



www.invisible-dog.com

invisibledog@email.com

THE UNCERTAINTY REVOLVING AROUND THE PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) is one of those Palestinian groups one hardly hears of, but who plays a crucial role in Gaza and has a radical approach in the fight against Israel. For this reason it has been blacklisted as a terrorist group by the United Kingdom (November 19 2001), the United States (November 27 2002) and the European Union (December 21 2005).

Just like Hamas - and under some respects even worse than Hamas - the Islamic Jihad portrays its political and military fight against Israel in a religious light, thus making its initiatives more radical. Its military operations have unequivocally taken the shape of acts of terrorism.

The armed struggle as a jihad, or holy war, makes the cohabitation with the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine (PLO) - the umbrella group that gathers the majority of Palestinian groups - extremely difficult. Relationships are even more tense with the political branch of the PLO, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). In fact, the PLO is an assembly of basically secular groups, closer to marxism in the past and with little or no ideological contact at all with islamic extremism.

Under this respect, the Islamic Jihad competes with Hamas for the leadership of radical Palestinian islam. It is not by chance that the group benefits from the support and proselytes in the Gaza Strip thanks to its hardcore stances as opposed to those recently taken by Khaled Meshal's group. If islam is used by Hamas in an ideological and theological key, the Islamic Jihad employs religion politically. If Hamas is more careful to its social agenda, the Islamic Jihad favors a military approach.

The PIJ was born in 1979 (even though sometimes its birth is postponed to coincide with the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987) under the good auspices of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The latter will later shift its support to Hamas, founded 10 years later by Sheykh Ahmed Yassin with the backing of the Brotherhood.

The reason for the Muslim Brotherhood's shift from the PIJ to Hamas was probably due to the Islamic Jihad founder's, Fathi Shaqaqi, conversion to Shi'ism. For a Sunni orthodox organization like the Brotherhood this represented a huge problem. Shaqaqi had converted following the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran, an event that marked a new era for islamic liberation struggles. And this was exactly what Fathi Shaqaqi was politically pursuing: a fight against oppressors (the Shah was replaced with Israel) and for a theocratic rule over Palestine. Furthermore, Shaqaqi's ideas were not in line with those of the Muslim Brotherhood. He privileged a military approach to political goals, while the Brotherhood pursued the opposite. And this was considered a way too moderate approach for Shaqaqi.

Fathi Shaqaqi was born in Gaza in 1951 when the Strip was still under Egyptian control. This is one of the reasons why his group is deep-rooted in Gaza rather than in the West Bank. A maths graduate at the Bir Zeit University near Ramallah, Shaqaqi obtained a medical degree in Egypt and came in contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members are doctors in the majority.

Following the killing of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in 1981, Fathi Shaqaqi and other key members of his group were expelled and deported to Gaza. Shaqaqi then went to become a doctor in Jerusalem and came under the spotlight of Israeli security services. In 1983 he was convicted to one year in prison for subversive activity. In 1986 Fathi Shaqaqi received another 3 year sentence. During the first Intifada in August 1988 Shaqaqi was deported to Lebanon. Here he made contact with the Hezbollah, who will later become one of the main supporters of the PIJ, and with the Iranian theocracy through their embassies in Beirut and Damascus.

In 1989 Fathi Shaqaqi settled in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp (the biggest in the Middle East with over 150 thousand inhabitants) in the outskirts of Damascus, thus benefiting from the support of Bashar al Assad's regime whom at that time financed all those Palestinian groups fighting against Israel.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad's opposition to the 1993 Oslo Agreement between the PLO and Israel lead to the formation of a coalition with all Damascus based Palestinian radical factions, including Hamas. On a military level, this lead to a series of suicide attacks, car bombs and joint military operations with Hezbollah. From that moment onwards, Fathi Shaqaqi became one of the major threats to the State of Israel and, as has often happened in the fight against Palestinian terrorism, a target for Mossad operations.

On October 26 1995 Fathi Shaqaqi was in Malta under a false name. The Mediterranean island was often a stop over on the road to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Fathi was on his way to Libya. Gaddafi had promised financial support to the PIJ. As he walked back to his hotel, Shaqaqi was approached by a motorbike and shot dead by a silenced pistol. The killers then left their motorbike, boarded a car driven by an accomplice and disappeared by sea through a small harbor on the coast.

The death of the leader of the Islamic Jihad had a negative impact on the group's capabilities. Fathi Shaqaqi was replaced by another founder of the group, Abdullah Ramadan Shallah, also known as Ramadan Abdullah Mohamed Shallah. Shallah was also born in Gaza and had a Phd in Economics obtained at the Durham University in the UK. Shallah had also lived in the United States from 1990 to 1995 in Tampa, Florida. He was then working at the University of South Florida, but at the same time he lead an organization named "Islamic Committee for Palestine" and another group called "World Islam and Studies Enterprise". Both these organizations were dedicated to the recruitment, indoctrination and contact of terrorists.

Ramadan Shallah did not have the charisma of his predecessor and his leadership coincided with a fall in recruitment and, as a consequence, of military operations. Furthermore, 911 and the US fight against terrorism have also impacted the group's operational capabilities.

