allowing the staging of TU-95 Bear nuclear bombers (May 2014); the possible agreement about the re-opening of the Lourdes SIGINT station and regarding oil exploitation between Rosneft and CUPET (July 2014). In reality the TU-95 is a venerable platform from the 'Fifties of the past century and basing them in Cuba would deny the advantages of their AS-15 Kent cruise missiles; no serious refitting work has been recorded in Lourdes and even the arrival of a Vishnia-class intelligence collection ship during a round of Cuban-US negotiations (January 2015) did not really concern US officials; and finally negotiations with Rosneft are still continuing by mid-April 2015.<sup>3</sup>

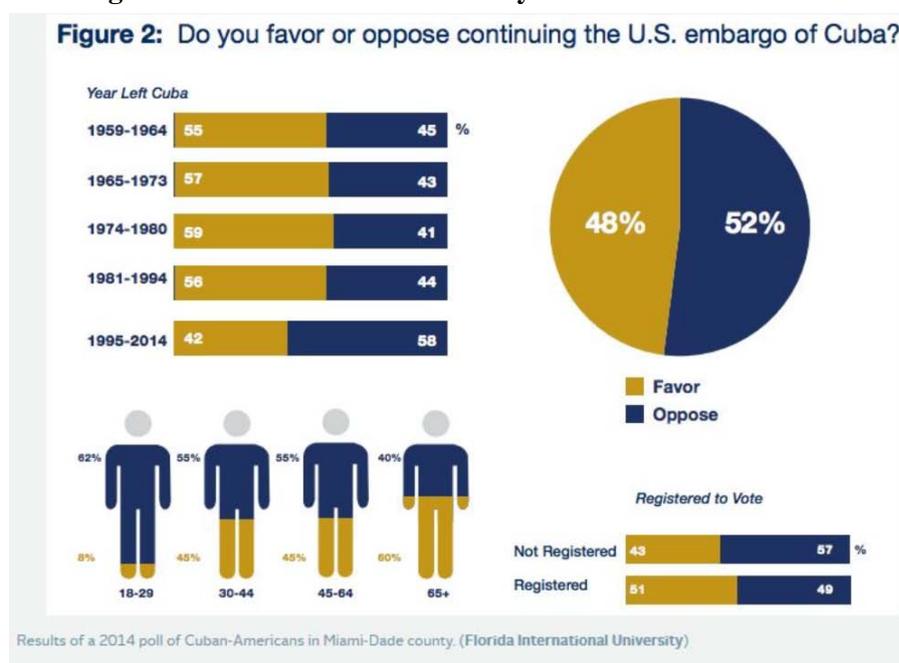
On the other hand China could offer only commercial support, while the Brazilian alternative to the then strong Venezuelan support with subsidized oil began to fade with the quick decline of the South American giant's economy.

By June 2013 a secret bilateral dialogue started between Cuba and the USA in Canada and with the assistance of the Vatican, that lasted for seven negotiation rounds. From 2013 to 2014 there were weak signals of a possible thaw including: the Cuban presidency of CELAC (Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos Caribeños y Latino Americanos) in January 2013 and the tacit acceptance by the US of the Cuban participation to the OAS Summit of 2015 (October 2014). Havana had been suspended as a member of the Organization of American States since 1962. Eventually the joint action of the governments of

<sup>3</sup> In this respect Chinese SIGINT presence in Bejucal and Santiago de Cuba seems to be much better established.

Canada (definitely right-wing, but also very involved in the Cuban economy) and that of the Vatican greatly facilitated and accelerated the opening process.

**Weak signals from the Cuban community in Miami**



Source: Florida International University

Even before the end of the Cuban missile crisis, the USA started to put up a set of sanctions with the intent of strangling the island’s economy and provoke a regime change. Thirty years after and despite the end of the Cold War, sanctions were strengthened with the mentioned Cuba Democracy Act and successively redefined and made harsher by the Helms-Burton Act.

Without real political change from both sides, the acts would ensure the embargo at least until year 2018, when Raúl Castro would retire in favour of his appointed successor, prime deputy president Miguel Díaz-Canel. Particularly

the Helms-Burton Act is stymieing many practical consequences of the diplomatic thaw and will be enforced until a new transition government in Havana:<sup>4</sup>

- Legalises all political activities;
- Frees all political prisoners, dissolves the Department of State Security, allows prison inspections by international humanitarian organizations;
- Organizes free and fair elections, allowing equal access to the media under international observation;
- Takes public and demonstrable commitments on freedom and basic human rights in the fields of politics, economy and trade unionism;
- Excludes the Castro brothers from power.

After January 2015 the sanctions' regime has been lifted in the following aspects:

- Visas for Cuba without government authorization and facilitating the trade of Cuban cigars;
- Use of credit cards with no restrictions on the island;
- Insurance coverage by US companies for travellers or residents in Cuba for travel, health or life;
- Facilitations for unauthorized transactions, allowing US banks to start relations with Cuban ones;
- Investments in small companies;
- Delivery of building materials to private Cuban firms.

