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DATAGATE “SCANDAL”: INTELLIGENCE AND LACK OF ETHICS

There are no limits or ethics that can condition the workings of the world of intelligence. It is thus superfluous to discriminate between what is considered right or correct and what isn't.

Information Services operate in the interest and tutelage of a country's national security. With this objective in mind, everything is permitted. There exist no rules and no limits. A good example of this is the case of Jonathan Jay Pollard, the spy who was caught in 1985 while he was stealing US secrets and delivering them to Israel.

The cooperation on which bilateral and multilateral relations between intelligence Services are based are always the product of convergent national interests. Weddings based on interest, never on love. This does not mean that certain Services are not more cooperative amongst them than other similar organizations are. Yet even among these more cooperative organizations, there prevails a context of diffidence. This because there exists information and disinformation as well. Because sometimes those that are tagged with the epitaph of terrorists by one nation may be patriots to another nation. The elimination of a target may be a murder or it may be self-defense, the betrayal against one nation may be patriotism to another nation. It is a gray world, where right and wrong is not so important, as is particular interest.

In the world of spies there are two sectors that are considered of the utmost secrecy and are thus very rarely shared with other intelligence Services: the encrypting, decrypting and wiretapping activities.

The encrypting of a message, news or information, prevents others from accessing its content. No Service ever tells another Service what or how it operates in a specific sector. Such revelation would compromise that country's security. It's sources, contacts, evaluations, intentions, operative circumstances, apparatuses and other sensitive activities would be invariably compromised as well. The more sophisticated a cryptographic system is, the more protected are a Service's communications and the more difficult it is to decrypt them. The defensive activities that protect communications always go hand in hand with offensive activity used to decrypt the communications of others. Those who manage to decrypt the communications of others never admit that they did so. They silently intercept messages, decrypt them, and thus come to know things that other countries would want to hide. It is the AISE motto: “Arcana Intellego” (Latin for “understanding secrets”)

Most people do not realize that all of the electronic and radio emissions that move through the ether are systematically intercepted or are at least the potential target of interception. This sector goes by the name of SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) and ELINT (Electronic Intelligence). These two sectors are developed by all Information Services.

As far as concerns the Italian context, the encrypting (including the procurement of encrypting systems and methods to the State apparatus) and decrypting activity is of exclusive competence of the AISE. Law 124 of 2007 assigns to AISE the exclusive competence in terms of SIGINT (projected abroad, not on the national territory, of course).

Getting to the heart of the matter: a technician working for the US National Security Agency, Edward Snowden, has recently divulged news that the organization that he worked with was intercepting everything, US and foreign citizens, friends and enemies, allies and foes, diplomatic seats and members of international organizations alike. The NSA was doing so in a systematic and massive way, as its technical and human capabilities allowed it to. That's was the "scandal". The countries that realized that they were targets of the US "attentions" rebelled and asked for explanations.

Suddenly the public realized that many of the embassies located on the US territory, Italy included, were the object of espionage. The same happened to some UN delegations and representatives. It then emerged that the EU structures were also under tight monitoring.

The diatribe immediately took a political turn. Some countries expressed disdain, as if they had been betrayed or as if their pride had been wounded by someone they deemed to be a reliable ally. Yet it must be said that among all this disdain there are ample doses of hypocrisy.

The embassies of foreign countries in any part of the world are the object of informative interest. Their offices are monitored, their communications are systematically intercepted and, where possible, informers within the embassies themselves are sought and paid. It is an operative routine that is largely used in the field of counter-espionage.

One could object on the fact that the US intercepting and monitoring activity was so strongly concentrated on countries that are considered political friends. Thus – even though Snowden hasn't spoken about it much – one can imagine what kind of activity is reserved for countries that are considered hostile. It is on this front that the US technician will probably negotiate his own future by ingratiating himself with the SVR (Služba vnešnje razvedki), the Russian international intelligence service, heir of the KGB.