Abdullah Ramadan Shallah is currently wanted by the US State Department (since November 27 1995) and by the FBI (since February 24 2006) on counts of terrorism, conspiracy and other crimes

(extortion, money laundering, murder, corruption). A 5 million dollars bounty has been put on Shallah for the crimes he committed while in Tampa.

POLITICAL STANCE

The current political stance of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad swings from the attempt to approach the PLO (contacts are underway for their re-entry in the organization) to a radical opposition to the PNA, whose leaders come from the PLO. The contradiction is only apparent and is based on political calculus, rather than on the PIJ's electoral strength. In the eyes of the Islamic Jihad the PNA represents a government in dialogue with Israel and a signatory of the Oslo Agreement, whom the PIJ refutes. The same can be said for the Palestinian Legislative Council (the Parliament) from whom the PNA stems in the form of a government.

On the other hand, the Islamic Jihad is conscious of its military strength, but also of its lack of electoral support. With the exception of a modest number of followers in Gaza, Jenin and Hebron, the PIJ knows it cannot compete for Parliament against other islamist or secular groups. Even though lately - thanks to its increased military firepower - the Palestinian Islamic Jihad has gained some popularity. Overall though its votes are an estimated 4% of all Gaza voters, who total 900 thousand. This is one of the reasons the group did not participate in the 2006 elections that saw Hamas triumph in the Strip.

But how many votes you have has no influence on re-entering the PLO, since access to the organization's governing bodies, namely the Palestinian National Council (PNC, Munazzamat al Tharir al Filistiniyah), is granted both by elections (in which the PIJ has said it will run) and quotas (in countries like Jordan, Syria and Lebanon). A return in the PLO does not imply an automatic recognition of the Oslo Agreement, even though it implies an osmosis between the PNC and the PNA. The Islamic Jihad's is a subterfuge to avoid isolation, rather than a clear political stance. This approach also takes care of Iran's wishes of maintaining an ideologically pure group that has not been contaminated by deals or negotiations with the Israelis.

In 2011 the PLO has constituted a new organism, the Temporary Committee for Leadership, with the aim of reforming its structure and of allowing the return of all those factions like Hamas and the Islamic Jihad who don't recognize the Israeli State. At this time both groups are represented in the Committee.

The PIJ's military strength as opposed to its political weakness pushes the group to fueling the clash with Israel and to play the role that best suits them. If there was peace and dialogue, Shallal and his acolytes would have no bargaining chips.

Furthermore, the Islamic Jihad has to face yet another hurdle: Khaled Meshal's confirmed leadership of Hamas. This means that the competing islamic group in Gaza is favoring dialogue (and thus the two states solution), rather than its once radical stances on the elimination of Israel as supported by Ismail Haniyeh. If Hamas were to reconcile with the PNA, this would favor the peace process and their participation in the next Palestinian elections.

This could have some serious repercussions for the PIJ. Would they be able to move freely in Gaza in the same way Hamas has allowed them to move to date? After all, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad says no to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, no to the peace process and to those who carry on

with it (namely the PNA), yes to an Islamic state in Palestine and yes to armed struggle. On the other hand, Hamas has a new political agenda: yes to a Palestinian state within the 1967 boundaries, yes to popular uprisings, yes to the attempt of erasing Hamas from terrorist blacklists and turning it into a political force and negotiating partner and yes to a return in the PLO.

Backing this new agenda are Khaled Meshal's financiers in the Gulf, namely Qatar, Sunni interests, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi's new policy. All of these groups are hostile to Iran, to date the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's major and only sponsor.

And this is where Ramadan Shallah's political calculus comes into play: it is better to return in the Palestinian orbit, rather than remain isolated in Gaza and the West Bank.

MILITARY STRENGTH

As we've already stated, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's sole bargaining tool is its military strength. The military wing of the movement, which is vaguely separated from the political branch, is represented by the Al Quds Brigades. Its estimated force is around 1,000/1,500 men (the organization claims a larger figure) that, in order to avoid Israeli retaliation, are divided into secret and isolated cells coordinated by a regional command whose orders come from the political leadership.

After suffering heavy losses in the fight against Israel in 2008-2009, the Al Quds Brigades military capabilities were improved thanks to Syrian and mainly Iranian support (i.e. weapons supply, logistical and training support). Iran also provides income for the families of detainees and provides health assistance to members of the Islamic Jihad.

The organization's increased military strength was highlighted during the November 2012 clashes (that began on November 14 during the Israeli "Pillar of Defense" military operation) when the Al Quds Brigades launched over 900 rockets onto Israel. The majority of these weapons - Fajr 5 and Grad rockets - came from Iran and were smuggled into Gaza by the Hezbollah. Only a minimum part of the rockets was produced locally because of Egypt's closure of supplies coming from the tunnels in the Sinai. The Fajr rockets have a range of 75 km - Tel Aviv is only 71 km away from the Gaza Strip - and have a powerful explosive warhead. The circumstance has forced the Civil Defense in Tel Aviv to train the population against this threat.

