

## LIBYA'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM



*Research centre at Tajura, Libya*

Despite recent declarations by the Libyan PM Mahmoud Jibril – at the end of his mandate – about the discovery of a nuclear arsenal, the north-African country had officially suspended its nuclear program (and WMD program), which at any rate was at an early stage, on December 19, 2003.

The official statement was preceded by months of secret negotiations with the USA and the UK.

The decision, taken by Khadafi, was favoured by two events in particular: the attack against Saddam Hussein, accused of producing weapons of mass destruction, and the arrival in Tripoli of a container – that was emptied during its stay in an Italian harbour - that originally contained material used in the building of nuclear centrifuges. The Libyan leader had realized that he was being watched closely and that he risked becoming in the near future the target of further international military actions. The accord for the suspension of the program was also due to an opening by the US to co-operation in the field of security, both military and economic. In practice Libya was expecting kickbacks from the suspension.

Either way, the idea of getting his hands on nuclear weapons has been one of Khadafi's goals since the revolution's early years, and the program – albeit with alternating results – was ongoing for years. His ambition was to be armed with atomic weapons - like Israel - in an attempt to defend the interests of the Arab people and/or his personal hegemony, the so-called Islamic nuclear weapon.

Right after the 1969 revolution Khadafi had sought – without succeeding – the assistance of the Chinese to produce and/or acquire an atomic weapon. In 1975 he had officially adhered to the treaty of nuclear non-proliferation that had been agreed to by the Senussi monarchy in 1968. Despite the treaty, in 1974 an accord of nuclear co-operation was reached with Argentina.

A structure was built in Tajura in 1981 with the help of the then-Soviet Union whose official intent was that of building a nuclear plant for the production of energy for civil uses. Libyan students had been sent the world over (even in the USA until the year 1983, when the US administration discontinued the practice) to study the possible applications of such energy.

Uranium had been imported (the IAEA - International Atomic Energy Agency - speaks of imports by Libya in 1985, 2000 and 2001). As admitted by Abdul Qader Khan, father of the Pakistani nuclear program, the Pakistani had provided technical assistance to Libya. Other sources have mentioned the involvement of North Korea and German specialists. According to studies by the Western intelligence agencies, Libya had spent an overall \$200 million in the program, which had failed to develop for lack of management personnel, structures and technology.

In 2003, following the decision to suspend the nuclear program, Libya decided to turn its equipment over to the AIEA. The centrifuges and other specific parts were flown to the USA on January 27, 2004, shortly before the authorised

visits by international inspectors in Tajura. On March 10, 2004, the Libyan authorities signed yet another protocol with the AIEA, then headed by the Egyptian national Al Baradei. Yet the remaining fissile material (enriched uranium) was still due to leave Libya bound for a safer location.

This last step remained on stand-by for years. Libya insisted in its demands for compensation for the suspension of the program, saying that the material sent to the US was valued at about \$100 million and that the suspension had not been adequately counter-balanced by political and practical initiatives as promised by the United States.

From the political angle, Khadafi wanted that the US make a public statement praising the Libyan availability in not pursuing the nuclear solution (Seif al Islam had requested the staging of an encounter between Khadafi and US President Barack Obama during the 2009 UN General Assembly in New York). On the economic side, Tripoli was demanding weapon provisions, the construction of a centre for nuclear medicine and a reduction of the commercial sanctions still enacted against Libya.

This tug-of-rope protracted itself until the year 2009 when Libya decided to refuse giving away its enriched uranium. In November 2009 a solution seemed to be at the door. The radioactive material (about 5,2 Kg) was placed inside 75 canisters that were sealed by AIEA personnel while waiting to be loaded on a plane and flown to Russia. Yet suddenly the Libyan authorities changed their minds and refused the transport. A final solution was reached after further discussions, menaces and negotiations that were conducted personally by Seif al Islam on behalf of his father: On December 21st the canisters were loaded aboard the plane and flown to Russia. Days later the US secretary of state Hillary Clinton phoned the Libyan foreign minister Musa Kusa to thank him and to emphasise the bettering of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Since then Libya's nuclear problem has not resurfaced. The structure in Tajura, according to those who have visited it in the past years, remained completely abandoned. The office that was presiding the project – the "Tajura Nuclear Research Center" – has changed its name and has become the "Renewable Energy and Water Desalination Plant Center". The office remained – until the war against Libya – under the supervision of the person who was in charge of the atomic project, Labour and Development minister Matoug Mohamed Matoug and it is likely that its role, despite the name-change, had remained unaltered.