Beginning on September 11, 2001, the National Security Agency has grown enormously, both in terms of financing (about 5 billion additional dollars annually), of personnel (it is esteemed that the Agency employs from 50 to 60 thousand technicians in addition to the contractors that are employed through outsourcing like Snowden) and of importance in the US intelligence community (where it presently plays a primary role). The NSA is in charge of encrypting, decrypting, SIGINT and ELINT which, as we mentioned, are the more delicate aspects of information activity. From its unique central headquarters in Fort Meade, Maryland, the NSA has expanded to other operative centers in San Antonio

(Texas), Denver (Colorado), Salt Lake City (Utah), Kunia (Hawaii) and Fort Gordon (Georgia).

Yet the so-called “Datagate” scandal is also tied to the fact that the NSA, together with other Agencies of other countries, is the central part of a global interception system (satellite, radar, radio, telephone, internet, etc.) that leaves nothing unobserved. The component that goes by the name of “Echelon” is in a position to intercept radio, electronic and telephone communications. It’s main structure is in Harrogate, Yorkshire, UK. There are “listening” centers in Sugar Grove (Virginia) and Yakima (Washington). To these main structure we must add other “listening” centers around the world that take care of regional monitoring, such as the Sigonella, Sicily, radar center that is in construction and that is under the formal control of the US Navy and which directs its “ear” towards the middle east.

The following Agencies have adhered, together with the NSA, to the Echelon program: the British “Government Communications Headquarters”, New Zealand’s “Government Communications Security Bureau”, Australia’s “Defense Signal Directorate” and the Canadian “Communications Security Establishment”.

It is not by hazard that all of these are English-speaking countries and that they have a strongly rooted alliance with the US. They are thus supportive and obviously benefit from all that is intercepted around the world.

One could argue that what the NSA did against the UN, the embassies, the EU and the European central bank was not done by the US alone, but by all the participants in the Echelon project. It is also a fact that the aforementioned countries (especially the UK) have been particularly silent with regards to the indignation of the world against Washington’s obsessive curiosity.

The more serious problem is that this sharing of sensible intelligence data derived from the more or less justified wiretapping (the term “legitimate” would be inappropriate) has become in time a preferential lane for intelligence cooperation. A sort of exclusive club to which other intelligence Services that – although they are equally qualified – were denied access.

The more devastating effect of this “conventio ad excludendum” (agreement to exclude) was felt during the war in Iraq. Since 2003 there existed two distinct doors to the access of intelligence information: one for the Echelon countries and the other for all the other sides that were fighting alongside the US. As if the war and the risks thereof justified this distinction in the sharing of information. It often emerged that news of primary interest for the security of a country’s contingent did not reach the interested country because they circulated within this reserved and exclusive club.

Countries such as Italy and France did not lament this discriminating and dishonorable system in a context of war and thus worsened the situation of their own men fighting abroad. To accentuate the importance of this flux of information it is sufficient to say that the telephone communications throughout Iraq were administered by the US. In practice,

all that was said over the telephone was automatically intercepted, heard and turned into operative information.

As can be easily imagined, there is a substantial difference between systematic access to information within a context of political, commercial and financial war (all of it shared selectively) and what should be shared automatically among so-called friends in a context of all out war.

What has emerged through Snowden's revelations is but the tip of the iceberg of an intrusive intelligence-gathering system over the internet – the so-called PRISM – that is surely even more diffused than people may think. Soon we will find out that all of the important search engines provide the US with data on the world's internet users, allowing to spy contacts, e-mails, phone calls and any kind of communication between any person, be they American, Chinese or European. Every country does it within its own context. Italy does it through a decree approved by the Monti government. France does it on its own people. There are even some accords that allow the US to cooperate with the individual national Agencies of other countries. The only difference is that the US does it abroad.