The very fact that the PIJ was able to smuggle and stock the rockets in Gaza without the Israelis detecting and destroying them is a sign of the group's military capability and of the organization's tight proof from enemy infiltrations. And this means efficiency.

Another less publicized aspect that has worried Israel was the Islamic Jihad's hacking of the Israeli telephone system. The PIJ was able to send recorded voice messages to the civilian population. This is a typical act of cyber warfare, probably obtained through the Hezbollah (who run an efficient cyber warfare center in Beirut), that could create more problems in the future for Tel Aviv.

The Al Quds Brigades today prevail in the competition with the military wing of Hamas, the Ezzedin al Qassam Brigades, and the two groups hardly ever collaborate. The recent killing (November 14 2012) of Hamas' military chief, Ahmad Jaabari, has widened this gap even further.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN

Iran has been the country that has supported Hamas more than anyone else. Ever since Khomeini's 1979 revolution support kept coming until they split roads following the crisis in Syria. Apart from the fact that both Khaled Meshal and Ramadan Shallal were forced to quit Damascus to avoid putting their lives in peril, Hamas is concentrating its efforts in supporting the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in its fight against Bashar al Assad. They are on the same side as the monarchies in the Gulf (mainly Qatar where Meshal often stays even though his headquarters have moved to Cairo). Furthermore, Khaled Meshal's recent confirmation at the head of the movement's political office and his victory of Ismael Haniyeh, the latter in favor of a closer relationship with Iran and who is on more radical positions, puts any cooperation with Tehran in serious difficulty.

The Islamic Jihad instead has maintained a neutral stance on the Syrian crisis (labeling the issue as an internal affair of Damascus, whilst other Palestinian factions, like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine of Ahmed Jibril have been deployed in assistance to Assad's troops), thus strengthening its relationship with the Iranian theocracy. They are now basically the sole Palestinian organization talking with Iran. A closer relationship with Tehran also means closer ties with the Lebanese Hezbollah, with whom they share a sort of joint military command in their fight against Israel. Here lies yet another contradiction, since the Hezbollah are fighting alongside Bashar al Assad. On the other, following Meshal's departure from Damascus, there are news of Hamas members training and assisting the Syrian rebels.

Finally, there is also a close personal friendship between Ramadan Shallal and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad which makes Iranian support to the PIJ financially considerable.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Currently Ramadan Shallal sits at the helm of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in a position of Secretary General of the organization. He politically leads the group through the Supreme Consultative Council (Shura), that has recently moved from Damascus to Tehran. The movement also has offices in Khartoum and Beirut. The Consultative Council for the Jihad operates alongside the Shura taking care of all military matters. The PIJ is lead in Gaza by Khader Habib and by Raed Salah, aka "Abu Shakra" who was arrested several times by the Israelis and briefly held in the UK in 2011, in the Occupied Territories. Other key members of the group are in Israeli jails. The Islamic Jihad is to blame for the hunger strikes that routinely take place in prison. One of the most prominent members of the Islamic Jihad is Khader Adnan, who went on hunger strike for 66 days in 2012 before being released.

In the past, mainly starting in 1989 and until 2007, the operational activity of the PIJ has been characterized by suicide attacks and car bombs against the civilian population. After that, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad turned more into a military force, also thanks to the building of the Israeli security walls that have made both guerrilla operations and infiltrations from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank more difficult.

Lately, the organization has declared it will respect the ceasefire with Israel unless attacked and will retaliate without prior consultation with Hamas. This is once again a show of autonomy. The PIJ's

radical stances are there to earn the sympathies of other Palestinian extremist factions that don't accept Hamas coming to moderate terms with Israel.

There are several Islamist Palestinian groups both in the West Bank and in Gaza. In some cases they are dedicated to the political opposition to Hamas, but more often they are involved in terrorist activities not necessarily targeting Israel. Such a proliferation of extremism has been made possible by a strongly islamized environment where teachings by imams are not sufficiently disciplined, by economic hardship and constant threat of Israeli military retaliations. Several among these radical factions were groups formerly part of Hamas or Fatah. They now find ideological proximity with the PIJ. This also allows room for the infiltrations of groups affiliated with Al Qaeda.

There are several names out there: "The army of Umma", "The Zarqawi Group for Palestine" (from the name of an Al Qaeda terrorist killed in Iraq), "Al Tawhid wal Jihad" (founded in 2008 with a declaration of affiliation with Al Qaeda), "Fatah al Islam", "Jund Ansar Allah" (founded in 2008 to contrast Hamas' moderate line), "Jaysh al Islam" (affiliated to Al Qaeda and yet another Hamas splinter group), "Ansar al Sunna", the "Mujaheddin Shura Committee" (that has recently launched rockets against Israel), "Popular Resistance Committee", "The Sword of Truth Brigades", "Jaysh al Qaeda" (lead by extremist Abu Sahib al Maqdissi). And the list could continue.