Other embargo relaxations will come from presidential executive orders to open limited opportunities in: trade, investments, banks, telecommunications,

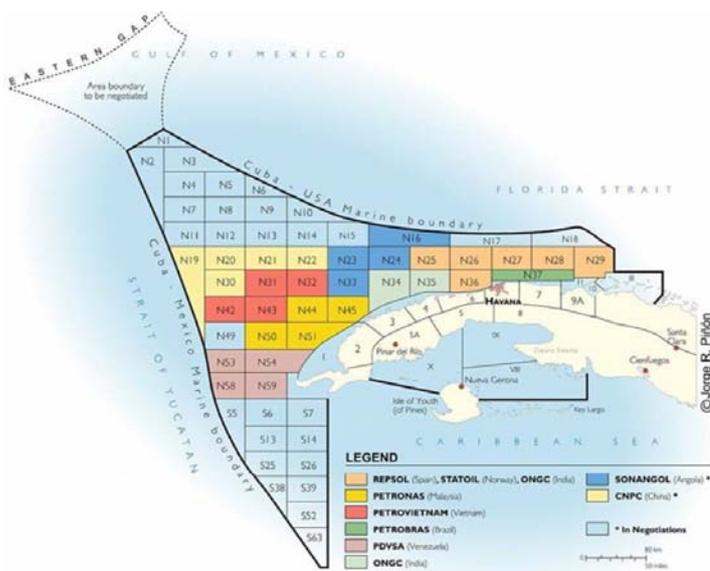
<sup>4</sup> One should note, however, that within the Cuban Communist Party there is an emerging debate on the possibility of adopting a direct, popular and secret vote to elect the Cuban president and the first vice president of the Council of State, instead of an election by the Parliamentary Assembly as it happens since decades. The debate was launched with the idea of reforming the electoral law, but still within the one-party system framework. During the online discussion only one participant suggested a return to a multi-party system. In any case the current municipal elections (19<sup>th</sup> of April 2015) will take place with the existing provisions of law.

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pharmaceuticals, agriculture, travel and tourism. The negotiating teams agreed also to: open embassies as soon as possible, delist Cuba from the terror sponsoring countries (15/7/2915), expand internet access and other freedoms for Cubans and the liberation of 53 political prisoners.

Removing Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, is a diplomatic success with limited economic consequences, especially in terms of dual use trade. Regarding the formal resumption of diplomatic links, there is still a problem regarding the freedom of movement and contacts of future US diplomats in the country. It is interesting to observe that, for the time being, energy has not been included in the dialogue agenda.

Oil concessions



Source: Univ. of Texas, Jorge R. Piñon

The Summit of the Americas meeting with Castro has crowned a brilliant move by Obama who has combined in December 2014 a limited political investment

with a high media and political short-term return. Moreover he has transformed the congressional gridlock into an opportunity for the administration, shifting the onus of disagreement on the Congress who has to convince its own economic constituencies about the convenience of continuing an embargo. Evidently Obama will continue to fully use his authority, avoiding as much as possible congressional hurdles.

Moreover, polls indicate that Cuban-American voters and American citizens are in favour of a change in the bilateral relationship, creating the condition for pressuring the lawmakers. Even before the summit: congressional visits to Cuba have peaked, US Chamber of Commerce lobbyists are quite assured to achieve substantial gains on trade freedom before November 2017 with a Republican Congress and a number of anti-sanctions bills should be discussed by Congress by April 2015.

In the short term progress will not necessarily be fast. On the one hand, as said, opposition in Congress will be strong and the fact that some Republican presidential candidates are of Cuban origin will help in polarising the issue for some time. On the other Raúl Castro has made abundantly clear that he will open very gradually and keeping all the fundamental traits of Cuban politics, including some remarkable foreign connections with North Korea and Venezuela.

- This means that Havana has to lift also its own internal blockade that does not allow the economy to function in an efficient way and has to improve its human rights policies. On this account NGOs do not have great hopes in the near term, although direct talks on this issue between the US and Cuba have formally started by the end of March. Even in the sports sector, generally more open to exchanges, the regime has no intention to liberalize the careers of Cuban professional baseball players, who are the among the best in the world and sometimes are icons in the USA.
- There are substantially two scenarios that depend heavily from general global economic conditions (global and regional debt, including US, Chinese, Russian, Mexican, Brazilian, Venezuelan debt; energy prices; level

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of regional and global GDP in the next two years) and from very local outcomes (the transition process from the old Communist guard to the new one in 2018):

1. A more or less slow transition towards a Communist Chinese and Vietnamese model, where consensus is bought by economic prosperity and social mobility, while the party continues to dominate public life although with higher levels of corruption;
2. A socio-political stagnation due to the prevailing economic crisis and a failed transition. Former European Communist countries, Venezuela and different Arab countries can provide insights about this evolution.

Especially in the latter case one cannot exclude in principle the possibility of an increase of peaceful opposition movements and the sparking of revolts that combine socio-economic and political motivations. How these revolts could prelude to a second and democratic Cuban Revolution is for the moment quite unpredictable, but the majority of single party regimes in the last 25-20 years has failed as rule, not as an exception. External help, interference or intervention do not modify the inherent structural weaknesses of political systems unable to evolve substantially towards the goal of meeting both material and political needs of their own population. In other words Ostalgie can be an interesting and respectable cultural feature, but it does not exist while these regimes are in place.

## *European Defense Initiatives*

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*Claudio Catalano*

### **The Ukraine Crisis is still the main concern for European security**

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On 1 January 2015, Lithuania has assumed the rotating presidency of the European Union (EU) for the first half of 2015 with a special focus on the Ukraine crisis at the Eastern border of the EU.