Today, nobody pays attention to the fact that in Fort Meade, where the General Keith B. Alexander's NSA headquarters are located, they are now creating a task force of another 10 or 15 thousand men and with great financial backing. We speak of cyber-warfare, which in this case means not only to disturb foreign systems, but also to know what goes on inside other countries' computer systems. The targets: Any and all. Without distinction between friend and foe. We'll speak of it again soon.

UNITED STATE'S SYRIAN ENIGMA

U.S. President Barack Obama had traced a “red line” forbidding the use of chemical weapons by the regime in Syria in the fight against the rebellion. After several denials, tests, journalistic investigations and international pressure, that “red line” seems to have been crossed.

The direct consequence of such a circumstance should have been a U.S. intervention against Damascus. But the Obama Administration's first moves show a prudent behavior on what to do next to help the rebels in their fight against Bashar al Assad's loyalists.

If, for technical reasons, the imposition of a no-fly zone over the north of Syria has been ruled out, there are only two operational options left on the table: the supply of weapons to the rebels and/or a direct support in the form of foreign troops fighting alongside the rebellion. Imposing a no-fly zone would imply the prior destruction of Syria's aerial defense system; not doing so would endanger the flights of the forces employed in the enforcement of the aerial blockade. This would require an initial bombardment of radar and missile posts utilized for defense purposes and an attack against the enemy's command and control system. On the other hand, a direct support to the rebels and their flanking on the ground would also require a direct U.S. intervention, but that would also increase the dangers associated with the operation. An armed intervention also postulates the coming into play of other countries (and there are none available on the market at the moment). Hence, whether the U.S. likes it or not, there is only one option left: arm the rebels.

The U.S. reluctance against a direct involvement against the Bashar al Assad's regime is not dictated by Russia's opposition to external military interventions in Syria's internal affairs, but rather by the United States' foreign policy decisions. A military intervention would contradict President Barack Obama's policy of pulling out of theaters of operation such as Iraq and Afghanistan where costs and difficulties have outweighed gains. At the same time, an armed action could determine a final outcome – as has happened in Libya – contrary to U.S. interests.

Reluctance has thus turned into prudence and prudence into ludicrous measures.

Firstly, great difficulties have emerged in supplying weapons to the rebels because not all the groups fighting against Bashar al Assad are considered “reliable” and thus qualified for receiving U.S. support. As a matter of fact, there are groups such as Jabath al Nusra that are linked to Al Qaeda, there are highly dangerous extremist factions and Washington needs to assess who should receive the weapons and who should not. This is not an easy task given the varied articulations of the rebel forces that make each choice a difficult one. Furthermore, there is no assurance that the weapons supplied to a “reliable” group will not fall in the hands of an “unreliable” one. The United States still remembers what happened in Afghanistan when the Stinger missiles handed over to the Mujahedin to fight against the Soviets ended up in terrorist hands.

The second issue is what kind of weapons should be supplied to the rebels: should they be given efficient, mainly anti-aircraft systems as required by their theater of operations or

should the supply be a mere facade and nothing more than a political gesture? It is pretty evident that if the United States are not sure where these weapons will end up, they will tend to reduce the supplies to the minimum. In a context already abundant with weapons such as the Middle East, fostering the market even further could create more problems.

There is still another issue that needs to be solved: both the Alawite regime and the rebels use weapons coming from former Warsaw Pact countries (now Eastern Europe) and Russia (former Soviet Union). This implies that any logistical supply will have to take this factor into consideration (also because weapons seized from loyalists could be used against them) and it would make sense to continue supplying rebels with weapons coming from that part of the world. This would mean that the United States will have to purchase weapons supplies on the free market and thus collide, not only politically, with Russia.

Lastly, U.S. policy decisions will also have to overcome a last obstacle: Turkey. Ankara has refused to allow weapons destined to rebels to go through its territory. This is a decision Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan has communicated by phone to President Barack Obama on June 19 2013. Why did Turkey, after having hosted for the Syrian opposition and its military command for a long time, have such an unexpected change of position? There are a series of reasons and they are all correlated.