The PIJ's current standing in the extremist galaxy will continue unless a just and negotiated solution to the Palestinian issue is found. Otherwise, the group could become attractive in case of a return to armed struggle as a tool to achieve Palestinian claims. And if this was the case, there will be future additions to the list of all those Palestinian militants and leaders who share the same faith as Shaqaqi, like: Abu Walid Dahdouh, Louai Saadi, Mahmoud Tawalbe Mahmoud al Majzoub, Thamer Khuweir, Husain Jaradat, Ayman al Fayed, Khaled Shahan...

THE WATER-WAR BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS

Many people think that the controversy between Israelis and Palestinians is limited to the issue of the occupied territories and the right to self-determination. Yet the outcome of the negotiations between the two nations is burdened with another major issue that could prove decisive: the future allocation of water resources.

The issue arises from the fact that the area inhabited by Israelis and Palestinians is not sufficiently rich in water, and Israel has been using more than its share to the detriment of the Palestinians. The problem has been raised during negotiations as an element of contrast and, during daily life, as an instrument of coercion and blackmail.

Although the issue of water has a social bearing, it has been administered with political and public order parameters in mind. When the clash between Israelis and Palestinians gets overly violent, one of the first measures on the part of the authorities in Tel Aviv – apart from closing the enclave and denying access to Palestinians – is that of denying them access to water.

This is an incidental fact. The systematic fact is that the limited access to water hinders Palestinian agriculture and the health and hygiene level of Palestinian families.

The water in the area comes from two main sources:

- a groundwater aquifer that runs north-south through Israel and Cisjordan parallel to the sea-shore, from the mountains of Galilee to the desert of Bersheva;
- the Jordan river and its tributaries;

There are a number of wells through which one can access the aquifer, while the river water is directly channeled or pumped.

Both the wells and channel/pumps are controlled - directly or indirectly - by the Israelis.

But there are also pejorative elements in the scheme, such as an inefficient - old and run down - distribution network on the Palestinian side, coupled with a devastated sewer network (also thanks to the Israeli military intervention). This allows for a very little recycling of used waters.

The situation assumes even more dramatic connotations in Gaza.

THE SITUATION IN GAZA

Compared to Cisjordan, the Gaza strip has less water resources, both in relation to its population density and because of the fact that the groundwater aquifer used by Gaza inhabitants is for the most part contaminated. About 95% of the water is contaminated by the sewer system mentioned above and has a high level of salinity because of its nearness to the sea.

There are also other, external, factors that make the access to water precarious, such as the scarcity of rain in the past few years that has denied sufficient water to the aquifers (statistically speaking there is a drought every four years). Seen as the same aquifer is exploited in an abnormal manner by the Israelis, the impoverishment of the groundwater reserves continues undisturbed.

A study by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (O.C.H.A.) of the United Nations has recently predicted that the combined “increase in population, scarce winter rains and intensive exploitation” of water resources could produce by the year 2016 a complete depletion of the specific water resources that would be irreversible by the year 2020. Every year the level of the groundwater aquifer used by the inhabitants of Gaza decreases by 15-20 cm. The Gaza strip's 2 million-or-so inhabitants need about 200 million cubic meters of water every year, while the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) has ascertained that the groundwater resources can be tapped for a maximum of 55 million cubic meters per year. Any further exploitation would mean their progressive and final depletion.

Also, in 2006, an Israeli air attack destroyed the main electric plant in the Gaza strip. This has hindered the pumping of water and the functioning of the structures that recycle the used water. In addition there is the lack of gasoline. Since June 2007 the embargo against the Gaza strip by the authorities in Tel Aviv has prevented the Palestinians from importing equipments and materials needed to repair and maintain the water and sewer system. Presently, much of the sewer system unloads its water directly at sea.

Military operations in 2008-2009 have also worsened the situation.

Insufficient, irregularly flowing water, a high level of pollution, a critical health situation and a rapidly growing population are all elements that add up to a strong social want on the Palestinian part. As such, all of these elements have been used by Israel as a bargaining chip with the Palestinians.

Presently the inhabitants of Gaza have to import – when it is allowed – water from the Israeli water company. In the future they would like to import the water by ship from Turkey, if need be.

There are obviously a number of international initiatives that would/could solve the problem. The rise to power of Hamas in 2007 blocked a project for the construction of a desalinization plant financed (with 400 million dollars) by USAID. Another project has been drafted by the World Bank for the reparation and restructuring of the water and sewer systems (worth 6.4 million dollars), yet once again the security hazards do not allow any work to be carried out in the area.

THE SITUATION IN CISJORDAN

In the territories that are controlled by the ANP (Palestinian National Authority) the health situation is less critical, but the social and economic situation is much the same as in Gaza.

The groundwater aquifer that crosses Cisjordan is used mostly by Israel (73%) and by the ANP (17%). The remaining 10% is absorbed illegally (notwithstanding Israeli law but with the complacency of Israeli authorities) by the Israeli settlements.

Much of the water coming from the Jordan river – although the Israelis control only part of it – goes to Israel, which pumps it out of the river and channels it through its own network that is inaccessible to Palestinians. Israel controls the source of the river on the Hermon and its main tributaries such as the Yarmuk. The Jordan river's water is pumped into the Israeli national water network from the lake Tiberiade, thus before the water reaches Cisjordan. The same thing is done on the Yarmuk river, which is a tributary of the Jordan river.