On 28 January, at the Foreign Affairs Council of the Council of the EU, the European foreign ministers have approved new sanctions against Russia. This happened because, earlier rebels supported by the Russians have conquered the Donetsk airport and launched an attack on the port city of Mariupol in the East of Ukraine. The day before, European heads of state and government had instructed their ministers to approve sanctions on the basis of “evidence of continued and growing support given to the separatists by Russia, which underlines Russia's responsibility.”<sup>1</sup>

Conversely in a "food for thought" document, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, suggested an easing of sanctions to Russia.

The Ukraine dossier is in fact, increasingly in the hands of the President of the European Council, the former Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who according to the Treaty of Lisbon has representation on EU foreign policy. Mr Tusk main security concerns are focusing on the EU Eastern border, of which Poland is the main bordering Member State. Mr Tusk is also contrary to the normalization of relations with Russia, without Russia's respect of Minsk agreements signed on 5 September 2014.

This “good cop/bad cop” attitude in the EU is reflected in the position of Germany, where Chancellor Angela Merkel suggests at the summits of heads of state to increase sanctions to Russia, while German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, says the soft line toward Russia.

<sup>1</sup> Statement of the Heads of State or Government, European Council, 27 January 2015. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/01/statement-of-the-heads-of-state-or-government/>

## *European Defense Initiatives*

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While Chancellor Merkel has consulted, as head of government with President Tusk, the High Representative Mogherini consulted with Foreign Minister Steinmeier, leading to a weakening of the position of the High Representative. Her position was further weakened when President of the EU Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, decided to delegate the security and defence issues to Michel Barnier, the French former European Commissioner (1999-2004 and 2009-2014). This also reflects the interest that the France have on the European defence industry, especially after that Claude-France Arnould of France was succeeded in the position of EDA chief executive by Jorge Domecq of Spain. At the level of NATO, the French still held fast to the position to the ACT, crucial for industrial cooperation.

A further weakening of a “single voice” for Europe with the Russian and Ukrainian partners, has been represented by the initiative of Chancellor Merkel and French President, François Hollande, to act directly as mediators between the two parties. The Franco-German action was set in early February because the anti-Kiev forces broke the five months ceasefire agreed under the Minsk agreements of 5 September 2014. The anti-Kiev forces have won the important railway junction of Debaltseve salient, while the Ukrainian national currency lost one third of its value on the stock exchange.

So Ms Merkel and Mr Hollande have visited Kiev on February 5 and later convened a summit in Moscow and Minsk in Belarus on February 8, with the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, and representatives of the Ukrainian pro-Russian rebels, all hosted by the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko. The format of the summit was widened to four parties and named “Normandy four”.

Ukrainian President, Poroshenko, had requested the United States and the Europeans to send weapons to balance the alleged Russian support to the anti-Kiev forces. On February 5, US Secretary of State, John Kerry, had met President Poroshenko in Kiev stating that the United States was considering sending arms to Ukraine.

The same day, the EU defence ministers meeting at a NATO summit in Brussels said they were opposed to send weapons to Ukraine, in particular Roberta Pinotti of Italy, Ursula Von Der Leyen of Germany, while Michael Fallon of the UK and Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert of the Netherlands, said they were in favor of a “non-lethal” support, such as training. The Minister of Lithuania,

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Juozas Olekas, as European president, said they supported some military elements of the request Ukrainian, but being outvoted he did not insist on this position. The United States took no official position though some American analysts argued that the United States should provide Ukrainian anti-tank weapons.<sup>2</sup> Meeting with President Obama in Washington before the “Normandy four” negotiations in Minsk, Chancellor Merkel stated at the press conference that she did not see a military solution to the conflict.

The Ukrainian issue has also dominated the 51<sup>st</sup> Munich security conference on 6-8 February 2015. In this forum, Kerry supported the German solution for a non-military solution to the conflict, even in the face of strong pressure from Congress, led by Republican Senator John McCain to send weapons to the Ukrainians. In fact it seems that Kerry has confessed to 15 US congressional representatives present in Munich that he wanted to convince President Obama to send weapons in Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

On February 9, the anti-Kiev forces conquered Logvinova, creating a pocket that cut off the Ukrainian troops who defended from August 2014, the strategic town of Debaltseve at the intersection of M03 and M04 highways and causing a counterattack of the Ukraine forces to regain the lost territory .

The same day, the EU foreign ministers agreed to activate any new sanctions on Russia against 19 individuals and 9 entities. However, the sanctions were not to be active from February 9, but they would be put on hold up until February 16 to let the negotiations in Minsk go.

On 12 February, the “Normandy Four” negotiations in Minsk reached a new ceasefire with the withdrawal of heavy weapons from Eastern Ukraine, by assuring the respect of borders and the exchange of prisoners, but the truce did not took effect on February 12, but from February 15. In these three days, the pro-Russian forces consolidated their positions, and the line of the border to be respected was freezed by the frontlines as they stand on February 15.