Firstly, Turkey has become the target of attacks – like the one on May 11 2013 in Reyhanli that has killed 53 people – and this denotes the export of the Syrian instability within its boundaries. The transit of weapons to the rebels and the flow of armed groups to and from Syria will definitely not improve the security of the country. Internal issues related to the arrogance of Erdogan and of his Islamic party's policies have also added up to the regional instability. The diatribe between the Turkish PM and the West was ignited by the criticism over how the Turkish government has handled protests, the same happened with the police and its brutal methods. Turkish authorities have thus parted ways with those countries supporting the Syrian rebellion.

Recep Erdogan has felt betrayed and abandoned and, once again, has re-directed his foreign policy towards Neo-Ottoman stances: a greater distance from Europe and its obsessive request for human rights protection, greater attention to Arab and regional issues, pursue of an equidistant policy from NATO. After all, the spark that led to the protests was borne out of the intention of the ruling AKP party to introduce Islamic precepts in a widely westernized and secular society. Parting ways with the West is thus the signal of a religious biased diversity.

The Turkish PM is also worried of what is happening inside Syria. The loyalists' reconquest of the city of Qusayr certifies that the Bashar al Assad's regime is far from military collapse. The nemesis of the Syrian rebellion still lacks an unavoidable ending. With the opening of negotiations in Geneva, it is wiser and more prudent for Turkey to keep a low profile with regard to Syrian affairs. Furthermore, this is not Recep Erdogan's first denial to the United States. Even in 2003 he had turned down a U.S. request of opening a war front in the north of Iraq.

Whatever the political or practical motives behind the Turkish attitude, Washington faces another problem: how to bring weapons to the rebels. If Lebanon and Iraq are excluded for practical reasons, Israel for political motives, the only option left to deliver weapons to the Syrians is through Jordan. In fact, this is where U.S. efforts are focusing. Nonetheless, an arms influx through the south of Syria will penalize the supply to the northern front of the rebellion that, after the fall of Qusayr, is cut off from the supplies coming from the Lebanese Sunnis. When, in the near future, the fight will be for the supremacy over Aleppo and surroundings (where Hezbollah units, Shiite Iraqi militias and Iranian Basijis are already concentrating), weapons' supplies from the south will pose serious procurement problems to the rebels.

Furthermore, Jordan poses a series of logistical issues. It can only rely on one commercial harbor in Aqaba (if compared to several Turkish ports). It does not have on its territory NATO air bases or NATO logistical infrastructure (as opposed to Turkey). So it is by far less functional not only for the direct supply to Syria, but also for the influx of weapons from abroad. King Abdallah rules over a country under the Western sphere of influence. His country – lacking any resources of its own – depends on systematic international aid and serving U.S. strategic interests can be taken for granted and is more than welcome (because it means there will be more benefice in the future).

It is not by chance that Jordan has been hosting Syrian rebels training camps with U.S. instructors. The United States, probably more out of a symbolic gesture than out of resolve, has sent 700 troops to Jordan in addition to the 300 men that have been sojourning in the Hashemite kingdom since last year. This was done in conjunction with the yearly military drills held in Amman and that were suspended because of the ongoing conflict in Syria. Besides from the ground troops, Jordan is now hosting two batteries of Patriot missiles together with its crews and logistical support and around 20 F-16 fighter jets that landed for the drills and that were never repatriated in the United States.

Overall, the U.S. military initiatives have a greater defensive value rather than an offensive one. And if one were to evaluate their impact, they indicate that the United States have no intention of directly intervening on Syrian soil. Rather than a menace against the Alawite regime, they represent for Damascus the confirmation that they can operate with resolve against the rebels, possibly dosing with precaution the use of chemical weapons, and nothing more.

In the midst of the diatribe over whether to intervene or not in Syria there is also the issue of the S-300 missiles Russia wants to hand over to the authorities in Damascus. In a public statement on June 20 2013, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has confirmed Moscow's green light to the supply. This is another signal that the Russians will not let the United States move free handedly on the Middle Eastern chessboard.