Palestinians do not have access to sufficient water, so they cannot develop their agricultural potential adequately. When they attempt to buy water from Israel they are charged higher prices, making the Palestinian agricultural products less competitive.

In the Israeli-controlled Cisjordan, 90% of the Palestinian agricultural production is presently based on irrigation through rainwater (while 50% of the Israeli fields are irrigated with technical systems). This adds up to another dreadful statistic: 86% of the farmland in the occupied territories is exploited by the Israelis. Only about 6% is in Palestinian hands, the rest is under military jurisdiction and therefore off-limits.

After the 1967 occupation, the control of the water resources was taken from the Palestinians and given to the military government which was later named (for obvious aesthetic purposes) “Civil Administration”. This office administered production, distribution and usage of the water resources. Every concession was subject to an authorization, every directive was issued directly through military decrees, thus cutting the Palestinians out of the decision-making process. The civil/military Administration decided who could dig wells and how much water each could extract from the wells. In 1982 the control over water resources was transferred from the Civil Administration to the Israeli state water company “Mekorot” with a 49-year concession (which ends in the year 2031). It is like saying that until that year the occupied territories will remain occupied.

Thanks to the concession, which gave the Mekorot company a monopoly over water in the region, allowed for pipelines and wells to be build – always in favor of the Israeli clients, of course. If the territories were to be reclaimed by the Palestinians, these structures could cause big problems and controversies. The Palestinian living in the occupied territories is considered just an end-user with limited and controlled access to the water system. The territories that are called “occupied” territories are in fact already part of the “great Israel” as in the Zionist dream. When water gets scarce during the summer season, Mekorot closes the water on Palestinian villages and uses it for its Israeli clients.

During the October 1967 war (also known as the “war of the 6 days” or the “Yom Kippur”) the Israelis destroyed 140 water wells. In the course of the following 20 years, the Palestinian community has been allowed to build but 13 wells.

In their fight for water the Palestinians, in order not to buy water from Israel at a high price, often build “illegal” wells (without an authorization) that are destroyed if discovered. According to Human Rights Watch, in 2011 alone Israeli authorities have destroyed 89 “abusive” Palestinian water structures (wells, containers, baths), 25% of which were financed by international associations (including the EU). A report by Oxfam states that if the Palestinians were not limited in the use of water, their gross national product would increase by 1,5 billion dollars c.ca.

THE FUTURE

The water problem, with all the social discomfort that it causes, is instrumental in the Israeli policy of attempting to force its Palestinian counterpart – be it Hamas in Gaza or the ANP in Cisjordan – into signing a global agreement (territories, self-determination, water) favorable to Israel. Whether this tactic will prove successful remains to be seen, because the negotiations between Israel and

Palestine may not benefit from yet another element of contrast that generates further resentment. A forced accord, says history, never lasts very long.

Israel's agricultural workforce is quite limited and makes up a meager 3% of its gross national product. Less water, economically speaking, would not mean catastrophic consequences. Some staples, such as cotton, were reduced due to the intensive use of irrigation. On the Palestinian side agriculture represents 14% of the gross national product and about 33% of the workforce.

The Israeli 3% is made up mostly of settlers that live in the occupied territories, near the borders with Palestine and near Palestinian villages. These people are more sensible to security issues and are for the most part extremists and ultra-zionists.

In the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, these people belong to the nationalist far-right and make up a potent lobby that the Israeli government seldom ignores. Benjamin Netanyahu and the right-wing coalitions have often been heralds and victims of the settlers.

The latest government that emerged after the past early elections is riddled with individuals that have ties to the settlements and to the extreme right-wing: Lieberman, Alkin, Slomjansky, Ariel. Not only don't they want to share the water, but they don't intend to negotiate or give any concession to the Palestinians.

It is thus improbable that an accord over the administration of water could be reached, even outside of the main negotiations.

International laws, conventions and accords that could be used to settle the matter are not conclusive or binding. According to the UN 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 1, every people is entitled to the free use of its natural resources.

There are rules that regulate the use of water from international rivers (Helsinki, 1966), rules that regulate the international groundwater (Seoul, 1986) and rules regulating international water resources (1986). All of these treaties should determine the criteria to solve controversies, but have no real binding legal value. These treaties can solve the controversy on a geological, hydrological and morphological level, but are useless when faced with a political issue.

Then there are the multilateral commissions formed to solve controversies in the region, but their boycotting on the part of Lebanon and Syria, coupled with the reluctance of Israel to discuss the issue, have made such commissions powerless. The only middle-eastern country that doesn't have water problems is, in fact, Lebanon.

There is an Israeli-Palestinian joint water committee (JWC) that was formed in 1996 during the Oslo negotiations. The committee is formally in charge of discussing the issue. Yet even in this context, every Palestinian concession is matched with a concession for the settlements. Every concession is, of course, the product of a difficult and time consuming bureaucratic process. The settlements are generally serviced by the national Israeli water network, while the water structures in the occupied territories of Cisjordan, the waters of the Jordan river and those of Gaza are not discussed during negotiations with the ANP.