2 Adrian Croft and David Alexander “European defence ministers oppose sending weapons to Ukraine” Reuters, 5 February 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/05/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-weapons-idUSKBN0L91SR20150205>

3 Josh Rogin “Kerry Tells Lawmakers He's for Arming Ukraine” Bloomberg, 9 February 2015. <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-02-09/kerry-tells-lawmakers-he-s-for-arming-ukraine>

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In fact the effective cessation of hostilities has not yet reached at the time of writing. A temporary truce was reached at midnight on February 18, when the Ukrainian troops have finally abandoned Debaltseve salient, by fighting to win their way out of the pocket and leaving the strategic city to the anti-Kiev forces. During the “Normandy Four” negotiations, the anti-Kiev forces had asked the Ukrainian forces in Debaltseve to surrender and not getting it, without a credible explanation –a part from that of Mr Poroshenko who said that the Russians have delayed the start of the truce - the truce was postponed of 60 hours until the Ukrainians finally retreat from Debaltseve.<sup>4</sup>

The withdrawal of the weapons and the exchange of prisoners have not yet occurred because not a total cessation of the fighting.

In the United States, Senator McCain has held that France and Germany, with the support of President Obama, have contributed to the dismemberment of a sovereign country in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, from February 17, the Russians have begun a series of massive aerial exercise, which will culminate with exercise “Ladoga 2015” on Lake Ladoga.

Complicating the situation is the new position of the new pro-Russian government Tsipras in Greece, and the threat of a Greek rapprochement with Moscow remains as a “sword of Damocles” on the EU.

The Baltic States and Poland continue to be the “hawks” in Europe. They are willing to send weapons to the Ukrainians and to approve new sanctions against Russia. Poland is also continuing its long-term plan of armament.

The Nordic countries are increasingly distancing themselves from Russia: Finland has finally rejected the Russian proposal for cooperation in the defence industry already advanced in 2013. Sweden took over the rotating presidency

<sup>4</sup> Andrew E. Kramer and David M. Herszenhorn “A Bloody Retreat From Debaltseve as Ukrainian Forces Suddenly Withdraw” The New York Times (online) 15 February 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/19/world/europe/ukraine-conflict-debaltseve.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/19/world/europe/ukraine-conflict-debaltseve.html?_r=0)

<sup>5</sup> Martin Matishak “GOP senators fear 'dismemberment' of Ukraine in new siege” The Hill, 17 February 2015. <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/232973-gop-senators-obama-is-legitimizing-the-dismemberment-of-ukraine>

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of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF), military cooperation between Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland with the proposal to develop initiatives Nordic situational awareness for cooperation aerial, naval, and in the early warning systems, as well as to consider joint initiative in cyber defence and the establishment of a Battle group of NORDEF modeled on the Swedish-led EU Nordic Battle Group.<sup>6</sup>

At the NATO summit in Brussels on 5 February, defence ministers have decided the structure of the so-called Spearhead force within NATO Response Force. Spearhead will be a high operational readiness multinational brigade-sized unit with 5,000 persons ready to deploy in 48 hours (with the rest of the force deployable within a week), with air support, naval and special forces, as well as a reserve force of two additional brigades for a total of 30,000 persons for the NATO Response Force. Spearhead is to be tested during 2015, so as to reach its initially operational readiness in early 2016.

France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK will be rotating framework nations for the Spearhead HQ. Germany, Norway and the Netherlands have already started training for the activation of a Spearhead interim force.

Six command and control centers have been established in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania for the logistical planning and coordination of training and exercises.

Germany, Denmark and Poland have decided to work together to develop the command Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin in Poland.

The NATO Readiness Action Plan (RAP) protects the Eastern border of Europe, but leaves open the southern flank of the Alliance and the Mediterranean that are also threatened by instability.<sup>7</sup>

6 Gerard O'Dwyer "Sweden Proposes Aggressive Nordic Defense" Defense News 10 February 2015. <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/warfare/2015/02/10/sweden-nordic-cooperation-russia-nordefco-cooperation-nbg-sreide-battlegroup/22865811/>

7 See: Defence Ministers agree to strengthen NATO's defences, establish Spearhead Force, NATO press release, 5 February 2015. [http://www.nato.int/cps/bu/natohq/news\\_117188.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/bu/natohq/news_117188.htm); "Nato Sets Sizes For Spearhead, Response Forces" U.S Department Of Defense, 5 February 2015. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128120>

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### **Forecast**

Many analysts agree that President Putin intends to stay long in the Eastern Ukraine consolidating a status quo favorable to him in the long term.

The British magazine “Business Insider”, also claims that the December 2014 military doctrine of Russia has among its main objectives to undermine NATO's commitment to art. V mutual defence of the member countries, by discrediting it and trying to make NATO to implode.<sup>8</sup>

It is expected that the influence of the “hawks” in Central and Eastern Europe will continue for long.

In June 2015, shortly before the end of the Lithuanian presidency of the EU, the Czech chief of the defence, Petr Pavel, is expected to become the chairman of the NATO Military Committee.

Probably the European Council in June 2015, which will end the Lithuanian presidency semester, will have something to say about the situation in Ukraine. While it is easy to predict that the next Atlantic Council to be held in Warsaw in 2016, will focus on the Ukrainian crisis.

In all this, the Southern Flank or the Mediterranean, became the “Cinderella” of European security, despite the constant threat of illegal immigration and the new threat of the Islamic State in Libya.