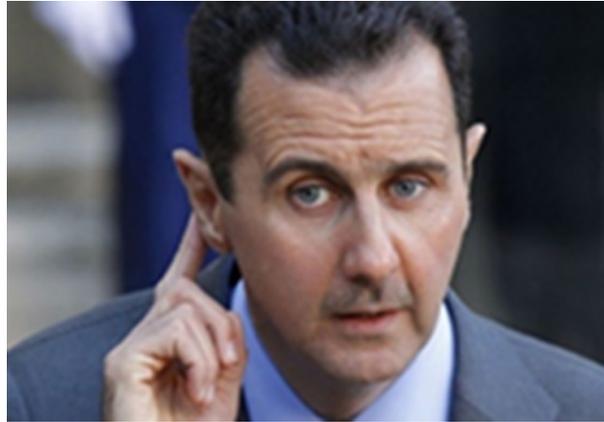
Another office was later created, the "National Bureau for Research and Development", perhaps as a facade of scientific research that was not necessarily dedicated to the nuclear sector.

Nevertheless, from 2003 on, the Libyan authorities have continued to seek nuclear energy, officially for peaceful uses but probably with the secret intent of acquiring, through their technicians, a certain degree of know-how in the sector. Along the years there have been contacts with a number of countries with regards to the atomic sector:

- The French: In March 2006 the French signed an accord with Libya for the development and civil use of nuclear energy. The Signatory on the French side was the director of the Atomic Energy Commission Alain Bugat. On the preceding year there had been technical visits in Tripoli for the purpose – among others – of planning the conversion of the Tajura structure into a desalination plant. Further talks and accords for the search of uranium on Libyan soil had been reached with a company named AREVA, the same company that administers the uranium deposits in Niger. There was further talk with the French about developing nuclear power for civil usage during Khadafi's official 2007 visit in Paris.
- A new accord with the USA for the civil use of nuclear power, including a series of specific co-operation projects (training of students in the nuclear sector, the creation of a centre for nuclear medicine, bilateral co-operation between specific offices, the use of radioactive material for generating energy and applied to the health sector, agriculture, industry, etc.). The spokesman for the US Department of State, Tom Casey, seen the embarrassing internal political implications of the initiative, denied that such agreements were ever reached.
- In 2008 Russia and Ukraine proposed the building of a nuclear reactor for civil use. Ukraine was willing to collaborate within a barter system: co-operation in exchange for oil, bids for the construction of infrastructure in Libya and the commercialisation of agricultural products. Both initiatives never reached the operative level.

But getting back to the public statements of Mahmoud Jibril and to the discovery of a nuclear arsenal in the hands of Khadafi. There is unlikely that such arsenal could effectively be made of nuclear material. It is more likely that it coincide instead with the deposits of aggressive chemical agents that the Libyan leader possessed, despite his expressed intent, in 2003, to have them destroyed.

## WHY ISN'T ANYONE HELPING THE ARAB SPRING IN SYRIA?



*Bashar Al Assad*

The question is legitimate if we compare the recent international military intervention against Gaddafi's Libya and the unwillingness to do the same against Bashar Assad's regime. A bloodthirsty dictatorship the first, as violent the latter. A typical example of double standards.

Any military intervention is part of a nation's foreign policy and - as it is easy to imagine - only theoretically are what we would call principles the basis for any decision. Interests - be they strategic or economic - are what decisions are based upon. This assumption is worth especially for countries aspiring to play a key role in the world affairs. Exporting democracy - a theory dear to the Bush doctrine - is a good slogan when other opportunities come to surface.