Directly or indirectly, the Syrian issue has turned into a high value strategic game. A war of nerves – interspersed by menaces and offers for dialogue and mediation – in the attempt of ruling over the Middle East, whose strategic importance shall be retained as long as its oil resources are considered essential. And if the menaces lack the fundamentalists to

make them credible, then room is left for talks in the apparent objective of seeking a negotiated solution to the crisis.

“Geneva 1” started out in June 2012 when a group in support of Syria (composed by UN Security Council members and regional representatives) formulated the hypothesis of creating a transitional government in the country. We are now at “Geneva 2” (a conference still lacking a debut date) and at the informal talks that were held during the G-8 summit in Northern Ireland in June 2013. But the greater the space allowed for negotiations to start, even though probably inconclusive and rhetoric, the lesser the chances of feeling the need of a direct involvement in Syrian affairs by the United States and other international actors.

This is probably why the internal debate in the U.S. over to who, what and how to supply weapons to the rebels is filled with semantic blabber serving a vague empirical diplomatic approach whose only purpose is to conceal Barack Obama's reluctance to intervening in Syria. The terms of the negotiations are the same as they were yesterday: the effort to put an end to the civil war, the creation of a transitional government, the 1.5 billion dollars pledge in humanitarian aid, the obligation for those participating in the negotiations to respect the agreements, the will to chase out of Syria both terrorists and extremists, a strong condemnation against the use of chemical weapons.

In the mean time, Bashar al Assad is still holding on to power, the atrocities of the war continue, “terrorists” and “extremists” (even though it is unclear on which side they fight on) continue roaming around, and the chemical weapons – that all sides deny having used – will probably soon resurface on the ground.

THE “STAN COUNTRIES” AND THE SUPPLY OF ENERGY SOURCES

The so called “Stan Countries” (where “stan” is a Persian suffix for “the land of...”; it is usually preceded by the name of an ethnic group: for example Tajikistan is the “land of the Tajik”) are the following countries.

- Kazakhstan (capital Astana), 16 million inhabitants;
- Turkmenistan (capital Ashgabat), 5 million inhabitants;
- Uzbekistan (capital Tashkent), 27 million inhabitants;
- Kyrgyzstan (capital Bishkek), 5.5 million inhabitants;
- Tajikistan (capital Dushanbe), 7.5 million inhabitants.

These are all countries that became part of the Soviet Socialist Republics in 1924 and 1925 and then became part of the Soviet Union (founded on December 31 1922). They were part of the union for 69 years until December 25 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed.

The “Stan Countries” represent, together with the Caucasus, a strategic area for Russia in Central Asia.

Before its collapse and during the Cold War, the Soviet Union was formed by 15 Republics:

the four founding Republics of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Transcaucasian Republic (the latter dissolved in 1936 and was split into Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia); the five “Stan Countries”; Moldova; the three Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

We should also consider in this picture the so-called “satellite countries” in Eastern Europe that were linked to the Soviet Union by the Warsaw Pact (May 14 1955).

Following the Cold War, the Perestroika (literally the restructuring) led by Mikhail Gorbachev (who resigned in December 1991) and the decade of rule by Boris Yeltsin, power in Russia has been handled by Vladimir Putin. Since 2000 and through “legitimate” elections, Putin has tried to reconstitute the dignity and role of the Russian Federation in a context of internal and international political turmoil.

We will refer to the two main areas of Russian strategic interest in the Caucasus and the “Stan Countries”. In particular:

a. the post Soviet Union Caucasus was divided along the homonym mountain ridge into Northern Caucasus, belonging to Russia, and Southern Caucasus, belonging to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Besides from the ethnic issues (like Ossetia split between Russia and Georgia), Russia's economic interests (such as energy sources and their pipelines running through Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, and directed to Europe) have privileged a country with a Muslim majority such as Azerbaijan, and not Armenia, that like Moscow is Christian-Orthodox.