Italy should, therefore, seek to shift attention to Libya and the Mediterranean, in particular during the visit of the President of the Council, Matteo Renzi, to President Putin in Moscow in early March 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Bender “This is the simplest explanation of why Putin is so opposed to NATO” Business Insider, 12 February 2015 <http://uk.businessinsider.com/simplest-explanation-of-why-putin-hates-nato-2015-2?r=US>

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*Lucio Martino***The Obama administration foresees a successful second-term**

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The second Article of the American Constitution of 1789 requires the President of the United States to report annually to Congress on the state of the Union and, at the same time, to recommend the adoption of measures he believes are necessary to deal with any particular contingency. In January 2015, President Obama delivered his sixth State of the Union address, and for the first time he delivered it before a Congress fully under the control of the Republican Party. It had been known for some time that the Democratic President would cover a wide range of issues in his speech, ranging from health care reform to immigration, from climate change to national security. However, rather than make concrete suggestions to Congress regarding how to deal with present problems, President Obama, when the speech is analyzed in full, appeared to have opened the campaign for the general elections scheduled for November 2016. The key elements of the proposals outlined by President Obama seem to point the political debate of the next two years in the direction of income inequality and the middle-class economic issues. The Administration's advisers have argued that insisting on reducing income inequality has to date favored the Democrats, as may be seen in the case of President Obama's victory over Governor Romney at the last presidential elections. Nevertheless, it is impossible to avoid noting how President Obama can no longer count on the support of Congress to put in place a new plan to increase tax revenue.

The White House and leaders of the new Republican majorities in Congress have in recent times repeatedly expressed their desire to converge on a political vision which combines their various interests. However, the interaction of recent weeks seems only to demonstrate how difficult it is to find common ground. Seen from this perspective, President Obama's proposals in his State of the Union address seemed almost intended to distance the Democrats from the Republicans, given the traditional aversion of the latter to any increase in the tax burden. The Obama Administration claims that much of the money recovered by the new taxes would be used to finance measures to help the middle class. In particular, the Obama administration intends to support families where

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both spouses work, to increase the average salary and lower interest rates on mortgages on first homes, as well as to ensure higher levels of education. On the whole, the Democratic Party considers the measures announced by the President as necessary to maintain the momentum of sudden economic growth that saw unemployment fall below six percent.

After the depths of the financial crisis of 2008, the economy of the United States has grown by eight percent in real terms. This development is even more significant if compared with the drop of more than two percent in gross domestic product recorded during the same period within the Euro zone, and with the loss of another percentage point in the Japanese economy in the same period. In addition, the gap between the gross domestic product growth rates of the economies of emerging markets and the United States, shrank by almost seven percentage points in 2007 to just over two percentage points in 2014, and it is expected to decline further by the end of the year even if, as it seems, the Chinese economy continues to slow down. Business statistics show even more amazing results achieved by the United States under the Obama Administration. The current indebtedness of US companies listed on the stock exchange is lower than that of all major US trading partners combined. Labor productivity is now substantially higher than that of the Euro zone, Japan or even any emerging country. The average costs of production in the United States are lower than all ten other major exporters with the exception of China. Finally, there is the remarkable growth of energy production. Last year, the United States exceeded Saudi Arabia in total production amount, becoming the largest producer of oil and natural gas in the world, six years earlier than predicted by even the most influential analytical institutions. The push for the production of shale oil and gas has in part lessened because of low market prices, but this is certainly not something to worry the American consumers. In recent years, the Obama administration has made a significant increase of oil production a top priority, and has touted the benefits the entire US economic system would reap from lower oil costs. The President also recently reduced the tax burden on the national oil industry in order to promote their productive capacities. In this latest State of the Union address, President Obama explained how the United States is now less dependent on foreign oil than it has ever been in the last thirty years, in line with what he promised during the election campaign in 2008.

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President Obama has tried to dissuade Congress from attempts to undermine regulations his Administration is preparing in order to reorganize the electric energy sector, the real project of work for his second term. President Obama emphasized, not without some exaggeration, what his Administration has done to promote the emergence of new sources of clean energy, and has even described the United States as the leading country in the wind energy sector. The truth is, however, that it is not the United States but China which has constructed the largest number of wind power plants, although it is also true that US wind farms are characterized by a higher level of efficiency and produce a greater total quantity of electricity. According to President Obama, no current challenge represents a greater risk to future generations than climate change. Amid the applause, President Obama therefore undertook to finalize a new and important international climate agreement by the end of the year.

When it comes to foreign policy matters, however, the 2015 State of the Union address seems to confirm the prospect that during this last stage of the second term it might be Democrats the most vocal critics of the Obama Presidency and Republicans his closest allies. This possibility seems to have been confirmed in the National Security Strategy 2015 (NSS 2015) presented in early February. The National Security Strategy report should theoretically be written with a broad and comprehensive description and discussion of US interests in mind. However, the documents of the last twenty years have not gone much beyond simply repeating the rhetoric of the main official policies, becoming special focus mouth-pieces or Administration desires. The best example in this regard can be seen in the National Security Strategy 2002 which directly promotes the opportunity for the armed forces to undertake preventive action. With the next National Security Strategy in 2006, the same Bush Administration then expanded and further strengthened this particular approach until it was discontinued by the Obama Administration. The National Security Strategy 2010 marked a decisive break with the two previous editions. The Obama Administration confirmed that its sole objective was the defeat of Al Qaeda and their supporters, and not the defeat of international terrorism as a whole. US foreign policy was re-formulated to resist every temptation to resort to unilateral action, with a distinct preference for seeking international consensus, possibly as part of a large institutional and international architecture such as that provided by the United Nations or the North Atlantic Alliance.