It is in such cases that we assist - as in this moment in the Arab world - to a NATO military intervention in Libya, but not in Yemen and Syria. The Saudi military intervention - with the support from the Emirates - in Bahrein to protect another dictatorship is justified, while others are not even taken into consideration.

There is an international justice that apparently takes on the sufferings of the Libyan people, but at the same time it does not deem necessary to intervene in Damascus or Sana'a. Statements are made against dictators and human rights violations, but actions are limited to declarations and menaces of sanctions that will produce no effect.

It is thus interesting to understand why the international community is so reluctant to get involved in a military confrontation with Syria. Here are some of the reasons:

- Syria has a population of about 23 million inhabitants (5 million of which could be called up by the military), limited gas and oil reserves and a military apparatus with all respect. That is: it is a dangerous military objective that would require a prolonged and qualified international military effort (giving for granted the final success of an international coalition), but without the relevant economic interests that backed the attack on Libya.
- Syria is geographically placed in an area with strong instability. The fall of the regime in Damascus and the creation of a military void could trigger a series of negative side effects in the region whose outcomes are unpredictable. The military weakening of Syria could favour the hegemonic and expansionistic aims of Iran (as has already happened with the war in Iraq, an aspect that had been underestimated by the U.S. at the time). It would once again dangerously increase the role of the Shiites and would put in danger the monarchies in the Gulf States. We would witness a contiguity of interests in favour of the Iranians against Israel.
- Iran and Syria are tied by military agreements. They signed in 2005 a pact of mutual defence. In December 2009 such links were reinforced. Surely enough an attack against Syria would see Tehran intervening in support of Damascus and an Iranian direct intervention in a conflict is not to be excluded. This means the war could spread to neighbouring countries in the region.

**Invisible Dog – Periodico online**  
Direttore Responsabile – Alessandro Righi  
Edito da Invisible Dog Srl  
Via Cassia 833, Rome, Italy

Testata registrata presso il Tribunale di Roma n.198/2011 del 17/6/2011

- In the case of a war, Syria could instigate other non-conventional forms of fight such as terrorism. They have a strong know how in this sector accumulated over decades. They also have a vast manpower - real and not potential - to rely on: the Palestinian radical groups that are hosted on its territory and that have Syria's support in Lebanon, the Hezbollah, the Kurds. As in Iraq, Al Qaeda operatives could flood the country in case of a conflict.
- The destabilization of Syria is not in Israel's interest even though they are one of the arch-enemies of Tel Aviv. They are currently a threat, but one under strict control. It is sufficient to remember the aerial strike against the nuclear site of Deir Alzour on September 6 2007. Israel's greatest fear is who could be taking over the regime in Damascus in case Bashar Assad is kicked out. The Muslim Brotherhood, who clashed with the regime and was wiped out by Hafez Assad in Hama in February 1982, is the most probable pretendent to the throne. They represent - even for Syria's weak internal opposition - the strongest force on the ground. This hypothesis is of great concern to Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood have increased their influence in Egypt after Mubarak was dethroned (and the first negative consequences on the relationship between Cairo and Tel Aviv have already taken shape), they are strongly connected to Hamas in the Gaza Strip (with Hamas being the Brotherhood's branch in Palestine) and they could take over in Damascus. The movement's political and religious radicalism could surround Israel's borders and this is something Tel Aviv wants to avoid. Israel's main priority is national security even if this means having to deal with a bloodthirsty dictatorship. Over the decades Damascus and Tel Aviv have always had an indirect dialogue and have always come to terms on common issues. Israel is now facing a greater threat: Iran. It cannot disperse its forces on other theatres. As the Iranian nuclear program advances the probability of an Israeli military strike on those sites is on the rise.
- Turkey is another country not interested in the destabilisation of Syria and the consequences thereof. Ankara prefers having reliable partners while it attempts to extend its influence over the Arab world. Damascus and its regime are already an integral part of Erdogan's geo-strategic interests. Not to mention the Kurdish question, once again in the spotlight after the series of attacks by the PKK against Turkish garrisons last October. Even though these attacks originated from Iraqi Kurdistan, it is also true that the Kurdish issue geographically spans from Turkey to Syria, from Iraq to Iran. In 1998 Syria was supporting the PKK, but had to stand back in front of the menace of a Turkish military intervention and had forced the then PKK leader Ocalan to leave the country. If Syria were to dissolve in a civil war, Kurdish armed groups could find new sanctuaries and bases in this country.
- Saudi Arabia had recalled its ambassador in Damascus last August protesting against the ruthlessness of the Alawi regime. This does not mean King Abdullah does not fear a regime change in Syria. The recent deals between Damascus and the Arab League - brokered by Riyadh - go in this direction. It is an attempt to come to terms with Syria's intransigence. But around the corner are also Saudi fears of Iran taking advantage of the situation. We should not forget that around 15% of Saudis are Shiites.
- From a political point of view, a NATO or Western military intervention would resemble much an act of neo-colonialism or imperialism and a direct support to Israel. This interpretation of events would not help the marketing of an attack, especially because the current Israeli PM Netanyahu is holding on to extremist positions in its negotiations with the PLO. Furthermore, as already mentioned, there is the possibility of an attack against Iran with the sure support of the Anglo-Americans.
- Gaddafi had many enemies, not only in the West, but also within the Arab and African world. Bashar Assad has a far "better" reputation because in the Middle East the lack of democracy, human rights violations and the inheritance of power have been the rule. The search for supporters or sympathisers would be a much easier task for the Syrian dictator than it has been for his Libyan counterpart.
- The Alawi regime being the expression of a minority (74% of Syrians are Sunni against 15-16% of Alawis) has always had a privileged relationship with other religious minorities, especially Christians who represent 10% of the population. The Church in Syria has a series of benefits including tax breaks. This is why Christians are in some cases considered being close to the regime. A regime change for them, especially if the Muslim Brotherhood were to take its place, is a cause for concern. And behind the worries of the Christians are those of the West.