The driving principle of the Oslo negotiations was an equal distribution of the water resources on the basis of the following factors: the quantity of such resources, the social and economic needs, the past use of the resources, the possibility to use alternative resources and their cost, and the attempt to limit damages on both sides.

The “past use of the resources” part of the negotiation is perceived by Israel as a reference to a pre-existing situation, that is the right to maintain their privileged position by lineage. No matter if the privilege was obtained through coercion and limitations imposed on the Palestinian population and as a consequence of unilateral exploitation. The reference to “social and economic needs” accentuates the needs of the Israeli economy, which is much more developed than that of their counterpart, as if it were a rightful claim to more water.

The Israeli vision of the water problem has developed into one that sees the right to water as a private, not shareable, right. It is striking to see – for those who have been in the occupied territories – the difference between the settlements, patches of verdant abundance among the desolated and arid surrounding areas.

Israel has made the water issue into an issue of national security and intends to base its political negotiations on this parameter. On the other front, the divergences between Hamas and the ANP limit the Palestinian common strategy to counter Israeli impositions and restrictions. On the global level, the divisions and civil wars of the Arab world do not supply sufficient international support for the Palestinian claims.

Presently the Israelis use approximately 333 cubic meters of water per person annually while the Palestinians only use 83. It is a 1 to 4 relationship. Yet the settlers receive much more, their share being 1450 cubic meters per person. This last figure clearly goes to show an improper and unbalanced use of water for mere political ends.

The Israeli population counts presently around 8 million inhabitants, 90% of whom reside in urban centers. According to statistics from 2011 there are over 534.000 settlers, 320.000 of whom reside in the occupied territories of Cisjordan, 7800 in the Gaza strip, 198.000 in Jerusalem and the remaining 20.000 in the Golan heights. This half-a-million individuals are able to influence the Israeli public opinion because they live in the front line: the front against Arabs. They have substantial tax exemptions, social services, a powerful political lobby and are the ones that use and abuse the water resources. Their water is subsidized by the government (they pay only a fraction of extraction and transportation costs).

As of today there doesn't seem to be the right conditions for a peaceful solution to this controversy about the equal division of water resources. It is a problem that is linked both to the land that must be returned into Palestinian hands and to the self-determination of the Palestinians themselves. Even though the issue may seem to be subordinated to other, more pressing issues, without a solution to this problem, peace and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians will not be possible.

IRAQ : THE SCOURGE OF A USELESS WAR

The Second Gulf War began on the night of March 19 2003 following the same ritual as its predecessor (the First Gulf War started on the night of January 16 1991) over ten years before : first came the electronic jamming to block all radio communications, then missiles were launched to destroy the Iraqi command and control system, aerial defense installations and the electricity network, bombings then focused on Saddam Hussein's units and military infrastructure and finally civilian infrastructure was targeted (with the sole exclusion of oil installations) before a full scale land invasion was launched. The same script with the same results: in 1991 the fall of Iraq came about after 45 days (February 28 1991), in 2003 by mid April the Baathist regime had already collapsed.

Exactly as during the First Gulf War, also in 2003 the United States dedicated their entire attention to the military aspects of the conflict, without preparing adequate replies to what should have happened after the fall of the dictatorship. The rhetoric on the exportation of democracy used by President George W. Bush postulated the reply: the Iraqis will acclaim the Americans as liberators, a democratic opposition will replace Saddam and terrorism will disappear from the region. This was the same dreamlike approach of 1991, when US forces did not enter Baghdad because - as Bush father thought - the Iraqis would have gotten rid of their dictator themselves.

There is no doubt Saddam Hussein was a brutal and bloody tyrant, nor was there any uncertainty on the fact that several opposers would have been happy with his defenestration. But this is where the first mistake comes in: the United States had based their entire strategy on the Iraqi National Congress (Al Moutammar al Watani al Iraqi, INC), a group trying to gather all those opposing the Baathist regime. It was an organization though that did not represent the Iraqi people, nor was it deep rooted back home.

The INC was lead by a controversial figure, Ahmed Abdel Hadi Chalabi, whose name first came to light in the 90s following the issuing of an international arrest warrant by Jordan for the bankruptcy of a local bank, Petra Bank. Chalabi had been convicted to 22 years in jail. Self proclaimed innocent, Ahmed Chalabi claimed he was politically persecuted. After he fled though none of the clients were reimbursed. The money had disappeared with Chalabi.

The founding of the INC opened a door a opportunity for the Shiite Iraqi, especially financially. The organization received conspicuous funding from the US Administration, the CIA and was favored among the British. Ahmed Chalabi claimed he had contacts in Iraq, he formulated political solutions for the post-Saddam, he supplied his financiers and sponsors with information from a series of sources he managed in Iraq. Obviously, most of the information was on Weapons of Mass Destruction that, once the war was over, were never found.