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Overall, the NSS 2015 seems to go in two directions. On the one hand it highlights the strength of an economic recovery that closes the depression opened by the financial crisis of 2009, and on the other it reaffirms the importance of the multilateralism in international relations typical of US foreign policy of recent years. The document seems to be affected by the desire to find that middle position needed to drive a "sustainable" approach to global security that goes beyond the simple maintenance of modern military power and to offer something for every possible reader. The centrality of the dedication to combating climate change is not in doubt. The role the energy-producing companies must play in order to ensure the energy independence of the United States is equally clear.

The part of the document given over to the promotion of values and democracy does not offer solid grounds for contention and would easily find as many supporters among conservatives as among the progressives. And to satisfy those who believe that the US should not waste its patrimony in international affairs, either tangible or intangible, the NSS 2015 is concerned with directly connecting the global leadership of the United States to its economic strength. Not surprisingly, the NSS 2015 reserves considerable attention to the economy, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Treaty on Transatlantic Trade and Investment between the European Union and the United States, and the global energy markets. The world as depicted by the NSS 2015 is, therefore, a world in which the United States represents the foundation of a strong international system, a participatory one based on rules and global institutions, a united force that cannot be defended by relying only solely on military power. The NSS 2015 interprets national security in the broadest sense possible. In including within its scope economic, environmental issues and human resources, the NSS 2015 goes far beyond any previous document in considering for the first time climate change and epidemic crises to be direct threats to national security.

The NSS 2015 tackles and discusses the use of military force in a manner in line with the particular approach the Obama Administration has always followed. Every mention of the military system is in practice combined with a parallel reference to diplomatic activity. The document says, for example, that American troops will remain ready to defend national interests by providing essential support for diplomacy because the use of force is neither the only, nor the primary, nor the best tool available to the United States. Not without

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some ambiguity, in describing a military system intended to shrink in size but not in capacity in accordance with a vision of "full spectrum dominance" typical of the new millennium, with the NSS 2015 the Obama administration is evidently also trying to curry favour with the hawks in Congress, an increasingly necessary tactic for the approval of the Federal Budget.

With regard to the larger foreign policy choices, the "pivot" towards the Asia of the Pacific has always maintained an absolute centrality. The impression is that, in doing so, the Obama administration is also attempting to divert attention from the Middle East, a zone for which the NSS 2015 provides no overview. This is not very surprising considering that the last two administrations in the United States have one after another experimented in this region every feasible strategy without achieving the desired results. Public attention is always focused on issues such as the Caliphate or the Ukraine crisis, but NSS 2015 offers especially valuable information on what will be the American approach with respect to other issues and other sectors, beginning with that of Space. The document declares that the United States will seek to develop technologies and tactics to deter and defeat any attempt aimed at attacking their space systems, as well as to improve its survivability, something seen by many as another important step towards the militarization of space. Unmanned aircraft have become of particular importance under the Obama administration, and for the first time the NSS 2015 promises unidentified limits and constraints to their development and use. Finally, as always in this kind of document, what is lacking is not less important than what is present. The best example, from this point of view, is offered by the way with which the NSS 2015, while addressing the political transition in Syria, does not explicitly state that the Syrian President Assad must leave power. No less important it is the way in which the NSS 2015 carefully avoids mentioning any specific provision of direct assistance to the Ukrainian government, while leaving the door open to new peaceful cooperation with Russia if the latter decides to change policy.

In this framework, a quite confident Obama administration, reached a remarkable success in his foreign policy. At the end of March, a first preliminary agreement was reached between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, namely China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States, plus Germany (P5+1), whose implications go far beyond the narrow question of curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions

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and avoiding the prospect of an Iranian nuclear force in the foreseeable future. This preliminary agreement is the most visible symptom of the historic change taking place in international dynamics regarding the Middle East. Slowly but surely, the Obama administration has done away with Containment of Iran as a steering principle of the Middle East policy of the United States. Now, the most important goal is a D tente with Iran that will allow the United States to retreat from the Middle East and focus more on other regions and priorities. Such a strategy requires the Obama administration to downgrade all of those old and new allies who perceive a rising Iran as their most important threat. For the first time in thirty five years, Iran and United States have reached a public agreement on a matter vital to the national interests of both, acknowledging that both sides have legitimate interests in an important strategic question such that they see fit to reach an agreement that protects the mutual interests.

If implemented, the nuclear agreement cannot avoid influencing the entire range of relations between these two countries, favoring the creation of a new architecture of peace and regional security because it seems clear that Iran and the United States are increasingly aware of the fact that none of the so-called intractable conflicts in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon can be solved, even partly, without a certain degree of mutual cooperation. The chaos which followed the so-called Arab spring seems to have convinced the Obama Administration that Iran is basically an island of stability in a very unstable region, above all because it is characterized by a centuries-old tradition that prevents it plunging into anarchy even in the face of the toughest economic sanctions and of the most serious political unrest. The gradual dissipation of revolutionary fervor, and the rise of moderate neo-reformists, adding to the impact of economic sanctions, has also made it clear that the prosperity of Iran, as well as regional political weight, is directly connected with improving relations with the United States. In other words, the United States and Iran now seem to need each other to protect the economic and strategic interests of each in the Middle East and beyond.