## WHO WILL BE THE NEXT LIBYAN AMBASSADOR IN ITALY?

Within the system of security structures that Khadafi had set up in Libya, foreign espionage activity was delegated to the External Security Service (Jihaz al aman al Kharigi), a body whose workings fell officially within the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (aka the general committee for foreign relations and international co-operation). Despite the official version, in a more practical sense the administrative part of the ESS was under the Ministry's control, but the head of the Service took orders and answered to the Rais alone. Thus one control was formal (theoretic) and another functional (practical).

The advantage of this set-up was to generate a strong mix of a country's foreign policy with its espionage activity. Ambassadors and/or any among the ranks of the diplomatic structure of the Jamaryah abroad were either coming directly from the secret services or were Khadafi's most trusted collaborators (who operated in the interest of the secret services). Among the primary duties of the ESS, before the opening to the West that occurred in 2003, was that of gathering information on Libyans residing abroad, locating the dissidents among them, and eliminating them.

During this period of dissident hunting, a wide share of the diplomats representing the country abroad were picked from the ranks of the secret services. The 1988 designation of Hafez Gaddur to the role of Libyan consul in Palermo sees the former Libyan police captain and member of the secret services being officially in charge of a diplomatic seat. Gaddur was a trusted man of the regime and a close friend of another exponent of the regime that will later assume the control of the External Security Service: Mohamed Abdulsalam Musa Kusa, whom, in June 1980, while working as Libyan Ambassador in London, will be expelled for expressing in public the opinion that the physical elimination of dissidents abroad is a necessity.

Gaddur will spend 12 years in Palermo thanks to the rise of Musa Kusa in Khaddafi's consideration and to his heading of an organisation, the "Mathaba", that was dedicated mostly to foreign activity as a centre "for the fight against imperialism, sionism, fascism and racism". More prosaically, the Mathaba continued the hunt against dissidents of the regime that sought shelter abroad. In 1992 Musa Kusa became vice-minister of foreign affairs and in 1994 he took the helm of the External Security Service. Gaddur's career is a long downhill ride. After leaving Palermo he was designated Libyan Ambassador to the Vatican and, 3 years later, Libyan Ambassador in Italy.