But just like Bush, Ahmed Chalabi wanted the US to wage war against Saddam Hussein. The information he provided were paid for by the CIA and the INC was turned into a flourishing business. At a time when US authorities were basically looking for an excuse to attack Iraq, Chalabi provided his political patrons what they wanted to hear.

Disinformation rather than information? It surely wasn't an insurmountable ethical issue for someone like Ahmed Chalabi.

Besides from Chalabi's personal and financial interests, the biggest problem was that the INC had no grip on the Iraqi population and once Saddam Hussein was ousted they would not have been able to impose their guide to the country. The only true opposition to the Iraqi dictator sat in exile in Tehran; the Shiite clerics that returned to the country after the conflict proved they had tighter links with the Ayatollah's regime rather than with the Americans.

But here comes the second mistake: the war against Saddam destroyed all civilian infrastructure with detrimental effects on the lives of ordinary people. Electricity was absent or rationed, fuel had to be bought on the black market (a paradox for one of the major oil producing countries), both the water and sewer systems had collapsed, bridges and roads destroyed, hospitals were lacking supplies. The Iraqis could well have acclaimed the US troops as liberators, but they would also have expected their country to be rebuilt. Once again the United States focused more on the military aspects of the invasion and not on the effects on civilians. As we write today, after 10 years the reconstruction of Iraq has not been completed.

Then, once the invasion was over, the US named a proconsul like Paul Bremer - a career diplomat - whose task was to lead the country in the transition to a new democratic Iraqi authority. Bremer led what was known as the Coalition Provisional Authority, CPA, a de facto US lead government. The CPA immediately committed the third and probably most serious mistake: starting from May 23 2003 all members of the Baath party and all members of the army were dismissed and excluded from any future government posts. The Iraqi army was disbanded and declared illegal. The ban extended to the members of Security Courts and even the Olympic Committee.

Membership to the one party Baath was often dictated by need (as happened in Italy during fascism, when school teachers were obliged to join Mussolini's party in order to teach) and did not represent, at least in the majority of cases, a proof of guilt or collusion with the regime. The dismissal of this mass of people had terrible social effects. First of all it followed religious lines: if the Shiites were discriminated under Saddam, now it was the Sunnis' turn. Secondly, in a basically state-run economy, public employment was a life line for millions of families who were suddenly left destitute.

Based on 2003 data, out of 24 million Iraqis and 6.1 million males with ages from 15 to 49 (thus enlistable for the army), the Iraqi National Army counted on 390 thousand men, 20 thousand were enlisted in the aviation and 100 thousand were policemen and law enforcement officials. To this, we have to add 600 thousand reservists and paramilitaries. Bremer's edict, regardless of whether it was a right decision or a wrong one, left 1 million Iraqi families without a salary for an estimated total of 4 to 5 million people. To this we have to add the 20% of Iraqis with full time public jobs and 21% of Iraqis with part-time positions. We're talking about nearly 10 million people, over half of the country's population.

Paul Bremer's mistake generated another paradox: a country ruled by a cruel and bloodthirsty dictatorship that was once free from terrorism became the world's terrorism central. Terrorists could now rely on the support of that part of the population, Sunnis in majority, that had been socially marginalized and left without any economic means to rely on. The fight against the US invaders and emerging Shiite clerics became a struggle for their lives. In a few months time the Iraqis not only lost access to electricity, water and fuel, but they also lost their most precious asset: security.

Saddam Hussein could have been the worst leader on earth. He denied liberties, but granted security. And here comes in an underestimated cultural aspect of Iraqi people. Democracy and freedom have a value if we recognize their importance. We need time to appreciate them, time the Iraqis never had. If at the end of a dictatorship a country falls into anarchy and chaos there is little we can do to value democracy as it stands today in Iraq.

Ousting Saddam without any credible political alternatives also brought to light all the contradictions afflicting Iraqi society that the dictator had managed, *manu militari*, to contain: the Sunni-Shiite dissension, Kurdish secession.

The clash between Sunnis and Shiites was the inevitable consequence of a Sunni minority rule and grip onto power through the Baath and a marginalized Shiite religious majority. The conflict inverted the roles replacing an injustice with another injustice: Sunnis were now marginalized and Shiites in power. Saddam's

regime ruled through the use of force, something impossible after his demise. After all, the army was made up by Sunnis and once they were dismissed they joined the ranks of the opposition and the guerrilla. The Americans and the British tried to set up a Shiite lead national army, but results have been disappointing.

The issue of the new Iraqi National Army and of its continuing impotence is another piece of evidence of the US lack of preparation in dealing with complex issues. The United States initially denied Iraqi authorities the possibility to reconstitute civilian ministries, but foremost the Defense Ministry. All government tasks were under the allied controlled CPA. In June 2004, realizing this policy was backfiring, there is a change of attitude. The CPA is dissolved, an interim Iraqi government is formed and a new organism called IRMO (Iraqi Reconstruction and Management Office) is created. The IRMO is tasked with financing the reconstruction of Iraq and of assisting all new Iraqi ministries in executing their tasks. In other words, each ministry is put under international, or rather anglo-american, tutelage.