*Claudio Bertolotti*

## **Al-Qaeda vs ISIS & Co. A new critical phase for the Afghan war**

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### **Recent events**

#### **February**

- *Self-claiming ISIS militants killed a Taliban commander during a clash in the Charkh province. The governor of northeastern Kunduz stated that there were about 70 ISIS militants in the province.*
- *Afghan treasury chief stated that the new Afghan finance minister discussed a plan with the International Monetary Fund to privatize the New Kabul Bank - formed after the original Kabul Bank collapsed in 2010 generating a financial crisis in the country – that has lost around \$56 million in the last four years*

#### **March**

- *Afghan President Ashraf Ghani stated that ISIS views Afghanistan as a key component in its broader goal to establish a caliphate in the Middle East*
- *United States delays troops withdrawal from Afghanistan. The United States will keep the 9,800 troops currently in Afghanistan on the ground through the end of the year, rather than reducing the number to 5,500 as planned; the U.S. military bases in the cities of Kandahar and Jalalabad are likely to remain open beyond the end of 2015. US President pledged to continue to conduct targeted counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan.*
- *President Ghani visits the United States: Ghani declared a new phase in relations between Afghanistan and the United States, stressing his commitment to combating militancy and making Afghanistan a stable democracy.*

#### **April**

- *A group of Uzbeks in northern Afghanistan claiming to be from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) pledged their allegiance to ISIS's Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.*
- *UN reports 6,500 foreign militants fighting in Afghanistan have links to Al-Qaeda and ISIS.*

- At least 17 people were killed and about 40 were injured, including a prominent parliamentarian, on 2 April in a suicide bombing in Afghanistan's Khost province.

- Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov promised Russian support to Afghanistan during a visit by Afghan National Security Advisor Muhammad Hanif Atmar to Moscow. Lavrov stated that Russia is ready to help Afghanistan in stabilizing its current complex conditions, and to cooperate with Afghanistan's allies in fighting against terrorism and counter narcotics. Previously Lavrov criticized the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) for being unable to provide security; moreover Lavrov stated that ISAF has failed to handle the set goals because terrorism in the country has not been unrooted and drug trafficking has increased.

### ***AQIS, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent***

As reaction to the expansion of the Islamic State (ISIS, also known as Daesh) in the Indian Subcontinent, on September 2014 al-Qaeda has announced the establishment of the jihadi new wing, called 'Qaedat al-Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent' (AQIS, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent) – the Indian wing that would spread Islamic rule and raise the jihad across the subcontinent, as a glad tidings for Muslims in Burma, Bangladesh, Assam, Gujarat, Ahmedabad, and Kashmir. The group reports to the head of the Taliban in Afghanistan Mullah Omar and is led by a former commander of the Pakistani Taliban who is also in al-Qaeda's wing in Pakistan. The mission of AQIS is to establish a global caliphate based on the Islamic law.

In line with this mission, months ago (September 2014) Al-Zawahiri released a video appointing Maulana Asim Umar as the Emir of AQIS; the appointment follows the extensive presence of al-Qaeda and associations with various jihadist groups in Pakistan.

Recently (March 2015) AQIS spokesman Usama Mehmood confirmed that nearly 50 of the group's members have been killed in US drone strikes, including three senior leaders in separate strikes in January, one of them was the appointed Emir Maulana Asim Umar. The other two were named as the group's Deputy Head Ustad Ahmad Farooq and Qari Imran the group's central council member in charge of operations in Afghanistan.

Furtherly, AQIS commanders have been reported killed in a raid conducted in

Karachi. According to 'The Express Tribune', on April 14, the Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Department conducted an operation in Karachi's Orangi Town; as result, five militants have been killed including two AQIS commanders: Noorul Hassan, AQIS' Karachi chapter chief, and Usman – alias Irfan or Abdullah –, AQIS deputy commander.

What is interesting to highlight, is the 'professional' profile of the appointed (and killed) Emir. Who was Asim Umar, the Head of al-Qaeda's India unit?

He was considered to be a long-time propagandist of the militant group and earlier been associated with the Pakistan Taliban, Umar was expected to ensure that the relations with the Pakistani group were maintained. In other words, the appointment of Umar showed the importance of Pakistan jihadist groups to al-Qaeda Central Command, with Umar's links to these groups as the key to foster close cooperation. In addition, Umar as ideologue could facilitate access to Pakistan's youth as recruitment ground for al-Qaeda in contraposition with the ISIS presence in the area. His appointment was the continuation of a long standing relationship between al-Qaeda Central Command and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), whereby al-Qaeda is the ideological inspiration for the TTP, with the latter providing support and even reported safe havens for al-Qaeda militants.

It is clear that not the Afghan Taliban but leaders and members of AQIS had been the main target of US and Pakistani operations since the security forces have launched military operations in Pakistani North Waziristan in June 2014. Afghan Taliban still remain a secondary target because the real target is al-Qaeda, its affiliates and the radical competitors (such as ISIS).

Why not the Afghan Taliban?

- Firstly, the Afghan Taliban is a local movement, with strict relationship with al-Qaeda but without global or regional ambitions.
- Secondly, the US is attempting to break up the relationships between the Taliban and their external supporters (in order to break down a connection which represents a strength for both the actors).
- Thirdly, the Taliban are not included in the terrorist-list because their potential and desirable role in the future of Afghanistan.
- As a final point, neither the International Coalition forces nor the Afghan National Security Forces are able to defeat the Taliban.