Meanwhile the tie between Musa Kusa and Gaddur tightened and Gaddur became more and more important. Gaddur had other influential friendships as well, such as the one with Abdallah Senussi, husband of Khaddafi's second wife's sister, one of the pillars of the regime's security system, former head of the military intelligence, later the recipient of an international arrest warrant for his involvement in the 1989 destruction of a UTA flight in the skies above Niger. Senussi is a brutal man who was personally involved in the repression against the inmates of the Abu Salim penitentiary in 1996 (about 1200 detainees killed, sparking the protests in Benghazi against the regime in February, following the arrest of a lawyer that defended the interests of the families of the victims).

Senussi – after leaving the helm of the military intelligence for reasons of international opportunity, was then designated vice-director of the External Security Service (thus – but only apparently – under Musa Kusa) to then re-emerge once more in 2009 as head of the military intelligence and head of the committee for the fight against illegal immigration, an office that has served the purpose of bestowing upon Senussi the co-ordination of the country's entire security apparatus: Police, Army, Secret Services (domestic, foreign and military). Gaddur spoke often in favour of Sanussi to accredit him with Italy, despite the international arrest warrant: he introduced him without advance notice to the Italian Interior Minister in 2009 during the latter's visit to Tripoli. He also accredited Senussi as a member of the delegation visiting Italy during the negotiations regarding illegal immigration.

Gaddur used his influential contacts in Libya (his sister was also accredited as being liked by Khadafi and by Musa Kusa's brother who was the head of the rais' secretariat) to increase his prestige on the Italian territory. The treaty of friendship, partnership and co-operation that would be signed on August 30th 2008 in Benghazi, Libya, was piloted by Gaddur who became the principal interlocutor in the negotiations, substantially replacing the Italian diplomats in Tripoli.

**Invisible Dog – Periodico online**  
Direttore Responsabile – Alessandro Righi  
Edito da Invisible Dog Srl  
Via Cassia 833, Rome, Italy

He spoke directly with the highest political and institutional personalities of Italy. He did so in a transversal way but all the while accrediting – sometimes through the use of lies – his decisional power in order to confirm his credit back home in Libya. He placed himself in the midst of every economic negotiation (Unicredit bank, ENI – the Italian public power giant, Finmeccanica). He contacted the companies and piloted every possible Libyan investment. He even became the member of several companies' boards of directors. He decided on the issuing of visas to enter Libya unilaterally, such visas would not be issued without his personal authorisation. He thus had the possibility of approving or rejecting the companies that intended to operate commercially in Libya. He often invited Italian authorities and public figures in Libya. He became the only vehicle for any possible accord – both commercial and political – with his country.

But in February this year things changed. The regime began its repression, the international Powers decided to enact an armed intervention against Khadafi. Gaddur immediately realised that the wind was changing. He initially tried to adopt a prudent position by giving the idea that he did not share the repressive ideas of Khadafi. When his principal sponsor, Musa Kusa, escaped to London in March, he consolidated his new line. He issued public declarations in the presence of another dissident ambassador – and predecessor of Gaddur as Ambassador in Rome, Italy – Shalgam. He removed the Jamaryah flag from his residence, replacing it with the new one. He would show up for interviews with the rebel's badge pinned to his shirt. During the first visit of the new Libyan prime minister in Rome he did all he could to appear and accredit himself as the trait-d'union between past and present Libyan-Italian relationships. What Gaddur really needed was to erase his past collusion with the regime.

Today Gaddur is fighting a new battle. He does so for his political, and perhaps physical, survival. In Tripoli he arouses great suspicion. He knows that the National Transitional Council has begun to put together a file with his name on it. He has been summoned to Tripoli during the past weeks but declined circumspectly while waiting – or so he claimed – that the new government acquire full powers. The fact that he knows every past commercial intrigue between Italy and Libya and is close to powerful figures in the Italian establishment plays in his favour. In order to keep his contacts in Italy he now needs to show that nothing has changed in terms of his personal power.

The National Transitional Council needs Gaddur's know-how, at least during the initial period, after which they will be able to dismiss this man who has been for over 20 years in the midst of every Libyan-Italian intrigue. Thus the burning question: who will be the next Libyan Ambassador in Rome?