Another relevant conflict in the region is in the Nagorno-Karabakh, a landlocked portion of Azerbaijan inhabited by an Armenian minority.

b. the “Stan Countries” have been enticed – and still are – by Russia for their energy sources. This has been done through military and security cooperation deals and alliances. But these countries still privilege a self-management of their own resources.

In order to introduce the issue of Russian energetic resources, we should first take a look at where Italy draws its supplies from in what is commonly labelled as the “Gas War”. The most recent available data shows that Italy:

- produces : 13 billion cubic meters of gas yearly;
- needs : 81 billion cubic meters of gas yearly.

Overall, Italy imports 68 billion cubic meters of gas from the following countries (data from 2011):

- Russia (Trans-Austria Gas-TAG pipeline): 24 bln;
- Netherlands/Norway (Transitgas pipeline): 16 bln;
- Algeria (Transmed pipeline): 20 bln;
- Libya (“Green Stream” pipeline): 8 bln.

Italy has recently sealed a deal with Azerbaijan for the supply of 10 bln cubic meters of gas per year from the “Shah Deniz II” gas field channelled through the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). The supply can be increased to 20 bln cubic meters.

The TAP pipeline passes through Greece, Albania and the Adriatic Sea to the coast of the Italian southern region of Salento. Italy has thus become the entry point in Europe for Caucasian gas.

Overall, European gas supply is subject to a series of constraints:

- an excessive dependence of European countries from Russia, at least according to the United States;
- the Russia/Ukraine controversies. The latter owns the pipelines that go through its territory and has rented to Russia a number of military bases – including the well known base of Sevastopol on the Black Sea – in exchange for a reduction in the price of gas supplies. On the other hand, Russia is pushing Ukrainian gas prices to market levels and is building two pipelines that will circumvent Ukraine, the North

Stream and the South Stream pipelines. A third pipeline running through Anatolya, known as Nabucco, is being funded with the help of the United States to put an end to Russian monopoly in the region. The Nabucco pipeline is facing supply problems since most of the gas fields have already been taken by Chinese competition and by its ever increasing “thirst” for energy supplies.

- The deposits in the Arctic Ocean face a number of controversies and are claimed by the countries facing the Arctic Circle.
- Interference over the control of recently discovered gas fields (the Italy/France competition over Libyan reserves; the contrast between Israel and Turkey for the Eastern Mediterranean deposits known as “Aphrodite” and “Leviathan” etc.).

All of the above have pushed Russia in the attempt of extending its reach to Central Asian deposits and in sealing a number of deals with the Stan countries, and in particular with those with the largest potential energy reserves (oil, gas and so forth) as spelled out in the following table:

“STAN COUNTRIES”	GAS	OIL	URANIUM	ELECTRIC ENERGY
	Cubic meters	1000 t	t	kwh
Kazakhstan (16 mln)	20.2 bln	76069,8	17803	68494 (te)*
Turkmenistan (5 mln)	59.5 bln	8887,2	/	14720 (h)**
Uzbekistan (27 mln)	62.9 bln	1853,4	2400	38183 (te)
Kyrgyzstan (5,5 mln)	12.5 mln	49,9	/	10633 (h)
Tajikistan (7,5 mln)	40 mln	/	/	15971 (h)

* te = thermoelectric plants

** h = hydroelectric plants

The table allows the following assessments:

the yearly gas production of the first three Stan countries is in billion cubic meters. This means there is room for exports. The two remaining countries produce by the millions, an amount insufficient even for domestic supplies.

- the same can be said for the production of oil;
- the production of electric energy is relevant in those countries utilizing hydroelectric plants (Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). Their lack of resources has been compensated by their geographic position and by the proximity to mountains and glaciers. The two remaining countries have enough gas and oil to feed thermoelectric plants for their electric production.