## ***ISIS is moving to Afghanistan***

Moreover, what is important to underline is that, in contrast with the AQIS, ISIS is moving to Afghanistan, creating affiliates groups, recruiting Afghan and foreign fighters and conducting operational activities.

Recently, ISIS militants were responsible for kidnapping dozens of Shiite men; the information was for the first time officially reported by the Afghan government: ISIS is now officially a threat. In detail, two former Taliban leaders, who switched to ISIS, were behind a mass abduction in February, in which ISIS militants seized 31 passengers from buses traveling from Zabul province to Kabul.

As reported by the 'Washington Post' and summarized by the 'Foreign Policy - The South Asia Daily', hundreds of foreign fighters are moving into Afghanistan from Pakistan bolstering the Taliban and increasing the level of violence in the conflict.

Afghan officials stated that in Badakhshan province the Taliban militants overran military positions in the province and beheaded 18 Afghan National Army soldiers; this event could be assessed as an effect of the influx of foreign and Pakistani fighters.

According to Afghan official statement who beheaded the soldiers were foreign fighters and not the local Taliban.

Besides, a recent report confirms the role of the foreign fighters and their influence. The United Nations stated that thousands of foreign fighters from about 100 countries are fighting for al-Qaeda, ISIS, or affiliated groups; of those fighters, an estimated 6,500 are operating in Afghanistan. The UN report was released after a group of Uzbek militants claiming to be members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) swore allegiance to ISIS.

## ***General situation in brief***

The situation is generally worsening.

The escalation of insurgency attacks comes as the traditional 'spring fighting' season is about to begin. The situation is worsening especially in southern and eastern provinces.

As confirmed by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in the first quarter of 2015 the number of casualties caused by ground operations rose eight percent compared to the same time period in 2014; in contrast the

overall number of civilian casualties declined by two percent but is reported a fifteen percent rise in women and children casualties.

Concerning the Afghan National Security Forces, the Afghan National Army (ANA) lost more than 20,000 members in 2014 due to desertions, discharges, and casualties in combat, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). From January to November 2014, the ANA's numbers declined by 11 percent, to 169,000 soldiers (the force is still the smallest it has been since the fall of 2011).

Moreover, the Afghan Counternarcotics Minister stated that the poppy cultivation had risen seven percent in the current season; according to the official report, poppy was grown on 224,000 hectares of land in 132 districts and 65 percent of the cultivation occurred in Helmand, Kandahar, Farah, and Nimroz provinces.

The new actors are imposing new dynamics whose consequences are not easily containable.

### **Analysis, assessments, forecasts**

The Armed Opposition Groups activity and attacks are expected to rise with the coming of spring season when the weather gets warmer and snow begins to melt in Afghanistan; in line with the past years, the insurgency would get its momentum in a conflict that continues to hit Afghan security forces at an accelerated rate.

As consequence, it would be difficult for the Afghan government to push through its peace agenda that aims to find a political solution based on negotiate to the persistent crisis and instability.

Furthermore, many Taliban fighters have abandoned their original groups and have joined the so-called ISIS.

Considering the influx of foreign fighters in Afghanistan, this fighting season will be – one more time – the hardest fighting season. It is assessed that only part of the threat had migrated to Afghanistan from Pakistan as consequence of the Pakistan's military operation in North Waziristan; but an important component of the foreign fighters presence in Afghanistan has to be considered, on the one hand, as the direct result of the ISIS policy to expand the "caliphate" influence into Indian subcontinent and, on the other hand, the AQIS' effort to contrast it.

This fresh wave of foreign fighters has added a probable new dimension to the Afghan conflict, threatening more instability, more violence, more challenges to the International Community and to the weak Afghan government which is not able to contrast militarily the Armed Opposition Groups and to contain the growing conflictual dynamics boosted by old-actors and newcomers.

On the one hand, the Ghani-Abdullah policy is to improve the relations with Pakistan in order to gain its support in facilitating peace talks with the Taliban. But, as possible consequence of the foreign fighters expansion in Afghanistan, negotiations with the few Taliban leaders could be more difficult and could drive to an unsuccessful result because many young Taliban fighters, in particular the most fanatic ones, are apparently switching their loyalty to ISIS. A trend that is supported by the large use of social media as recruiting technique both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. At the moment, the Taliban leadership has not shown any indication that it would agree to a peace negotiation with the Ghani-Abdullah government.

Moreover, the role and the regional ambitions of Iran are growing, possibly as consequence, on the one hand, of the ongoing US-Iranian nuclear dialogue and overture and, on the other hand, of the ISIS expansion and the Iran's role to contrast ISIS in Syraq (and Afghanistan); as recently stated by the Iranian Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, Iran offers joint counterterrorism operations with Pakistan and Afghanistan inside their territory". This is an important dynamic that will open to a new phase of the Iranian's role in the region.

Concluding, after Syraq and Lybia, ISIS is trying to extend its influence into Afghanistan. Considering the development of the phenomenon from the double perspective of "time" and "space", we have to be aware of the need to contain, disrupt, degrade and defeat ISIS immediately wherever it exists and considering it a transnational, global and linked threat, and don't committing the mistake to analyze the events and the attacks in MENA areas as disconnected dynamics: each single events, even if not coordinated, is a part of a large political plan based on revolutionary and disruptive ideological principles.



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