In this context the Defense Ministry is reconstituted. It is flooded with cadres lacking any military experience. Their ranks were the result of nepotism or trade. A Shiite civilian with insufficient military background is appointed minister, the Secretary General is a Kurd from Massoud Barzani's group, while military intelligence is handed over to a Kurd from Jalal Talabani's faction. After all, the Kurds were the only ones with military experience thanks to their Peshmerga units, but they had no interest whatsoever in having a new Iraqi National Army to fight their independence claims. But the issue was not only the appointment of the wrong people at the head of the Ministry, nor the lack of military experience of the cadres, but the US distrust of Iraqis. The United States began a pseudo training of the military cadres to counter the Sunni armed opposition, but carefully avoided supplying the units of the newly formed Iraqi army with adequate weapons. The fight against the insurgents was basically lead by the US army and by General David Petraus, whose rapid rise to the head of the CIA was as fast as his demise. If the Sunni armed opposition still continues to carry out attacks and acts of sabotage it is because of the decisions taken back in 2004.

The dismissal of the Sunnis and their joining the ranks of the rebels also created a link between these communities and Al Qaeda's jihadists, whose majority are Sunnis. This tie continues to date.

The rise to power of a Shiite leadership in Iraq has also reshaped the balance and the game of alliances in the Middle East strengthening Iran. US unpreparedness is striking once again. It was inevitable that if a Sunni dictatorship was brought down and replaced by a new Shiite authority with ties to Tehran this would have lead to a reshaping of the relationship between Iran and Iraq. Furthermore, from a geo-strategic point of view, the disappearance of one of the strongest armies in the Middle East and the advent of chaos would have stimulated the appetites and aspirations of neighboring countries. It wasn't difficult to identify Iran and its hegemonic aims as one of those countries. After all, it was the United States that had funded and armed Saddam Hussein in his fight against Iranian expansionism in the 80s.

With regard to the Kurdish issue, the Peshmerga militias were the only ones that had fought against Saddam Hussein whilst he was still in power. They then helped the US troops defeat the Iraqi dictator. At the end of the war the Kurdish independence claims resurfaced once again. If the dream of a Kurdish State is not juridically possible at the moment, the Kurds already have some form of independence. The weakness of the central government in Baghdad has allowed the Kurds to form a Federal region with ambiguous powers. Commentators could point to the fact that the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, is Kurdish. But this does not say anything on the Kurds' loyalty to Iraq.

Iraqi Kurds profit from the oil extracted in their region, the Peshmerga act as an army in their territories, foreign investments (mainly Turkish ones) are flooding their land. They have become a de facto State within a State. Once again the question is whether the United States had envisaged such a scenario or if this is yet another byproduct of the lack of attention - or shortsightedness - of US policy. Turkey perceives Iraqi Kurdistan as a market for its products, but the Kurdish issue remains a delicate internal affair since the

majority of Kurds live within Turkish borders. A stronger Kurdish Iraq could lead the way for other Kurdish communities in the Middle East. And the region needs everything, but further motives for instability. Nevertheless, the recent stances taken by the PKK in Turkey and the statements from its jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan could lead to a positive solution to the long-standing problem. But still, Iraqi Kurdistan could end up being the first and only pseudo-country for the Kurds.

Analysts can debate over the fact that any war ousting an autocratic regime as the one led by Saddam Hussein is justified and is worth being fought. This principle could be valid if foreign policy was guided by the ideals of international justice and not by national egoism. But this has never happened. In the case for the war in Iraq there were strictly personal motivations (the Bush family's grudge against Saddam Hussein), targets for world and regional influence, interests for the control of Iraqi oil fields. The latter casts some serious doubts over the US legitimacy to wage a war. If the international community (or the US who often take over this role) were to fight all the dictators still in power, there wouldn't be enough armies to fight them all off. It suffices to say that Bashar al Assad is still in power and no one has raised a finger to kick him out.

Any appraisal of the war in Iraq should be based on what the conflict has cost, both economically and in terms of human lives, and what has been achieved.

About 5.000 allied troops have perished (4.488 Americans), 32 thousand people have been wounded, 200 thousand Iraqi civilian victims (over a total of around 1 million Iraqi deaths), 2.2 trillion dollars spent and what has this achieved?

Iraq is today a country ravaged by instability and civil war and fragmented among Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites. Attacks are on a daily basis and reconstruction is not yet complete. Iranian influence has grown stronger and the new Shiite leadership is deploying the same corruption and nepotism as during the good old days under Saddam Hussein. It should be enough to remember that on the day of the decennial of the war in Iraq 61 people were killed and 200 wounded in attacks. In 2012 there have been almost 5.000 deaths caused by insurgents or terrorist attacks. The Iraqi State is also adding to the toll with 130 death penalties last year and the 18 executions carried out in March 2013. Regardless of international requests, post Saddam Iraq is continuing in its old habits.

Is this what President George W. Bush had in mind when he stated on May 1 2003 from the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln "mission accomplished"? Or is this the future of Iraq the newly appointed Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel envisages when he say "war has been completed"?